

Understanding Elders' knowledge creation to strengthen Indigenous knowledge sharing

Abstract:

Indigenous knowledge contains wisdoms, perceptions, innovations, practical know-how, and shared experiences associated with an indigenous community (Agrawal, 1995). The applied knowledge and experiences held by indigenous Elders emphasise the continuing needs of safeguarding their knowledge for the future generation to inherit. Understanding Elders' knowledge creation is critical to strengthen indigenous knowledge sharing and enrich the well-being and livelihood of indigenous community. Although there is evidence of a growing body of literature regarding indigenous knowledge preservation, often the transition of oral knowledge to written text poses a problem because the integrity of the oral knowledge must be altered in order to suit the dominant language system. As a result, indigenous knowledge may lose its significance and meaning. Battiste (2005) suggests that misperception of the richness of indigenous languages, stories, teachings and experiences has often resulted in inappropriate recording and storage of sensitive materials. As a consequence there has been an inevitable loss of Aboriginal languages and heritages that were not captured ethically and were often fragmented or suppressed. As non-indigenous researchers, we are still grappling with the question of which research methodology and practice is the best to use without devaluing the significance and importance of indigenous knowledge. This paper discusses the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge system and shared practices in understanding and nurturing Elder's knowledge creation and dissemination to ensure that innovative research practices are valued.

In framing the Ngarrindjeri Elders' articulated cultural knowledge, a qualitative method was employed that is grounded by a dialogue analysis structure of visual ethnographic of research. The visual ethnography and dialogue interview processes focus on ethical collection and dissemination of knowledge. The methods create a collaborative research practice that is culturally appropriate for capturing live experiences of indigenous knowledge sharing.

Preliminary results from a pilot study undertaken with five indigenous Elders provides a framework for understanding the inherent value of both tacit and explicit indigenous knowledge creation. Application of this framework will influence a new approach in understanding knowledge system of beliefs whereby interconnectedness to the land and country plays an importance role in indigenous society. Future research aims to uncover new understandings that will develop a conceptual model of Elder's knowledge practices by integrally linking with the lives of the indigenous people.