

A Participatory Co-creation Model to Drive Community Engagement in Rural Indigenous Schools: A Case Study in Sarawak

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Abstract: This paper presents the formulated ‘play-to-engage’ model for indigenous community engagement that incorporates factors in cultural protocols and game design thinking. The hybrid model of the participatory co-creation model was formulated in the study that had been rolled out in two rural primary schools in West Borneo. These schools are located in remote villages, away from urban amenities, and technological affordances and resources are limited. There are more than twenty culturally-diversified indigenous tribes in Borneo. Although it is a known fact that indigenous cultures, including those in Borneo, have many cultural protocols and distinctive custom practices, it is still a challenge for researchers who work with such communities to understand, adhere to and follow the cultural protocols. The model looks at incorporating gameplay and culture protocols to drive community engagement. Since play is universal, the creation of a trustworthy partnership between the community and researchers was established through the use of play during the engagement process. Narratives captured in the study represented reflection, problem solving and creativity in the interactions with the indigenous communities, based on the developed indicators of the ‘play-to-engage’ model.

Keywords: play-to-engage, participatory co-creation, indigenous community engagement, culture

1. Introduction

Social research and intervention associated to the communities in Asia, in particular the indigenous rural communities, pose a challenge in terms of the need to be more empathetic and aware of the cultures that are very diverse, especially when the research and intervention approach is based on Western contexts. There is a need to be a more holistic and pragmatic pathway for ensuring that we are sensitive to the context of the communities in order to build trust and positive partnership.

One methodology to address the social inequity outsider researchers and indigenous peoples communities is the participatory action research (PAR). The participatory action research approach to community issues is a culturally relevant and empowering method for indigenous people in Canada and worldwide as it critiques the ongoing impact of colonisation, neocolonialism and the force of marginalisation (Severtson, Bauman, & Will, 2002). Participatory action research gives a voice to the oppressed and marginalised, and the methods and processes promote empowerment, inclusivity, and respect (Dickson & Green, 2001). Most importantly, this approach serves to deconstruct the Western positivist research paradigm that is, and has always been, antithetical to indigenous ways of coming to knowledge on many levels; theoretically, cognitively, practically, and spiritually (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2000). PAR can, therefore, be quite significant to the inclusion of indigenous epistemology in the discourse of research.

Much of the literature about indigenous community engagement centres around the “connections between two bodies of critical scholarship - Eurocentrism and Whiteness (Madden, Higgins and Korteweg, 2013)”. Madden et al. addressed the nature of community engagement on indigenous communities in Borneo, where