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Learning to Resist: The Skins Workshops and Epistemic Resistance in Indigenous Media Education¹

Introduction

The transformation of colonial power from territorial occupation to digital infrastructure marks what Couldry and Mejias (2021: 788) identify as “data colonialism” – a historic new phase of colonialism that involves the seizure of human life through data extraction. Where 19th-century colonialism extracted raw materials through physical occupation, 21st-century data colonialism extracts human experience and social relations through algorithmic systems embedded within everyday digital interactions and circulating through corporate infrastructures. This represents the emergence of “data relations” (Couldry and Mejias 2019: 337), a transformation that structures social life through continuous extraction and commodification in ways that parallel how colonial relations structured earlier capitalist development.

Understanding this continuity requires attending to its specific mechanisms. Data colonialism does not operate abstractly; it is enforced through

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algorithmic systems that impose particular epistemological frameworks on all who engage with digital infrastructure. For Indigenous communities, whose knowledge systems are structured through relationality, protocol, and place rather than through the abstraction and extraction that platform logic requires, this enforcement constitutes a specific and acute form of violence. Examining how Indigenous media education can function as resistance to this violence requires first establishing how algorithmic systems foreclose alternative epistemologies and what Indigenous knowledge sovereignty defends against this foreclosure.

How do Indigenous-led media education initiatives function as sites of epistemic resistance to data colonialism? And what pedagogical conditions enable the assertion of Indigenous epistemological sovereignty in digital production? These questions require examining Indigenous-led educational practices as epistemic counter-pedagogy. I use this term to describe approaches that center marginalized epistemologies as organizing logic for knowledge production, enabling communities to create from their own knowledge systems rather than adapting to dominant frameworks imposed through colonial infrastructures.

In this analysis, I argue that Indigenous-led media education functions as counter-pedagogy when grounded in cultural sovereignty, enabling resistance through acts of creation that assert Indigenous epistemological authority over digital production. This resistance operates along two interrelated fronts: epistemologically, by centering Indigenous knowledge systems as governing logic for digital production; and in terms of sovereignty, by maintaining community protocols that ensure cultural authority over knowledge remediation.

For Indigenous communities, infrastructural dependency implies engaging with digital infrastructures in which they have almost no representation or agency. As articulated in the *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper* (Lewis 2020), this reliance forces communities to negotiate with systems based on Western rationalist epistemologies that fracture relational knowledge into individualized content, representing a profound conflict between platform logic and Indigenous knowledge systems. This inherent tension creates a situation in which inclusion efforts risk reducing Indigenous participation to the provision of cultural content, while the deeper governance protocols required for Indigenous data sovereignty remain unrecognized or excluded (Whaanga 2020). Understanding this dynamic is essential: data colonialism does not only exclude; it incorporates, encloses, and repurposes.

Yet resistance persists. Across diverse contexts, Indigenous communities and scholars are developing counter-pedagogies that address how, why, and for whom to use digital platforms, exploring ways to use them as tools

for asserting cultural sovereignty in digital spaces. I examine one such initiative: the Skins Workshops, an Indigenous-led digital media education initiative operating since 2008. Through sustained engagement with Indigenous youth, community partners, and technologists, the Skins Workshops invite participants to create video games grounded in community-specific stories, protocols, and relational ethics. Through the process of remediating community stories and cultural protocols into video games, participants navigate questions about the terms on which Indigenous ways of knowing enter digital space.

I focus on the Skins 5.0 and 6.0 workshops held in Hawai'i (2017–2018), analyzing how their pedagogical structure operationalizes epistemic resistance in practice. While previous scholarship has established the Skins program's decolonial orientation and pedagogical philosophy (Lewis et al. 2010; Lewis 2014), this analysis reveals the specific mechanisms through which their curriculum design enacts Indigenous epistemologies as the organizing logic of digital production processes.

The analysis proceeds in three movements: theoretical framework, case study analysis across pedagogical structure and game mechanics, and discussion of the model's broader implications and limitations.

My positionality shapes this inquiry: as a non-Indigenous researcher working transnationally, I approach this case not to extract or universalize Indigenous methods but to trace epistemological architectures of resistance that might inform solidarity across contexts, respecting that such knowledge cannot be appropriated. I do not seek to produce a replicable "model" but to identify how pedagogical innovations developed within specific Indigenous contexts might speak to broader struggles against algorithmic coloniality. Solidarity, in this sense, requires learning from Indigenous-led initiatives how decolonial pedagogy functions as sovereign assertion rather than liberal inclusion.

Epistemic Resistance and Indigenous Knowledge Sovereignty

If data colonialism operates through the extraction and epistemological structuring of knowledge, then resistance must address not merely access to digital tools but the epistemological authority to determine how knowledge systems structure digital production. This section examines how epistemic resistance functions through the assertion of Indigenous knowledge sovereignty, establishing the theoretical foundation for understanding the Skins Workshops as counter-pedagogical practice.

Algorithmic Violence and the Foreclosure of Alternatives

Beyond the material extraction of data lies what McQuillan (2022) terms algorithmic violence: the harm produced when algorithmic systems impose reductive categorizations, predictions, and interpretations that override the lived realities of marginalized communities. McQuillan (2022) identifies three dimensions through which this violence operates: administrative violence, where automated systems make governmental decisions that disproportionately harm communities; representational violence, where communities “become known” only through data categories and predictive models produced by external institutions; and hermeneutic violence, where algorithmic interpretations override communities’ own understandings of themselves (McQuillan 2022). Taken together, these forms of violence reveal how digital systems function not as neutral tools but as instruments of epistemic domination aligned with what Gramsci theorized as hegemony – securing consent by naturalizing dominant worldviews as universal common sense (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2016: 37).

This enforcement operates through what appears to be technical neutrality and scientific objectivity but functions as epistemological foreclosure. As Lewis, Whaanga, and Yolgörmez (2024: 2144–2145) discuss in their *Abundant Intelligences* project on Indigenous perspectives on AI, dominant AI frameworks “exclude many ways of knowing about the world” and treat intelligence as individual property rather than relationally constituted, erasing the social, cultural, and material contexts essential to Indigenous conceptions of intelligence.

The mechanism of this foreclosure lies in platform architecture itself. Computing systems embed what Ali (2016: 18–19) terms “abstract disembodied computing” – a paradigm rooted in modernity’s detached calculative rationality that treats knowledge as decontextualized object to be extracted, categorized, and optimized for circulation. By abstracting knowledge from bodily experience and relational contexts, this design fundamentally conflicts with Indigenous epistemologies structured through embodiment and place-based protocols. The incompatibility is architectural: platforms designed for frictionless data extraction cannot accommodate knowledge systems requiring relational accountability without restructuring their foundational logic.

When the design logics of digital platforms encounter Indigenous epistemologies, they function as homogenizing forces that strip away precisely the elements giving those knowledge systems coherence. For instance, when sacred stories are reduced to shareable “content,” when oral histories are flattened into searchable text, when protocols governing knowledge transmission are ignored for frictionless circulation, the relational and embodied

conditions that make this knowledge meaningful are obliterated. The result is not simply misrepresentation but epistemic violence: Indigenous epistemologies are reshaped to fit the ontological assumptions structuring platform capitalism.

Understanding how resistance operates requires first understanding what is being defended – the epistemological frameworks that algorithmic systems render incompatible or illegible.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems as Relational Epistemologies

Seminal Indigenous epistemology researchers (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008; Smith 1999) have established that knowledge in many Indigenous communities functions not as static object but as relational process. Meaning emerges through situated practices, responsibilities, and protocols governing who may know what, when, and under what circumstances. This relationality extends across multiple dimensions: knowledge exists within relationships among humans, between humans and non-humans, between present communities and ancestors, and between people and land. As Wilson (2008) articulates through the concept of relational accountability, research and knowledge-making practices must be accountable to all these relationships rather than extracting information for individual or institutional benefit.

Indigenous knowledge systems elevate storytelling as epistemological practice for interpreting the relational ecologies among humans, non-humans, land, and ancestors (Corntassel et al. 2009; Chan 2021). This knowledge is understood as a process of continuous growth, an ongoing journey often described as iterative and circular (Iseke 2013), in contrast to the linear, progressive models structuring Western epistemologies and, by extension, algorithmic systems designed to categorize, archive, and retrieve information as fixed data points.

Protocols governing knowledge transmission constitute another fundamental dimension distinguishing Indigenous epistemologies from platform logics. These protocols determine not merely what knowledge exists but who holds authority to share it, under what conditions, with what responsibilities, and toward what purposes. Some knowledge is held collectively by communities; other knowledge belongs to specific families, lineages, or individuals. Some stories can be shared widely; others require particular relationships, ceremonies, or permissions. Some knowledge is seasonal, appropriate only at certain times (Iseke 2013).

Within this scope, asserting Indigenous intellectual sovereignty (Rigney 1999) enables Indigenous peoples to maintain epistemological frameworks

while engaging with digital tools and resist algorithmic reduction and standardization. Such sovereignty resists the colonial binary between “traditional” and “technological,” embodying Vizenor’s (2008) concept of digital survivance: active presence and innovation rather than mere survival. This manifests when Indigenous peoples engage digital technologies as active creators who exercise epistemological authority over their digital production even when working within platform constraints, refusing both technological determinism and narratives of cultural loss.

The conflict between these epistemological frameworks and platform logic is architectural. Understanding what Indigenous epistemologies defend is prerequisite to understanding how they resist.

Toward Epistemic Resistance

Epistemic resistance, in this context, refers to the active refusal of imposed knowledge frameworks and the reclamation of epistemic authority by communities whose ways of knowing have been marginalized or rendered unintelligible. As Mollema (2024: 574) articulates, decolonization requires “the abolishment of political, ecological, and epistemic borders that technologies erect and reinforce in the phases of design, production, and development.” A decolonial practice does not merely critique colonial structures but actively dismantles the epistemological boundaries they impose.

This resistance operates through the assertion of epistemological sovereignty: the capacity to create from one’s own knowledge systems. For Indigenous communities, counter-pedagogies operationalize this sovereignty by ensuring their epistemologies and protocols structure digital production, enacting what Lewis describes as “reversing the colonial trajectory” (Lewis 2014). This approach recognizes that sovereignty can be claimed not by rejecting colonial technologies but by exercising authority over how those infrastructures are engaged (Lewis 2016).

The question becomes: How does such resistance operate in practice? The following section examines this through detailed analysis of the Skins Workshops – tracing how their pedagogical structure and production processes operationalize epistemic resistance.

Case Study: Skins Workshops as Decolonial Pedagogy

The Skins Workshops is a series of intensive game-making workshops that have operated since 2008 under Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures (IFF), offering a sustained example

of Indigenous-led digital media education. Co-founded by Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati Fragnito at Concordia University in Montreal, AbTeC was established as a research-creation network, investigating how Indigenous-controlled digital spaces can be developed. The Skins Workshops extend this mandate by inviting Indigenous youth to create video games grounded in community-specific stories, protocols, and relational ethics.

Each workshop brings together community partners, artists, and technologists. Participants learn industry-standard tools embedded in a pedagogical structure that foregrounds cultural responsibility (Lewis et al. 2010). Rather than neutral technical capacity building, Skins frames game design as a site for cultural decision-making where every design choice is embedded within questions of cultural revitalization, community accountability and protocol.

Methodology

There have been six long-format editions of the Skins Workshop to date; I focus specifically on Skins 5.0 (2017) and Skins 6.0 (2018), both held in Honolulu, Hawai'i, in partnership with Kanaeokana.² These iterations were selected because they represent a mature stage of the workshop model with well-documented curriculum structures and outcomes, and because their Kanaka Maoli context – distinct from the Mohawk-centered earlier workshops – makes the pedagogical structure analytically visible as a framework rather than as culturally specific content.

Primary sources include publicly available materials accessible through the AbTeC online library and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures website: curriculum documents (Initiative for Indigenous Futures, 2017, 2018), workshop blogs (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace 2017d, 2018), and playthrough recordings (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

I employ a critical-interpretative methodology operating through two primary analytical strategies. First, critical document analysis of curriculum materials, examining the mechanisms through which Indigenous epistemologies are placed at the center of pedagogical structure. Second, close reading of playthrough recordings, examining how specific game design choices – narrative structures, interaction mechanics, and rule systems – encode Kanaka Maoli epistemologies as gameplay logic.

² Kanaeokana is a collaborative network dedicated to strengthening Hawaiian education through the promotion of Native Hawaiian culture, language, and educational sovereignty (Kanaeokana: The Kula Hawai'i Network, 2024).

This methodology's main limitation is that I cannot access the lived pedagogical process itself through publicly available documentation alone. I therefore examine the architecture of epistemic counter-pedagogy: how resistance is designed to operate, rather than resistance in practice, which would require ethnographic engagement with workshop processes and reception studies of how games are encountered by diverse audiences. The section that follows traces how this architecture operates across its pedagogical structure, production process, and game mechanics.

Pedagogical Structure: Creating Conditions for Epistemic Resistance

The Skins Workshops' pedagogical arc functions not merely as technical skill-building but as an intervention against the colonial logics embedded within digital platforms. It creates conditions for developing participants' capacity for epistemic resistance. The curriculum proceeds through five phases (Initiative for Indigenous Futures, 2017, 2018).

Phase 1: Brainstorming and Story Development establishes epistemological foundations before technical instruction. In Hawaiian editions, the workshop opened with a ceremonial gathering at Papahana Kuaola – a reclaimed territory – where participants were welcomed through *pule kino hi hu* (Hawaiian ceremonial circle), received lei, and shared in chanted genealogies, *mo'olelo* (Hawaiian narrative traditions), and ancestral foods, setting spiritual and cultural foundations. Community partners Noelani Arista and Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa then guided participants through the ethical dimensions of remediating *mo'olelo* into interactive media: raising questions of cultural accountability, appropriate representation, and what it means to Indigenize digital gameplay. Storytelling sessions followed, where community partners and participants shared narratives, traced their origins, and collaboratively imagined interactive translations, positioning them as knowledge carriers rather than passive recipients of technical instruction. Participants then selected the game's story and characters through consensus-building.

Once story foundations are established, *Phase 2: Prototyping and Pre-production* and *Phase 3: Learning Technical Skills* bridge narrative to production through paper prototyping and technical skill development. The workshop's sequential design ensures that when participants encounter technical tools – Unity, Blender, Photoshop – they do so within a culturally-established framework: story, characters, values, and representational ethics already determined collectively during Phase 1. Decisions such as not allowing players to embody Hawaiian deities and instead enabling movement

through environments where cultural figures are encountered were carried forward as design constraints into technical production.

With technical capacity and cultural grounding in place, *Phase 4: Production* involves intensive collaborative creation. Daily reviews track production progress while collective participant check-ins continue to orient creative decisions around cultural implications. Internal playtests assess whether story and gameplay articulate well.

The final phase inverts conventional evaluation structures. *Phase 5: Presentation and Playtesting* restructures evaluation toward community accountability. Participants, community partners, instructors, and guests engage in a final playtest and critique, assessing narrative coherence, cultural resonance, and technical function. Games are understood as prototypes demonstrating the integration of community storytelling with interactive form, not as polished commercial products.

By establishing cultural protocols before technical instruction and structuring curricula around the community's storytelling practices and their contemporary issues, the workshops create conditions where participants learn game design as an Indigenous knowledge practice.

Making as Resistance: Asserting Sovereignty

The mechanism through which creation becomes resistance lies in what the five-phase structure demands epistemologically before any technical production begins. Phase 1's placement of oral tradition, ceremony, and community protocol prior to tool instruction is not sequencing preference – it is an epistemological refusal. By establishing relational epistemologies as the governing logic of production (Lewis et al. 2010, 2014), the workshops render algorithmic hegemony's demand for abstract, disembodied computation structurally inoperative from the outset. Participants do not learn Indigenous knowledge systems in addition to technical skills; Indigenous epistemologies determine what problems the tools are recruited to solve, what stories are narratable, and what relationships game mechanics must honor. This inversion, in which cultural authority precedes platform logic, operationalizes epistemic resistance not as critique from outside but as active refusal enacted within the production process itself. Crucially, this authority is not contingent on individual initiative but embedded in the workshop's role structure, meaning sovereignty over production is institutional, not incidental.

The evaluation criteria of the final phase continue this logic of epistemological refusal: where dominant game production systems assess value through market viability, technical polish, and monetization potential, the

workshops' final playtest substitutes cultural resonance and narrative coherence: games are understood as complete when they honor the participant's epistemological and storytelling frameworks. What counts as a successful game is determined by relational accountability, not algorithmic legibility. The platform's extractive affordances remain present throughout, though they operate within a governing epistemological logic they were not designed to accommodate. Creation unfolding through this full arc does not simply prepare future resistance; it constitutes an assertion of Indigenous epistemological authority that data colonialism's architecture cannot accommodate without contradiction.

This mechanism was operative from the program's earliest iteration. Workshop designers articulated their goal as encouraging First Nations youth to become "more than consumers of digital media [and] show them how they themselves could be creators with a cultural, critical approach to video games" (Lewis et al. 2010: 2). The sequencing is significant: criticality is built through creation rather than preceding it. In the pilot *Skins 1.0* workshop (2008–2009) held with Mohawk youth, participants creating *Otsi! Rise of the Kanien'keha:ka Legends* had to "reflect on how they knew those stories, who had told them, and which stories were appropriate for such remediation" (Lewis et al. 2010: 1). These reflections arose from practical necessity: to build narrative structure, participants had to determine which stories were communally owned versus individually held, which could be shared publicly, and how cultural elements might map onto game mechanics without misrepresenting their meaning. The production process generated the epistemological work, not the other way around. Lewis et al. found that "discussions about these stories in the context of technical skills development provided substantial motivation for both further inquiry into the stories and greater participation in the skills development" (Lewis et al. 2010: 1). Technical and cultural knowledge production were not parallel tracks but mutually constitutive: making the game deepened cultural accountability, and cultural accountability shaped what the game could be.

This dynamic is evidenced across later iterations. In *Skins 5.0*, participant Nathan Nahina stated: "I am proud to be a part of this team and doing my best to represent our culture in the right way but also creating an interesting game to play... let's create more creators!" (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace 2017d). The phrase "represent our culture in the right way" is analytically significant: it demonstrates that participants had internalized cultural accountability as a production standard, not as an external constraint imposed by facilitators. Representation becomes a form of sovereignty: the authority to determine how one's culture appears in digital space. Forest Frizzell's description of game-making as enabling participants to "weave ancestral stories with a contemporary way of storytelling" further illustrates

this repositioning: participants are not translating culture into digital form but asserting their authority as storytellers and knowledge carriers within it (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace 2017d).

The games that result are therefore not products of resistance but its material trace. *He Ao Hou* (Skins 5.0) and *Wao Kanaka* (Skins 6.0) do not merely represent Indigenous epistemologies; they enact them structurally, through mechanics, narrative logic, and language. What that enactment looks like in practice, and what it refuses, is examined in the following section.

Game Mechanics as Epistemological Practice

He Ao Hou exemplifies this approach to remediation: rather than framing the environment as empty land available for use and treating materials as resources to extract and accumulate, as in the dominant Western 4X paradigm of “explore, expand, exploit, exterminate” (Carpenter 2021: 48), the game foregrounds situated, relational mechanics focused on balance and respect. In this point-and-click adventure game, the kukui nut³ functions not as a generic tool-item but as a nexus of situated relationships enacted differently across the game’s environmental contexts. In Kanaka Maoli practice, kukui nuts served lighting, medicinal, and culinary purposes; in the game, the kukui symbolizes clarity and wisdom, aligning with a relational understanding in which knowledge remains entwined with nature rather than abstracted from it. For instance, on Wai (water planet), the gameplay requires the kukui nut for clarifying cloudy water and revealing a helpful shark; on Pele (lava planet), hula dancing practice is required to make kukui plants grow; on Ahupua’a (plant planet), the kukui nut serves as projectile to awaken Kamapua’a (a shape-shifting deity associated with agriculture and fertility). In the mechanics, the kukui’s properties emerge through *kaona* (layered meaning) enacted in specific contexts rather than as fixed attributes. The kukui nut mechanic makes contextual embeddedness the condition of intelligibility itself. Players must discern appropriate uses through environmental cues, narrative encounters, and cultural logic rather than relying on quest markers.

This mechanic operationalizes Wilson’s (2008) relational accountability: players cannot succeed through extraction but must develop relational literacy with the environment. *He Ao Hou* contains no health bars, no resources harvested for advantage, no enemies eliminated for points. Instead, gameplay

³ The kukui nut holds deep cultural significance in Hawaiian cosmogony and daily practice. Beyond its practical uses, kukui symbolizes enlightenment, guidance, and ancestral knowledge. Its association with *mālamalama* (illumination, understanding) underpins its role in ritual, storytelling, and protocols of learning (Young et al. 2005).

centers on observation, appropriate action, and restoration of balance, creating what Miner (2022) terms “critical protocols” – integrating Indigenous cultural protocols into gameplay mechanics. These design choices embed obligations toward collective well-being, reframing success from individual accumulation to relational maintenance.

This refusal of extractive mechanics operationalizes the divergence Smith (1999) identified between colonial and Indigenous epistemologies: colonial frameworks treat knowledge as discrete objects to possess, while Indigenous frameworks center ongoing relationships and reciprocal responsibility. When mechanics embody Indigenous epistemologies, they become acts of sovereignty: assertions of Indigenous authority over meaning-making systems. Players must enact Indigenous worldviews through gameplay, experiencing how these knowledge systems structure possibility and refuse the terms of algorithmic hegemony from within. What the Skins Workshops demonstrate is that epistemic counter-pedagogy does not necessarily require rejecting colonized digital infrastructure, it requires reorienting that infrastructure to epistemological frameworks it was not designed to serve.

What Skins Reveals: The Potentials and Limits of Epistemic Counter-Pedagogy

What does a pedagogical model that produces epistemic resistance from within colonized infrastructure reveal about the possibilities and limits of decolonial media education? The Skins Workshops suggest that such resistance can be institutional and transferable across Indigenous contexts – while remaining necessarily partial and situated rather than total. This section examines both dimensions.

Learning to Resist: Addressing Data Colonialism’s Dimensions

The Skins Workshops address data colonialism not through any single intervention but through three mutually reinforcing conditions: cultural protocols governing what knowledge enters digital space and how; Indigenous epistemologies structuring the logic by which it is encoded; and community accountability maintaining sovereignty over production and evaluation. These conditions constitute the pedagogical foundations through which epistemological sovereignty is asserted in digital production. The case study demonstrates that they must operate simultaneously – protocols without epistemological grounding risk becoming procedural formality; technical

capacity without cultural authority reproduces extraction; evaluation without community accountability surrenders the terms of success to platform logic. Together they operationalize resistance along the two fronts the introduction previously identified: epistemologically, by creating conditions where knowledge remains embedded in its relational and cultural context rather than abstracted from it as platform logic requires; and in terms of sovereignty, by maintaining cultural authority over not just what is produced but how production is structured and evaluated.

This establishes what AbTeC frames as “Aboriginally determined territory in cyberspace”: digital spaces where Indigenous communities control self-representation on their own terms (Lewis and Fragnito 2005). This sovereignty, however, operates at the pedagogical level rather than the infrastructural one – cultivating participants’ epistemological authority without displacing the colonized platforms through which that authority is exercised. Resistance, in this model, is real and consequential but necessarily partial: it reorganizes the logic of production within colonized infrastructure without resolving the infrastructural conditions that make such reorganization necessary.

Epistemic Counter-Pedagogy: Transferability as Methodological Orientation

This pedagogical model’s significance extends beyond its specific iterations through its transferability across Indigenous contexts. The adaptation from Mohawk-centered workshops to Kanaka Maoli contexts in *Skins* 5.0 and 6.0 illustrates what this transferability actually consists of: not the importation of a fixed methodology but the enactment of shared epistemological commitments through culturally specific content, protocols, and knowledge systems. This adaptability operates neither as universal replicability, which would flatten the epistemological specificity that makes resistance possible, nor as complete context-specificity, which would suggest no transferability. Instead, it functions as methodological orientation: a set of pedagogical principles that can be enacted differently across contexts while maintaining their epistemological integrity.

What enables this adaptation are resonances in epistemological foundations across Indigenous communities – storytelling practices, relational ontologies, protocol-based knowledge transmission (Smith 1999; Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008) – combined with shared structural challenges: language revitalization, cultural continuity across generations, addressing systematic misrepresentation, and asserting Indigenous digital presence and agency. This suggests that pedagogical approaches grounding digital production in Indigenous knowledge systems can travel across contexts in ways that resonate

across communities navigating similar colonial conditions in digital space. However, what transfers across contexts alongside the pedagogical model are the digital infrastructures within which it must operate; the conditions that make epistemic counter-pedagogy necessary do not change when the methodology travels.

Limitations and Unresolved Tensions

Those persistent conditions generate tensions that the pedagogical model itself cannot resolve. These are not failures but productive contradictions revealing the complexity of enacting decolonial pedagogy within ongoing colonial conditions.

The workshops' focus on capacity-building and production processes over games' longevity creates significant trade-offs. Early games produced through *Skins* 1.0 (2008–2009), 2.0 (2011), and 3.0 (2012) remain accessible for download but are not actively maintained, risking eventual obsolescence. The cultural knowledge encoded in those games may become digitally inaccessible as software environments change. This raises genuine tension: if games function as vessels for cultural transmission, does their obsolescence undermine those goals? Workshops transmit technical skills and creative agency, but cultural artifacts themselves may not persist beyond the pedagogical moment.

This connects to deeper challenges around cultural authority and community knowledge governance. The workshops address this through ongoing protocol discussions with community partners, yet determining ultimate authority remains what Lewis et al. (2010: 7) describe as “virtually impossible.” Rather than resolving this definitively, the workshops navigate it case-by-case through consultation, sometimes choosing to withhold certain stories from digital remediation when authority or appropriateness remains uncertain. The question of who holds authority to encode community knowledge into digital form remains genuinely unresolved, not because the workshops fail to address it but because Indigenous communities themselves are navigating complex, contested terrain around knowledge governance.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the act of sharing cultural knowledge digitally carries inherent risks the workshops cannot fully control. Once games circulate, interpretive control shifts from creators to audiences. Players may engage with Indigenous characters and narratives through frameworks that reproduce colonial dynamics of appropriation. While games encode Indigenous epistemologies at the production level, reception remains shaped by player interpretive frameworks that the workshops cannot govern. This reveals an irreducible tension: creating visible Indigenous presence in digital

space to counter misrepresentation simultaneously opens cultural knowledge to potential misinterpretation and appropriation.

These tensions are not problems to be solved but conditions inherent to Indigenous media education within ongoing colonialism. They demonstrate that epistemic counter-pedagogy operates within genuine constraints and unresolved questions that no single pedagogical model can resolve. The significance lies in creating spaces where Indigenous communities navigate complexity with their own authority, making decisions aligned with their own priorities even when those decisions involve difficult trade-offs.

Conclusion

The Skins Workshops demonstrate that epistemic counter-pedagogy is not a pedagogical stance but an enactment: resistance that operates through creation itself, not deferred to its aftermath. When digital artifacts are structured through Indigenous knowledge systems, they do not simply include Indigenous voices but instantiate alternative ways of inhabiting digital space. The pedagogical power lies in creating conditions where participants demonstrate through practice that alternative epistemologies can structure digital experience, not as supplement to technical instruction but as its governing logic.

Learning to resist means learning with other ways of knowing, not merely about them. What this demands of decolonial media education is an orientation toward making space for alternative epistemologies to govern digital production from its foundations. Resistance to data colonialism is also cultivated in pedagogical conditions where communities recruit infrastructure to serve their own ways of knowing. The question shifts from access to authority: not whether Indigenous communities can participate in digital space, but on whose epistemological terms that participation is structured.

What remains unresolved here is not incidental but generative: collaborative methodologies that can attend to Indigenous counter-pedagogies as practiced rather than designed; community-defined evaluative frameworks for understanding how Indigenous-led digital initiatives function beyond their production contexts; and cross-initiative dialogue among Indigenous digital media practices that moves beyond game design toward broader questions of epistemological sovereignty in digital space. The Skins Workshops do not resolve the contradictions of enacting decolonial pedagogy within ongoing colonialism –but they demonstrate what such enactment makes possible. This suggests that decolonial pedagogy cannot be reduced to representation or access, but requires the sovereignty to determine which questions digital production is recruited to answer.

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Abstract

This article examines Indigenous media education as a form of epistemic resistance to data colonialism by studying the Skins Workshops, an Indigenous-led game design program. By analyzing the curriculum and the games produced in Hawaiian contexts, the author shows how a pedagogical approach that centers Indigenous protocols, Knowledge Keepers, and community accountability creates conditions for epistemological sovereignty. The workshops counter epistemic violence by cultivating participants' ability to create digital products using Indigenous knowledge systems instead of platform logics.

Keywords: epistemic resistance, Indigenous media education, Skins Workshops, data sovereignty, decolonial pedagogy

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