LOCAL CONTEXTS: BECAUSE THE ‘S’ MATTERS
TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND
INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE

KIM CHRISTEN WITHEY

Associate Professor of English,
Associate Director of the Digital
Technology and Culture Program, and
Director of Digital Projects at the Plateau
Center, Native American Projects Office,
Washington State University, U.S.A

Video URL: http://bit.ly/1j448JH

SUMMARY

This presentation introduces Local Contexts, an educational website that includes an introduction to a set of innovative traditional knowledge (TK) license and labels being developed in a response to Indigenous communities’ needs.

KEY CONCEPTS

Traditional knowledge, cultural protocols, digital heritage, commodification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Mukurtu? What needs inspired the development of this software? What were its goals?

2. What particular challenges arise in controlling the use of digital content relating to cultural heritage?

3. Kim outlines two ways that localcontexts.org seeks to enable Indigenous communities to have some control over their digitized heritage through traditional knowledge (TK) licenses and labels. What does each do and what are the differences between them?

4. In her presentation, Kim suggests that “legal frameworks often divide people.” When it comes to protecting cultural heritage, in what ways do you think this might be true? Are there other ways that the opposite might be true?

5. Kim concludes her presentation by suggesting that the TK licenses and labels are “part of a social movement.” What does she mean by this? Do you agree or disagree?
A. Cultural Heritage Appropriation/Commodification Case Study

1. Identify an example of where cultural heritage has been appropriated or commodified, and provide a short summary.

2. Outline the perspectives of at least three different groups on this example.

3. Identify any relevant professional heritage association Codes of Ethics concerning this issue. How could these be used to resolve conflicts?

4. What is the current situation of the case study? Was any conflict resolved?

5. Drawing on the points raised in Kim’s presentation, what is your opinion on the use of cultural heritage in this example? Would you have done anything differently? Why or why not?

B. Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Professional Codes of Ethics

1. Identify five heritage/archaeological/anthropological organizations with Codes of Ethics (local, national and international).

2. Provide a summary of how each code addresses the responsibilities of professionals to: a) heritage sites and objects, b) intangible heritage, c) Indigenous communities, and d) the public.

3. Do these codes address the issue of cultural commodification? If so, how?

4. How would you improve these codes to accommodate issues of appropriation and commodification? Use the issues and examples discussed by Kim to craft an additional statement addressing these concerns.

RESOURCES


Creative Commons Website. http://creativecommons.org


Local Contexts Website. http://www.localcontexts.org


Mukurtu Website. http://www.mukurtu.org/
