

Language Teaching as #LandBack: Bridging Deaf Education, Dominant Language Instruction, and Indigenous Language Reclamation

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Abstract:

Learner categories can be useful in the structuring of pedagogical praxis and goals; however, learner categorization can lead to rigidly defined learner trajectories that may not reflect the actual linguistic profile of the learner. In this paper we argue for a focus on language transmission as a more responsive method in language pedagogical planning. We adopt a #LandBack framework that posits interconnected realities such that language domains are necessarily mutually dependent and require an inter-relational approach. We propose that learners experience interconnected realities of language exposure and usage that are best examined when focusing on language transmission. To exemplify this, we draw upon Metallic's (2023) linguistic methods of Indigenous law revitalization to show how language realities are informed by language transmission which in turn shape communicative practices. Ultimately, learner categorization and trajectories of acquisition are concerned with building language futures. However, learners commonly navigate multiple language futures which are constrained by systematic learner categorization in pedagogical spaces. We argue that adopting a #LandBack framework allows learners to traverse linguistic futures as #LandBack fundamentally emphasizes interdependent relationships over autonomous categories.

Keywords: learner categories, #LandBack, language pedagogy, language acquisition, language revitalization

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1 Introduction

1.1 Categorization problem in language education

Language education is typically organized through categories. Across applied linguistics, educational linguistics, language policy and Deaf Studies, distinctions such as ‘first-language acquisition,’ ‘second-language acquisition,’ ‘heritage-language learning,’ ‘bilingual education,’ and ‘language reclamation’ help structure research agendas, pedagogical practices, and institutional decision-making. Such categories are useful because they capture recurring learner trajectories and provide frameworks through which educational systems allocate resources, design curricula, and evaluate outcomes. Yet some learners resist categorization. Consider an Indigenous Deaf learner. Such a learner may possess familial, cultural, and territorial connections to an Indigenous language while accessing that language primarily through reclamation initiatives. The same learner may encounter sign language through pathways shaped by delayed access, educational placement, or family language practices. At the same time, they are likely to participate in educational systems organized around a dominant spoken language such as English, French, or Spanish. Existing educational categories appear partially applicable yet collectively insufficient as the learner seems to occupy several frameworks simultaneously.

This observation is significant not because Indigenous Deaf learners are uniquely complex. Rather, such learners reveal assumptions that frequently remain invisible when educational categories function as expected: they expose the extent to which language pedagogies that are often treated as distinct, Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation, are already intertwined in practice (McKay-Cody 2019, Skyer & McKay-Cody 2025). The fields themselves, however, rarely operate in conversation with one another. Deaf education has historically focused on questions of linguistic access, modality, language/input deprivation, and educational equity (Hall, Levin, & Anderson, 2017; Henner & Robinson, 2023). Dominant-language instruction, including English-language education in North America and Spanish-language education throughout Latin America, has largely centered on questions of language development, literacy, integration, and institutional participation (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; Ortega, 2019). Indigenous language reclamation has emphasized community authority, interrupted transmission, sovereignty, and linguistic resurgence (Leonard, 2017, 2018; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). Although these traditions address different historical and political realities, they share a concern with language transmission: how language becomes available, how communicative practices are valued, and how linguistic knowledge moves across generations. But the tendency to treat these domains as separate has consequences. For instance, educational systems frequently assume that learners can be located within a single pedagogical framework. Yet many learners navigate multiple language ecologies simultaneously. Indigenous

Deaf learners provide a particularly visible example, but similar tensions emerge among Heritage speakers and signers, multilingual hearing and Deaf learners, Indigenous learners educated primarily through dominant languages, and migrant individuals of a wide variety of profiles, whose communicative repertoires span multiple linguistic and cultural contexts. Such learners expose the limitations of educational systems organized around relatively stable assumptions regarding language access and development.

Recent work in Crip Linguistics has provided an important lens through which to examine these assumptions. Henner and Robinson (2023) argue that linguistic theory and language education have often been organized around normative expectations concerning communication, competence, and development. Rather than treating variability as deviation from an expected path, Crip Linguistics directs attention toward the conditions under which communicative systems emerge, persist, and interact. Related work by Koulidobrova and Chen Pichler (2025) further demonstrates that categories such as first-language learner, second-language learner, homesigner, late signer, and heritage learner frequently depend upon assumptions regarding what counts as language and when language acquisition is understood to begin. Finally, much work from the ROLE-Collective (e.g. Navaroodipad et al. 2026, a.o) has been arguing that learners whose experiences diverge from those assumptions reveal the contingent nature of the categories themselves.

This observation suggests a broader question: if language pedagogies are already interconnected through the learners who move among them, why do educational systems continue to treat them as separate? In this paper, we argue that answering this question requires shifting attention from language acquisition alone to language transmission. Across dominant-language instruction, Indigenous language reclamation, and Deaf education paradigms, educational institutions do more than teach languages. They participate in determining which communicative practices become available, which forms of knowledge remain accessible, and which relationships endure across generations. Language teaching is therefore not merely an instructional activity. It is also a mechanism through which relationships among language, knowledge, community, and place are organized. This insight, in turn, brings the discussion into conversation with #LandBack.

1.2 #LandBack in language education

Although often associated with territorial return and Indigenous sovereignty, #LandBack has increasingly been understood as encompassing broader processes of relational restoration, including relationships among governance, language, knowledge, responsibility, and place (Menka, 2025). However, such relationships do not reproduce themselves automatically: they require ongoing mechanisms of transmission. Within this process, language occupies a distinctive position. For instance, language not only communicates knowledge; it helps organize the conditions through which knowledge remains available (McCarty et al., 2019). It also connects people to communities, histories, responsibilities, and territories (Leonard, 2017). Consequently, language teaching becomes one of the institutions through which relationships are

either sustained, transformed, or disrupted. The argument advanced here is therefore neither that all language teaching constitutes #LandBack nor that pedagogy can substitute for territorial return, sovereignty, or material redistribution. Rather, we argue that language teaching becomes relevant to #LandBack when it contributes to the transmission of relationships among language, knowledge, community, and place. More specifically, we suggest that #LandBack offers a framework through which distinct language pedagogies might be understood not as isolated enterprises but as interconnected projects that must increasingly operate in solidarity with one another. To develop this argument, we first examine the instability of conventional language-learning categories and the assumptions regarding transmission that underlie them. We then draw upon Crip Linguistics and recent work on initial systems to reconsider dominant models of linguistic development. Next, we examine Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation as distinct yet interconnected political economies of language transmission. Finally, drawing on Metallic's (2023) linguistic methods for Indigenous law revitalization, we propose five pedagogical sites through which language teaching may contribute to broader projects of relational continuity and reclamation. Crucially, the goal is not to collapse different language pedagogies into a single model. It is to imagine how they might work in solidarity. In this, we align with Meighan & Hammine (2026), who discuss the importance of Indigenous knowledge-based methodology in teaching of English as a dominant language (ELT and TESOL) but move beyond that point.

1.3 Positionality

Co-author 1: I live and work in the USA. The state that has been my home for the past 20 years is one of the "original colonies" (Hollister 1857). Its name is Algonquian and so is its story across the 12,000 years of settlements. For generations, the land has been stewarded by the Eastern Woodlands Algonquian peoples, though its recent history has been that of displacement and attempt at erasure. This is something I understand well: an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, I grew up in a country that is no more. The country some of my family still live in is at war; other family members remain on the opposing sides of the conflict. I grew up in the land of linguistic dominance and language oppression, albeit not always aware of it. This set of facts cast a long shadow on my perspective as an educator and as a human being. Today, I train teachers of English as an Additional language (L2) for state schools and other educational institutions. This means that my students' students are multilinguals who communicate in languages other than English and which, most typically, are not autochthonous to the area currently named the USA (e.g. Spanish, German, Pashto, Kryol, Russian, Igbo, Tagalog, etc.).

Co-author 2: I am an Indigenous linguist who works on various aspects of my heritage language. My interests lie in theoretical morphophonology, language documentation, revitalization and maintenance and Indigenous epistemological approaches to language inquiry and theory. I often draw from sociocultural practices learned growing up in my home community in the examination of ways in which colonial structures erode or decenter Indigenous thought and ways of life. I am

currently an assistant professor linguistics at [X] where my academic background allows me to blend my interests in theoretical linguistics with Indigenous epistemological approaches to language. Throughout this paper, I draw on personal experiences having grown up in an Indigenous community as a backdrop for my understanding of the concepts and principles discussed below.

2 Learners Across Systems: The Problem of Category Stability

Let us first address the actual need for categories. Educational systems depend upon categories. Categories such as first-language learner, second-language learner, heritage-language learner, native speaker/signer, emergent bilingual, late signer, and language learner help organize research programs, educational policies, assessment systems, and pedagogical interventions. They provide a vocabulary through which educators describe learner trajectories and allocate resources. Yet categories are rarely neutral descriptive tools. They also reflect assumptions about language, development, and access. Importantly, much of language education proceeds as though these categories correspond to *relatively* stable learner types. Learners are assumed to possess identifiable relationships to particular languages, and those relationships are expected to follow recognizable developmental trajectories. The resulting categories often appear self-evident. Yet a growing body of scholarship suggests that such stability may be more apparent than real and categories frequently become difficult to sustain when learners' actual communicative experiences are examined in detail. Thus, the issue is not merely terminological. Rather, category instability reveals deeper assumptions regarding language itself.

Let us illustrate. Traditional acquisition frameworks often presuppose relatively clear developmental pathways. Learners are expected to begin with access to a first language, acquire additional languages over time, and move toward increasingly sophisticated forms of linguistic competence. Such models have generated important insights and remain useful in many contexts. Yet they are less successful when learners' communicative experiences diverge from these expectations (Henner & Robinson 2023). Consider, e.g., a deaf child who develops an extensive communicative repertoire before encountering a conventional sign language. Such learners are often described through categories such as homesigner or delayed first-language learner. Yet these labels may obscure as much as they reveal. Communicative systems developed prior to exposure to a recognized language are frequently treated as incomplete, prelinguistic, or transitional despite functioning as meaningful systems of interaction (Goldin-Meadow 2005 a.o.). But the problem is not that these learners lack communication; the crux of the problem lies in the fact that educational and research frameworks struggle to determine how exactly such communication should be categorized (Koulidobrova & Chen Picher 2021).

Similar tensions emerge elsewhere. Heritage-language scholarship has long documented the difficulty of distinguishing heritage speakers from native speakers and second-language learners.

Learners frequently possess uneven competencies distributed across domains, modalities, and contexts. Their linguistic experiences resist straightforward classification within traditional acquisition frameworks. Indeed, the emergence of heritage-language studies as a field reflects recognition that existing categories proved insufficient for describing recurring learner trajectories (Montrul, 2016; Rothman, 2009).

Indigenous language reclamation presents related challenges. Indigenous learners may encounter ancestral languages through community programs, immersion schools, adult-focused learning initiatives, or revitalization efforts rather than through uninterrupted intergenerational transmission. Such learners may possess strong cultural, familial, and territorial relationships to a language while simultaneously exhibiting linguistic profiles often associated with second-language learners (Shah & Brenzinger, 2018; McIvor, 2020). Existing educational categories frequently capture portions of these experiences without adequately accounting for their complexity (Leonard, 2017, 2018).

Importantly, these examples do not represent isolated exceptions. Rather, they reveal a broader pattern. Learners routinely develop communicative repertoires under conditions of uneven access, shifting linguistic value, interrupted transmission, and overlapping language ecologies. The assumption that language development proceeds through clearly bounded categories becomes increasingly difficult to sustain under such conditions.

Indigenous Deaf learners, much like ‘International returnees’ (Gauthier & Genesee 2011) and ‘adoptees’ (Kubota et al., 2022) make this problem particularly visible. An Indigenous Deaf learner may simultaneously navigate sign language acquisition, dominant-language education, and Indigenous language reclamation. Educational systems often treat these domains as distinct, yet they converge within a single learner. Such learners therefore expose the limitations of frameworks that assume pedagogical domains can be separated neatly from one another. The significance of this observation extends beyond any individual learner population.

Category instability forces us to reconsider what categories actually accomplish. They do not simply describe learners; they organize assumptions regarding language access, developmental trajectories, educational goals, and institutional responsibilities. When categories fail, they reveal the assumptions upon which educational systems depend. This point is especially important because the categories discussed here emerge from distinct political and historical contexts. Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation have developed in response to different concerns and pursue different objectives. Yet all three rely upon assumptions concerning how language becomes available, how development proceeds, and how communicative competence should be recognized. The problem, therefore, is not simply that some learners occupy multiple categories simultaneously. The problem is that the categories themselves presume forms of stability that many learners do not experience.

Recognizing this instability requires more than creating additional learner categories. It requires reconsidering some of the assumptions regarding language, communication, and development that underlie language education itself. One place to begin is with a deceptively simple question: What counts as language?

3 Initial Systems, Recognition, and the Myth of Linguistic Completion

The previous section argued that educational categories often become unstable when confronted with learners whose communicative experiences diverge from normative expectations. Such instability raises a more fundamental question: what exactly qualifies as language? The question appears deceptively simple. Educational systems routinely distinguish between language and non-language, between communication and linguistic competence, between learners who possess language and those who do not. Yet these distinctions frequently depend upon assumptions that become difficult to sustain when examined closely. Koulidobrova and Chen Pichler (2025) address this problem through the notion of *initial systems*. The term refers to communicative systems that emerge under conditions where access to conventional linguistic input is limited, delayed, or uneven. Such systems may incorporate gesture, depiction, mouthing, homesign, partial linguistic structures, multimodal communication, and locally developed conventions. Importantly, they function as meaningful communicative resources regardless of whether educational institutions recognize them as language. This observation is significant because educational frameworks often position access to a recognized language as the beginning of linguistic development. Language acquisition is assumed to start once learners encounter a conventional linguistic system. Initial systems challenge this assumption. For many learners, communication does not begin when educational institutions acknowledge language. Communication precedes recognition.

The distinction is more than theoretical. Consider the homesigning child whose communicative repertoire develops prior to exposure to a conventional sign language. Such systems are frequently described as incomplete, transitional, or prelinguistic despite supporting increasingly sophisticated forms of interaction. Similar tensions emerge among multilingual learners whose communicative practices span multiple languages, modalities, and semiotic resources. Educational frameworks may struggle to categorize these practices, yet communicative activity persists regardless of classification. The issue therefore concerns *recognition* as much as *communication*.

Educational institutions often determine which communicative practices count as language, which linguistic forms deserve support, and which developmental trajectories are considered legitimate. Such decisions have material consequences. They influence educational placement, assessment, resource allocation, and policy development. More fundamentally, they shape whose communicative practices are recognized as meaningful.

Although these questions emerge prominently within Deaf Studies, they are not confined to Deaf learners. Heritage-language learners routinely navigate communicative repertoires that resist straightforward classification. Indigenous language learners often develop relationships to ancestral languages through complex combinations of community knowledge, dominant-language education, ceremonial participation, and reclamation efforts. Migrant learners similarly draw upon multiple linguistic resources whose legitimacy varies across institutional contexts. In each case, educational systems confront communicative realities that exceed conventional categories.

Crip Linguistics provides a framework for understanding why such tensions recur. Henner and Robinson (2023) argue that linguistic theory has often privileged normative assumptions regarding communication, competence, and development. Rather than treating variation as a natural feature of human communication, educational systems frequently position particular communicative forms as benchmarks against which others are evaluated. Learners whose experiences diverge from those benchmarks become visible primarily through perceived deficiency. And Crip Linguistics reverses this perspective. Instead of asking why learners fail to conform to normative expectations, it asks how those expectations came to be treated as normative in the first place. Communicative diversity becomes the starting point of analysis rather than its exception.

This shift has important implications for language education across domains: across dominant-language instruction, Deaf education, and Indigenous language reclamation, educational systems often invoke notions of attainment, mastery, proficiency, fluency, or recovery. The terminology differs across contexts, but the underlying logic is remarkably similar: learners are imagined as moving toward increasingly complete approximations of an identifiable linguistic target. Yet the notion of completion becomes difficult to sustain once initial systems are taken seriously. For instance, as we see both in Indigenous language and Deaf-based pedagogy, more often than not, the following is true: because intergenerational transmission has been interrupted (or is simply unavailable), the ‘usual’ method of teaching/learning (either as L1 or L2) is not applicable; thus, Indigenous language instructors often rely on what is perceived to be valid pedagogy, often based on what is found in Westernized forms of education (Henne-Ochoa 2018) format, learning *about* rather than through (Long 1991, Villalobos 2013, Ellis 2016), temporally limited to hour long subjects, etc.). Further, in the cases of Indigenous language reclamation/education as well as teaching of the Deaf, most actual instructors are not credentialed in L2 acquisition processes at all – their training does not typically require L2 and multilingualism coursework. This makes the resulting pedagogy even more complex because not only do the instructors face language transmission interruption, they also do not exactly know how to teach L2 to adults aside from relying on intuitions or curricula *necessarily* designed by others.

Additionally, communicative repertoires are rarely fixed (Gumperz, 1964; Busch, 2012, and many others). They expand, contract, overlap, and adapt in response to changing social conditions. New linguistic resources become available while others recede; meanings emerge through interaction rather than through movement toward a final state of competence. Language development therefore appears less as a process of completion than as an ongoing process of participation (Norton, 2013). This observation resonates with broader shifts in applied linguistics (e.g. Pennycook, 2021): recent work has regularly emphasized language development, languaging, translanguaging, and communicative repertoires rather than static notions of linguistic attainment (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2018, et seq; Ortega, 2019, et seq). Crip Linguistics pushes this insight further by questioning the assumptions regarding access and recognition that often remain implicit even within developmental models. The result is a fundamentally different way of approaching language education. And the central question is no longer whether learners have reached a particular linguistic endpoint; rather, the question becomes how communicative systems emerge, how they remain available, and how educational institutions participate in shaping those processes. In other words, attention shifts from acquisition to transmission.

This shift proves especially important for the present argument because transmission foregrounds relationships rather than outcomes. It directs attention toward the conditions through which language becomes available, the institutions that regulate access, and the communities that sustain communicative practices across generations. Seen in this way, the problem is no longer simply educational. It is political. It is not merely how languages are learned but how language futures are organized. Different language pedagogies answer this question differently. In the foregoing, we demonstrate that Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation can be understood as distinct yet interconnected responses to this problem.

4 Three Political Economies of Language Transmission

Although Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation are frequently treated as separate domains, each can be understood as a distinct political economy of language transmission. Each organizes relationships among language, learners, institutions, and communities. Each establishes particular assumptions regarding who should learn what, under which conditions, and toward which futures. Importantly, describing these domains as political economies does not imply equivalence. Their histories, goals, and political commitments differ substantially. The point is not that they pursue identical objectives. Rather, it is that each participates in the organization of language futures. The question is what kind of future each seeks to reproduce.

4.1 Dominant-Language Instruction: Integration and Mobility

Dominant-language instruction operates within a different political economy. Whether English-language education in North America, French-language instruction in parts of Africa and

North America, or Spanish-language education throughout Latin America, such programs frequently aim to facilitate participation within existing institutional structures. Learners acquire linguistic resources associated with educational advancement, economic mobility, professional opportunities, and civic engagement (Bourdieu, 1991; Tollefson, 1991; Wiley & Garcia, 2016). The future being reproduced is therefore one of integration.

This observation should not be understood as criticism. Dominant-language education often provides access to resources and opportunities that learners actively seek. Indeed, many multilingual learners pursue dominant-language proficiency precisely because such proficiency expands educational and economic possibilities (Cummings, 2000; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). Yet dominant-language instruction remains organized around particular assumptions regarding participation: the pedagogical objective is often not simply communication but access to institutions whose operations are already established (e.g., consider TOEFL-based curricula chiefly aimed at the learners' ability to enter an institution of higher learning in the US or Canada, McNamara & Roever, 2006; Chapelle et al. 2008). Language teaching therefore functions as a mechanism through which learners gain entry into broader social, educational, and economic systems.

4.2 Indigenous Language Reclamation: Continuity and Resurgence

Indigenous language reclamation operates according to a different logic. Where dominant-language instruction often emphasizes integration and Deaf education foregrounds access, reclamation initiatives are frequently organized around continuity. The central concern is not simply increasing speaker numbers or improving language proficiency. Rather, reclamation seeks to sustain relationships among language, community, knowledge, governance, and place (McCarty et al., 2008; McCarty et al., 2009; Leonard, 2017, 2018; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014; Olko & Salabank, 2021). This distinction is significant because reclamation emerges in response to histories of disrupted transmission. Colonial policies frequently targeted not only languages themselves but also the social and institutional relationships through which languages remained available across generations. Consequently, reclamation efforts often address broader questions of community authority, cultural continuity, and collective futures.

While colonial policies commonly sought to disenfranchise Indigenous participation through erasure (Wolfe, 2006), this does not imply that Indigenous language learners and speakers did not navigate the aforementioned colonial institutions. On the contrary, Indigenous peoples are by and large required to in some way interact with them, whether as clients or as employees. As such, Indigenous languages will have formulated communicative strategies to discuss Eurocentric institutions such as schools, financial institutions, governing practices, etc. This may be through linguistic borrowing or through manipulation of internal grammatical structures to coin neologisms. However, there exists a unilateral communicative pathway such that these institutions largely do not make space for Indigenous languages. Transactions carried out in these

spaces are largely expected to be done through the use of the dominant, colonial language. This results in the language developed for these institutional spaces being largely descriptive in nature, that is, they are used in communicative practice unilaterally with other speakers to discuss and describe experiences in these institutional spaces, but may not be used to communicate with representatives or officials of these spaces to complete some transaction. As such, learning events may include instruction of language related to institutional artefacts or practice (i.e., monetary denominations or institutional vocation), but may center language that may be more applicable to participation in community life. This further supports the need to shift from acquisitional approaches to transmissive ones. Indigenous language learning spaces commonly focus on immediately beneficial communicative practice and need, whatever these may be as defined by the community itself. While Indigenous languages are capable of discussing topics like financial transactions, governmental policy or academic theory, Indigenous language learners often need communicative tools to converse with and express themselves to fellow community members, in spaces where Eurocentric institutions are de-centered. The future being reproduced is therefore one of resurgence. Language learning becomes part of a larger project through which communities maintain and renew relationships among people, knowledge, responsibilities, and territories.

4.3 Deaf Education: Access and Participation

Contemporary Deaf education is fundamentally concerned with access. Historically, Deaf learners have frequently been denied consistent access to fully accessible linguistic input, resulting in educational systems organized around questions of language deprivation, modality, communication rights, and educational equity (Hall et al., 2017; Henner & Robinson, 2023). Whether through sign bilingualism, bilingual-bicultural models, or other approaches, contemporary Deaf education increasingly foregrounds the importance of ensuring that learners have meaningful access to language from the earliest possible stages of development (Enns et al., 2021). The future being reproduced is therefore one of linguistic participation.

And since language functions as a prerequisite for educational engagement, social inclusion, civic participation, and self-determination (McCarty & Nicholas, 2014; Humphries et al., 2012;; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007), the central pedagogical question concerns how linguistic access can be ensured under conditions where traditional assumptions regarding language transmission may not hold. Importantly, Deaf education does not merely teach language. It organizes access to *language itself*.

4.4 Toward Pedagogical Solidarity

Note that these political economies differ substantially: Deaf education foregrounds access; dominant-language instruction foregrounds participation; Indigenous language reclamation foregrounds continuity. Each responds to distinct historical conditions and pursues different

educational objectives. Yet focusing exclusively on these differences obscures an important reality; the same learners frequently move across all three systems. For instance, an Indigenous Deaf learner may require sign language access, dominant-language literacy, and Indigenous language reclamation simultaneously. A heritage signer may navigate relationships among family language practices, educational institutions, and broader multilingual environments. Indigenous learners routinely participate in dominant-language educational systems while engaging in community-based language revitalization efforts. Educational frameworks often treat these domains as separate, but learners experience them as interconnected.

This observation has significant implications. If learners move across multiple language ecologies simultaneously, then language pedagogies cannot be understood as isolated enterprises. Decisions made within one pedagogical domain inevitably shape possibilities within others. A language policy promoting dominant-language proficiency may affect opportunities for Indigenous language learning. Decisions concerning sign-language access may influence participation in community language programs. Reclamation efforts may depend upon educational structures established through dominant-language schooling.

The issue, therefore, is not whether these pedagogies should become identical. They should not. Their goals remain distinct. The challenge is how they might operate in relation to one another while still remaining distinct in their theoretical framing, objectives, methodologies, and outcomes. This question points toward a form of pedagogical solidarity. By solidarity, we do not mean the elimination of difference. Rather, we mean recognition that distinct language pedagogies participate in shared questions of transmission, access, continuity, and linguistic futures. In other words, educational systems need not collapse these domains into a single framework. They do, however, need mechanisms through which the domains can remain connected. The significance of this observation becomes particularly apparent when viewed through the lens of #LandBack. If #LandBack concerns the restoration and maintenance of relationships among people, knowledge, governance, and place, then language pedagogies become relevant not because they pursue identical goals but because they participate in the transmission of those relationships. In other words, we no longer focus simply on what language education teaches. We focus on how language education helps sustain relationships across different language futures. It is here that #LandBack begins to offer a useful pedagogical framework.

5 #LandBack as Relational Transmission

The preceding discussion argued that dominant-language instruction, Indigenous language reclamation, and Deaf education constitute distinct political economies of language transmission. Their goals differ. Their histories differ. Their institutional structures differ. Yet they converge in the experiences of learners who move across multiple language ecologies simultaneously. The

challenge, therefore, is not how to eliminate these differences. The challenge is how to sustain relationships among them.

This question has received surprisingly little attention within language education literature (but see McCarty & Nicholas, 2014; Henner et al., 2021). Educational systems frequently treat pedagogical domains as separate enterprises; language learners are assigned to programs, categories, and instructional pathways that correspond to institutional boundaries; yet, learners themselves cross those boundaries multiple times a day. As a result, educational systems often fragment experiences that learners encounter as interconnected. The issue is not simply pedagogical but relational – what must be transmitted is not language alone but the relationships through which language remains meaningful.

As discussed above in section 1.2, public discourses frequently frame #LandBack through territorial return, jurisdiction, and Indigenous sovereignty. These dimensions are essential and cannot be separated from the movement itself. At the same time, Indigenous scholars have repeatedly emphasized that #LandBack concerns more than land as property but relationships among people, knowledge, governance, responsibility, and place. #LandBack therefore involves questions of continuity as much as questions of territory. Continuity, however, is not *self*-sustaining. Relationships endure only when mechanisms exist through which they can be transmitted across generations. Language occupies a distinctive position within this process because language functions simultaneously as a communicative resource, a repository of knowledge, and a mechanism through which relationships remain available. Languages transmit stories, responsibilities, histories, place-based knowledge, governance structures, ceremonial practices, and forms of collective memory. Language transmission therefore becomes inseparable from the transmission of relationships. This view helps clarify why language education matters within broader projects of reclamation.

Aligned with general educational discussions, language education often focuses on learner outcomes (Leung, 2012). And while questions of proficiency, fluency, literacy, assessment, and attainment are important, such measures capture only part of what language pedagogies accomplish: language teaching also helps organize the conditions through which relationships remain available. Educational systems therefore participate not only in the transmission of linguistic forms but also in the transmission of the social worlds those forms inhabit. As we hope has become apparent, this argument extends beyond Indigenous language reclamation. For example, Deaf education transmits relationships among communicative access, identity, and participation. Dominant-language instruction transmits relationships among language, institutions, and social mobility. Indigenous language reclamation transmits relationships among language, community, governance, and place. The relationships differ. The mechanism is shared. In other words, all language pedagogies participate in transmission of some sort. The question is what they transmit and how those transmissions relate to one another.

This perspective suggests a different way of approaching solidarity among language pedagogies. Solidarity does not require that all pedagogies pursue identical goals. Nor does it require that differences among Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation disappear. Rather, solidarity emerges when pedagogical systems recognize their mutual participation in broader ecologies of transmission. The task is therefore not pedagogical unification. It is relational coordination. #LandBack, as a potential framework for such coordination, foregrounds relationships rather than categories. It does not ask whether a learner belongs within a particular educational domain; it asks how relationships among language, knowledge, responsibility, community, and place are being sustained. #LandBack most commonly argues for two overarching principles which are drawn upon here as a base framework for our thesis.

1. The rejection of a separationist methodology.
2. The promotion of Indigenous self-determination in the exact applications of #LandBack as an operational framework.

The first of these principles is rooted in the idea that Indigenous communities and cultures, although not monolithic, recurrently exhibit an ecological approach to environmental issues. What affects the land affects the water and in turn affects the air. In non-Indigenous approaches, environmental issues are generally positioned within disjointed silos, each to be treated separately at a micro-level without regard to the broader implications of how each of these domains fit into the broader picture (Menka, 2025). This is essentially the tact that we take in re-examining learner profiles. Positioning a learner within a given profile (i.e., domain) fails to address broader implications of pedagogical need instantiated by the learners' fit into their individual broader linguistic ecologies.

The second principle we draw upon is the promotion of Indigenous decision making. This aspect of #LandBack as a framework argues for Indigenous jurisdiction and authority in decision making processes as an aspect of self-determination (DeLancy 2023). This is a foundational tenet of #LandBack as a framework and applies directly to our thesis in that it promotes the practice of learner centered determination. That is, while learner profiles may position a learner within a stagnant classificatory silo, self-determining decision making allows the learner to navigate the linguistic ecology that is specific to them without classificatory subjugation dictating learner experience and its pedagogical implications.

The perspective offered through #LandBack shifts attention away from disjointed silos and toward connections that learners must navigate across them. Yet this raises a practical question. If language teaching participates in the transmission of relationships, what pedagogical mechanisms make such transmission possible? We draw upon Metallic's (2023) "Five Linguistic Methods for Revitalization Indigenous Laws" as an example of an operationalized methodology applied within the #LandBack framework. Although developed in the context of Indigenous legal resurgence, Metallic's linguistic methods illuminate broader processes through which

language, knowledge, responsibility, and place remain connected. Her framework suggests several pedagogical sites through which language teaching may contribute to relational continuity across distinct language ecologies. These sites provide a useful starting point for imagining what pedagogical solidarity might look like in practice.

It should be noted here that these principles were developed in relation to how they interact with the Migmaq language, which is often classified as a polysynthetic language with complex morphological structures. However, as will be exemplified below, these principles need not be exclusive to any one linguistic typology and may be applied more broadly.

6 Language Teaching as #LandBack: Five Pedagogical Sites of Relational Transmission

The argument developed thus far suggests that language pedagogies cannot be understood solely through the languages they teach. Rather, they participate in the transmission of relationships among language, knowledge, institutions, communities, and place. The question becomes how such transmission occurs in practice. Metallic's (2023) discussion of linguistic methods for Migmaq law revitalization offers a broader account of how relationships remain available across generations. Her methods, meta-principles, grammar, word-parts, word-clusters, and place names, identify linguistic sites through which knowledge, responsibility, and continuity are transmitted. Reinterpreted pedagogically, these become five sites of relational transmission: axiology, grammar, morphology, semantic networks, and toponymy. The significance of these sites lies not in their uniquely Indigenous character. Rather, they reveal dimensions of language teaching that often remain implicit across educational domains. Each site demonstrates that language instruction transmits more than linguistic forms. They transmit relationships.

6.1 Axiology: Teaching What Matters

Transmission begins with value. Educational systems necessarily determine which forms of knowledge deserve attention, which communicative practices are legitimate, and which futures are worth reproducing. Such decisions are often treated as curricular concerns; however, they remain *decisions regarding transmission*. Metallic's discussion of Migmaq meta-principles illustrates this point clearly. Drawing on Indigenous legal traditions, she argues that certain lexical items function not merely as words but as bundles of teachings (e.g. 'hozho' in Dine); learning such terms involves engagement with systems of responsibility, reciprocity, and interpretation rather than vocabulary alone (Metallic, 2023).

Here, a comparison across language pedagogies is instructive. In dominant-language instruction, vocabulary frequently reflects institutional participation. English learners may encounter lexical fields organized around employment, banking, healthcare, citizenship, or academic success; Spanish-language education throughout Latin America often similarly privileges participation within national institutions. Such lexical choices are not neutral. They transmit assumptions

regarding desirable forms of social participation. In contrast, Indigenous language reclamation often foregrounds different relationships. In Anishinaabemowin programs, for example, lexical instruction frequently centers kinship systems, relationships to Elders, ceremonial responsibilities, seasonal activities, and land-based practices: see, for instance, <https://www.waasabiikimmersionschool.com/curriculum-teaching-method>. Thus, learners do not simply acquire vocabulary – they acquire ways of organizing relationships. In Deaf education, one often finds terms related to community and able-ism, (language) access/interpretation, as well as the visual nature of language itself (e.g. iconicity/transparency, relation to gesture, etc.). Similarly to the Anishinaabemowin example, the O’odham *’i:migĩ(kinship)* remains in integral aspect of O’odham life and society a necessary aspect of language learning. The O’odham *’i:migĩ* system encodes maternal and paternal lineage and relational age. For example, beyond broader, synthesized terms like “aunt” or “uncle”, the *’i:migĩ* system makes precise distinctions as to which parent that aunt or uncle is related to and whether they are a senior or junior to that parent. In traditional spaces, these terms may also be used as greetings, that is, when meeting one’s kin, one addresses them by their kinship term as a means of respect and acknowledgement. While such systems are present in many languages cross-linguistically, in the O’odham example, these terms help a learner orient themselves and others within the broader landscape of familial ties and familial/communal responsibility. This orientation becomes essential as a relational feature of language ensuring sociocultural competence through language knowledge. Here, then, the term *’i:migĩ*, relates broader, culturally specific axiological knowledge beyond its English equivalent, *kinship*, through its implicational meaning. *’I:migĩ* is thus better defined as “the complex relational system encoding familial ties, reciprocal responsibility and relative positionality within community”. The values imparted by/into the curricular designs exemplified above differ. Yet all pedagogies teach what matters. The pedagogical question is therefore not whether language instruction transmits values but whose values are transmitted and toward which futures.

6.2 Grammar as Relationship

Metallic's second method concerns grammar, or focus on form. In many educational contexts, grammar is presented primarily as a system of forms. Learners, in turn, master rules, structures, and patterns in order to communicate effectively (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, a.o.). Such approaches are understandable and often pedagogically useful. Yet, this focus on form/grammar *itself* may also transmit relationships. Consider, for instance, animacy systems in Migmaq and Anishinaabemowin. Grammatical distinctions between animate and inanimate nouns do not correspond neatly to biological life. In Anishinaabemowin, for example, *dewe'igan* ('drum') is grammatically animate. Ceremonial items, medicines, and objects associated with particular forms of responsibility frequently occupy animate categories despite appearing inanimate from an English perspective. Similarly, Migmaq grammatical categories often encode relationships that resist straightforward translation into English. By the same token, in Deaf studies/sign language instruction, much focus is dedicated to the examination of the different ‘parameters’

signs (handshape, orientation, location, movement) as well as different types of classifiers and non-manual expressions and their perception/articulation – as the domains of inquiry that have been argued to align with different learner profiles in Deaf Studies (Enns et al. 2021; Author & CP 2023). A similar situation is found in the O’odham postural verbal paradigm which encodes how the position of referents in the natural world is perceived. For example, an item may be thought of as sitting, lying or standing. For example, houses and trees are said to stand using the verb *cu:c*, while people and animals are said to stand using the word *gegok*. This has previously been analyzed as inanimate (*cu:c*) vs. animate (*gegok*) (Hale, 1959; Saxton, 1980). However, traditional O’odham ontology often perceives of plant life as living entities. In this case, it is more apt to refer to these not in terms of animacy, but in terms of ambulation. O’odham speakers make such distinctions based on whether an item is perceived to move from place to place on its own, or whether the item is fixed in place. Here we find another instance of how language as a transmissive method of knowledge and relation differs between Indigenous epistemologies and Western linguistics.

The pedagogical significance of these observations is substantial. Learners of these languages are not merely memorizing noun classes; they are encountering a linguistic system that organizes relationships among people, ceremonial practices, responsibilities, and material objects differently from (most) dominant-language models. Here, a comparison with English-language instruction is revealing. English grammar frequently treats nouns according to formal syntactic properties rather than relational significance. Learners may learn count versus mass distinctions, agreement patterns, or article usage, but grammatical instruction rarely invites reflection on why, for example, a drum, a pipe, or medicine, might be treated linguistically as a participant in social life. The distinction is not absolute. Rather, it illustrates different ways in which grammar participates in the transmission of social worlds.

6.3 Morphology and Renewal

Metallic's word-part method demonstrates that meaning often emerges through relationships among morphemes rather than through dictionary definitions alone. This observation has particular significance for language reclamation because it highlights the capacity of languages to generate new meanings. Morphological systems do not merely preserve inherited forms; they provide resources through which communities adapt to changing circumstances and create terminology for new realities. For example, Alvarez and Hale's (1970) work on expression of linguistic concepts in O’odham shows lexical innovation to describe linguistic terminology through the use of agglutinative morphological strategies and relying on speaker/community level perception of linguistic phenomena. Terms for consonant and vowel are built off the central principle of breath movement through the oral cavity. A consonant, *'i:bhei so:bida*, is a restriction of the breath, while a vowel, *ciñ ku:pioka 'i:bhei*, is a breath passing through an open mouth. Retroflex articulation is referred to as *ñe:ñ widuta*, or “tongue swinging”, a paraphrase of a commonly used expression, *lalalag*, which uses retroflex articulation and means “to gab on

about”. Alvarez and Hale employ morphological systems, centered in community understanding and perception, as a means of neological generation. Anishinaabemowin provides similar examples. Contemporary terminology for technological and educational concepts often emerges through combinations of existing morphemes rather than direct borrowing from English. We also see something similar in sign languages/deaf studies, e.g. moves to create signs for ever-evolving STEM lexicon rather than fingerspelling new items (e.g. <https://deaftec.org/stem-dictionary/>). Morphology therefore becomes a site of renewal.

By contrast, morphology in dominant-language instruction frequently supports literacy development and vocabulary growth. English learners may study prefixes such as *un-*, *re-*, or *pre-* and roots derived from Latin and Greek in order to improve academic reading comprehension. Such instruction is valuable, but its primary goal is often access to existing lexical resources rather than participation in the creation of new ones. The shared feature is not the pedagogical goal. It is the recognition that languages remain productive systems rather than static objects. Pedagogical solidarity therefore depends in part upon understanding language learning as participation in ongoing processes of renewal.

6.4 Semantic Networks and Systems of Knowledge

Metallic's word-cluster method shifts attention from individual words to relationships among concepts. Meaning does not reside solely within isolated lexical items: it emerges through connections among words, stories, practices, places, and responsibilities. According to Metallic, this method analyzes groups or clusters of related words in order to examine how Indigenous languages organize and relate world views and values (2023). She provides an example of her own work on the Migmaq meta-principle *Netukulimk* which relates Indigenous methods of resource stewardship. Metallic recorded a number of terms describing how Migmaq process resource stewardship, such as through redistribution of resources, processes of handling resource access overextension and equal resource access among the group. These words form a semantic cluster which relates how Migmaq share resources. While the word roots may not be grammatically related, their semantic content is tightly interwoven within the Migmaq worldview. Metallic's observation challenges a common assumption of language teaching. For example, many educational approaches organize vocabulary (instruction) through thematic units. English-language learners may study food, transportation, employment, healthcare, education, or housing – the approaches often argued to be effective and responsive to learner needs (as in Richards, 2006 and Nation, 2013, a.o.). Yet, they also reveal a particular model of language learning in which vocabulary is organized around participation in institutions and everyday transactions (Shohamy, 2006). Here, Metallic's analysis of Migmaq legal concepts suggests a different possibility. Terms associated with governance, responsibility, reciprocity, conflict resolution, and community obligations become meaningful not in isolation but through their relationships to one another. Knowledge emerges through networks rather than individual definitions.

For example, we find parallels to Metallic's word-cluster network method in Hale and Casagrande's (1967) work on O'odham definitional strategies. In their article, Hale and Casagrande note thirteen overarching principles of definitional categorization when asking how a speaker would define a given item in O'odham. A major strategy identified by the authors is referred to as the *attributive* strategy. This strategy is further characterized by five features: 1) stimulus property (color, size, etc.); 2) distinctive marker (number of legs/feet, tails, stingers, etc.); 3) habitat; 4) behavior (characteristic actions performed by the referent); and 5) age/sex/descent (mostly used for kinship). The authors note that this definitional strategy is commonly used in the classification of items found in the natural world (plants, animals, land formations, celestial items) and for defining kinship relations. Notable is that many definitions of these types include linguistic features relating to an ambulatory taxonomy, that is, animals are commonly defined as "wandering" while plants are commonly defined as "standing in one place". In section 6.2, a similar system of ambulation was noted for O'odham postural verb assignment. Another strategy commonly used for animals is *comparison*. For example, *wolf* is defined in part as "rather like coyotes", while *coyote* is in turn defined in part as "the same size as dogs". This suggests a gradient relational perception of canine-like animals centered around the most commonly occurring of the three mentioned and specific to O'odham experience: dog > coyote > wolf. Examining such semantic networks exemplifies ways in which O'odham categorize the natural world through perceptually salient and culturally conditioned characteristics of referents by comparing how items that are defined through any one of the thirteen definitional strategies outlined by Hale and Casagrande.

A similar principle can be observed in many Indigenous language programs. In the instruction of Anishinaabemowin, for example, a lesson on wild rice harvesting or trapping may simultaneously involve place names, kinship terminology, ecological knowledge, seasonal cycles, and ceremonial practices; vocabulary associated with seasonal harvesting, kinship, ceremony, and land-based practices often appears as interconnected systems rather than discrete lexical units or even 'functional themes', as in (Ningewance, 2004). In Deaf education/sign language instruction, instruction may be connected to the relation to various body parts, or phonological similarities, but also a *visually-based* approach to understanding the word (Weber et al. 2025). In other words, learners acquire not simply vocabulary but relationships among concepts.

The pedagogical implications of such a move are substantial for all of the profiles under examination. Language teaching always transmits systems of knowledge. The question is how those systems are organized. Vocabulary organized around institutional participation transmits one set of relationships. Vocabulary organized around kinship, place, responsibility, and ecological knowledge transmits another. Note: we do not think that this distinction should be understood as a binary opposition. Instead, we simply point out that it reveals that language teaching inevitably privileges particular networks of meaning. We in turn argue that pedagogical solidarity requires making those networks visible. Doing so allows learners to recognize not only

what words mean but how systems of meaning are structured. Language teaching therefore becomes one mechanism through which relationships among concepts remain connected across generations.

6.5 Toponymy and Place

The relationship between language teaching and #LandBack becomes most visible through place names. Metallic's (2023) place-name method demonstrates that Migmaq toponyms frequently encode ecological knowledge, historical memory, subsistence practices, and community relationships to territory. These names function not merely as geographic labels but as repositories of knowledge. To illustrate: *Waqametgug*, the Migmaq name for Rivière Bonaventure, refers to a clear or pristine river. *Gaqpesawègadi* identifies a smelt-gathering place. *Penatkuk* refers to a bird-nesting area. These names do not simply designate locations. They encode information about ecological conditions, community activities, seasonal practices, and relationships to land. They function as compressed narratives through which knowledge remains available across generations (Metallic, 2023). Indigenous narrative, history and experience as encoded in topological perception can thus relate to learners the types of concepts that are deemed important to one's community/culture. For example, an examination of O'odham place names in Saxton, Saxton & Enos (1998) shows six general onomastic devices: Flora, Fauna, Artefact, Description, Event, Landforms/Features. These onomastic strategies encode relationships to land. The choice of naming strategy reveals the importance of culture, history and survival. For example, among places categorized as *flora* are such places named after plants like *cattail* or *willow*, which are commonly used in traditional O'odham basketry and may indicate places where such plants are in abundance. Places categorized as *event* include such places as *Turtle Got Stuck* or *Coyote Sitting* which may indicate important historical or mythological events associated with a particular place or region. Among places named for landforms or features are places like *Arroyo Mouth*, associated with traditional farming practice, or *Place of Water*, both of which may indicate resources necessary for survival and continuance.

The pedagogical significance follows directly: teaching such names is not merely teaching vocabulary; it is teaching *relationships to place*. From this perspective, language learning becomes simultaneously an engagement with geography, ecology, history, and collective memory. Consider how this plays out in Deaf studies. One example is robust discussion among Deaf Ecuadorians about which sign to use for “Ecuador” – one is historically related to ASL and



IS ; the other is a much older version and imbued with ‘independence’-based



language ideologies but often not used by Deaf Ecuadorians (Author et al 2026).

The story behind the adoption of the new sign reflects the agency of the Deaf community in Ecuador – the Deaf-led movement to connect with other signing communities in Latin America and beyond.

Here again, a comparison with dominant-language instruction is revealing. Students throughout North America typically learn names such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ottawa. Yet the Indigenous histories embedded within these names frequently remain invisible. The names persist while the relationships they encode disappear from educational practice. A #LandBack perspective invites a different approach – instead of treating place names as neutral labels, pedagogy can (and should) foreground the histories, ecological knowledge, and territorial relationships embedded within them. Place names become sites through which learners encounter both language and land simultaneously. Indeed, the significance of such a curricular move extends beyond Indigenous language reclamation. For instance, Deaf learners, multilingual learners, and dominant-language learners alike inhabit places whose histories frequently remain hidden within ordinary educational practices. Toponymy provides one mechanism through which those relationships can become visible. Among the five pedagogical sites discussed here, place names perhaps most clearly illustrate how language teaching participates in the transmission of relationships: (i) Land is not merely referenced through language; (ii) Land is remembered through language; (iii) Land is interpreted through language; (iv) relationships to Land are sustained through language.

6.6 Bringing the Sites Together

The five pedagogical sites discussed above differ considerably. Axiology (#1) concerns value. Grammar (#2) concerns relational structure. Morphology (#3) concerns renewal. Semantic networks (#4) concern systems of knowledge. Toponymy (#5) concerns relationships to place. Yet all perform the same fundamental function – they transmit relationships.

We have thus returned to the central argument of the article: the distinction among Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation is not that one transmits relationships while the others do not. All language pedagogies transmit relationships. The difference lies in *which* relationships are prioritized, how they are organized, and who exercises authority over their transmission. Metallic's framework is valuable precisely because it makes these processes visible. Her methods demonstrate that language teaching is never merely the transmission of linguistic forms. It is also the transmission of values, responsibilities, systems of knowledge, relationships to place, and possibilities for future action. From this perspective, pedagogical solidarity does not require that different language pedagogies become identical. Rather, it requires recognition that all participate in broader ecologies of relational transmission.

Following this line of reasoning, language teaching becomes more than instruction. It becomes one of the means through which language futures remain connected to one another. And it is

through those connections that language teaching can begin to function as part of broader projects of reclamation and continuity.

7 Pedagogical Solidarity and Language Futures

7.1 Interconnectedness

We began with a learner who did not fit comfortably within existing educational categories. The Indigenous Deaf learner introduced in the opening section appeared to occupy multiple pedagogical domains simultaneously. Existing frameworks developed within Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation each captured important aspects of that learner's experience. Yet, none fully accounted for the relationships among them. The preceding sections have suggested that this difficulty is not accidental. Rather, it reflects a broader tendency within language education to organize pedagogical domains as though they were independent of one another. Educational systems, which often separate questions of communicative access, dominant-language participation, and language reclamation into distinct institutional spaces, routinely encounter learners who constantly move across these spaces. That is, their linguistic lives frequently exceed the boundaries through which educational systems are organized. The challenge is therefore not merely one of classification but of coordination.

Throughout this article we have argued that language pedagogies participate in the organization of transmission. They help determine which communicative practices remain available, which forms of knowledge remain accessible, and which relationships endure across generations. Although Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation pursue distinct goals, all three contribute to the shaping of language futures. This observation has important implications: educational systems often evaluate language programs according to domain-specific outcomes, as Deaf education may focus on language access and participation; dominant-language instruction may emphasize proficiency, literacy, or academic achievement; and Indigenous language reclamation may prioritize continuity, community engagement, and linguistic resurgence. Of course, the goals remain essential, but they do not exhaust what language pedagogies accomplish. Language teaching also helps organize relationships among educational systems themselves. For example, an Indigenous Deaf learner's ability to participate in language reclamation efforts may depend upon access to sign language. Participation in community language programs may be shaped by dominant-language literacy. Relationships to place may be mediated through educational structures established outside Indigenous communities. Decisions made within one pedagogical domain therefore create possibilities and constraints within others.

7.2 Interdependence

Language pedagogies are already interconnected. The question is whether educational systems acknowledge that interdependence. We have thus far proposed *pedagogical solidarity* as one possible response. Caveat: by solidarity, we do not mean *pedagogical uniformity*. The objective is not to collapse Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation into a single model. Such an approach would erase important historical, political, and community differences. Instead, pedagogical solidarity begins from recognition that distinct language pedagogies participate in shared ecologies of transmission. That is, different pedagogies will continue to pursue different goals, but those goals need not be pursued in isolation.

A #LandBack perspective asks us to imagine such solidarity as it refocuses educational policies on interdependent relationships rather than categories. In short: the question becomes not simply which language is being taught, but how relationships among language, knowledge, community, responsibility, and place are being sustained. Seen from this perspective, the pedagogical sites discussed in the previous section take on broader significance. Axiology, grammar, morphology, semantic networks, and toponymy are not merely instructional domains. They are mechanisms through which relationships remain visible. They provide opportunities for educational systems to recognize connections that might otherwise remain fragmented. Importantly, this framework does not position Indigenous language reclamation as a model that other pedagogies must imitate. Rather, Indigenous language reclamation offers insights concerning relational continuity that may prove useful across educational domains. Metallic's (2023) linguistic methods are valuable precisely because they identify ways of sustaining relationships *without* erasing differences. Pedagogical solidarity therefore involves neither assimilation nor separation. The objective is not to produce identical language futures. It is to ensure that distinct language futures remain capable of supporting one another.

This distinction returns us to the Indigenous Deaf learner, whose 'portrait' reveals that language pedagogies are already connected whether educational systems acknowledge those connections or not. The question is whether pedagogical structures will continue to treat those connections as incidental or whether they will begin to organize language education around them more intentionally. #LandBack offers one possible answer – not because it eliminates differences among pedagogies but because it reminds us that relationships must be sustained if futures are to remain possible.

8 Conclusion

We began this discussion with the idea that learner profiles do not fit comfortably within existing educational categories. For instance, an Indigenous Deaf learner may simultaneously navigate sign language acquisition, dominant-language schooling, and Indigenous language reclamation. Educational systems often approach these domains as distinct enterprises, each with its own assumptions, pedagogies, and institutional structures. Yet, the learner encounters them as

interconnected realities. Additionally, such a description extends beyond any single learner population. Throughout, we have argued that such learners reveal assumptions that frequently remain invisible within language education. In particular, they expose assumptions regarding language access, language development, and language transmission: categories such as first-language learner, second-language learner, heritage-language learner, and language reclaimer remain useful in many contexts but often rely upon forms of stability that many learners do not experience. Recognizing this instability shifts attention from acquisition alone to broader questions of transmission. In this manuscript, we have argued that the research should consider not simply how languages are learned but how communicative practices remain available, how knowledge moves across generations, and how educational institutions participate in shaping language futures. Viewed from this perspective, Deaf education, dominant-language instruction, and Indigenous language reclamation appear less isolated than educational systems often assume and thus scholarship might generally indicate. Although their histories, goals, and political commitments differ, all three participate in the organization of transmission. Each contributes to determining which relationships remain possible and which futures become imaginable. This observation formed the basis of our argument for pedagogical solidarity.

Importantly, we have argued that pedagogical solidarity does not require that distinct language pedagogies become identical, nor does it imply that differences among educational traditions should disappear. Rather, solidarity begins with recognition that language pedagogies already participate in shared ecologies of transmission. Learners routinely move across multiple language futures even when educational systems continue to treat those futures as separate.

Further, we advocated for the utilization of #LandBack as one framework for understanding this challenge because it foregrounds relationships rather than categories. As Indigenous scholars have repeatedly argued, relationships among language, knowledge, responsibility, governance, and place require ongoing work if they are to endure. Language teaching participates in that work. The pedagogical sites examined here—axiology, grammar, morphology, semantic networks, and toponymy—illustrate some of the mechanisms through which such relationships remain available. They demonstrate that language instruction transmits more than linguistic forms. It also transmits systems of value, structures of meaning, relationships to place, and possibilities for collective futures.

In closing, the argument advanced here has been deliberately modest; e.g., we have not argued that all language teaching constitutes (or should constitute) #LandBack. Nor have we suggested that pedagogy can substitute for territorial return, sovereignty, or material redistribution. Rather, we have argued that language teaching becomes significant because it participates in the transmission of relationships. Those relationships connect learners to languages, communities to knowledge, and futures to the histories from which they emerge. In that respect, the Indigenous Deaf learner who opened this article reminds us that such relationships rarely exist within a single pedagogical domain. They exist across them. The challenge for language education is

therefore not simply to teach languages well but to sustain the relationships that make language futures possible.

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