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Innovative Practices

Indigenous Open Access: From Coercion to Kinship

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Abstract

In this reflective article, Andrews shares their perspective as an Indigenous librarian who has recently transitioned into a role advocating for open education and open access frameworks. They consider some of the nuances between open and Indigenous methods of knowledge sharing and management, how they could coexist, and their accountabilities as an Indigenous open education librarian.

Keywords:

Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Indigenous Librarianship, Open Access, Open Education, Higher Education

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Introduction

In this reflective article, I share my perspective as an Indigenous librarian who has recently transitioned into a role advocating for open education and open access frameworks. In particular, I aim to consider some of the nuances between open and Indigenous methods of knowledge sharing and management, how they could coexist, and my accountabilities as an Indigenous open education librarian. The entanglement of these two frameworks has been explored by scholars including Christen (2012), Flor (2013), and McCracken and Hogan (2020). While there is an increasing body of literature and webinars that consider these intersections, in this article my main focus is a series of interviews I conducted with Indigenous practitioners of Indigenous data sovereignty or open frameworks paired with my own personal reflection and observations as someone new to this work. My interviews were designed using kaupapa Māori frameworks that emphasize autonomy for the interview participants and influenced by relational practices such as visiting (Tuck et al., 2023). It is with their permission that I share my participants names and responses in this work.

My Positionality

I am a member of the Ngāti Paoa iwi and am of Māori and Pākehā descent. After a lifetime of racism in colonized Aotearoa, my Māori grandparents did not insist that their own children engage in te ao Māori, hoping they would gain social mobility in a Pākehā-dominated society. Likewise, my Pākehā grandmother was also hopeful that her children would experience more opportunities than she had in adulthood. Consequently, like many members of my generation, I was not raised with knowledge of our tikanga or reo, nor was I involved in events on our marae beyond my infancy.

Many members of my whānau live abroad. In adulthood, I moved from Tāmaki Makaurau to the United States. As technology has advanced, attitudes around kanohi i te kanohi have evolved, and Māori creative works have become successful in mainstream media. I have found ways in adulthood to engage in wānanga, including basic raranga, rongoā, and te reo Māori.

My work in academia has afforded me opportunities to engage with kaupapa Māori and learn from generations of Māori scholars and writers, including those who engage in public scholarship on social media. Despite living a hemisphere away from home, technology also allows me to keep up-to-date with iwi and whānau matters, including voting in tribal elections and even running Zoom hui for my iwi. I am a member of a local kapa haka group here in San Francisco, and in my day-to-day work I offer support to Pasifika and Indigenous students on campus and in my wider profession. While I hope to eventually return home and engage in ahi kā, te reo immersion learning and directly contribute to my community, in the meantime I know that I am engaging in te ao Māori to the best of my ability as a member of the Māori diaspora.

I share my personal history here because I believe it is relevant to my perspective of examining two knowledge frameworks that appear to be in opposition to each other. Like many other mixed-race or urban-Indigenous people, my upbringing gives me a nuanced awareness of

what it is like to be accountable to and in community with multiple groups of people. I can often see different perspectives even if I do not agree with them and different frameworks for action within those groups. I also want to make it clear that Māori do not exist as a monolith, and I do not speak for everyone in my iwi, or my whānau. Nonetheless, I hope that you might find this article an interesting exploration of how two kinds of cultures move towards a just means of knowledge management.

My Career Path

In 2019, I joined the University of San Francisco as the instruction/first year experience librarian. Two years later, I accepted the role of open education librarian, a new position for the university. Although I was excited to learn new skills and advocate for our students through policy, I also had some personal reservations.

Anecdotally, most of my peers in first year experience were early-career librarians who were also first-generation, queer, or people of colour—identities that aligned with the student populations they were hired to engage with. Conversely, most of the librarians I knew who worked in open education or scholarly communication did not hold those identities. The world of first year experience or student success was one in which relationships and potential were emphasized; whereas in scholarly communication, it has felt like what mattered was credentials, achievement, and the ability to interpret and shape policy. Previously, my outreach audience was students and their families; now, it is faculty, administration, and publishers—groups I had already witnessed as wielding hierarchy and microaggressions against library workers. In short, I had plenty of learning and adjusting to do if I were to succeed in my new position. However, I would not have to undertake this learning alone.

Open Access and Colonization

When I began my new position, I was already a participant in the Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) Open Education Leadership Program. The SPARC program gave me a theoretical foundation of open access principles and the opportunity to pursue a culminating capstone project on the topic of my choosing. As I was interested in what it meant to be an Indigenous person advocating for open education and open access on campus, I decided to use my capstone project to consider this juxtaposition.

Throughout the program, I read many papers on the open access movement, and I was struck by the comparison that could be made between open access advocates and colonizing missionaries. In his seminal text titled Open Access, Peter Suber (2012) introduces the framework by saying, “imagine a tribe of authors who write serious and useful work, and who follow a centuries-old custom of giving it away without charge” (p. 2). In this one sentence, Suber both commits a microaggression and sets the stage for vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018). Suber continues:

> If authors like that exist, at least they should be able to take advantage of the access revolution. The dream of global free access can be a reality for them, even if most other

> authors hope to earn royalties and feel obliged to sit out this particular revolution. These lucky authors are scholars, and the works they customarily write and publish without payment are peer-reviewed articles in scholarly journals. Open access is the name of the revolutionary kind of access these authors, unencumbered by a motive of financial gain, are free to provide to their readers. (p. 3-4)

The open access landscape is rife with inspirational, energizing language that echoes this tone. Suber's (2012) paragraph above includes "serious and useful," "centuries-old custom," "access revolution," "dream," "global," "free," "revolutionary," and "provide." SPARC's (n.d.) definition of open access includes the phrases, "communicating the results of research is what allows us to turn breakthroughs into better lives," "open access is the needed modern update," and "open access empowers anyone to use these tools, which hold the potential of revolutionizing how research is conducted" (para 1). The Open Education Consortium (n.d.) posits that it is harnessing today's collaborative spirit; Open Education Global (n.d.) aims to expand access to education enabling every person on earth to access and contribute; OER Commons (n.d.) forges alliances with its pioneering efforts which are at the forefront of a new educational era. The Open Library of Humanities (Smith, 2018) states that now is the time to form the bonds that will give strength and conviction to all those supporting the APC-free gold open access of the future. The Institute for Open Leadership (CC Wiki, 2014) states that the Creative Commons (CC) vision is nothing less than realizing the full potential of the Internet — universal access to research and education, full participation in culture—to drive a new era of development, growth, and productivity.

Lastly, SPARC (2022) invokes primitivism and ableism in its descriptors of those who present barriers to open access; they are "crippled by a centuries old model," "a print-based model in the digital age," and "legacy publishers." While not every advocate for openness uses this language, it is not difficult to find instances of marketing copy that utilize this binary approach to openness.

Christen (2012) has previously examined the tension between Indigenous rights to privacy and the public domain, stating:

> The colonial collecting history of Western nations is comfortably forgotten in the celebration of freedom and openness that would give 'us' a storehouse of materials for the common good. In fact, the commons was never a place of inclusion, nor was it ever unregulated or uncontrolled. (p. 2876)

Skylee-Storm Hogan and Krista McCracken (2020) analyzed 14 open educational resources (OER) with Indigenous content. In their resulting white paper, they state,

> As this paper argues, creators of OER seeking to include Indigenous knowledge need to approach their work within a framework of reciprocity, care, and humility. They also need to understand that many systems of organization and knowledge production are directly linked to colonialism and can cause harm to Indigenous peoples. (p. 2)

I firmly believe that students deserve free access to high-quality learning materials, regardless of whether or not they are enrolled in a formal program of education; likewise, I believe that traditional publishers should not be profiting from the work and research of authors. However, it is evident that proponents of open access frame the movement as being inherently good and universally applicable. In these instances, it can be difficult for these advocates to resist the positioning of open and practice the humility that McCracken and Hogan (2020) recommend. Those people working in open access are referred to as pioneers, innovators, thought leaders, and on the cusp of a revolution; language which, as an Indigenous person, reinforces values of colonization, Manifest Destiny, and lack of consent. Much like missionary work, open access appears as a process of conversion from a "primitive" system to a "civilized" one, and delivered with religious zeal for the benefit of those who are uneducated and in need.

What then, does that mean for those of us who do not believe that every piece of knowledge should be archived and shared without restraint? Granted, there is nuance to be found in the open movement with two examples, including the use of embargoes in publishing and the flexibility of Creative Commons licenses to shape how one's work can be reused.

Nonetheless, in open access rhetoric, we repeatedly hear the claim that open access enables access to education, but what kind of education does this enable, and for whom? My grandfather often told me the story of how he was one of eleven children and the only one in his whānau to attend high school. There, he was punished for speaking te reo Māori, and rather than continue to learn the rongoā his father had taught him, he was made to learn tradesmanship and play on the school rugby team. In a racist society, the prestige of his education did not help his job prospects or prevent him from being denied service in establishments. For Native American and First Nations families, access to schooling has meant forced separation from family and punishment for engaging in traditional practices, including instances in which educators murdered the native children under their care. What then is the value proposition of open access for Indigenous people whose lands, families, knowledges, and aesthetics have repeatedly been taken by colonizers without consent?

The SPARC Project

In addition to a theoretical foundation in open frameworks, the SPARC Open Education Leadership Program culminates in a capstone project of the participant's choice. For my project, I chose to investigate an Indigenous perspective of open access through a combination of interviews and a literature review pertaining to open access, Indigenous data sovereignty, and Indigenous knowledge management.

In undertaking this work, I was interested in exploring whether Indigenous knowledge and open access were truly at odds with each other, or whether there were Indigenous practitioners in these fields making these frameworks work for them and their Indigenous communities. I was interested in the ways that people working in open access grappled with issues of diversity, cultural humility, and the right to privacy not just for their students but also

for their colleagues or peers. Going into this project, I did not expect a particular outcome or set of rules to emerge, but I was curious to see what perspectives and experiences I could find.

The Interviews

In March of 2022, I interviewed four Indigenous professionals whose work aligned either with open access or Indigenous data sovereignty. In line with a kaupapa Māori research framework, I sent my participants questions in advance with the option to opt out of any questions. Our interviews were conversational and geared towards the comfort of the participants, and participants had the opportunity to review my capstone report before it was published. I offered each person a self-funded koha as acknowledgement of their time and work. Our interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length and were conducted over Zoom. I remain grateful to my interview participants and am still reflecting on the wisdom they shared. The participants were:

- Chris Cormack, (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe); Kaihuawaere Matihiko; Koha team technical lead, Catalyst IT
- Tahu Kukutai, (Ngāti Tīpa, Ngāti Kinohaku, Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Mahanga); Professor of Demography, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato (The University of Waikato); founding member of the Māori Data Sovereignty Network Te Mana Raraunga and the Global Indigenous Data Alliance
- Kayla Lar-Son, (Métis and Ukrainian); Indigenous Programs & Services Librarian, X̱wi7x̱wa Library; Program Manager Librarian, Indigitization program; University of British Columbia
- Kim Tairi, (Ngāti Korokī Kahukura); Kaitoha Puka (University Librarian) at Te Wananga Aronui o Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland University of Technology); Open Access Australasia Executive Committee Chair 2022-2024

I asked each interview participant a slightly varied set of questions to account for the variations within their communities and their differing highly-skilled roles. They shared a wealth of knowledge during our talks together, but for the sake of brevity in this article I will draw on one quote from each of them to illustrate some of our discussion.

Overall, participants were supportive of open access as a framework with a distinct use case and set of benefits. Respondents noted that open movements exist as a set of tweaks within an existing colonial knowledge system, and while these tweaks represent benefits, they still largely adhere to the rules and hierarchies of the original system. I found it interesting that the two participants who actively work in the academic library sector seemed to be more flexible about creating change from within the mainstream open access movement than their counterparts outside of libraries.

In my first interview, Kayla Lar-Son gave a very concrete example of creating a new tool that applies Indigenous protocols to open access and open education frameworks: her 6Rs of Indigenous OER, which is also featured in this issue.

Kayla explains,

> I was looking at the 5Rs of open educational resources and looking at how this does not actually fit into an Indigenous worldview of how knowledge is shared. So I was looking at it and thinking that there has to be a better way of working within an Indigenous worldview and open education in a way that makes sense. I was looking at the 4Rs of the Longhouse, as well as the 4Rs of Indigenous Education which are from Kirkness and Barnhardt, and thinking about how they could almost transform those in a way that would align with Indigenous worldviews for open education and open educational resources.
>
> And really thinking about protocols that align with openness and how knowledge is actually earned—it is earned, and it takes time to earn it, so we can't just look at it with that Western understanding that everybody has the right to know everything. Knowledges, especially knowledges that are sacred knowledges or traditional knowledges, it takes time, it takes accountability to community, you have a responsibility to be a steward of those knowledges, and you have a responsibility to that community.

Likewise, when I asked Kim Tairi her thoughts on whether Indigenous knowledge protocols and open access requirements could be intertwined, she pointed to factors such as the potential to respectfully increase Indigenous access to mainstream knowledge or research, while maintaining firm boundaries to protect Indigenous knowledge and data. Tairi stated,

> I think that reciprocity and collective good and community is what is in common, so it's that, how can we make sure that our research has the best possible impact for communities, and that's kind of what open access is for me. How are you going to get it into the hands of people who are going to make a difference and improve life for iwi, Māori, for all Indigenous people?
>
> Then if you marry that with respect, respecting that our stories are part of our DNA, it's how we learn, it's how we share our origin stories, it's how we continue to thrive, and they are really precious things.
>
> I don't think they necessarily need to be at the different ends of the spectrum. If you're about collectivism and making sure that knowledge has real-world impact and improves things, and the other things, honouring Indigenous knowledges, making sure Indigenous people have control, for me they're a no-brainer. I don't think they're binary, it's not "either/or", I think open access needs to respect the fact that Indigenous data sovereignty is important and it needs to be done the right way.

Unsurprisingly, Tahu Kukutai was the participant who spoke most about Indigenous data sovereignty and Māori data sovereignty, and she was quick to note that this work had been carried out for generations, long before we had the moniker "Indigenous data sovereignty." Kukutai warned against the potential dangers of putting too much energy into trying to change a system that ultimately may not be able to be changed. Kukutai stated,

> If we keep doing the same old same old, I don't think we're going to get anything done fundamentally different. And earlier you were talking about the evangelical nature of open access, but I mean, who's it really working for? Open data movements have their genesis in antigovernment corruption, and so I can kind of see why they took on that sort of fervent, "Open the books! Open the books! We know you're doing bad things" *(laughter)*.
>
> But they can't necessarily transport their thinking into domains for all people at all times, so I'm always circumspect about the claims of the open data movement to deliver anything meaningful for Indigenous peoples.
>
> My own view, though, is that there's always going to be limits trying to disrupt colonial architecture. Doesn't mean you can't do good stuff—you can, but I think you do have to be realistic about the scale of change that can be effective within those systems and whether you want to put your energies there or whether you want to put your energies elsewhere.

Chris Cormack also expressed reservations regarding how much change was possible while still operating within the open movement, stating,

> I feel like the open movements are resistance to a problem, where the solution needs to be refusal. I think about Indigenous data sovereignty more as an act of refusal than an act of resistance. In order to actually get there, we need to refuse the right, refuse people's perception that they have the right to sell data, and we need to hold it and look after it ourselves.
>
> You can only get so far when you're working inside an existing framework and tweaking it. So, the way that open source licenses and open data licenses and Creative Commons, they're built on that there's a bug in copyright essentially, and they're built on exploiting that bug. But it's still working entirely within that Western framework of copyright and publishing and who owns words and all those kinds of ideas. So you're never going to get to where you wanna get because you're still working in a very constrained system and tweaking it, and making it better. Which is good! You need both. We need to keep doing them—they're the best we have at the moment inside that system—but we also need to start refusing to engage with that system in any way that is practical or reasonable to do.

Overall, participants were wary of how open could be ethically applied to Indigenous knowledge systems but were more than willing to explore ways they could engage with open access and open education on their communities' own terms. Māori data sovereignty and Indigenous data sovereignty are movements that are having robust and exciting conversations on how to conserve and steward Indigenous knowledge for future generations. In particular, Kukutai generously shared stories of how her iwi was working on a long-term project to record whakapapa for all of the families in her iwi and make sure that whānau had access to that

knowledge—knowledge that perhaps may not be found in libraries, museums, or archives. As of this writing, my whānau has begun work on a similar project, and I can attest to the excitement and sense of responsibility I see my whānau expressing in engaging with and preserving this essential and personal knowledge.

Reflections

Despite a small sample size, conducting these interviews allowed me to gain a lot of perspective and knowledge, and I am grateful to my interview participants for their generosity and the richness of the ongoing work they do to serve Indigenous peoples every day. My participants have been working in the information sector for some time, and collectively they have helped to shape government and institutional policy and bring about practical outcomes for Indigenous communities, students, and researchers. Along with candid critiques, they all also expressed hope for and satisfaction in their work and their colleagues.

Although I have only used one big-picture quote from each participant, our discussions generated pages of transcripts, and reflecting on them allowed me to distill the following themes or reflections:

1. Indigenous peoples are not monolithic. Not only did the colleagues I spoke with have different experiences, goals, relationships, and obligations, but their own interests, knowledges, and hopes also changed or evolved over time. Indigenous peoples have always embraced developing technology, and I expect this to remain the case when continuing to explore methods of knowledge stewardship.
2. Knowledge and progress are not individual achievements. Everyone I spoke with honoured collective efforts and acknowledged the ongoing help, guidance, and expertise of others, including ancestors, elders, colleagues, and lands.
3. We need more Indigenous colleagues. As Indigenous knowledge workers, participants noted unspoken cultural expectations they encountered in colonial workplaces that went beyond their stated job duties. They also noted the difficulty institutions had in recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff.
4. Communities want to empower and help themselves. Communities are willing to collaborate with non-Indigenous institutions if these institutions demonstrate that reconciliation, relationship-building, and respect are true priorities that will be given the time they deserve. All respondents discussed how communities were establishing their own academic journals, internal databases or tribal registries, library software systems, and formal knowledge management systems.
5. Open frameworks are beneficial but inherently colonial. While open access, data, education, and source frameworks are all improvements to Western knowledge systems, they still exist only as tweaks within the existing system. A truly radical and lasting change for Indigenous peoples requires a new system to be created and embraced by Indigenous peoples with their specific cultural protocols in mind.

6. Indigenous sovereignty will always precede open frameworks. Respondents noted that the "open by default" approach does not apply to Indigenous knowledges. This is particularly true in the historical context of Indigenous knowledges, protocols, and ways of knowing being erased, banned, or taken as a means of exerting colonial power. Indigenous communities never owe researchers or institutions participation in open frameworks.

Conclusion

Upon further reflection, I was able to shift my mindset away from the initial binary I saw between Indigenous data sovereignty and open access. For now, I see two potential models in which these frameworks interact:

1. A spectrum upon which Indigenous communities can choose to keep their knowledge fully "closed" and protected at one end and share some items or objects as "open by default" at the other. This allows for flexibility yet protects consent, and there are several tools already developed such as Mukurtu CMS and Traditional Knowledge Labels that invite this sliding scale of curation and sharing. Furthermore, private companies, Western governments, religious groups, families, and all manner of other groups of people routinely make their histories, protocols, and community knowledges "closed," and this is widely accepted as reasonable rights to employ.
2. Acknowledging the limitations of open access, data, source, and education movements as making admirable refinements to, but never fully breaking away from, traditional Western models of scholarship and publishing. In this scenario, Indigenous peoples may well contribute to open movements but remain aware of the White, patriarchal standards upheld by Western scholarship and publishing, the evangelical nature of how open positions those it posits to help, and those who are wary of participating within it. In this scenario, I see Indigenous data sovereignty as being a more pronounced and separate movement that attempts to move away from Western institutions and knowledge systems as much as possible.

In 2022, I was invited to be part of a panel presentation hosted by SPARC called "Examining How Systems of Research and Education Still Reflect the Structures of Colonialism." Alongside Dr. Thomas Hervé Mboa Nkoudou, Dr. Beth Patin, and moderator Kanishka Sikri, our panel was one of a series of four devoted to discussing how universities, and thus academic libraries, are rooted in oppressive systems like white supremacy, racism, and settler colonialism, and how that is connected to our current work in libraries (SPARC, 2022).

Increasingly, I have seen examples of open access and education being evaluated for disability and health accessibility, cultural humility and relevance, and equitable representation of identities not just as open access beneficiaries but as content and curricula creators, publishers, researchers, and wider community members. Consideration of how Indigenous people participate

in these power structures and how their knowledges are used and shared seems like a logical next step for institutions to consider when they have grappled with the basics of diversity and inclusion. If they are willing to leave the open access pulpit, listen, and respect boundaries, then I am certain there is a vast potential for collaboration, mutual learning, and joy. For my part, I feel more grounded in advocating for open access while practicing discernment. Generally speaking, I can move OER projects forward while still intervening if I sense extraction or coercion in the process. I am grateful that groups such as SPARC and the Open Education Network exist, but more so for the continued work and resistance of groups such as Te Mana Raraunga, United States Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network, Maiam Nayri Wingara, and the Global Indigenous Data Alliance. We will not be swept up in the coercive rush to openness, and any kinship that develops here will include consent and accountability.

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Glossary

Iwi	Tribe
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa
Pākehā	Aotearoa people of European descent
Aotearoa	The Land of the Long White Cloud, New Zealand
Te ao Māori	The Māori worldview
Tikanga	Traditional Māori protocol
Reo	Language
Whānau	Family
Marae	Tribal meeting place, meeting house
Tāmaki Makaurau	Auckland
Kanohi i te kanohi	Face-to-face
Wānanga	Education, learning
Raranga	Weaving
Rongoā	Māori medicine
Kaupapa Māori	Research method incorporating Māori views and tikanga
Hui	Meeting
Kapa Haka	Māori cultural performance group
Ahi Kā	Continuous occupation or presence on land
Koha	A gift or contribution which maintains social relationships
Tā moko	Traditional Māori tattoo, applied according to tikanga
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakataukī	Traditional proverb
Maramataka	Māori lunar calendar