Hear Our Languages, Hear Our Voices: Storywork as Theory and Praxis in Indigenous-Language Reclamation

Teresa L. McCarty, Sheilah E. Nicholas, Kari A. B. Chew, Natalie G. Diaz, Wesley Y. Leonard & Louellyn White

Abstract: Storywork provides an epistemic, pedagogical, and methodological lens through which to examine Indigenous language reclamation in practice. We theorize the meaning of language reclamation in diverse Indigenous communities based on firsthand narratives of Chickasaw, Mojave, Miami, Hopi, Mohawk, Navajo, and Native Hawaiian language reclamation. Language reclamation is not about preserving the abstract entity "language," but is rather about voice, which encapsulates personal and communal agency and the expression of Indigenous identities, belonging, and responsibility to self and community. Storywork – firsthand narratives through which language reclamation is simultaneously described and practiced – shows that language reclamation simultaneously refuses the dispossession of Indigenous ways of knowing and re-fuses past, present, and future generations in projects of cultural continuance. Centering Indigenous experiences sheds light on Indigenous community concerns and offers larger lessons on the role of language in well-being, sustainable diversity, and social justice.

In 2007, following twenty-two years of Indigenous activism, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Among its provisions is the right of Indigenous peoples "to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures."[1] This right goes unchallenged for speakers of dominant languages, but is systematically violated for speakers of Indigenous languages throughout the world. Of approximately seven thousand known spoken languages, 50 to 90 percent are predicted to fall silent by century's end. Two-thirds of those would be Indigenous languages.[2] In these contexts, languages are not *re*placed but rather *dis-*

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placed through policies designed to eradicate linguistically encoded knowledges and cultural identifications with those associated with dominant-class ideologies. The result of state-sponsored linguicide – which novelist and postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has called "the linguistic equivalent of genocide"[3] – is worldwide Indigenous-language endangerment.

We take as foundational premises the inherent human right to learn, use, and transmit a language of heritage and birth and the fact that linguistic diversity is an enabling resource for individuals and society. However, more than universalist notions of linguistic rights and the quantification of Indigenous-language endangerment, we valorize an enduring tradition of Indigenous persistence in which linguistic diversity is the most reliable guide toward the future for Indigenous peoples. As Mary Hermes and Keiki Kawai'ae'a write, diverse Indigenous languages have persisted over many centuries, sometimes going "underground" during the most oppressive times; thus, it is ahistorical to speak of reclamation as "new."[4] We foreground the possibilities inherent in a vital Indigenous-language reclamation movement, which represents the forward-looking legacy of the survivors of assimilation programs. Centering Indigenous experiences sheds light on Indigenous community concerns and offers broader lessons on the role of language in individual and communal well-being, sustainable diversity, and social justice for all oppressed peoples.

We develop three themes in this essay. First, we privilege what Stó:lō scholar Jo-ann Archibald calls storywork: experiential narratives that constitute epistemic, theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological lenses through which we can both study and practice language reclamation.[5] As method, storywork provides data in the form of firsthand accounts[6] through which to gain insight into the *meaning* of language reclamation in diverse Indigenous communities. Lumbee scholar Bryan Brayboy asserts the role of storytelling in theory building: "Locating theory as something absent from stories is problematic. . . . Stories serve as the basis for how our communities work."[7] And Paul Kroskrity notes, Native storytelling contains "an action-oriented emphasis on using . . . narratives for moral instruction, healing, and developing culturally relevant tribal and social identities."[8]

Second, we distinguish between language and voice. Language, bilingual education scholar Richard Ruiz writes, "is general, abstract, and exists even when it is suppressed"; in contrast, "when voice is suppressed, it is not heard – it does not exist."[9] Like Ruiz, we equate voice with agency; as the storywork that follows illuminates, this is not simply an intellectualized experience of identity (it is not about language in a general or abstract sense), but an embodied experience of personal belonging and responsibility. From this perspective we explore the ways in which language reclamation is part of larger Indigenous projects of resilience, rediscovery, sovereignty, and justice.

Third, we argue that language reclamation is not about returning to an imagined "pure" form of an ancestral language. Instead we highlight the dynamic, multisited, heteroglossic, and multivocal character of Indigenous-language reclamation,[10] underscoring that the "success" of these efforts must be locally defined but also externally shared – a movement toward mobilizing strategic new global alliances and protocols of collaboration.[11]

We first present five narrative accounts of language renewal: Chickasaw, Mojave, Miami, Hopi, and Mohawk. The narratives represent "storywork in action";[12] in telling individual and communal journeys, each author demonstrates the significance of stories as empirically grounded cultural resources for recovering and sustaining Indigenous knowledges and identities.[13] We conclude with a final narrative that speaks to our

anchoring themes and the meaning of storywork for Indigenous language reclamation.

Chikashshanompa' is a Muskogean language spoken by less than fifty people, most of whom reside within the Chickasaw Nation in south-central Oklahoma. As Kari Chew relates, Chickasaw people consider Chikashshanompa' a gift "with which to speak to each other, the land, the plants, the animals, and the Creator."[14] *Though centuries of colonization have disrupted the continuity of intergenerational language transmission, the Chickasaw Nation is actively undertaking a multipronged language reclamation effort.*

The story of language loss and reclamation in my family begins in 1837, when the U.S. government forced my great-great-great-grandparents from their Southeastern homelands to present-day Oklahoma. Their children, who attended English-language boarding schools, were the last generation in my family to learn Chikashshanompa' as a first language. I was raised in Los Angeles, where my grandparents relocated after leaving the Chickasaw Nation. Though it was important to my family to visit and maintain a connection "back home," the language was not spoken or talked about among my relatives.

I did not know my language as a child, but I believe it has always been within me – a gift from my ancestors and Creator – waiting to be resurfaced. In my young adulthood, during a college internship with my tribe, I had my first opportunity to take a Chikashshanompa' class. It did not take long for the language – my language – to captivate my soul. One phrase I learned was, "*Chikashsha saya*," "I am Chickasaw." Though I had said these words many times in English, they never fully conveyed my sense of who I was: saying them in Chikashshanompa', I had finally found my voice. The experience inspired me to continue learning the language and to use my education to support other Chickasaw people in their pursuit of language reclamation.

Throughout my work, I have built relationships with Chickasaw people deeply committed to learning and teaching Chikashshanompa'. One was Elder fluent speaker Jerry. While I knew Jerry as a patient and dedicated language teacher, he had not always been that way. For many years, Jerry was skeptical of younger generations' interest in Chikashshanompa' because he believed that the language was destined to perish with his generation. He asked those who approached him wanting to learn, "If I teach you, who are you going to speak to? There's nobody else that speaks it and I'm not going to live forever."

In time, persistent language learners convinced Jerry to teach them. Despite his initial reluctance, Jerry came to embrace language work as his life's calling. The younger people he taught were eager to learn and began to speak the language well. Seeing their dedication and progress made Jerry reconsider his perception of Chikashshanompa' as a "dying" language. He posed his question again: "If I weren't here anymore, who's going to carry [Chikashshanompa'] on?" But this time he had an answer: the younger generations of committed language learners "would carry it on."

Coming from a family that did not "carry" the language, I was thankful that Jerry wanted to give Chikashshanompa' to learners of my generation. Not only did Jerry teach me Chikashshanompa', he taught me about what language reclamation means: speaking the language proudly, and, most important, sharing it with others.

One of the ways Jerry envisioned sharing the language with future generations was through children's books. Inspired by Jerry, a small group of language learners and I created stories in Chikashshanompa' with beginning and youth language learners in mind. I couldn't wait to show Jerry our work. About two weeks before I planned to see him, however, I received news that Jerry had passed.

As I mourned the loss of a dear teacher, I thought also of the hope that Jerry held for the language. When I asked Jerry about what he thought would happen to the language during my lifetime, he said he foresaw a new generation of speakers. "Right now is just the beginning [of our language reclamation story]," he reminded me. "There's a lot more." While I never had the chance to share our stories with Jerry, I know he would be proud to see language learners sharing in his vision to give the language to emerging generations of Chikashshanompa' speakers.

Pipa Aha Macav, The People With the River Running Through Their Body and the Land (the Mojave), trace their origins to Spirit Mountain near present-day Needles, California. Mojave is a Yuman language spoken by peoples indigenous to the southern California, Nevada, and Arizona desert. At Fort Mojave, there are approximately twenty tribal elders who learned Mojave as a first language. Natalie Diaz is one of a small group of young adults, parents, and youth who embarked on a journey to learn the Mojave language from the elders and to create a repository of language resources for future generations.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes, "the most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized. . . . To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others."[15]

Language negotiates the way I know myself – what I believe I am capable of, how I know myself in relationship to others, what I can offer others, what I deserve from others in return. Language is where I am constructed as either possible or impossible.

To lose a language is to lose many things other than vocabulary. To lose a language is also to lose the body, the bodies of our ancestors and of our futures. What I mean is: Language is more than an extension of the body; it *is* the body, made of the body's energy and electricity, developed to carry the body's memories, desires, needs, and imagination.

When a word is silenced, what happens to the bodies who spoke it? What happens to the bodies once carried in those erased words?

When a verbal expression of love is crushed quiet, how long can the physical gesture of love continue in such oppressive silence? How can the gesture answer if nobody calls out for it verbally?

In Mojave, the word *kavanaam*, which carries within it a very physical and caring gesture, was lost. We didn't know it was lost, since we'd never felt it, never had it offered to us or acted out upon us. This is a small story of how we returned to kavanaam – first the word, and eventually the gesture.

In a language class, an adult learner told our Elder teacher, who was her aunt, "I want to tell my son 'I love you.'" Many of us had already heard the teacher's reply: "Mojaves don't have a phrase for 'I love you.'" We were given this data by White linguists who had studied our language, and found it scribbled in their numerous notes. Studying a language differs greatly and dangerously from feeling a language. Luckily, the learner did not accept a White linguist's detached "knowing" of a language built in a Mojave body and meant to be delivered onto another Mojave body. The learner further shared that she'd never heard her father or mother say they loved her. She didn't want her experience to be her son's inheritance. She needed to tell him she loved him, in his Mojave language.

"What do you really want to say?" the teacher asked.

Emotional beyond words, the learner answered in gesture, reaching her hands out as if her son were in front of her, then returning her hands back to her own body, pressing them to her chest.

"Okay," the Elder teacher said, "We have many ways to say this."

And we learned those ways, none of which translated to "I love you." Our ways were too urgent to fit within three small English words.

This is how we found kavanaam. Later that evening, the learner stopped by my mother's house, still wanting to process the emotional moment from class. She shared another story about the last time she and her sister saw her father; he was being wheeled into the emergency room. Her sister said again and again, "I love you, Dad."

He didn't reply. He didn't say, "I love you too." Instead he reached out and pressed her arm repeatedly, squeezing his large hand around her forearm, wrist, and palm.

After a moment, my mother responded, "He told your sister he loved her, just not with words."

My mother recounted how her mother, grandmother, and aunts pressed her and her siblings' legs, shoulders, and arms, as babies in cradleboards and into their teens. My aunt pressed my great-grandmother's body well past her hundredth birthday. This pressing was a gesture of care, of tenderness, a conversation between two Mojave bodies, a way of saying that was more powerful than words.

The next morning, when I visited my Elder teachers and told them this story, they remembered: kavanaam, to press the body. "I haven't heard it in a long time," my teacher said.

Mojaves didn't say the English phrase "I love you," but not because we did not feel tenderness. "I love you" meant little to us – how could we have trusted the English-language expression of *love* when its speakers had been so unloving to us, our human bodies, and the bodies of our earth and water?

When we lost our languages, we lost many ways of expression. We did not speak the word kavanaam and shortly thereafter we ceased to gesture or enact it. We were altered – our bodies were changed because the ways we knew to care for one another's bodies were changed. We couldn't say the tenderness, and soon we began to believe our bodies did not deserve such tendernesses.

American violence inflicted on Indigenous bodies, throughout history and today, doesn't define our capacity for tenderness. We found kavanaam where it had been waiting, in our bodies. We took back a part of our culture that held the Mojave way of perceiving ourselves and our relationship to the world. Yes, America has given us violence, and still we deserve tenderness – moreover, we are as capable of delivering it to one another as we are of receiving it from one another.

To reclaim a language is many things, one of which is to regain the verbal and gestured language of tenderness and the autonomy to love ourselves.

Myaamia – Miami – is a major dialect of Miami-Illinois, an Algonquian language spoken by peoples indigenous to the Great Lakes region. Multiple forced relocations, first into what is now Kansas and later into Oklahoma (then called "Indian Territory"), left in their wake diaspora, language loss, and massive population decline. Miami people today reside in forty-seven U.S. states, with approximately five thousand citizens enrolled in the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and an estimated ten thousand more who may claim Miami or Illinois as a heritage language. This is the context for myaamiaki eemamwiciki (Miami Awakening), a personal and community-based language and cultural reclamation process, described below by Wesley Leonard.

In his final State of the Nation address to the citizens of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in 2007, my grandfather, akima waapimaankwa (Chief Floyd E. Leonard, 1925 – 2008), called for tribal elders "to teach those who are rising up to become the elders of tomorrow" and recognized the "many middle-age and young people who are working hard to gain knowledge of [Miami] culture, language and traditions."

He acknowledged how a series of historical ruptures created a situation in which contemporary Miamis often must actively seek tribal cultural knowledge and learn our language, myaamia, as a second language. These ruptures include the forced removal of part of the Miami community from tribal homelands in Indiana, U.S.-run boarding schools in which Native American children were not allowed to speak their tribal languages, and the nearly complete silence of myaamia to the point where linguistic science erroneously labeled it "extinct."[16] In fact, we have been successful in bringing our language back into the community – a process that ironically began by applying tools of linguistic science to analyze archival documentation of myaamia.

By acknowledging both this history and the contemporary response, my grandfather referenced a core idea of my tribe and of other Native American groups, which is that the past informs the present and the present looks to the future (that is, today's tribal youth will become elders). Appropriately, within the archival documentation of myaamia was our language's grammatical particle *kati*, which marks that something will occur. This gives us the grammar to talk about the future, including learning, speaking, transmitting, and expanding myaamia in a way that aligns with changing Miami community needs and values.

My experience with wider society's view of Native Americans and our many languages is that while nobody forgets the existence of the past (however inaccurate their accounts of it may be), the present and future are comparatively overlooked. While complex forces underlie this phenomenon, many of them can be captured by one word: colonization. By extension, our response must be *decolonization*. Today's Miami people are engaged in decolonization as we reclaim our language, not only by learning and speaking it, but also by identifying beliefs and practices that perpetuate colonial values and voicing alternatives to them, which I will now do.

Much of my work focuses on educating about how colonialism relegates Native American languages and peoples to the past and thus doubly silences Native languages, first through policies that coerce communities to replace their languages, and then through relegating those languages to "disappearing" or "extinct" status even when they are still spoken. (The latter sometimes still occurs with myaamia, even though myaamiaataawiaanki noonki kaahkiihkwe – "we speak Miami today" – and myaamiaataawiaanki *kati*.) Sadly, such erasure is frequently reinforced in academia despite its contemporary calls for inclusion, diversity, responsibility to communities, and broad inquiries into the arts and sciences.

In linguistics, my field of training, erasure can occur when linguists fervently document "the last speakers" of Indigenous languages and frame this work around preservation of the past rather than reclamation, which looks to the future. Though many linguists put significant effort into facilitating community language goals, this work tends to be marginalized within academia as superfluous or unnecessary in comparison with "pure" scientific work. Still worse is when community goals get removed from the discipline's focus under the claim that "linguistics is the scientific study of language," a phrase that demonstrates a failure to recognize that Indigenous peoples' engagement with science may offer epistemologies that can expand the scope of scientific inquiry. For example, one myaamia language teacher defines language as "how a community connects to each other and how they express . . . themselves and their culture to each other." By this definition, "community" becomes a vital part of language, and, following my grandfather's call, helping today's young people become the elders of tomorrow becomes a central part of linguistic inquiry.

Hopiit, the Hopi people, a kin-based matrilineal society, are the westernmost Puebloans, residing in their aboriginal lands in what is now northeast Arizona. Contemporary Hopi village life continues to revolve around a rich secular and ceremonial calendar, which is the mainstay of this cultural community. Nevertheless, the Hopi language is rapidly losing ground to English. Here Sheilah Nicholas relates her personal journey to recover Hopi, her language of birth.

"*Um tsayniiqe paas Hopiningwu.*" ("When you were a child, you were *fully* Hopi.") My mother directed these words to me as she observed me struggle to carry on a Hopi conversation as an adult. I recall turning to English and defensively yet feebly responding, "I'm *still* Hopi." My mother's words struck deeply and produced an acute linguistic insecurity. This brief linguistic exchange opened the floodgate to a critical consciousness about the intimate bond between language, culture, and identity and the profoundly affective nature of language.

When my mother reiterated a similar comment on another occasion, I countered with my memory that it was she who advised me to "put away" my Hopi so I could do well in school; yet she was now subjecting me to comments I interpreted as questioning my Hopi identity. My defensive retort was disrespectful, but she acknowledged that she should have advised, *"Pay um uuHopilavayiy enangni"* ("Along with [learning to use English], continue with your Hopi language").

It would be many years before I would understand that I had misinterpreted her critical comments, which I perceived at the time as an assault on my cultural identity – how could a mother do this? Today, I acknowledge she *was* rightfully perplexed about my struggle to speak Hopi; it was my first language and I spoke it with ease as a child. My reinterpretation of her statement – "When you were a child, you were a *fluent speaker* of Hopi" – expressed her astonishment at my loss of fluency. Although initially painful, my mother's words became the catalyst for my personal language reclamation journey – to assert that I have remained Hopi and to reclaim the ability to "describe the Hopi world, not only the physical in the sense of touch, sight, and hearing, but also mentally, intellectually, because the words conjure up . . . images that are not necessarily borne out by reality."[17] These images allow us to visualize and conceptualize the ontological perspectives of the Hopi world held by our ancestors transported through time and language.

My journey was inspired by two questions: What happened to my Hopi? Could I claim a Hopi identity if I could no longer speak or think in Hopi? Mentors at the American Indian Language Development Institute propelled me forward in my journey of language reclamation. Akira Yamamoto, in response to my first question, imparted hope, explaining that Hopi acquired in childhood still resided in the deep recesses of my mind and body; I only needed to "pull it up and out." Emory Sekaquaptewa, also my clan uncle, provided the vehicle for my reculturalization: literacy instruction. While this journey has been an immense undertaking, the outcomes include reclamation of cultural identity and belonging, return and reconnection, responsibility and reciprocity, self-empowerment and self-determination, persistence – the right to remain Hopi – and agency and voice. For the most part, this was a solitary journey to rectify my "responsibility" to my children by ensuring that a strong cultural and linguistic foundation is there for them when they are ready to seek it out. This responsibility extends to the grandchildren I hope to have. A useful analogy for this pursuit is the emergency instructions on a passenger aircraft – you need to place the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting others. I cannot hope to foster Hopi reculturalization in my children and grandchildren if I have not taken the first steps myself.

This journey brings a profound understanding of the Hopi expression "*Hak so'onqa nimangwu*" ("One always returns home"), referring to the journey to elderhood and onward toward spiritual eternity. Many individuals in my parents' and grandparents' generation who guided me to this milestone have passed on; now it is my generation to which the younger generations will look for guidance. My journey led me back home to undertake the responsibilities of *Hopilavaynaa'aya* (attending to the Hopi language), and now of becoming family matriarch. I do not view these processes as separate. Both my ongoing work with community language practitioners and preparation for assuming the role of matriarch led me to reestablish connections in our Hopi world and refurbish my mother's house in our maternal village, thus preparing a cultural place for our family to return to when they begin their journey homeward. In the Hopi perspective, this trajectory of reclamation is embedded in the Hopi word *itumalmakiwa*, "my lifework."

Kanien'ke:ha – Mohawk, a Dutch barbarization of an Algonquian term – is a Northern Iroquoian language spoken by peoples indigenous to what is now upstate New York, southern Quebec, and eastern Ontario. As Louellyn White relates, the Indigenous self-referential term is Kanien'keha:ka, People of the Place of the Flint. The Akwesasne Freedom School about which she writes grew out of activist efforts determined to prepare Kanien'keha:ka children in the ways of their culture. The school remains one of the leading Indigenous language immersion-revitalization programs today.

"You're *Onkwehon:we*[18] just like me!" said my three-year-old son to his daycare teacher. She's a Kanien'keha:ka substitute teacher from the community of Kahnawà:ke. He continued to tell her about "bad pipelines" and how they were going to "poison the water and hurt all the Onkwehon:we." I didn't think he paid much attention to my rants about the controversial oil pipeline under construction near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation[19] until he made his own "black snake"[20] by taping together empty paper towel rolls to resemble the pipeline and loudly sang out in English and Lakota, "WATER IS LIFE . . . *MNI WICONI*!"

It was a proud moment knowing my son was connecting to our language, Kanien'ke:ha, and understanding our relationships and responsibilities to the natural world. I had been consciously trying to use our heritage language at home as much as I could, which was in part a push-back against the French he was learning at daycare (I had migrated back to the Northeast after many years away and landed in French-speaking Quebec). I figured if he was going to learn French, I had better teach him what I could of Kanien'ke:ha too. So at bedtime I tell him about Creation and the story of Skywoman. He's trying to make sense of himself when he says things like: "I came from the Sky" and makes up songs about "Onkwehon:we dogs" or "Onkwehon:we trucks" and *Sonkwiatisu* (Creator). So, in this way, my own journey in language and identity reclamation is reflected through my son's journey. Like most Kanien'keha:ka, I don't know how to speak or understand much of our language, but I'm making a conscious effort to pass on what I can in hopes my son will grow up with a stronger sense of self and cultural identity as Onkwehon:we than I did. Our journey of language reclamation goes beyond the mechanisms of language as communication and honors the ways that language encapsulates culture and identity.

I grew up in the homeland of the Kanien'keha:ka in the Mohawk Valley of central New York. Born to a mother of European descent and a Kanien'keha:ha father with roots in the community of Akwesasne,[21] my upbringing lacked a strong cultural and linguistic connection to my Indigenous heritage. My father wasn't a flu-

ent speaker of our language but he always made sure I knew my family in Akwesasne and I try to do the same for my son. My parents split before I was born, so growing up as the only Native in a dirt-poor household full of non-Native half-siblings wasn't easy. The burdens of poverty, abuse, and dysfunction compounded those of being mixed and were often difficult to bear; there was never enough of this, always too much of that. Over the years those burdens were made lighter and my connection to my identity stronger due in part to the research I conducted with the Akwesasne Freedom School,[22] a pre-K through ninth-grade school with a Mohawk-immersion curriculum, long before my son was born.

Accurate estimates of Kanien'ke:ha fluent speakers are hard to come by. Some claim that out of seven Kanien'keha:ka communities within the geopolitical borders of the United States and Canada, constituting a population of about twenty-five thousand, 10 percent are fluent speakers.[23] Even though the language is currently spoken by all generations in some communities, it remains vulnerable. Thus, I became an advocate for Indigenous language reclamation through my work, which also led me back home to my community and helped strengthen my family connections and sense of belonging.

During my research on the intersections of language and identity within the Akwesasne Freedom School community, I was on a parallel path of learning my heritage language and culture, building community, and developing a stronger sense of my own identity. As this process unfolded, I struggled with the existential questions of life's meaning. I attempted to shift my focus from my personal struggles with identity to one of a higher purpose of understanding from a Kanien'keha:ka perspective. I still struggle with the uneasy feelings that accompany the balancing act of growing up without a strong cultural foundation, but through my ongoing work with language and cultural reclamation I have found my way home and feel closer to where I belong.

It's my responsibility as Onkwehon:we to pass on cultural values to my son so he grows up with a strong sense of who he is, where he comes from, and where he's going. I have the same difficulties as any parent, but I know he's embodying what it means to be Onkwehone:we when he asks for the story of Skywoman at bedtime and he's learning about his responsibility to care for the earth when he sings lullabies to the spiders he finds hiding in our house and talks about Standing Rock. After I told him that the pipeline might be rerouted away from Standing Rock, he said, "Yay, I get to drink more water! But, are they going to build it near the elephants, the bugs, and the animals? They need water too."

We come to our final question: How can storywork help build a theory of language reclamation in practice? Stories and storytelling are central to "explaining and theory-building," Ananda Marin and Megan Bang maintain.[24] Theories through stories "are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities," Bryan Brayboy emphasizes.[25] The stories shared here possess explanatory power; when we "hear our languages, hear our voices," we gain insight into what language reclamation means in diverse Indigenous communities and for individual community members. Storywork provides both a theory and a guide for praxis.

It is clear from this storywork that language reclamation is about much more than matters purely linguistic; as Wesley Leonard notes for myaamia, language reclamation is not about preserving the past, but rather using accumulated wisdom to inform present action and future planning. Language reclamation is soulful work; as

Kari Chew relates her initial encounters in a Chikashshanompa' language class, "It did not take long for the language – my language – to captivate my soul." Language reclamation is also embodied work, as reflected in Natalie Diaz's account of finding *kavanaam*, love, "where it had been waiting for us," in Mojave gestures of tenderness and care. On the surface level we "know" we are Chickasaw, Mojave, myaamia, Hopi, Kanien'keha:ka, but, as the stories show, feeling that identity is deeply experiential. This speaks to a common metaphor in language reclamation research and practice: "We *are* our language."[26]

Language reclamation is both individual and communal – a personal yet community-oriented responsibility, Sheilah Nicholas relates. "I was on a parallel path of . . . building community and a stronger sense of my own identity," Louellyn White reflects. "Though I had said 'I am Chickasaw' many times in English," Chew stresses, saying those words in Chikashshanompa', "I felt I had finally found my voice." Language reclamation is thus a journey of belonging, of restoring hope for cultural continuance by connecting youth and parents with the knowledge and wisdom of elders. Finally, language reclamation is decolonizing; it both *refuses* the dispossession of Indigenous ways of knowing and being,[27] and *re-fuses* and reconnects, pointing "a way home."

We close with a story from Teresa McCarty, a non-Indigenous scholar-educator and "allied other"[28] in this work.

What I share here grows out of teachings learned in the context of collaborative work over many years with Indigenous educators, communities, and schools. One of those teachers was a Navajo Elder, Dorothy Secody, whom I met early in my work on a bilingual-bicultural curriculum development project at the Diné (Navajo) Rough Rock Demonstration School. "If a child learns only English," Mrs. Secody said in Diné, "you have lost your child."

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Those words have stayed with me over the years. Indigenous-language reclamation is multifaceted; there are many pathways, as we see in the stories shared here and in accounts of language reclamation throughout the world. At the heart of these efforts is an intense desire and commitment not to "lose" the next generation – or the next, or the next – and to strengthen intergenerational connections through the ancestral language.

More than thirty years after Mrs. Secody spoke those words, a colleague and I were visiting an Indigenous Hawaiian-language immersion school, one of many Hawaiian schools dedicated to Indigenous-language reclamation. On the day of our visit, a nine-month-old child had just been enrolled in the infant and toddler program. As the teacher cradled the sleeping child in her arms, she explained that the infant-toddler program prepares children for the Pūnana Leo or "language nest" preschool. Once children reach preschool, "it only takes a few months for them to become fluent" in Hawaiian, she said. The infant-toddler program is "like yeast," we were told, providing the initial leavening for this rapid language development.

And so, as we listened and were guided through the school, I couldn't help but think back to the words of Dorothy Secody those many years ago. I wondered, what language and education trajectory awaits this young child, just launched on her first day of school?

If she is like other students we met at this school, she will go on to complete her entire pre-K–12 education there. The students in her classes will be peers she has known since infancy. "They are like family," a teacher told us as she looked out on her ninth-grade class. In her pre-K–12 education, I imagine this child will come to appreciate, in a profound way, a lesson we

heard repeatedly expressed by older students: "One of the most important things we value is our genealogy."

As the young child helps tend the gardens that produce food for the school, she will learn not only ethnobotany and the scientific language for traditional plants, but reciprocity; responsibility; belongingness; a sense of place; and respect for the land, the people, and the language. Those lessons were brought home to us by a senior when we asked about her postgraduation plans. "I want to start a Hawaiian photography business," she told us. What motivated that career choice, we asked? Without hesitation, she replied: "I'm just trying to give back to my community and revitalize our language."

To rephrase Dorothy Secody's point, with which I began: If a child learns her ancestral language, you have strengthened the links to countless generations – those who have passed, those present, and those to come.

Nearly twenty years ago Sam No'eau Warner, a Hawaiian-language scholar, educator, and activist, reminded us that language issues are "always people issues . . . inextricably bound to the people from whom the language and culture evolved." Language reclamation is not about saving a disembodied thing called language, he insisted. Rather, it is about voice, community building, wellness, equality, self-empowerment, and hope. We leave readers with this broader lesson of language reclamation – a lesson, Warner emphasized, that contains within it the seeds of transformation and "social justice for all."[29]

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

TERESA L. MCCARTY is the G. F. Kneller Chair in Education and Anthropology and Faculty in American Indian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Language Planning and Policy in Native America: History, Theory, Praxis* (2013) and *A Place to Be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling* (2002) and editor of *Indigenous Language Revitalization in the Americas* (with Serafín M. Coronel-Molina, 2016).

SHEILAH E. NICHOLAS is Associate Professor of Teaching, Learning & Sociocultural Studies and Faculty in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona College of Education. She is the editor of *Indigenous Youth and Multilingualism: Language Identity, Ideology, and Practice in Dynamic Cultural Worlds* (with Leisy T. Wyman and Teresa L. McCarty, 2014), and her research has appeared in *Review of Research in Education* and *International Multilingual Research Journal*, among other publications.

KARI A. B. CHEW is a Project Coordinator at the Indigenous Teacher Education Project at the University of Arizona College of Education. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona College of Education. Her research has appeared in *The American Indian Quarterly* and *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, among other publications.

NATALIE G. DIAZ is Assistant Professor of English at Arizona State University. Her work has been featured in *Poetry*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, among other publications. She is the author of the poetry collection *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2013).

WESLEY Y. LEONARD is Assistant Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Riverside. His research on language reclamation has appeared in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *Gender & Language*, and *Language Documentation and Conservation*, among other publications.

LOUELLYN WHITE is Associate Professor of First Peoples Studies in the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University Montreal. She is the author of *Free to be Mohawk: Indigenous Education at the Akwesasne Freedom School* (2015), and her work has appeared in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* and *Journal of Native American Education*, among other publications.

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[18] Onkwehon :we is a Kanien'ke :ha concept meaning "the original people."

[19] Since Spring 2016, thousands of people have gathered near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline Company oil pipeline (see http ://www.sacredstonecamp .org).

[20] Many Lakota believe the pipeline represents the "black snake" foretold in their prophecies. See Jeff Brady, "For Many Dakota Access Pipeline Protesters, The Fight is Personal," NPR, Novem-

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