

Archiving the Ephemeral: Oral Traditions and the Digital Decolonization of Folk Art Pedagogy

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Indigenous and other marginalized folk art traditions are frequently oral, embodied, and relational, transmitted through apprenticeship, kinship, and ceremony rather than through the fixed, written curricula that formal academic institutions are built to process; when such traditions enter universities, standard practice has been to translate them into the archive's own terms, stripped of restricted or seasonal knowledge, a process that reproduces the extractive logic colonial ethnography once used to collect indigenous material without consent. This is the research problem the paper addresses. Its objective is to examine whether digital archiving and folk art pedagogy can instead be organized around community authority rather than institutional convenience, and to propose a practical framework for doing so. The paper adopts a qualitative, desk-based methodology, purposively synthesizing archival and data-governance literature, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and documented Indigenous-led archiving practice through thematic analysis to identify recurring points of convergence. Drawing on Mukurtu, the Traditional Knowledge (TK) Labels developed through Local Contexts, the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, the paper develops a three-part framework, consent, custodianship, and curriculum, for introducing oral folk art traditions into formal academic spaces while preserving community control over what is recorded, who may access it, and under what conditions it circulates. The key finding is that this convergence is achievable, but that it requires institutions to accept real limits on what can be recorded, published, or counted as scholarly output, and to remain alert to the risk that AI-driven cataloguing tools may compound rather than resolve these problems unless governed by the same community-authority principles. The paper concludes with recommendations for curriculum design, faculty governance, and technical infrastructure that treat cultural autonomy as a design requirement rather than an ethical afterthought.

Keywords: *digital decolonization; oral tradition; folk art pedagogy; Indigenous data sovereignty; culturally sustaining pedagogy*