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Native American History & Government

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### Learning Styles of Native Americans

As Angelina Jolie once said, “Without pain, there would be no suffering, without suffering we would never learn from our mistakes. To make it right, pain and suffering is the key to all windows, without it, there is no way of life.” When I hear this quote spoken, I immediately think of the past- the past when there weren’t “shortcuts” for life. Things had to be done, in our eyes, “the hard way.” However, to accomplish such tasks as a Native American in history, you must learn from experiences. Experiences go from the learning style in which you may inhibit.

Andy Forsythe, a teacher on the Rosebud Reservation in Mission, South Dakota described some things that many people should understand about Native American’s concepts of learning. The average Native American incorporates a traditional learning style into their daily routine. Forsythe documented that Native American’s internal language is picture and emotion based while interacting is generally via body language. He emphasized that there must always be a “safe” environment where only dialogue is within small groups.

Within the same journal brought forth by Forsythe, it was mentioned that Native Americans value “wait” time. Research has shown that “wait time”—the amount of time speakers are given to speak and respond—is substantially longer in Native American culture than in European-American culture (Forsythe 2). Along with “wait” time comes the fact that Native Americans tend to observe before acting or questioning (2). Children on reservations learn

through observation. Theirs is a quiet way. Their minds are active, but their actions are passive. From what I understand it is essential to observe, learn, and when you are ready, you can then perform. Many Navajo women weave a perfect rug the first time they create it because they have observed enough to know how to weave a rug (2).

According to Steven C. Haas, Indian thinking is visual and circular in philosophy. As a result of a different hemispheric orientation of the thinking mind the brain of the American Indian the thinking mind, the brain of the American Indian developed with an orientation to circular thought and the brain of the Euro American developed with an the thinking mind, the brain of the American Indian developed with an orientation to circular thought and the brain of the Euro American developed with an orientation to linear thought (Haas, 2011).

Each culture has distinct learning style patterns. Along with those patterns, educators must use diverse teaching strategies with all students. Native American children appear to have especially high levels of visual and spatial skills and do less well on tests of verbal ability in English. This does not mean that every Native American child will have this ability pattern, just that this pattern is more common among this cultural group than among certain other cultural groups, such as Euro Americans.

It is known that Euro Americans tend to be field dependent learners. Euro Americans tend to have long attention spans as they do not get easily distracted. According to a presentation from April Y. DuPree, Euro Americans do best on analytic tasks and prefer a competitive learning environment that promotes competitiveness with various situations and experiences. As the Native Americans don't tend to speak often, the Euro Americans have formal speech. It is

known that they are not creative when telling stories though! They appreciate information that is impersonal, [as well] (DuPree, 2010).

As much as learning styles are essential, teaching styles are just as vital. As a future educator, I think about how often I am going to have to adjust my teaching style to tailor a student's needs. Right now, I am preparing myself for the worst! I am beginning to understand that not every teaching style I do with a particular lesson plan will suit each student's individual learning style and needs. However, I do need to observe the different learning styles in the classroom and incorporate as many as I can into a particular lesson plan.

Many teachers in today's society are shown to be field dependent learners (8). Most teaching styles are tailored to field dependent students as they stress the quiet, formally structured atmosphere. Native Americans in this type of environment may experience a time in which it is difficult to pay attention. They may have low motivation to complete tasks which may lead to poor classroom participation which mainly causes the high drop-out rates of Native Americans.

As observed throughout this brief research, there are many different learning styles not only throughout cultures but from an individual basis. Learning styles clash even in today's society and teachers must adapt their teachings to suit all student's needs even though that may be difficult at the time or depending on the assignment/lesson. All in all, the Native American and Euro American cultures are different while each culture, however, has their own practices and ways of doing things.

### Works Cited

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