
Vocational Self-Estimates and Perceived Competencies of Native High School Students: Implications for Vocational Guidance Counselling

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Abstract

The present study compared the vocational self-estimates and competencies of native to non-native students. Results showed that native students had less confidence in their vocational skills and their employment opportunities. The authors discuss the implications of these findings and detail a number of suggestions to improve native student confidence.

Resumé

Cet article compare une évaluation d'aptitude "vocationnelle" faite, d'un côté, par des étudiants indiens, et, de l'autre, par des étudiants canadiens. Un examen de l'importance des résultats obtenus dans le domaine du counseling vocationnel a révélé que les étudiants indiens manquent de confiance dans leurs capacités personnelles à trouver, ainsi qu'à retenir un emploi. Les auteurs discutent les conséquences pratiques de ces résultats, et recommandent certaines mesures destinées à améliorer la confiance qu'ont les étudiants indiens en eux-mêmes.

The unemployment rate of native Indians is high. Hurlburt and Toews (1984) reported that of 182 Indian women who wanted to work in Winnipeg, Manitoba, only 39.6% were employed. Campbell (1985) claimed that on-going federal and provincial government neglect had led to unemployment rates of 75% or greater in many northern Manitoba communities. He cited limited job prospects for northern youths as a contributing factor in the serious drug and alcohol problems that existed. Kauffman and Walsh (1978) also documented high unemployment rates among native youth. They concluded the barriers to employment were a decrease of jobs during winter, lack of fluency in English, inadequacy of transportation facilities in rural areas, alcoholism, personal problems, resistance to cultural change, and employer resistance. Hull (1987), in his comprehensive overview of Indian conditions in Manitoba, stipulates that the lack of employment among Manitoba's Indians poses a matter of concern, especially considering the dismally low employment rates among registered Indians aged 15 to 24. Hull claims that this may be attributable to lack of opportunities for employ-

ment in areas where Indians reside or to difficulties which Indians experience when competing for jobs.

Scott and Anadon (1980) proposed that vocational interest scores and stated choice of an educational major were similar between native and non-native college-bound youths. Although unemployment for natives is high, post-secondary education appears to have improved employment opportunities. The DPA Group Inc. (1984) demonstrated that employment rates of recent graduates were equal between native and non-natives, though incomes were slightly less. They reported a nearly 100% employment rate for Native graduates of professional degree programs such as Social Work and Law.

It is recognized that post-secondary education increases employment opportunities for natives, nonetheless, the number successfully completing professional programs at university is small. Noonan and Young (1985) claimed that 36% of native college students passed their courses compared with 77% of the non-native students. Native graduates of professional degree programs generally find employment, yet few graduate from these programs. Cheek (1984) found few natives in mathematically related fields such as natural and health sciences. They had difficulty in traditional mathematics classes and, she reported, that average mathematical achievement levels were extremely low in comparison to other ethnic groups. She concluded that Indian students avoid mathematics due to mathematics anxiety and thus severely limit their opportunity in the job market. Ortiz de Montellana (1978) suggested that more positive attitudes should be instilled during grade school in Native Americans, including an emphasis that science and mathematics are fun and that science is relevant to the child's culture. He further maintained that a feeling of identification with male and female scientists, and the students' recognition of their own self-worth would lead to confidence in dealing with scientific and mathematical concepts.

To realistically involve more native students in post-secondary education for employment, schools would require more appropriate vocational guidance programs. Jerde (1970) discovered that as late as 1970, for the native child, there was no periodical written dealing with contemporary natives in varying locations in society. Many, he concluded, lack confidence in their vocational skills, in part because of the paucity of native Indian role models.

Ludwig (1984) found a vast discrepancy between native students' occupational aspirations and their expectations. He concluded that there was no overall federal-provincial liaison working towards a proactive focus of development for their career education. He observed that vocational aspirations did not match young natives' expectations because of a lack of self-confidence that undermined their ambitions. Phillips' (1985) observations demonstrated that low scores on tests may

not necessarily be a true reflection of the native child's abilities because he or she may consciously decide not to stand out by performing well. Thus, the testing situation itself may lower the score of the native student.

Many career guidance programs have been developed to promote greater vocational awareness and self-confidence in native students. White Hawk (1976) stipulated that through the use of simple black and white illustrations showing Indians at work in 15 career clusters, the teacher could provide learning experiences that promoted the positive attitudes of students toward themselves and the world of work. McBain and McKay (1978) concluded that at Pima County, Arizona, a developmental career guidance project helped students to grow in self-awareness, decision-making, basic job skills, and positive attitude towards careers. Boudreaux (1979) described a Mississippi Choctaw vocational guidance program that dealt with self-concept, values clarification, objective decision-making, and goal-formulation, but concluded that there was a problem of limited occupational and career choices for Mississippi Choctaw students. In contrast, Nelson and Clark (1977) reported that there was very little tangible evidence of success in a career counselling component of an Indian Education program in Washington.

It may be that native students show a lack of confidence in their vocational skills. If native students have a low self-estimate of these skills, there may be a need to translate the findings into programs that provide more effective career counselling. The present study attempts to compare the vocational self-estimates and competencies of native to non-native students, and to explore the implications of the findings for vocational guidance counselling.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 114 native high school students, including 55 males and 59 females attending Frontier Collegiate, Cranberry Portage, in Northern Manitoba. The students were 90% Cree and 10% Saulteaux Indians from primarily isolated northern reserves. They lived at the school's residence while attending grades 9 to 12. The school population of 280 students was taught by a staff of 23 non-native teachers. The school had a full time guidance counsellor in a well-equipped office containing career planning materials and post-secondary academic information.

Procedure

The sample was tested on the campus of the Frontier Collegiate in northern Manitoba in September 1984 by the senior author with the

assistance of classroom teachers. Permission for testing was obtained from the Frontier School Division Superintendent and tests were administered in the students' classroom during the school day.

Instrument

The Holland Self-Directed Search (SDS) is a self-administered, self-scored, self-interpreted simulation developed by John Holland for vocational counselling. The classification system of six occupational types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional) is based on Holland's Theory of Careers. Tests results yield scores on 6 activities scales, 6 competencies scales (scale 1 to 11), 6 occupations scales, and 12 self-estimate scales (scale 1 to 7) which are all summarized into a three letter code. Correlational patterns among the six scales of

TABLE 1
*t-Test Comparison of Vocational Self-Estimates
Between Native and Non-Native Males*

Vocational Ability		Native Males (N = 55)		Non-Native Males (N = 1727)		† Value	p Value
		X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
Self- Estimates Part One	Mechanical	4.02	1.62	4.61	1.78	-2.67	.008
	Scientific	3.16	1.26	4.15	1.83	-5.63	<.001
	Artistic	3.85	1.48	3.54	1.90	+1.53	.125
	Teaching	2.96	1.62	3.84	1.67	-3.94	<.001
	Sales	2.56	1.54	3.81	1.73	-5.90	<.001
	Clerical	2.20	1.42	2.77	1.60	-2.92	.004
Self- Estimates Part Two	Manual	3.82	1.60	4.70	1.67	-4.02	<.001
	Mathematical	3.96	1.60	4.53	1.68	-2.58	.009
	Musical	3.36	1.99	3.36	1.96	+0.01	.989
	Friendliness	5.71	1.15	5.27	1.35	+2.77	.006
	Managerial	3.24	1.47	3.75	1.56	-2.55	.011
	Office	2.38	1.28	2.94	1.50	-3.16	.002

Scale is 1 to 6

the SDS form a crude hexagonal agreement of vocational interests. Separate non-native norms for 1727 high school males and 2138 females reported in the manual were used for comparison. Holland (1983) reported a corrected split-half reliability coefficient for the summary scales ranged from .83 to .95. The predictive validity over a three year interval was 43% for males and 66% for females. Hurlburt, Schultz, and Eide (1985) reported that the SDS was a moderately reliable and stable vocational interest test when used with native high school students.

The Self-Directed Search was initially scored by each student and scoring was verified by the senior author.

RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, there were significant differences on 10 of the 12 SDS self-estimate scales between the native and non-native high

TABLE 2

*t-Test Comparison of Vocational Self-Estimates
Between Native and Non-Native Females*

Vocational Ability	Native Females (N = 59)		Non-Native Females (N = 2138)		† Value	p Value	
	X	S.D.	X	S.D.			
Self- Estimates Part One	Mechanical	2.90	1.80	2.37	1.47	+2.24	.025
	Scientific	6.61	1.51	3.45	1.82	-4.19	<.001
	Artistic	3.42	1.93	4.15	1.83	-2.85	.004
	Teaching	4.03	1.88	4.98	1.53	-3.84	<.001
	Sales	2.83	1.84	3.83	1.63	-4.13	<.001
	Clerical	3.36	1.83	3.88	1.91	-2.17	.029
Self- Estimates Part Two	Manual	3.05	1.84	3.42	1.65	-1.52	.128
	Mathematical	3.49	1.61	4.26	1.75	-3.60	<.001
	Musical	3.47	1.87	3.75	1.83	-1.12	.264
	Friendliness	5.83	1.28	6.05	1.11	-1.31	.191
	Managerial	3.20	1.78	3.50	1.46	-1.27	.205
	Office	3.86	1.95	3.90	1.80	-0.14	.889

school students. The native males scored significantly higher on friendliness; similar on artistic and musical; and significantly lower on the remaining scales. Table 2 shows there were seven significant differences on the self-estimate scales between the native and non-native females. The native females scored significantly higher on mechanical; similar on musical, friendliness, managerial, and office skills; and lower on the remainder. Table 3 shows there were six significant differences on the self-estimate scales between native males and females. The native males were significantly higher on mechanical, scientific and manual; and the native females were significantly higher on teaching, clerical, and office skills.

Table 4 shows there were significant differences in perceived vocational competencies on four of the six SDS Occupational Codes between

TABLE 3
*t-Test Comparison of Vocational Self-Estimates
Between Native Males and Females*

Vocational Ability		Native Males (N = 55)		Native Females (N = 59)		t Value	p Value
		X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
Self- Estimates Part One	Mechanical	4.02	1.61	2.90	1.80	+3.49	<.001
	Scientific	3.16	1.26	2.61	1.51	+2.12	.034
	Artistic	3.85	1.48	4.42	1.93	+1.33	.184
	Teaching	2.96	1.62	4.03	1.88	-3.25	.001
	Sales	2.56	1.54	2.83	1.84	-0.84	.401
	Clerical	1.42	2.77	3.36	1.83	-3.75	<.001
Self- Estimates Part Two	Manual	3.82	1.66	3.05	1.84	+2.37	.018
	Mathematical	3.96	1.60	3.49	1.61	+1.57	.116
	Musical	3.35	1.99	3.47	1.87	-0.31	.757
	Friendliness	5.71	1.15	5.83	1.28	-0.53	.596
	Managerial	3.24	1.47	3.20	1.78	+0.11	.912
	Office	2.38	1.28	3.86	1.95	-2.31	.021

native and non-native males. The native males scored lower on realistic, investigative, social, and enterprising codes and similarly on artistic and conventional codes. Table 5 shows there were significant differences in perceived vocational competencies on four of the six SDS Occupational Codes between native and non-native females. The native females scored higher on realistic, lower on artistic, social, and enterprising and similarly on investigative and conventional. Table 6 shows there were significant differences on four of the six SDS Occupational Codes between native males and females. The native males scored higher on realistic and investigative codes, while the native females scored higher on social and conventional codes.

DISCUSSION AND COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Cultural Sensitivity and Competence

The native male and female high school students in the present study often recorded lower self-estimates and perceived competencies than the scores of the non-native norms for the SDS. Gade, Fuqua, and Hurlburt (1984) concluded that differences in interest profiles may reflect long-term cultural and socialization experiences of natives. Lenton (1979) reported that there were considerable discrepancies between what Indian students wanted in the way of a career and what they expected to

TABLE 4
*t-Test Comparison of Perceived Vocational Competencies
Between Native and Non-Native Males*

S.D.S. Code	Native Males (N = 55)		Non-Native Males (N = 1727)		† Value	p Value	
	X	S.D.	X	S.D.			
Compe- tencies	Realistic	4.87	1.97	5.90	2.87	-3.76	<.001
	Investigative	4.98	2.06	5.78	2.69	-2.81	.005
	Artistic	2.87	2.06	2.92	2.42	-0.17	.865
	Social	4.35	2.03	5.77	2.68	-5.09	<.001
	Enterprising	2.42	1.99	4.16	2.59	-6.36	<.001
	Conventional	2.33	1.90	2.48	2.10	-0.59	.555

achieve. She concluded that a considerable number of native students did not expect to realize their occupational goals.

It is good for counsellors to keep in mind that environmental influences and socioeconomic inheritance may have a more direct and important effect on the occupations open or attractive to natives than does their physical inheritance. The total cultural milieu or the narrowness or the breadth of an individual's social-class boundaries has much to do with career estimates and aspirations.

Lipsett (1962) has urged counsellors to be aware of the implications for a student of the various social factors — as they interact and influence vocational choice-making. Economic conditions, political directives, population distribution, and factors of age, social class, sex, ethnic membership as well as legislation and institutional needs and constraints all form the socio-cultural reality which acts to set the limits for career self-estimates and decision-making.

As is true with any member of a special subgroup, counsellors frequently fail because they try to fit or mold the native student into white middle class ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. "White" middle class values are so prevalent and taken for granted that most counsellors and faculty members are not even aware of the culturally biased values they hold (Katz, 1985, Sue, et al, 1982, Pederson, 1985a). Wrenn (1962, 1985) indicated that given this unawareness, counsellors continue to operate out of a culturally encapsulated framework.

TABLE 5

*t-Test Comparison of Perceived Vocational Competencies
Between Native and Non-Native Females*

S.D.S. Code		Native Females (N = 59)		Non-Native Females (N = 2138)		† Value	p Value
		X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
Compe- tencies	Realistic	2.83	2.03	1.63	1.93	+4.58	<.001
	Investigative	4.07	2.24	4.59	2.37	-1.76	.078
	Artistic	3.68	2.64	4.38	2.65	-2.02	.043
	Social	5.59	2.64	7.84	2.19	-6.48	<.001
	Enterprising	2.92	2.06	4.02	2.51	-4.04	<.001
	Conventional	3.90	2.58	3.28	2.46	+1.82	.069

In order for counsellors to have effective contacts with natives, they must acquire an understanding and appreciation of Indian cultural values and tribal diversity (Bryde, 1971; Spang, 1971). Existing counsellor efforts that consist primarily of stressing white middle class values and knowledge results in a gradual destruction of the mental and emotional health of the native individual. Thus, frequently the counsellor's failure, part of the larger failure of the educational enterprise, undoubtedly contributes to the unemployment rate and low vocational self-estimates of native individuals.

Enhancing the Self-Concept

That many native students reported lower self-estimates and competencies than the non-native norms may reflect a lower self-image and lack of vocational confidence. The SDS measures how people feel about their abilities; it does not measure aptitudes. Almost all of the native students in the study were raised on remote northern reserves offering little in the way of exposure to modern industrial/business employment opportunities and successful vocational experiences.

The major implication for the vocational counselling of native high school students appears to be the need to appreciate their levels of self-confidence. As a conceptual model for an approach in working with

TABLE 6
*t-Test Comparison of Perceived Vocational Competencies
Between Native Males and Females*

S.D.S. Code		Native Males (N = 55)		Native Females (N = 59)		t Value	p Value
		X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
Compe- tencies	Realistic	2.87	1.97	2.33	2.03	+5.45	<.001
	Investigative	4.98	2.06	4.06	2.24	+2.27	.023
	Artistic	2.87	2.06	3.68	2.64	-1.81	.070
	Social	4.35	2.03	5.54	2.64	-2.81	.005
	Enterprising	2.42	1.99	2.94	2.06	-1.31	.190
	Conventional	2.33	1.90	3.90	2.58	-3.72	<.001

native students, Super, Starishevsky, Matlin and Jordaan's (1963) developmental self-concept theory of career development might be enacted. In this theory it is suggested that people strive to implement their self-concept by entering an occupation.

In taking a job, making a vocational self-estimate or choosing a career, the individual is implementing a particular self-concept. Every condition of being employed has the power to either build or negate the person's sense of self.

Thus in all of its application, native career counselling should be an activity which recognizes, supports and stimulates the self-formation of the individual. Examining personal life-skills in the world of work, reflecting on strengths and competencies and their relevance for various occupations, experimenting with occupational fantasies and role-plays, focusing on positive self-appraisal, teaching decision-making and problem-solving skills, and enacting value clarification approaches are all strategies which will support the developmental as well as vocational self-concept of the individual.

Native Role Modelling

There were some scales where the native high school students reported similar or higher scores on the SDS self-estimates than the non-native norms. The higher average score on friendliness recorded by the native males may have implications for future employment in the hospitality and tourist industry. Both native males and females reported scores in art and music equivalent to the norms, and with similar or higher friendship scores greater participation in the entertainment field may develop. Entertainers with part or total native ancestry already include Roy Rogers, Johnnie Cash, Buffie St.-Marie, Rita Coolidge, Cher, and Burt Reynolds to list a few. In helping students achieve goals of understanding their vocational self-estimates, the task of the counsellor may include emphasizing of appropriate native role models.

Reducing Stereotypes and Sex Differences

Not only should native role models be observed in non-traditional careers, but student job opportunities must also be expanded to include non-traditional tasks. For example, the high mechanical score for native females may indicate more training in areas such as plumbing, electronics, mechanical work, and engine repair/maintenance which could lead to jobs replacing non-native males. Furthermore, native females had higher interests in teaching, clerical, and enterprising skills than native males. Career counselling should encourage native females to enter the occupations related to these skills and, as well, consider management levels where appropriate.

Although physical sex differences appear to be less important as factors in occupational choice than in the past, the psychological and social aspects of sex differences still require special consideration for counsellors. Counsellors need to develop an empathy and a knowledge base regarding the primary psychosocial factors that act as barriers and challenges to the successful career development of women. More specifically, native counselling must consider the diversity of factors that may account for the native women's present state of development as well as suggest ways and means of enhancing further development.

Facilitating Work Opportunities

To be unemployed in today's contemporary society is to be damaged materially and psychologically. Borgen and Amundson (1984) reported that prolonged unemployment leads to apathy alternated with anger, sadness and sporadic optimism, few habits of regular structured activities, few meaningful personal contacts, feelings of victimization, lack of personal power and low self worth.

With a more competitive job market, it is imperative that native youth who are job seekers are provided with strategies, resources and skills that enable them to find satisfying employment.

Job Search Support Groups

Job search support groups used as aids to employment assistance is well documented in the literature. Bolles (1985), Figler (1979), Trimmer (1984), and Krannich (1983), have all suggested joining a job search support group when job hunting. Trimmer (1984) describes the job search support group as containing the common elements of exposing the hidden job market, retaining individual responsibility for the search, enhancing the vocational self-image as well as developing cohesive, supportive relationships.

Job search support groups or workshops can help native group members share information about internal barriers that block them in their job search as well as introduce skill assessment (Bolles, 1977). An awareness of skills can be helpful in uncovering job openings, resume writing, interviewing and broadening the target area of the employment search (Bolles, 1985).

On-site Visits

On-site visits may also be helpful in the career decision-making process of native students as it allows for opportunities for first hand observations of possible careers. Bolles (1982), Carkhuff and Friel (1974) and Figler (1979) have all advocated on-site visits as an essential step in the career-planning process.

The purpose of these on-site visits is to link a student with a professional who is currently working in a career that is of interest to the student. This will allow for exposure to the career in the work setting itself and help the native students to use the experience as validating or reaffirming tentative career decisions.

Placement Activities

Out-of-school placement activities include assisting native youth to secure part-time and summer employment, placement in post-high educational and training situations and full-time employment after their school career is terminated.

Counsellors and others who assist native students in placement must be able to relate placement opportunities to the students' perceptions of themselves and to their projected life goals. Furthermore, vocational counsellors need to seek out employers who will show patience and sensitivity in the training of young natives. Through understanding natives' interests, abilities and goals, placement centres can offer vocational experiences which lead to natives' growing self-confidence and job success.

For example, band councils and provincial/federal governments may create game farms in order to provide a harvest of wild animals for sports hunters. Indians might run co-operatives to pool funds for investment purposes in apartment blocks and other small businesses. Such placement activities can assist native youth in securing employment as well as support and enhance the vocational self-concept of the individual.

Much needs to be done by both native and non-native individuals to avoid the development of an underclass of disaffected, under-utilized and grieving native Indian citizens.

SUMMARY

The present study has attempted to compare the vocational self-estimates and competencies of natives to non-native students. It explored the implications of the findings for vocational guidance counselling and demonstrated that there is a lack of confidence that native students feel toward their vocational skills and employment opportunity.

Since native students have a low self-estimate of their vocational skills, there is a need to transfer these findings into programs that provide more effective career counselling. Career counselling strategies which were described, focused on increasing the counsellor's cultural sensitivity, enhancing native students' self-concepts, decreasing stereotypes and gender differences, emphasizing native role-modelling as well as facilitating work opportunities for natives through job search support groups, on-site visits and placement activities.

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