

CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary and Conclusions

Conceptions of Giftedness Held by Urban Aboriginal People

From the interview and questionnaire results, it appears that this sample of urban Aboriginal people hold a conception of giftedness which is multifaceted. Theirs is not the traditional, narrow conception of giftedness which equates exceptional ability largely with a high IQ (Terman, 1925). Rather, they view exceptional ability in such areas as sports, leadership, creativity, communication, motivation, insight or intuitiveness, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills as relevant indicators of giftedness.

Descriptions of various gifted behaviours provided by interviewees and questionnaire respondents were similar to a number of conceptions of giftedness proposed in the literature. The described behaviours were seen to relate to various domains (DeFaan & Havighurst, 1957; Gagne, 1993), spheres of activity (Tannenbaum, 1983), intelligences (Gardner, 1985), talents (Taylor, 1986) and ability areas (Marland, 1972). Gifted behaviours were also seen to correlate with various characteristics recognised by the rating scales of Renzulli et al. (1976) and with Frasier's core attributes (1992b).

Inclusion of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability as an Additional Attribute

One purpose of this research was to investigate the types of attributes urban Aboriginal people associated with giftedness. Data from the interviews and questionnaire produced behaviour descriptions, most of which were

classifiable within one of Frasier's (1992b) ten core attribute categories. However, there were also descriptions which contained some aspect about giftedness that the researcher found could not be captured within any of the core attributes. Initially, two further attribute categories of Leadership and Sensitivity were proposed and along with the Miscellaneous category, used to classify these descriptions. Eventually, the behaviours indicative of giftedness from all three of these categories were combined under the one attribute category of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability, as previously discussed in chapter 6.

The literature offered support for the inclusion of the Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability attribute. Considerable reference was made to the use of leadership, and social and affective abilities as areas which might help to identify gifted students. Additionally, examples of characteristics or behaviours which might indicate these areas of exceptional ability were also found.

Both Clark (1992) and Renzulli et al. (1976) devoted sections to leadership ability, using a number of statements to alert observers to the types of behaviour associated with the ability. Other writers identified leadership amongst a number of characteristics which were classified as affective (Davis & Rimm, 1994; George, 1987; Reid, 1992), socioaffective aptitude (Gagne, 1993), psychosocial (Baldwin, 1985), interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1985), or personal / human qualities (Tonemah, 1987).

Within these classifications were also included characteristics and behaviours describing sensitivity to others, leadership, awareness of self and

well developed social skills. Within his socioaffective aptitude, Gagne (1993) placed such behaviours as 'social intercourse, empathy or the ability to perceive the points of view and feelings of others, social influence (e.g., leadership), manipulation...' (p. 73). Davis and Rimm (1994) termed social skills, personal adjustment, self-concepts, independence, self-confidence and internal control, as well as leadership ability, as affective types of characteristics of giftedness. Included in Gecrge's (1987) affective category were such descriptions as willingness to share, loyalty to friends, truthfulness and appropriate use of intuition. With regard to African American, Hispanic and Native American students, Baldwin (1985) proposed descriptors for the psychosocial area of giftedness which included leadership, altruism and empathy. She also classified within this area affective characteristics such as "social intelligence and feeling of responsibility for the community" (p. 232), and "intuitive grasp of situations and sensitivity to right and wrong" (p. 233).

In Australia, Kearins' (1988) study investigating Western Australian Aboriginal people's conceptions of intelligence, reported such affective characteristics as "reliability", "responsibility", "being sensible", and "staying out of trouble". A later study (Malin, 1989 in Harslett, 1993) in South Australia, with urban Aboriginal people, revealed that characteristics which were highly valued were independence, self-reliance, knowledge of family, autonomy and respect for the rights of others to their autonomy. In his research with rural Aboriginal people, Harslett (1993) found that the socio-emotional domain was highly valued by the students although it was not as valued by the adults. Within this

domain were behaviours similar to the findings of this research, such as respectfulness and manners; well behaved at school; socialises well with people; helpful in the house; show feeling and sympathy and care for their families, babies, and the elderly; doesn't get into trouble; independent; confident; shows leadership; and accepts responsibility. Sharing, respect for others, getting along with people and outstanding service to the society were some of the characteristics mentioned by Reid (1992) as possible indicators of giftedness in Maori populations in New Zealand.

Although not identified within a domain or area of giftedness, research with minority cultures has indicated a number of characteristics similar to the attribute of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability, and like those characteristics and behaviours which were described above. Working with African Americans, Gay (1978) reported that independence and a need for less supervision were reported as characteristics of the gifted. Florey et al. (1986) identified one characteristic of gifted Native American children as leadership skills within the child's own cultural group. For the identification of gifted Hawaiian students (De Morales, 1993), a checklist of behaviour descriptions included the following: respected by the group, inspires and encourages others, persuasive with peer group, sensitive, self confident and independent. Romero and Schultz (1992) found four general behaviours which were highly valued by the Pueblo Indians, one of which was the special ability to empathise and give to others. Faas's (1982) interview data from Native Americans yielded a similar gifted behaviour,

defined as a sensitivity for the feelings and needs of others as well as leadership abilities.

Finally, in a survey (Scott, Perou, Urbano, Hogan & Gold, 1992) of Anglo-Saxon, Hispanic and African American parents, using a question similar to the interview question in this research, 11 categories of gifted behaviours were generated. One of those categories was called "social, leadership and interpersonal." Additionally, two of the three groups of parents described indicators of giftedness as positive interpersonal ability.

Therefore, from the literature concerned with gifted behaviours and characteristics in minority groups, there was considerable support for the proposed inclusion of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability as an attribute in the context of this research pertaining to gifted urban Aboriginal children.

Successful Indicators of Giftedness in Urban Aboriginal Groups

As was shown in chapter 6 (Table 6.39), all of the core attributes and the previously proposed attributes of Leadership, Sensitivity and Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability were described to some extent in both the interviews of urban Aboriginal parents and the questionnaire responses of Aboriginal teachers. It was assumed that the usefulness of an attribute as an indicator of giftedness was related to (a) the frequency of its description and (b) the number of interviewees and questionnaire respondents who provided at least one description of an attribute.

Frequency of Attribute Description

In interpreting the data, it was anticipated that the more frequently an attribute was described in the interviews or the questionnaire, the greater was its significance as an indicator of giftedness to urban Aboriginal people. Although all attributes were described, it is valuable to consider which attributes were more frequently viewed as indicating giftedness since these may require greater emphasis or consideration in their application to identification procedures.

Overall, Table 6.39 showed that 206 (42.3%) of the 487 examples related to the attributes of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability or Motivation, and thus indicated that these attributes, in particular, may have the greatest significance as indicators of giftedness in urban Aboriginal children. It must be acknowledged, however, that Motivation behaviours will not necessarily be presented by underachieving gifted children be they from a culturally diverse background or not. Also the degree of significance for the attribute of Motivation must be considered in light of the fact that only 49% of the Aboriginal teachers rated Motivation, in Part A of the questionnaire, as frequently or extremely successful in identifying gifted Aboriginal students in the classroom. Therefore, until further research is conducted the significance of the Motivation attribute remains somewhat questionable and should be used with caution for classroom observations of urban Aboriginal students. However, it needs to be kept in mind that when using the 11 attributes in identification procedures, it is not a criterion that a student must display exceptional ability in all attributes to be seen as

potentially gifted. So, although some Aboriginal students will not demonstrate exceptional motivation in the classroom, the attribute should not be discounted completely for school use.

It is possible, though, that the attribute of Motivation may be quite evident in out-of-school activities. Therefore, the inclusion of the Motivation attribute on nomination forms used by parents when observing their children outside the school context may prove quite useful.

From Table 6.39, it can also be seen that, following the attributes of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal and Motivation, the next most frequently described attributes were Communication, Interests, Reasoning, Memory, Problem Solving Ability and Insight. These six attributes represented 49.3% (240) of the total examples, suggesting that they also may be strong indicators of urban Aboriginal children's giftedness. Finally, the low frequency of only 41 (8.4%) of the examples for the attributes of Imagination / Creativity, Humour and Inquiry, appeared to indicate that these attributes may not play as important a role as the other attributes in identification procedures used to recognise giftedness in urban Aboriginal children. As with the Motivation attribute however, this weak indication of the significance of the three attributes from the low frequency of examples must be viewed within the context of all the data. It is important to remember that in Part A of the questionnaire, 24 (83%) of the teachers considered Imagination / Creativity to be frequently or extremely successful in identifying gifted Aboriginal children, with 20 (69%) believing Humour and Inquiry to be frequently or extremely successful (Table 6.22).

Taking into account the results in Part A of the questionnaire, and recognising that each of these three attributes was described by some of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents, it was deemed justifiable to continue their inclusion as possible attributes of gifted urban Aboriginal children. Continued use of these three attributes also recognises the emphasis placed on inclusivity in identification procedures by writers in the field (Borland, 1986; Callahan & McIntire, 1994; Frasier, 1989; Richert et al., 1982; Treffinger & Renzulli, 1986; Zappia, 1989).

Number of Aborigines Describing Attribute

The other aspect of the data which was valuable in determining the usefulness of an attribute to describe giftedness successfully in urban Aboriginal children was the number of interviewees and questionnaire respondents providing at least one example of an attribute. That is, the more urban Aboriginal people who described an attribute, the stronger that attribute became as a way of describing giftedness for the culture.

When the numbers of interviewees and respondents providing examples for core and additional attributes were combined in Table 6.40, it was found that more people provided examples for the attributes of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability (65%) and Motivation (58%) than for any others. The high percent of urban Aboriginal people describing these attributes suggested that these two attributes should be viewed as important indicators of giftedness for urban Aboriginal cultures.

The description of all of the other attributes, with the exception of Humour, by at least one-fourth (28%-50%) of the interviewees and respondents, suggested that these attributes also were significant in the delineation of urban Aboriginal people's conceptions of giftedness. Humour, mentioned by only 6 (15%) of the respondents, appeared to be of least significance.

Explanation was sought by the researcher for the unexpectedly low number of respondents who described humour as an attribute which might indicate giftedness. In discussions with three members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Program, it was pointed out to the researcher that humour plays an inherent part of communications and interactions between Aboriginal people. It was postulated by them that as this is the case, it is possible that the parent interviewees and the teacher respondents may not have considered it an unusual ability which could indicate giftedness. In other words, every Aborigine would be seen to have a highly developed sense of humour and therefore, it would not be a very successful means by which to differentiate the gifted child. In addition to this speculation, the researcher was not able to provide from the research data any other reasons for examples of humour being reported by so few of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents.

Conclusion

Examination of the results regarding (a) the frequency of examples of attributes and (b) the number of interviewees and questionnaire respondents providing examples, revealed similar findings. Both sets of data indicated that

exceptional ability associated with the attributes of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability and Motivation were perceived by the urban Aboriginal people as the most significant indicators of giftedness in urban Aboriginal children. The results also indicated that the other nine attributes were, to varying degrees, seen as important indicators.

Relevance of the Core Attributes' Subcategories

As well as investigating the significance of each attribute in relation to the conception of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people, it was desirable to investigate the relevance of each core attribute's subcategories to the examples provided by interviewees and questionnaire respondents. To do this, consideration was given to the number of new subcategories which had been proposed in order to categorise some of the attribute descriptions, and to the number of existing subcategories which had been described.

Newly Proposed Subcategories

Upon review of the results it was found that only two new subcategories had been added to Frasier's core attributes to accommodate the types of examples provided by the interviewees. One subcategory which was for the attribute of Humour was "quick wit" and the other was "always questioning", for the attribute of Inquiry. The latter behaviour description was found to be similar to the behaviour "is constantly asking questions about anything and everything" on the creativity rating scale of Renzulli et al. (1976).

It was seen as desirable to add “quick wit” as a Humour subcategory in order to utilise the terminology used by three of the interviewees. The use of familiar phrases to describe the attribute might enhance other urban Aborigines’ abilities to identify exceptional ability related to the attribute of Humour. The four examples of Inquiry which eventually formed the subcategory “always questioning” could not be reasonably coded under any of the existing subcategories for Inquiry and therefore, this subcategory was a necessary addition.

Description of Existing Subcategories

From a re-examination of the interview and questionnaire results in Tables 6.5 to 6.7, 6.9 to 6.12, 6.14 to 6.16 and 6.25 to 6.32, it was determined that all subcategories outlined by Frasier were described for the attributes of Communication, Motivation, Interests, Memory, Reasoning, Humour and Problem Solving Ability. Further, it was found that only two subcategories for the ten core attributes were not described by at least one interviewee or one questionnaire respondent. The two subcategories not described were the Insights subcategory of “appear to be a good guesser” and the Inquiry subcategory of “play or experiment with ideas.”

Conclusion

Therefore, the existing subcategories as outlined by Frasier were considered to be relevant and appropriate to the conception of giftedness as described by urban Aborigines in the interviews and the questionnaire. Inclusion of the two additional subcategories of “quick witted” and “always

questioning” may assist to describe more accurately, in terms of urban Aboriginal cultures, the attributes of Humour and Inquiry, respectively.

Attribute Examples Coded as Culturally Specific to Urban Aboriginal People

Thirty-five of the thirty-seven culturally specific examples comprised seven culturally specific subcategories, previously established during the analysis of the interview and questionnaire data. These subcategories included the following, with the number of examples for each subcategory being shown in brackets: “interest in and concern about cultural issues” (9); “effectively deal with racism” (8); “sense of family loyalty” (5); “ability to switch language codes” (4); “ability to live effectively in a bi-cultural situation” (3); “storytelling” (3); and “natural ability of cultural members” (2). Two examples referring to confidence in cultural identity and to confidence in the classroom were not placed in a culturally specific subcategory.

Relevant Literature

The literature was examined to determine if similar types of characteristics had been reported for other minority groups. There were a number of writers who described characteristics similar to the behaviours classified in the subcategory of “interest in and concern about cultural issues.” Harslett (1993), in his research with rural Aborigines in Western Australia reported the following descriptions given by Aboriginal adults as behavioural characteristics of intellectually gifted Aboriginal children: has knowledge of Aboriginal culture, tradition, and language; speaks Aboriginal at an early age; and speaks clearly

in Aboriginal English. Aboriginal children in the same study (Harslett, 1993) provided similar characteristics including: knows Aboriginal ways; knows Aboriginal words; can talk Aboriginal language; and examples related to bush survival skills such as knows a lot about animals, can track, can find food and can cook food in the bush.

In an inservice model for identifying gifted Native American students (Florey et al., 1986) included "strong interest and emphasis in ceremonial and cultural events" (p. 4) as a characteristic. One of four categories identified by Tonemah (1987) was titled "Tribal/cultural understanding" and contained behaviours which could be interpreted as an interest in and concern about cultural issues. These behaviours were knowledge of tribal traditions, understanding of tribal history and understanding of tribal culture. Bradley (1989) noted that sensitivity to tribal rituals and traditions, and abilities which perpetuate the culture of Native American society were said to be characteristics highly valued by Native Americans generally. Further, Callahan and McIntire (1994) in a set of characteristics of outstanding ability, for use in the identification of gifted Alaska Native and Native American students, listed as one of these, "is more aware of cultural norms and standards at an earlier age".

The literature referred several times to behaviours related to exceptional ability in storytelling as an indicator of giftedness in the Native American and Native Alaskan cultures. Tonemah (1987) simply noted storytelling ability under the category of tribal / cultural understanding. However, Callahan and McIntire (1994) linked outstanding verbal and linguistic abilities in Alaska Native and

Native American children to a behaviour which they described as “recalls legends in greater depth and detail after fewer hearings”. Two other behaviours identified by Callahan and McIntire also appeared to relate to a storytelling ability. These were “has a great auditory memory” and “remembers details of ‘everyday’ events”.

One reference to a child’s dealing with racist attitudes which was similar to the “effectively deal with racism” subcategory was made by Gay (1978). She pointed out that due to keen observation skills the gifted African American child may “pick up” more quickly on racist attitudes and practices.

Other writers (Florey et al., 1986) identified a characteristic much like those of the culturally specific subcategory of “ability to live effectively in a bi-cultural situation.” They reported that one possible characteristic of gifted Native Americans was a highly developed perceptiveness in judging environmental situations in a ‘streetwise’ way rather than by cues and skills taught in school.

Baldwin (1985), George (1987) and Harslett (1993) noted loyalty to other members of the culture similar to the subcategory of “sense of family loyalty.” Baldwin provided eight descriptors which she believed to be the most typical in gifted African American, Hispanic and Native American student populations. One of these dealt with loyalty to peers. George also mentioned loyalty to friends and cross-age caring, but included another behaviour which might come closer to the subcategory related to family loyalty. This behaviour was described as “... a strong sense of worth and self within family and tribe, which enables acquisition of goals for self and others” (1987, p. 31). A behavioural

characteristic of gifted Aboriginal children given by Aboriginal children in Harslett's research was "... are kind. Care for people and play with them. Always help - help their parents, help in the house" (1993, p. 316).

Conclusion

Further consideration of the subcategories, in light of the literature, revealed that they seemed to be applicable not only to urban Aboriginal cultures but may be valuable for use with populations from other minority cultures. That is, although the actual examples were specific to urban Aboriginal cultures, the subcategories appeared to be of a general nature which could be relevant to the identification of gifted children from other minority cultures.

Effect of Subject Assimilation on Culturally Specific Examples

It was noted that the culturally specific examples lacked a 'traditional culture' quality which had been noticeable in Harslett's (1993) findings; but this was not totally unexpected. The less traditionally focused examples in this research most likely were due to the level of assimilation which had been experienced by the participants. All interviewees had lived in an urban area for at least the past 14 years and five (45%) had always lived in urban areas. Additionally, ten (77%) of the children described in the interviews had lived all their lives in urban areas. Some of the literature discussed the effects of assimilation and urbanisation of life style on the level of traditionalism found in people from minority groups.

Julian and Ostertag (1982) and Tonemah (1987) reported a high degree of diversity amongst Native American tribes. The United States government

recognises 177 different Native American tribes, each with their own culture of distinctive language, traditions and religion (Tonemah, 1987). Diversity between tribes and individuals was further increased because of "varying degrees of traditionalism (tribal heritage retention) and acculturation (off reservation/urban residency, inter-marriage) and educational levels" (Tonemah, 1987, p. 182).

Faas (1982) also viewed assimilation as an effect which should be considered in relation to the types of behaviours (traditional or otherwise) which would be associated with giftedness by any particular minority group. He identified three degrees of traditionality which are defined by the extent to which a group adheres to the traditional Native American way of life and to the use of a traditional language.

Kirschenbaum (1988) agreed with Faas and added that gifted characteristics were affected by a person's experiential background which was dependent on the extent to which a traditional lifestyle was practised by a Native American student's family. Some families may be very traditional and live as their ancestors have for centuries, while other families may have almost completely abandoned the traditional life style.

Conclusion

From an examination of the literature, it would seem then, that the low number of culturally specific examples coming from the interviews and the questionnaire in this research, was due in part to the high degree of assimilation undergone by participants. A variance in experiential background among the

rural Aboriginal participants in Harslett's research (1993) and the urban group in this research may also have resulted in fewer culturally specific examples.

However, the culturally specific examples were seen as important outcomes of the research for two reasons. Firstly, the examples helped to delineate more comprehensively urban Aborigines' conceptions of giftedness. Secondly, the culturally specific examples are definitive of Frasier's core attributes and the Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability attribute, enhancing their use in school identification procedures.

These results must be treated cautiously though, since 14 (38%) of the interview and questionnaire examples came from one interview. However, one must consider, too, that 15 other people contributed 23 similar examples. Although limited in number, the examples provided an initial collection of culturally specific examples upon which to build and an initial set of subcategories by which to classify them.

Summary of Findings

Giftedness is culturally based, according to Braggett (1985b), because of the "close connection between the nature of giftedness and the society in which it occurs" (p. 17). He suggested that in a multicultural society such as Australia, giftedness is likely to be viewed largely from the major culture perspective, which, in turn, may place minority groups in a disadvantaged position.

Braggett (1985b) asserted that the dominant view in Australia is "that giftedness pertains basically to the academic domain viewed within a white,

middle class, monocultural society, and that gifted children achieve outstanding success in virtually all academic areas with weaknesses in none... . Such stereotypes are deeply ingrained in Australian society and schools tend to reinforce them" (p. 3).

These societal views tend to overlook the possibility of culturally diverse gifted children. There is an obvious need for a broadened conception of giftedness and a more multi-sourced approach to identification which would utilise assessment techniques with greater sensitivity to cultural values and traditions of gifted minority children.

It has been proposed that effective identification of gifted minority children should be based on the recognition that exceptional abilities and their manifestations will be culturally influenced (Braggett, 1985b; Callahan & McIntire, 1994; Frasier, 1992b, 1996; Gagne, 1993; Gay, 1978; Goodnow, 1988; Harslett, 1993; Keats, 1988; Maltby, 1986; Tonemah, 1987). This research sought to investigate the conceptions of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people and to identify behaviours seen by them to be indicative of giftedness. It was anticipated that such knowledge would better inform procedures used to identify gifted urban Aboriginal students.

The findings of this research are summarised below.

- The urban Aboriginal people in this research appeared to hold a multi-faceted conception of giftedness. That is, giftedness was described as exceptional ability which was demonstrated not only in academic success but
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in a variety of areas such as sports, leadership, creativity, communication, motivation, insight, self-awareness and interpersonal skills.

- All of Frasier's (1992b) ten core attributes were described to some extent as indicators of giftedness by the urban Aboriginal interviewees and the Aboriginal teacher questionnaire respondents.
 - Other descriptions, which were not categorised under the core attributes, were related to being a leader, sensitivity to others' needs and emotions, self confidence, maturity, being responsible and social adaptability. These were eventually categorised as Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability.
 - Descriptions of the attributes of Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability and Motivation accounted for 206 (42%) of the 487 examples, thus indicating that these two attributes may have the greatest significance as indicators of giftedness in urban Aboriginal children.
 - Frequent description of the six attributes of Communication, Interests, Reasoning, Memory, Problem Solving Ability and Insight with 240 (49.3%) of the total examples, suggested that they also may be strong indicators of urban Aboriginal children's giftedness.
 - The low frequency of 41 (8.4%) descriptions for the attributes of Imagination / Creativity, Humour and Inquiry implied that these attributes may not play as important a role as the other attributes in the identification of gifted urban Aboriginal children.
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- The existing subcategories of the ten core attributes as outlined by Frasier were considered to be relevant and appropriate to the conception of giftedness as described by urban Aborigines in the interviews and the questionnaire. Inclusion of the two additional subcategories of “quick witted” and “always questioning” may assist to describe more accurately, in terms of urban Aboriginal cultures, the attributes of Humour and Inquiry, respectively.
- A limited number (37 or 7.6%) of culturally specific descriptions were identified. Such low numbers may be due to the high level of cultural assimilation of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents. The culturally specific descriptions were grouped into subcategories related to an interest in and concern about cultural issues, the ability to effectively deal with racism, a sense of family loyalty, an ability to switch language codes, the ability to live effectively in a bi-cultural situation, storytelling ability, and what were seen to be natural abilities of Aboriginal culture members. In light of the literature, these subcategories may also be viable for use with other minority populations.

Limitations of this Research

The small number (11) of interviews and the low return rate (39%) of the Aboriginal teacher questionnaire did not allow a claim of generalisability to urban Aboriginal cultures for these findings. Nevertheless, the results did contain valuable descriptive segments, and there emerged a distinct and similar pattern in the two data gathering activities which, to some extent, served to triangulate the data.

From this research, it was shown that the Aboriginal participants in this research described many characteristics of giftedness which are strongly suggested in the literature as being appropriate for use in identification procedures utilised with minority groups. Further, culturally specific behaviours, which may more accurately demonstrate an Aboriginal child's giftedness, resulted from this research.

It was not the intention of this research to make broad generalisations from these research data, which would encourage the stereotyping of Aboriginal people and their conceptions of giftedness. Rather, it was hoped that the research would be used as a basis to stimulate debate on the conceptions of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people and the attributes which urban Aboriginal people believe to be indicators of giftedness. It was envisaged that such debate would lead to improved identification procedures and more culturally appropriate education for gifted urban Aboriginal children.

Implications for Further Research

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, mention was made of the lack of research and knowledge related to the identification and education of gifted Aboriginal children, and, in this chapter, it was pointed out that there were limitations to the generalisability of the research findings. Therefore, further research might build on the results of this thesis in a number of ways.

This research was limited to a small number of urban Aboriginal people living in an area restricted to within a one hour drive of Toowoomba and to less

than 40% of the small number of Aboriginal teachers in the Queensland state education system. In order for the results to be more generalisable, further research is indicated concerning the conceptions of more urban Aboriginal parents and more Aboriginal teachers both within the state system and in Catholic and private schools. Additionally, larger samples of urban Aboriginal people could be sought in other Australian states and territories. It would also be of interest to conduct research which tapped the perceptions of Aboriginal children and youths to ascertain a more complete picture of the conception of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people and gain stronger triangulation of the data.

An unexpected and largely unexplained finding of this research, previously discussed on page 253, was the lack of descriptions and significance given to the attribute of Humour as an indicator of exceptional ability. This apparent anomaly could be investigated further in future research.

Although there were initial concerns related to the appropriateness of the use of the interview method with a non-Aboriginal interviewer, these concerns proved to be unfounded and data rich with detailed descriptions of gifted behaviours were obtained using this research method. Additionally, as might be expected, the interview method provided greater opportunity than was possible through the written questionnaire, to clarify cultural differences in expressions and understandings, and to verify and ratify the cultural sensitivity of the coding practice used to categorise the data. Therefore, because of the successfulness of the interview method in data collection, it is strongly recommended for use in

future studies conducted to explore urban Aborigines' conceptions of giftedness.

It must always be acknowledged, however, that the richness of any interview data is dependent, to a large extent, upon the articulation level of the interviewees. Further, it is recognised by the researcher that the less articulate interviewees may describe giftedness differently from the sample in this study.

Another possible direction for further research would be the validation of the revised 'checklist' of attributes through its use in identification procedures. That is, future research should explore the effective use of the eleven attributes by non-Aboriginal people including teachers and student peers, to identify gifted Aboriginal students. A related study could determine whether or not the attributes increased the number of gifted urban Aboriginal students being identified over a designated period of time.

Further research might focus on the investigation of the use of culturally relevant attributes as criteria in choosing formal and informal, culturally sensitive assessment practices and instruments for inclusion in multi-sourced identification procedures. For example, it would seem advisable to select instruments which would yield data related to the attributes seen by the culture to be indicative of giftedness.

Research might explore the eleven attributes from this study in terms of their usefulness to inform and direct the development of a culturally relevant classroom curriculum for gifted Aboriginal children. As was mentioned earlier in chapter 1, such curriculum is necessary to encourage the development and

manifestation of Aboriginal children's gifted behaviours. A more culturally responsive curriculum would also enhance the education experiences of all Aboriginal students.

The findings from this study may also be used in the research and development of special education programs designed to recognise and take into account the influence which culture has on gifted Aboriginal children's learning needs and ultimately on the development of their exceptional abilities.

This research has acted as a beginning point for the investigation of giftedness in urban Aboriginal populations. Much still is left to be explored in order to establish a more complete notion of urban Aboriginal giftedness and to identify and address related educational implications.

Conclusions

The literature supported the use of a conception of giftedness to be used in the identification of culturally diverse gifted students which is constructed from cultural conceptions of giftedness (Callahan & McIntire, 1994; Frasier, 1989; Renzulli, 1984; Tonemah, 1987; Whyora, 1992; Yarborough & Johnson, 1983). It was relevant then, to investigate the conceptions of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people in order to raise educators' awareness of these culturally based conceptions and the implications these conceptions have for the identification process.

One major aspect of identification where cultural differences must be taken into account is in the establishment of a set of observable attributes which may

be indicative of giftedness and which will guide identification procedures. Although a general list of attributes may be relevant across various culture groups, the ways in which such characteristics are demonstrated may vary depending upon the culture, its beliefs and traditions and the degree of acculturation within the population (Faas, 1982; Frasier, 1992b; Gay, 1978; Reid, 1989). Consequently, it is important for participants in the identification procedure, such as teachers and parents, to understand that intelligence can only be described and understood within a sociocultural context (Sternberg, 1986); and that this context will, in part, affect the ways in which gifted behaviours are manifested (Eraggett, 1985b; Frasier, 1992b; Gagne, 1991, 1993; Tannenbaum, 1983).

It was recognised that the identification of culturally diverse gifted children might be enhanced through the use of more culturally relevant attributes which take into account each child's experiential background (Callahan & McIntire, 1994; Frasier, 1989; Reid, 1992; Rimm, 1984; Treffinger & Renzulli, 1986). This research sought to investigate conceptions of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people in order to identify culturally relevant attributes of giftedness. Such knowledge encourages a more culturally sensitive approach to identification, and should result in the increased recognition of gifted urban Aboriginal children, and in the provision of appropriate services to previously unidentified gifted urban Aboriginal children. As well, the knowledge should inform the development of more appropriate curriculum for these children.

The major findings of this study confirmed that Frasier's ten core attributes of the giftedness construct provide a viable framework for identifying gifted urban Aboriginal children. However, the data suggested that an additional attribute, named Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability, be added to Frasier's attributes for use with populations of urban Aboriginal children. The substantial number (120) of gifted behaviour descriptions related to interpersonal or intrapersonal ability, provided by all of the interviewees and 15 (52%) of the questionnaire respondents, demonstrated the high value placed on such behaviours by urban Aboriginal people. As these were not classifiable within one of the ten core TABs, it was important to include an additional attribute which would emphasise to teachers and parents the need to consider exceptional interpersonal and intrapersonal ability as an indication of giftedness in Aboriginal children.

It is recommended that the Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability attribute be defined as an unusually heightened understanding of self and others. Examples of the attribute should include such descriptions as:

- self awareness - knowledge of own strengths, emotions and cognitive style;
 - a leader - able to persuade and influence others, independent in thought, an organiser, leader in achievement (top performer in a field of endeavour, i.e. sports, music, academic, art);
 - sensitive to the feelings and needs of others - concerned for others, empathises, a 'people person', can read others' moods;
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- socially adaptable to different cultural contexts;
- self confident;
- mature for age;
- responsible.

The greater recognition of the affective domain of giftedness through the inclusion of the Interpersonal / Intrapersonal Ability attribute, with Frasier's ten core attributes, provides a more comprehensive description of the conceptions of giftedness held by urban Aboriginal people. When used in identification procedures, it is anticipated that the eleven attributes will successfully identify greater numbers of gifted urban Aboriginal children than has been possible in the past.

Departments of education have a duty of care to all special populations to provide timely and appropriate educational services. In the absence of any other research in the Australian context which explores the conceptions of giftedness held by urban Australian Aborigines, the findings of this research should form a component of the identification procedures which departments of education in each Australian state and territory employ to recognise gifted children. In so doing, the knowledge gained from, and the processes established by this research should also help to inform a more culturally relevant curriculum and culturally appropriate educational service for gifted urban Aboriginal children.

Endnote

This research was undertaken with the hope that the results would be useful to practitioners in the field and that as such would be incorporated in identification procedures and included in professional development content to inform teachers and parents about gifted urban Aboriginal children. To date, the utilisation of these research findings has been most encouraging to the author. The following projects have made use of this work:

Zig Zag Project: Achievement: Up from Under - Curriculum Provision, Identification and Professional Development to Meet the Needs of Gifted Underachievers in Primary Schools. Queensland Department of Education and Queensland Catholic Education Office. 1993 - 1994. Funded by the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS), Gifted and Talented Component, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

Networking for Socio-economically Disadvantaged and Geographically Isolated Gifted Students. 1993 - 1994 and 1995-1996. New South Wales Department of School Education. Funded by the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS), Gifted and Talented Component, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

The Unicorn Project. 1995 -1996. Funded by the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS), Gifted and Talented Component, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

“Planning for the Education of Gifted and Talented Aboriginal Students” in Teaching TAGS - Talented and Gifted Students. 1996. Dr. Mort Harslett. Education Department of Western Australia: Perth, W.A.

Review of The Parramatta Diocese Gifted and Talented Program, New South Wales. 1996. Brigitte Ellis, Catholic Education Office.
