Skins: Designing Games with First Nations Youth

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ABSTRACT
Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) conducted the Skins Pilot workshop to explore a pedagogy that integrates North American Indigenous cultural frameworks into the design of digital games and virtual environments. Skins provides instruction in digital design, art, animation, audio, and programming within a context of Aboriginal stories and storytelling techniques. In the pilot workshop with Mohawk youth at the Kahnawake Survival School, students developed a digital game based on traditional stories from their community. Students were interested in integrating stories from their communities in digital games, respected but modified or expanded the stories where appropriate, and were capable of translating those stories through the complex means for developing a video game. Encouraged by these outcomes, AbTeC is adapting the Skins Pilot yearlong curriculum into Skins Intensive, a two-week intensive curriculum for a summer workshop that offers college credits through Concordia University. This paper describes the motivations behind revisions to the curriculum and considers possible advantages and disadvantages.

CATEGORIES AND SUBJECT DESCRIPTORS
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GENERAL TERMS
Design, Human Factors

KEYWORDS
Game design, education, curriculum, workshops, youth, First Nations, Aboriginal, American Indian, Native American, Indigenous

Introduction
Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC), based out of Obx Labs at Concordia University in Montreal and directed by Lewis and Skawennati Fragnito, is a network of academics, artists, and technologists that encourages Indigenous participation in online culture and exploration of new media technology. The main objective of the AbTeC research network is to discover, define, and implement methods by which Indigenous people can use networked communication technology to strengthen our cultures. In an effort to overcome the economic, social, and cultural factors that influence the low rate of Indigenous participation in the making of new media and encourage Indigenous representation in digital games and virtual worlds specifically, AbTeC proposed to conduct Skins, a game/virtual world development workshop for Aboriginal youth that teaches them design