

Borneo Children in an International Digital Playground: Intercultural Issues and Idiosyncrasies

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ABSTRACT

It is often argued that there is a great tendency for communities to be deprived of the benefits that ICT offers particularly due to geographical locations, socioeconomic status, gender and age. This paper describes an initiative to provide greater opportunities to the children of a remote rural community in Bario on the island of Borneo which had been previously equipped with basic ICT facilities. Twenty children, aged between seven to fifteen years, were invited to participate in an international digital playground called the Pangaea programme. The programme is designed to enable children to develop friendships and intercultural awareness with other children from Japan, South Korea, Kenya, and Austria. The paper highlights the initial perception and views of the Bario children during the early stage of the Pangaea programme.

Author Keywords

Intercultural communication, Children, Technology, Collaboration, Rural Communities.

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K.4.0 [Computers and Society]: General; J.m [Computer Applications]: Miscellaneous; H.1.2 [User/Machine Systems]: Human factors.

General Terms

Documentation, Experimentation, Human Factors, Collaborative Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Children in some parts of the world are growing up with technology being omnipresent in their lives. To these privileged few, getting access to knowledge and information, immersing in games, puzzles and adventure, as well as establishing new relationships or sustaining existing ones require only a click of the mouse or a tap on their touch pads within the vicinity of their homes or bedrooms. The same experience, however, is a substantial distance away for children of remote communities whose experience with technology are confined to school hours. In most instances, their access and use of technology are limited due to the high student-computer ratio at their schools. The different levels of access and experience with technology also make an impact upon how the children function as members of the current "Digital Era". Recognising the importance of narrowing, if not closing, the digital divide between these haves and have-nots, a number of technology-related initiatives at the international and national levels by governments, non-profit organisations and civil society have been implemented. The approach, focus and functionality to bridge these digital gaps differ from one location to another, but the ultimate goal is to ensure equitable access and use of technology for all members of the remote communities.

A national organisation in the United States, called the *Partnership for Twenty-first century Skills*, recently published a report which highlights the need for young people to be competent in critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. Acquisition of these 21st century skills would enable them to compete in the evolving global economy. The report [5] also acknowledged the existence of "a profound gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need for success in their communities and workplaces". Taking cue from the suggestions in the report, it is clear that children and young people need adequate and relevant exposure to knowledge and skills which are crucial for their survival in the increasingly