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Ni keehtwawmi mooshahkinitounawn: Lifting Up Representations of Indigenous Education and Futures in The Marrow Thieves

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Erratum

1) We previously listed the order of authorship as Muñoz, Horner, and Petrone. We have corrected the order to Horner, Muñoz, and Petrone. 2) This version includes a new FN1, which had been accidentally removed prior to publication.

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"We sang our songs and brought them to the streets and into the classrooms—classrooms we built on our own lands and filled with our own words" (24). —Miigwans, *The Marrow Thieves*

In the young adult novel *The Marrow Thieves*, Métis author Cherie Dimaline portrays a simultaneous set of realities. On the one hand, humans—propelled by the logics of settler colonialism and capitalism—have poisoned all the drinking water, air and lands have become polluted as a result of human-driven climate change, and non-Indigenous people are brutally harvesting Indigenous Peoples' bone marrow with the hope that this marrow will allow non-Indigenous folks to dream of futures in the midst of the apocalyptic catastrophe they created.

Alongside these bleak realities, *The Marrow Thieves* also amplifies the dynamic education that is, and always has been, existing in Indigenous[1] communities. These representations of Indigenous education extend far beyond the limitations of colonial classrooms and school walls and, as explored throughout this article, include everything from the relationship between knowledge and hair, to seeking advice from more-than-human relatives, to teaching with and learning from Story.[2] These examples of Indigenous education, among others, exist in *The Marrow Thieves* because Indigenous communities have already been living, learning, and flourishing in a post-apocalyptic world since the coming of settler colonialism.

Long before European contact with Turtle Island (North America), systems of education flourished in Indigenous communities. Since time immemorial, knowledges, cultures, literacies and other knowledge systems, skills, and ways of being were transferred and built upon through

[1] We use "Native (Peoples)" and "Indigenous (Peoples)" interchangeably to refer to the original inhabitants of North America and use tribal affiliations for specific examples of individuals and Nations. We use "Peoples" to indicate the uniqueness of nations, groups, and cultures that have been practicing self-determination long before colonization—their inherent sovereignties do not rely on recognition of modern colonizing nation-states.

[2] We capitalize "Story/ies/ing" to designate Indigenous narratives articulating identity, history, language, and cultural teachings, to elevate "story" beyond the diminutive definition of an account told only for entertainment.

myriad processes, including intergenerational pedagogies; Storying; contextualized and in/on time instruction and assessment; and responsible, reciprocal relations inclusive of animals, lands, and waters. Through such approaches to education, Indigenous communities practiced land stewardship, forestry, agriculture, spirituality, democracy, community care, warfare, peace, love, death, and life.

In these ways, education was part and parcel of daily life, embedded in an ecology of relations, occurrences, and places; and situated within social, economic, and political activities. Only as settler colonialism began to restrict Indigenous communities' educational sovereignty did schools—as physical and finite apparatuses of attempted subjugation—become aspects of Indigenous Peoples' lives and sense-making (de los Ríos et al.). And though schools, as vehicles of settler colonialism, have been operating in relation to Native communities on Turtle Island for hundreds of years at this point—and have done massive destruction along the way—Indigenous approaches to learning and teaching that pre-date such schools persist (Brayboy and Lomawaima). In other words, despite the sustained, systematic attempts at dismantling and eradicating Indigenous educational systems, these ancestral ways of learning and teaching continue, albeit not without alteration, adaptation, and "survivance," which is the joining of survival and resistance (Vizenor).

In fact, to this day, many Indigenous Peoples demarcate westernized notions of "schooling" from Indigenous perspectives on "education." As educational scholars Bryan McKinnley Jones Brayboy (Lumbee) and K. Tsianina Lomawaima (Mvskoke/Creek) articulate:

> Many people use the term education interchangeably with schooling, as we might expect when the broad sense of to educate—passing along discrete knowledges and the cultural definition of what counts as useful, important knowledge—

> coincides with schools' content and practices. For Indigenous peoples, however, Indigenous education and colonial schooling (which includes contemporary U.S. schools) do not coincide. (83)

Aligned with this demarcation—and in resistance to framing our analysis in response to settler colonialism—in this article, we trace representations of Indigenous *education* in the young adult novel, *The Marrow Thieves,* focusing particularly on the ways Indigenous education offers possibilities for Indigenous (educational) futures.

Before shifting to the remainder of this article, we take a moment to share who we are and how our unique identities and experiences shape our relationships to the content of this article. Melissa identifies as bi-racial—Métis/Anishinaabe and white—and due to harmful assimilatory effects of settler colonialism in her family, Melissa has spent years reconnecting with and returning home to her Métis and Turtle Mountain Anishinaabe cultures. As Melissa has been on a healing journey to attend to manifestations of intergenerational historical trauma caused by settler colonialism, her learning, teaching, and research are inextricably linked to her familial and personal experiences. Joaquin's identity as an Indigenous (Pascua Yaqui) and Mexican American person plays a direct role in his living, teaching, and learning. He was born and raised in what is colonially referred to as "Arizona" and now lives in what is currently known as "Minnesota." As a literacy teacher educator, he works to develop pedagogies for future teachers to recognize concepts central to Indigenous experiences, and these interests are scholarly and lived, as he is an Indigenous person living far from the recognized homelands of his community. Central to his work is recognizing his affinity to the Indigenous Peoples around him, while simultaneously acknowledging his outsider status. Robert comes to this work as a non-Indigenous, white, settler descendant literacy education faculty member at a land-grant

institution of higher education. For the past five+ years, he has been in research collaboration with students and staff at an alternative high school on a Native American reservation, and through this work—primarily the relationships developed—Robert has and continues to learn about the mechanisms and impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous communities in North America, as well as various ways these communities engage culture to heal historical trauma, thrive in their present lives, and imagine futures for their continued health and wellness.

The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism

Within conventional taxonomies, *The Marrow Thieve*s is categorized as a dystopian, post-apocalyptic story in which the world has an uncertain future. More specifically, the world white folks created under a settler colonist system has come to an end. In other words, the post-apocalyptic labeling of this novel signals an apocalyptic end for a particular subset of people, ideologies, and power structures—white, settler colonialism. Thus, it becomes important to delineate understandings of "post-apocalyptic" not as a generalized, equally applicable rendering but rather as something specific for particular people and systems. As scholars Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury state:

> Discourses on "global catastrophic risk," "human extinction," and similar large-scale threats are fundamentally apocalyptic: they see the collapse of currently-dominant power structures as the "end of the world" and the extinction of "humanity." This is a powerful and increasingly common way of conceptualizing the changing patterns… However, we argue that what these discourses in fact worry about is not, in fact, the end of earth, but rather the collapse of whiteness as a formation of global power. (326)

By drawing attention to the apocalypse in *The Marrow Thieves* as being an apocalypse of and for the system of settler colonialism, we note that settler colonization itself had long-since brought an apocalypse to Indigenous populations on Turtle Island. Thus, this delineation is crucial "to open space for futures beyond (the) apocalypse (of whiteness)" (322).

Settler colonization on Turtle Island has been going on for over 500 years and can be understood as an invasion of colonists whose aim is to settle the land through the construction of a new society in place of robust pre-existing Indigenous societies (Dunbar-Ortiz). Settler colonialism operates through a logic of elimination wherein the goal is to eradicate (e.g., assimilation, genocide) Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and knowledges so the settler society can claim the physical land and ultimately profit from it. Thus, settler colonial power is derived from the elimination of Indigenous Peoples (Wolfe).

This brand of colonialism began first as an *event* when settler colonists initially arrived and has continued over 500 years as a *structure* that continuously fuels the power of settler colonization by methodically privileging Eurocentric history, education, science, and culture while systematically engineering genocidal, ethnocidal, and linguicidal policies and practices to erase Native bodies, nations, histories, knowledges, and power (Wolfe). In other words, dominant settler society's (e.g., Canada, United States) present-day attempts at maintaining settler colonization are a continuation of a 500+ year systematic attempt to eradicate Native Peoples.

As we have recounted elsewhere (Horner et al.), from the time of settler colonial contact forward, colonial governments have conducted genocidal campaigns against Native Peoples, including boarding schools and destroying Native food sources. During genocidal practices in what's colonially referred to as the "United States," Native peoples were subjected to deliberate

policies of elimination directed by the federal government. Specifically, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 removed Native communities who resided east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river to create space for the influx of Europeans settling on and profiting from the land. The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 officially created reservations, which were designed to segregate and control Native Peoples' existence. The Dawes/General Allotment Act of 1887 divided up Native lands into an individual-ownership system, effectively dissolving relationships between Native families and ancestral lands while also making tribal lands available for purchase to non-Natives, further splintering the physical proximity and cohesivity of Native communities and homelands. Though Indigenous communities have never quit existing despite settler colonization's efforts, Native Peoples have, in many respects, "socially disappeared" in the imaginations of many non-Native individuals and communities (Na'Puti; Brayboy). As we have previously argued: "non-Native people often assume that they can now claim Native lands, cultures, and identities, since they believe Natives 'are no longer here'" (Horner et al. 108).

In *The Marrow Thieves,* Indigenous Peoples experience a *continuation* of the apocalypse that settler colonization brought to their homelands, while non-Indigenous people experience their *first-coming* of an apocalypse, which also includes the progressive dying of the settler colonial system itself. For example, cities became vacant with death and destruction, many "earthquakes [peeled] the edges of the continents back like diseased gums" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 25), and non-Indigenous people lost their ability to dream.

Indigenous Futurisms: Juxtaposing Settler Colonial Apocalypse & Indigenous Education

In pairing the apocalypse that comes to settler colonialism in *The Marrow Thieves* with representations of Indigenous education, a space emerges for the existence of *Indigenous futures*.

Indigenous futures stem, in part, from the concept of Indigenous futurism, which, coined by Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon, can be described as engaging with "fiction, visual and performing arts, film, video games, social movement organization, ceremony, and other mediums to promote decolonization, critique colonial power structures, and promote the resurgence of Indigenous forms of governances, [and knowledges], including better relations with earth and other planets" (Mitchell and Chaudhury 321). In other words, Indigenous futurisms are representations of Indigenous Peoples drawing on their own worldviews, traditions, languages, and stories as essential guides toward imagining possible futures for themselves and their communities. It's also important to note that Indigenous futures are not taken for granted, given the cultural and bodily death—and intentional elimination of a future—aimed at Indigenous communities by settler colonialism.

There are myriad ways of thinking concretely about Indigenous futurisms. For example, an Apsáalooke high school student might create a comic book containing a story about himself among intertribal Indigenous youth who build their own comic book store and fill it with their favorite comic books about coyotes, spiders, rabbits, and other trickster figures. In this way, the comic book story the Apsáalooke student constructs is a representation of an Indigenous future because the student sees himself as part of the future—he portrays this specific image of an Indigenous future that includes him.

Another example of Indigenous futurism could be an instance where a group of Lakota women host workshops for Indigenous families based on midwifery practices that are rooted in ancestral knowledges about prenatal care, pregnancy, birthing, postpartum, and community-care. The construction of this workshop series allows its attendees to learn and embrace Indigenous values, while also positioning them to quite literally welcome future Indigenous people into the

world. The Lakota women hosting the workshops are manifesting a reality where Indigenous birthing practices are being fostered in a way that can be transmitted to future generations of Indigenous families, thus ensuring Indigenous knowledge systems exist in the future.

Indigenous futurisms create shifts toward the possible end of settler colonialism as a structure of domination and create openings for the emergence of other ways of being in the world. Considering Indigenous futurisms inherently means that Indigenous Peoples not only exist in the future, but they also help construct it. Thus, representations of Indigenous futures subvert the goal of Indigenous genocide driven by settler colonization. Anishinaabe/Nêhiyaw community organizer Lindsey Nixon supports this: "Armed with spirit and the teachings of our ancestors, all our relations behind us, we are living the Indigenous future. We are the descendants of a future imaginary that has already passed; the outcome of the intentions, resistance, and survivance of our ancestors."

Representations of Indigenous education in *The Marrow Thieves* also serve as an example of what Indigenous futures look like. The existence of the Native characters in the text are proof that Indigenous Peoples survived the apocalypse of settler colonization, as well as the second apocalypse that is happening in real time in *The Marrow Thieves*. Also, even though the first settler colonial apocalypse came to Indigenous communities, they were able to continue their teachings and cultural practices (though not entirely intact), which means they were not only able to survive, but they were able to create an example of an Indigenous future through the Indigenous education that we see on the pages of Dimaline's book. Furthermore, as the characters in the book "do" Indigenous education, they are simultaneously continuing to ensure futures for themselves and their descendants. In the coming sections, we reveal how Indigenous futurisms already have been and are functioning in a present-day post-apocalyptic setting for

Indigenous Peoples. As Mitchell and Chaudhury point out, “where white futurists foresee ‘the’ end of ‘the(ir)’ world, many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) thinkers, makers, and actors are already (and have long been) generating new worlds in the wake of the apocalypse of white domination” (327).

Furthermore, if we consider *The Marrow Thieves* as part of school curricula, we allow schooling to be opened to what it might look like to begin dismantling the current canon—to facilitate a “literary apocalypse” for the canon—and then imagine what classroom futures could be like if we recreate them with fewer parameters of educational colonialism. In other words, imagining Indigenous futures can also help imagine *educational* futures for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In this way, we wonder what an educational system that isn’t inherently colonizing might look like—one that de-centers settler-colonial epistemologies and prioritizes Indigenous Knowledge Systems that are *led by* Indigenous Peoples. What might such an educational system have as its goals? Might, for instance, healing, dreaming, imagining, and revitalizing play significant roles? *How* might these things be accomplished—what would the pedagogies be? By raising these questions, our central aims are to both expand our views of education and help educators better name and challenge oppressive systems, as well as recognize potential pathways to dismantle such harmful systems.

What Does *The Marrow Thieves* Teach About Indigenous Education & Futures?

In a public talk in St. Paul, Minnesota in 2020, Cherie Dimaline, author of *The Marrow Thieves*, recounted how she came to write her novel. Inspiration came when she was jokingly “peer pressured” into “writing an apocalypse story from an Indigenous perspective” (Dimaline, “2020 Read Brave”). In characterizing an apocalypse, Dimaline noted one striking characteristic:

that in an apocalypse, a person could no longer live the life they were accustomed to living. It was then, Dimaline noted, that the story was almost self-evident: Indigenous Peoples had already experienced an apocalypse; Indigenous Peoples have already survived the apocalypse of settler colonization and are and had been already living in a "post-apocalyptic world." In this sense, *The Marrow Thieves* not only outlines a history of colonization as enacted by mainstream schools, but it also delineates the powerful modes of resistance and resilience—encapsulated in educational systems—that Indigenous Peoples have and do practice to keep their cultures intact.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, Indigenous education is represented through the journey of a small group of Indigenous characters who band together to escape the government officials (the Recruiters) who are tracking them to take them to "new" residential schools where they would have their bone marrow extracted for consumption by non-Indigenous people to facilitate their ability to dream. Told through the first-person point of view of Frenchie, a Métis teenager who is without his biological family, the novel brings readers into this small group of characters and the broader sense of Indigenous education, alongside Frenchie as he is apprenticed into this unit. This collection of characters, who refer to themselves as a "family," consist of: Miigwans, Frenchie, Wab, Slopper, Chi-Boy, Minerva, Tree, RiRi, Zheegwon, and Rose. Logistically, this group is en route north, to "return to [their] homelands [to] start the process of healing" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 193), and travels mainly through forest where they forage, hunt, build shelter, laugh, learn, and teach.

The family is intergenerational, intertribal (e.g., Métis, Anishinaabe, Nêhiyaw), and simultaneously honors differentiated positions within the group while also promoting an egalitarianism whereby everyone holds equal importance. As Miigwans, one of the older members of the group, says, "No one is more important than anyone else" (58). Though different

roles facilitate healthy functioning of the system (e.g., scouts, hunters), everyone learns each role. In this way, everyone knows how to participate in every facet of the inner workings of their family. At the same time, their system recognizes that each person has assets to be utilized for the greater good. For instance, Frenchie is particularly good at climbing trees and is often called upon to do so to see if Recruiters are in pursuit. Among the family unit, Minerva speaks Anishinaabemowin, an Indigenous language, and other characters have varied experiences with ancestral linguistic and cultural understandings.

Since the novel moves along Frenchie's trajectory of becoming a part of this family, it offers a window into processes, structures of participation, and pedagogies as they pertain to representations of Indigenous educational systems, values, and practices. Specifically, we note three central and critical learning and teaching practices: 1) Story/ies and Storying as key modes of knowledge and knowledge transfer; 2) culture as education (especially through language learning); and 3) learning and teaching contextualized within responsible reciprocal relationships.

"Everyone's creation story is their own": Story & Storying

In her talk, Dimaline recounted how her family members taught her that "stories hold people together" (Dimaline, "2020 Read Brave"). Within many Indigenous communities, Stories are valued as a means for the transmission of cultural knowledge and are drawn upon for sustaining, transferring, and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge systems, including understandings of language, place, values, and education (Tuck and Yang). Stories communicate lived ways of existing in the world and are integral to and inseparable from educational theory. Scholar Brayboy explains: "Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being" (430). Additionally, while

Stories themselves are powerful, Story*ing*—the process of how Stories are created and shared—serves as a route into establishing a relational way of learning and teaching. Educational scholars San Pedro and Kinloch describe Storying as "the interweaving and merging process (e.g., braiding, yarning) that occurs in the space between the telling and listening, the giving and receiving" (377S). Thus, Story and Storying create interlocking, fluid, transmissible relationships between humans, knowledge, culture, and futures.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, Storying is fundamental to the existence of Frenchie's family. It is the modality by which knowledge about the world and its immediate concerns is shared; in particular, the members of Frenchie's family are taught history, survival, kinship, and care through Story. Sometimes the gift of Story is a treat for the characters, as when Minerva offers, "I wanna tell yous about the rogarou tonight," and Frenchie feels the excitement of hearing "an old-timey story" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 66). Frenchie's anticipation about the impending story can be understood as an eagerness to learn about Anishinaabe/Métis ways of understanding the world and his role in it that are embedded in many Indigenous stories.

The importance of Stories is made evident by the character of Miigwans. For example, Miigwans recounts history, traditions, elements of culture, and growth in his first Story to the family after Frenchie arrives—a Story that is repeated many times during Frenchie's time with this family. Miigwans teaches, "we welcomed visitors, who renamed the land Canada. Sometimes things got real between us and the newcomers. Sometimes we killed each other" (23). Miigwans shares Story by way of providing critical learning about the experiences and violence of colonization, and it's important to note that this example is not only about educating the family on historical matters, but it is also a way to understand their current situation as a manifestation of settler colonization.

Each member of Frenchie's family has a "Coming-To" Story, a recounting of their arrival to the family, which often entails painful trauma and loss. For each person, their Coming-To Story is their own. Miigwans reminds the family members that "'Everyone tells their own coming-to story. That's the rule. Everyone's creation story is their own [to tell]'" (79). Throughout the Coming-To Stories, members of Frenchie's family explain and expand their identities, and come to be known by others—in the ways they wish to be known. Coming-To Stories are an act of agency as each person shapes and shares themselves without interference from others. For example, the members of the family beg Miigwans for Wab's long-withheld Coming-To Story "since she'd never waste enough words to share it herself" (78), but Miig stands firmly in his aforementioned belief that Wab gets to choose how and when she shares her story. On her timeline and feeling, one night "Wab took handfuls of thick smoke and rubbed her face… then she began" (79), finally Storying about her traumatic Coming-To.

In many ways, Story/ies and Storying in the novel function as a recapitulation of history, an acknowledgement of the present, and a preparation for the future. "We needed to remember Story," Frenchie reflects, and "it was his [Miigwaans] job to set the memory in perpetuity" (25). Frenchie explains how he learned about "a hundred years in one long narrative…we gathered for an hour so he could explain treaties…and…to list the earthquakes in the sequence they occurred" (25). The commitment of these stories to memory was crucial "because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive [and thrive]" (25). The educational significance and power of Story/ies and Storying lies in these practices' innate capacity to transfer knowledge (especially from elder knowledge carriers to newer/future knowledge carriers) to collectively sustain and revitalize Indigenous

epistemologies amidst ongoing settler colonial oppression. In these ways, the story *listener* is just as important as the story*teller* in the creation and continuation of Indigenous futures.

"I dream in Cree": Culture as Education

For Frenchie's family, culture and education are not distinct from one another but rather quite the opposite—culture is education and education is learning culture. One does not go to school to learn about culture. One engages—becomes part of—culture to learn, to be "educated." In other words, doing culture is inherently educational, and learning is intrinsically cultural. Throughout the novel this inextricable relationship is demonstrated in various ways, including Frenchie's recognition that learning to braid his hair holds cultural significance: "I did have the longest hair of any of the boys… I braided it myself each morning, to keep it out of the way and to remind myself of things I couldn't quite remember but that, nevertheless, I knew to be true" (21). Another example is when the younger family members watch "Miig [have] his nighttime smoke down there with [Minerva], taking extra long hauls so she could smudge herself, making shallow cups out of her crepe paper fingers and pulling the smoke over her covered head" (149). This is an instance wherein the family is learning, through implicit instruction, one way to caretake an elder, as well as a real-time example of the cultural practice of smudging.

Of all cultural practices, perhaps none is as important as language. One of the central targets of settler colonist efforts of cultural genocide was through linguicide, and no other domain illuminates the extraordinary means by which Indigenous Peoples have resisted subjugation than through intergenerational linguistic transmission and revitalization. For instance, Dimaline recounts her experiences learning stories in Michif, the language of the Métis. She explains that the women of her community would tell their stories in Michif, in English, and in Michif again, as a way to teach Michif while also embedding the Story in her memory. For

Dimaline, the significance of language is central and part of the answer to the question she asked in writing *The Marrow Thieves*: “Who do we want to be in the moment of our survival?” (Dimaline, “2020 Read Brave”). As a site of resisting colonizing practices, language allows Indigenous Peoples to maintain sovereignty and allows us to still be ourselves “in the moment of our survival.”

Language in *The Marrow Thieves* is a fundamental thread that ties Frenchie’s family together and is an essential site of learning and teaching. As the novel develops, the reader also comes to understand language as a critical tool of survival in the present and hope for the future. For instance, Dimaline illustrates an understanding central to the experience of many Indigenous Peoples: the violence of stolen languages. Many stories of residential school experiences document the painful and traumatizing procedures inflicted on Indigenous Peoples as means to erase language from their memories (Thomason). Miigwans reflects on this in his Coming-To Story, describing the loss of his husband, Isaac, to the Recruiters:

> Isaac didn’t have memories in his family of the original school…Isaac didn’t have grandparents who’d told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right, stories about men and women who promised themselves to God only and then took whatever they wanted from the children, especially at night. Stories about a book that was like a vacuum, used to suck the language right out of your lungs. (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 106-107)

Miigwans’ reflection here makes explicit the relationships between the history of violence against language and the power of language. The acknowledgement of language as a vehicle for knowledge transmission helps reveal one of the reasons linguicide took Indigenous communities

by settler colonial storm—it would prevent the transfer of cultural understandings and fracture a through line between past, present, and future. Conversely, forcing Indigenous youth to learn English (in residential schools) promoted an attempted enculturation of Eurocentric worldviews in the service of assimilatory attempts of ethnocide.

As the family members learn language, mostly from Minerva, the reader can see how critical and precious language is to them. Language acts as both a carrier of the past and a way forward for the family. In one instance, Frenchie chides Rose about being with Minerva, which he perceives as a mindless chore. Rose rebukes Frenchie, responding that "being with Minerva is pretty nishin" (38). Frenchie is immediately jealous when Rose reveals that "nishin" is "just a little bit of language" (38). Rose's access to Anishinaabemowin language through time spent with Minerva is infuriating to Frenchie, as he reflects on his own feelings of being disconnected from his Indigenous language. "How do you have language?" My voice broke on the last syllable. My chest tightened. How could she have language? She was the same age as me, and I deserved it more. I don't know why, but I felt certain that I did (38). As he leans into a new appreciation for Minerva as a carrier and teacher of language, Frenchie expresses the significance of language to him as a Métis person: "I turned the word over in my throat like a stone, like a prayer I couldn't add breath to…it made my lungs feel heavy and my heart grow light" (39).

Another poignant moment in *The Marrow Thieves* comes when Frenchie's family crosses paths with another group of Indigenous folks after having seen signs of syllabics—written forms of Indigenous language—embedded into the bark of trees. In the exchange between the groups, it becomes clear that one of the new characters (Isaac) is a fluent carrier of an Indigenous language. As Frenchie begins to preemptively feel excited about the implications of learning

from this new person, he and Isaac have the following exchange, led by Frenchie: "'What language do you dream in?' I already knew what he was going to say. 'Nehiyawok, big man.' I watched the word leave his mouth, felt it fall over my face through the cotton damp with breath and mud. It raised the skin on my arms to bumps. 'I dream in Cree'" (228).

In this moment, Isaac's admission, alongside Frenchie's realization, demonstrates the power of language within Indigenous endeavors to continue creating contemporary realities and futures for themselves rooted in Indigenous worldviews. Specifically, knowing Frenchie's family spends so much time evading settler colonial Recruiters who want to capture them to harvest their bone marrow in the hopes it will allow non-Native people to dream again, Isaac's statement "I dream in Cree," gives readers a direct line to the heart of the extraction and appropriation brought by settler colonialism. In this moment, dreams that exist in Nêhiyawak (Cree) cannot be stolen from Indigenous folks, as these dreams would not only be linguistically incomprehensible to non-Indigenous speakers, the knowledges and ideas carried in the dreams would also be incoherent to a non-Indigenous dreamer. Through Frenchie, Dimaline reveals that Native Peoples have this non-extractable part of their cultures that they will continue to teach and learn to dream futures rooted in Nêhiyawak language, education, and culture.

"We are all a story the universe is telling": Responsible Reciprocal Relations

While western schooling is based on an individual learner's understanding, in Indigenous educations, individuals operate within a broader ecology of learning and teaching that is contextualized and occurs collectively. In other words, unlike westernized schooling which is decontextualized from cultural communities (Rogoff et al.), Indigenous education is situated within everyday life and is "purposive" (Petrone) for immediate and future endeavors. More

specifically, education is not separate from but embedded in and a part of life and a broader sense of community and relations.

Throughout *The Marrow Thieves*, community relations, family, and caretaking are central to learning and teaching. The notion of collectiveness abounds throughout Dimaline's thinking, as she notes in her talk that "we are all a story that the universe is telling" (Dimaline, "2020 Read Brave"). Given this interrelatedness, notions of *responsibility* and *reciprocity* are paramount in Indigenous education. For example, the Anishinaabemowin word—indaanikoobijigan (ᐃᓐᑖᓂᑰᐱᒋᑲᓐ)—for great-grandchild/great-grandparent/ancestor teaches that we are inextricably connected to our relatives, and the word also holds meaning that we are responsible for reciprocally being good relatives to our human and more-than-human relations, as we impact one another through past, present, and future connectivity.

Though the human members of Frenchie's family are not biologically related, the responsible and reciprocal nature of their familial relationships develops throughout the novel. For instance, the youngest members of the family, RiRi and Slopper, are both carefully watched and cared for when it comes to learning. This is particularly true when it comes to teaching them the reality of the family's current situation. RiRi constantly pushes on Frenchie to tell her the stories Miigwans shares because she believes she is old enough to handle it. Frenchie, knowing the gravity of the situation, reminds her the time for Story comes when it is appropriate for the person. Frenchie tells her that Miigwans "will let you know the whole story when it's time," as a precaution against trauma. Frenchie recounts that "Slopper was pretty messed up for months after [he heard Story]. He stopped playing, didn't want to learn anything, and even stopped sleeping so good" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 28).

In this way, we can see the critical need to learn in connection to community, and the sense of well-being that can be communicated when teaching is conducted with nuance and care. This caretaking also illustrates the emphasis this cultural community places on youth and elders. "The old and the young are the most important, the most wise, because they are the closest to creation" (Dimaline, "2020 Read Brave"). In this view, even though all relatives within a community play crucial roles, the survival and flourishing of the young and the elders hold special places within a family system. Dimaline points out the potential for loss with the disappearance of either/both: "When the youngest is lost, you lose hope and when the oldest is lost, you lose your roots (Dimaline, "2020 Read Brave").

While the notion of community and relations includes other humans—past, present, and future—it also encompasses more-than-human relatives, including land, plants, animals, and other entities (e.g., the sun/moon, water, plants). For instance, Rose learns from her human Uncle that she can seek guidance from the moon, a more-than-human relative—a grandmother: "'That's what you follow now.' He [her Uncle] pointed to the full, silver moon with two bent fingers. 'That's your granny'" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 71). Later in the book there is an instance where many of the members of Frenchie's family become ill with bad coughs; to support a healthful recovery, "Minerva boiled cedar branches and pine needles into medicine and fed it to each of us every two hours" (93). In this example, Minerva is teaching the family how to draw on the medicinal knowledge their plant relatives offer them. In both examples, the family has to build connections with these more-than-human relations to understand what they can reciprocally learn from one another. This is evidenced, too, in how the characters understand their own fates to be connected to that of the earth: "When we heal our land, we are healed also" (193). In this sense, Indigenous education offers a window into the types of responsible

reciprocal relations needed to support ourselves and the earth in healing from the damage the novel prophesizes.

Healing Relationships: Implications for Reconciliation, Education, and Schooling

Indigenous education, as represented in *The Marrow Thieves*, starkly contrasts with mainstream schooling structures, practices, and purposes. For instance, whereas Story forms an important foundation for Indigenous education, so-called "objective" evidence and argumentative modes of communication dominate colonial schooling curricula and testing. In Indigenous education, learning is not separate from daily living and engaging in cultural practices; in colonial schools, curricula and instruction are largely removed from cultural practices with the aim of preparing children to later be integrated into community practices. Related, *The Marrow Thieves* reveals how Indigenous education exists within an ecology that prioritizes collective reciprocal responsible relationships whereas colonial structures of schooling privilege individualistic growth and "achievement."

Moreover, a hallmark of Indigenous education is the importance of *healing*. This emphasis on healing is a central difference between Indigenous education as it exists now and throughout the post-apocalyptic experience of the past 500+ years, and Indigenous educational systems as they may have existed before colonial contact. As Nêhiyaw author and organizer Erica Lee puts it, "…in knowing the histories of our relations and of this land, we find the knowledge to recreate all that our worlds would've been if not for the interruption of colonization." Because of settler colonialism, lands need to be restored, languages revitalized, and cultural practices sustained.

However, what representations of Indigenous education in *The Marrow Thieves* help us understand is that the needed healing extends beyond these particular facets of human psychological and emotional wellness. What needs to be healed is the *underlying ways of relating*—to the land, to each other, to ourselves, to Indigenous Knowledge systems, and to education—that settler colonialism has engendered. Without healing this deeper, infrastructural level, any attempts at healing "things" will be met with the same immutable system that demands their brokenness. In other words, what Indigenous educational systems offer is a way to move toward *reconciliation* of the damage caused by a broken system *and* the broken system itself.

Another way to consider reconciliation is through the Michif phrase: ni keehtwawmi mooshahkinitounawn, which literally means "reconciliation" but translates more honestly to "we lift each other up" (CBC). In creating a more robust understanding of what it might mean to "reconcile" the conflicting colonial and Indigenous systems, we can dream possibilities to build new and healthy relationships by lifting up Indigenous knowledges that have been working against the apocalypse of oppressive colonialism for the last 500+ years.

Specifically, for schooling systems to examine how they might create healing spaces, *The Marrow Thieves* turns us toward a recognition that there have been times in the past and present where Indigenous knowledges are extracted under the guise of being used for healing purposes, while Native folks are, ironically and harmfully, still excluded:

> "At first [beginning of the apocalypse], people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could help guide them. They asked to come to ceremony. They humbled themselves when we refused. And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves… How could

> they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?" (Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* 88)

Educators, then, must be intentional in their approaches to healing colonial ways of doing school so they do not (mis)appropriate Indigenous education and knowledge, thus furthering colonial violence toward Native Peoples. In order for schools to *not* become their own version of "marrow thieves," due diligence needs to be taken to pursue healing educational systems through reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples, while any Indigenous education that schooling systems are interested in learning from needs to be led by Indigenous educators, youth, and tribal nations.

Therefore, we argue that one of the central lessons to be learned from representations of education in *The Marrow Thieves* is that settler colonialism hurts everyone, including non-Indigenous folks, so any movement forward for current schooling systems needs to take into consideration how to repair relationships while also exploring how its systems work against healing and might facilitate healing. In the spirit of dismantling harmful settler colonial norms, recreating healthy relationships, and lifting up Indigenous futures, Dimaline reminds us that "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually" (193).

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