

Co-designing games to teach Indigenous history with primary sources

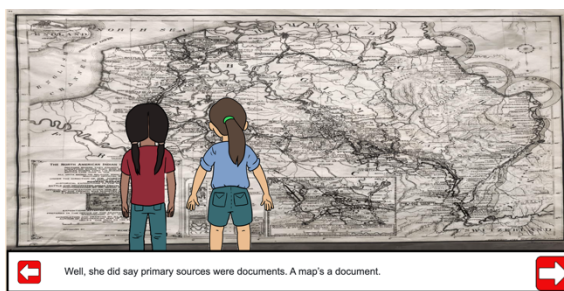
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Through game design with teachers, we are addressing the deficit in the middle school curriculum of positive stories from Indigenous history. Each session begins with primary sources from the Library of Congress, examples of educational games with a historical or cultural narrative, and lessons integrating game play. Artificial Intelligence software is used to draft and augment game narrative, dialogue and artwork. As each game level is created, it is returned to the educator cohort for suggestions for further revision. Recognizing the need for curriculum to align with state and tribal standards, content within games and lessons has been aligned to Common Core, Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings, North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings and Diné standards.

Results expected: We proposed to produce one game, present at one conference, with financial support from our own institutions and have two educator workshop sessions by November. These results were achieved.

Additional results unexpected:

- We received additional in-kind or financial support from two tribal colleges, a state university, non-profit organization and pow-wow committee
- Invited in-person or virtual presentations at two tribal colleges, for a charter school district, national youth conference, educational non-profit, military base, national education association and Indigenous technology conference
- Podcast episode for a major school district (with over 400,000 students)
- Zine created by non-profit arts organization
- Submitted presentations accepted at two national conferences



Lessons Learned and Challenges Met:

The overwhelming level of support for this proposal within five months of initiation revealed a broad, unmet need for authentic, positive curriculum teaching Indigenous history, particularly involving the use of technology. The major issue we needed to address was locating copyright-free, non-offensive primary sources. We decided to focus on World War I to the present. This accomplished two aims. First, it focused on the message we frequently hear from Indigenous school children about what they want to see in the curriculum, "That we are still here." Second, using more recent sources eliminated most (but not all) of the material with blatantly racist language. The Library of Congress served as a valuable starting point for primary sources that quickly led to a wide net of other resources including the National Archives, National Museum of the American Indian, World War I Museum, World War II Museum, Montana State Historical Society and even a U.S. senator's office. We also faced challenges with not all educators having reliable Internet access and conflicts with school scheduling. To address these challenges, we recorded all sessions and posted on a YouTube channel for teachers whose connections

dropped and scheduled future onsite sessions in conjunction with a powwow to combine cultural activities with professional development.

Open Questions

1. *How much AI modification of primary sources is acceptable?*



Original Photo



Photo expanded with Adobe Photoshop

We have limited artificial intelligence application to artwork to the game equivalent of B-roll in film. That is, shots that are used to provide context or visual interest. An example is shown above. The original photo was expanded with Adobe Photoshop to the 16:9 aspect ratio required by the game screen. We decided a modification was acceptable if a) it did not change the message received by the original content, b) it did not falsely portray a specific individual performing a particular action or in a specific location, and c) modification was noted in our database.

2. *What is the priority focus for our next games on Indigenous history?*

We have received 14 pages of game design recommendations from teachers, plus 18 game design worksheets and 46 game design cards completed during a student session. Internally, we struggle with the issue of whether focusing on the positive aspects of Indigenous history, like heroes of World Wars I and II, we are minimizing the serious negative aspects of history, from genocide through broken treaties to racism. While some recommendations addressed these themes, the most common next level desired from educators was a focus on developing an identity as an Indigenous person living in the United States. The most common theme from students was a game character using traditional Indigenous knowledge to survive and thrive, overcoming a series of game challenges.

Contact Us

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