Section 3: Contemporary Issues in Indigenizing the Academy

Indigenous Languages and the Academy

Sarah Townley (Labrador School Board) and Marguerite Mackenzie (Memorial University of Newfoundland) with Elizabeth Yeoman (Memorial University of Newfoundland)

Abstract: Language is almost universally considered to be very important, because it is a key aspect of culture and identity, because of the knowledge it transmits, and because it enables communication between generations and across communities. In this article, Elizabeth Yeoman interviews two specialists in indigenous language education about their experiences and stories of language, and education and cultural challenges throughout their lives.

> … even if our mother tongue was forbidden ("on pain of getting strapped on your bare buttocks") by the Church and the Government that ran such places right across the country ("to assimilate the Indians into our culture"), we still could speak it, if undercover of night and darkness and rope thick intrigue (like French spies in a Hitler movie). That is to say, we had formed, without our knowing it, a kind of "resistance movement" of the Cree language. And it worked; the language survived.
> (Tomson Highway, 2010: 50)

Tomson Highway's playful yet searing description of his experience in residential school highlights the importance of language to cultural survival. His account is one version but each community is different and the three indigenous languages of this province, Mi'kmaq, Inuktitut and Innu-aimun, represent three very distinct situations and histories. Yet there are commonalities. Language is almost universally considered to be very important, because it is a key aspect of culture and identity, because of the knowledge it transmits, and because it enables communication between generations and across communities. As Alfred Metallic, who defended his PhD thesis in Mi'kmaq at York University, put it, "Our language, it's how we maintain our relations and how we understand where we come from. It gives you access to your place in the world" (York University Alumni News, 2010). Conversely, in some indigenous communities language loss has been found to be a strong predictor of a high suicide rate (Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007). Thomas Homer-Dixon argues that maintaining indigenous languages is important in another way as well. In response to a Worldwatch study that found that half of the world's languages are likely to disappear in the near future, with indigenous languages being especially vulnerable, Homer-Dixon argued that such a loss would

> start to compromise the health of human society more generally. The reason is straightforward: complex systems – systems with lots of internal diversity – tend to be more resilient than simple ones. They tend to be better at absorbing and coping with unexpected surprises and external shocks, because their diversity represents a reservoir of information, adaptive strategies, and alternative behaviors that's available if dominant strategies and behaviors suddenly don't work for some reason (2010, unpaginated).

In the interviews that follow, two specialists in indigenous language education, Sarah Townley and Marguerite MacKenzie, share some of their extensive knowledge of how to maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages and their thoughts on Indigenizing the academy. Both interviews were conducted in the spring of 2013 and represent the situation at that time. Sarah Townley, a former student in Memorial's Teacher Education Program in Labrador (TEPL) program (an earlier Native and northern teacher education program) who also holds a master's degree in Education, is currently Inuktitut Program

Specialist with the Labrador School Board. Marguerite Mackenzie, Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Memorial, has played a vital role in curriculum development for Innu-aimun as well as leading projects to develop a pan-Innu dictionary and glossaries of workplace terminology. I had hoped to have a chance to speak also to Doug Wharram, who has worked for many years at Memorial on Inuktitut language programs, and to others working in the school system, but busy schedules, my own and theirs, did not allow for it in the timeframe of this special issue.

There are some surprises in the interviews. For example, Sarah Townley tells us that, contrary to popular belief, there are still a few young people in Labrador who speak Inuktitut. She also describes a residential school experience that contrasts with the one described by Tomson Highway and prevalent across Canada: at the school in North West River, Sarah feels that they were not discouraged from speaking Inuktitut and possibly were even encouraged to do so, and yet they rarely did. She reveals why this was so, and goes on to present an optimistic yet pragmatic picture of Inuktitut education in Labrador today. Marguerite MacKenzie shares thought-provoking findings about language learning and reading, the role of the school in language maintenance ("much less than people seem to think it should be"), and critical insights into the use of the internet and distance education for teaching in northern indigenous contexts. Both interviewees express serious concerns about the education and retention of teachers able to teach in indigenous languages and the challenges that face those who do follow this route, and both emphasize that family and community support for indigenous languages are essential if the languages are to survive. They also suggest ways the university can contribute to retaining and strengthening indigenous languages and cultures.

The interviews raise other issues and topics as well: how to educate and support non-indigenous teachers teaching in indigenous communities; the key role of elders in passing on language and culture; the importance of various resources from dictionaries to digital archives to software such as Rosetta Stone and Storyboard and equipment including Smartboards and i-pads; the value of a consistent spelling system; the "language nest" approach to language revitalization, successful in New Zealand Maori contexts and now used in Hopedale, Labrador; language immersion, enriched bilingual programs and more. The interviewees also discuss the serendipitous experiences that led them to their current work and, of course, their thoughts on how to "indigenize the academy".

The setting and context for Labrador Inuktitut

Elizabeth Yeoman (Education, MUN) interviews Sarah Townley (Inuktitut Program Specialist, Labrador School Board) about her work in Inuktitut curriculum development and teacher education:

EY: Could you tell me a bit about your current work?

ST: I work with the Labrador School Board and I'm the Inuk coordinator – Program Staff for the Inuktitut language programs and I also have the Life Skills portfolio. In that program our instructors teach younger students about cultural things. We make different things such as amautet. That's a woman's coat that you can put a baby in the back of and carry the baby around that way. In the past, we have also worked with seal skins and grasswork, just to name a few examples.

With the Inuktitut teachers, we have Inuktitut immersion in Nain, where they speak only Inuktitut all day from Kindergarten to Grade 2, and we also have Core Inuktitut where the students are taught about an hour every day. Also in the high school we have credit courses: Inuktitut 1120, 2120, 3120. They have to complete them in order to get their credits in Inuktitut.

EY: Do all students do core Inuktitut?

ST: Yes, all of them do, in the North Coast schools. The secondary level credit courses are being revamped. I'm working with Craig White on it right now. We're revamping Inuktitut 1120, 2120 and 3120.

EY: So you're coordinator of the Inuktitut language program and cultural life skills program? Could you tell me a bit about your office and the kind of work that is done there?

ST: I have two curriculum workers, Nancy Ikkusek in Nain, and Sophie Tuglavina in Makkovik. They help me put together Inuktitut materials that will be used in the schools. Sophie works in the high school area and Nancy does the lower grades. They get the manuals or lesson plans ready for the Inuktitut teachers to use.

For Life Skills we have a binder that I put together a few years back. It has patterns for how to make different things such as a vest, basket weaving, snowshoe making – instructions on how to make the wooden snow shoes, right from scratch. Here in the office what we do is gather up all the material, supplies and research who would be the best person to teach and find instructors who know how to make these things. Then we make all the travel arrangements from here if they have to travel to Rigolet, Makkovik, Hopedale, Nain, Postville. All five communities have core Inuktitut and Life Skills.

Another thing we do is if the teachers run out of school books, we mass produce more and send them out to them.

EY: What about other parts of Labrador, do they do Inuktitut and Life Skills?

ST: I don't usually deal with the schools in Lab City or Goose Bay but there are people who are wanting Inuktitut classes here at Queen of Peace and Peacock, smaller schools. At Queen of Peace middle school, they have exploratory Inuktitut. Students sign up if they want to take Inuktitut classes. It is usually two and a half hours a week for one month. I believe that every three months or so they run the exploratory program.

EY: So it's a bit of an introduction?

ST: Yes.

EY: How is the immersion program going?

ST: There are some teachers retiring soon so we're going to have to start looking for more Inuktitut teachers and new teachers are going to be hard to come by because we don't have a TEPL program like we did before. As far as I know that's being revamped too but I haven't heard anything for five or six years. So we don't have any Inuktitut teachers coming up unless we get them off the street. I don't know what's going to happen there.

EY: That leads to another question I wanted to ask you. What has MUN done in the past to support Inuit education and what could we do?

ST: We used to have Native and Northern Teacher Education through MUN and that program was working really well. I went through that route. I think it would be beneficial for the people who want to teach Inuktitut to go through a program like I did. As far as I know that's no longer in place. I don't know why it was cut out but it would benefit a lot of students. I know of two students who are in their last year of high school and would like to teach Inuktitut but if that program is not there what are they going to do? I don't know why it was cut out but I think it would benefit a lot of students.

EY: So you hope that something like the TEPL program will come back?

ST: Yes, and you've got to start working on it right now for MUN to get those students who are interested in teaching Inuktitut – and they do really want to – and they are in level three, last year of high school right now.

EY: Sarah, I think I can tell you that we're about to hire for two positions relating to Aboriginal Education in Labrador. One is a research position to do research with the communities to find out what they want. I believe they're going to start with Nunatsiavut so I think I can say that soon there will be something that hopefully will meet the needs you're talking about.

ST: That would be excellent because there are people who want to teach Inuktitut. They came to the Inuktitut speak off and they are able to speak Inuktitut. I think this would really support them in their wish to become Inuktitut teachers.

EY: Are these young high school students?

ST: Yes, they are, that I know of, at least two: one in Nain and one in Hopedale.

EY: That's wonderful. I thought that there weren't many young people who could speak Inuktitut in Labrador?

ST: They have done really well and are continuing to do so. They might not speak it every day but I think they do speak it at home because that's where they get the support.

EY: Can you talk a little bit about the state of Inuktitut in Labrador? Who speaks it? Do a lot of young people speak it?

ST: That depends on the community. In Nain and Hopedale they speak it more. In Hopedale they have the daycare centre called Inguaggualuit, the babies are learning to speak Inuktitut there. In Nain, you can hear people talking around town. It's not very much and they're starting to add English constructions, "s"s and "-ing"s but you can still understand what they're saying even though they're combining Inuktitut and English. When I travel on the coast, I usually hear a lot more in Nain and Hopedale than in the other communities.

EY: Are you suggesting that the daycare plays an important role in Hopedale?

ST: Oh yes, and also in Nain, I know the daycare plays a big part there. When you do cultural activities, have a feast, you can still hear people speaking Inuktitut. It's more the elders in the community, more than young people.

EY: But there are these two young people who want to teach it and who speak well enough to do that?

ST: Oh, yes.

EY: May I ask you how you got into this work?

ST: Back in 1984, the late Dr. Beatrice Watts approached me when I was working as an interpreter/translator in the hospital in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the old Melville Hospital. She said she needed a curriculum worker, so after an interview process I was hired on. That was back in January 1984. I've been working in Inuktitut education ever since then. She encouraged me to start taking TEPL courses which was then the Native and Northern so I started taking courses whenever I had the chance to. She must have been leading me to where I am today. I guess you knew her?

EY: Yes. She was a wonderful person.

ST: Yes she was. She led the way. She opened the door for me and I guess I must have continued on what she wanted me to do.

EY: Could you say something about the value of Inuktitut for Inuit in Labrador?

ST: For me, really if I didn't have the Inuktitut language, who am I? Where would I be? With my grandson – I have a new grandson. Whenever I see him, I speak to him in Inuktitut. I didn't do that with my three boys because of the stigma back then. The stigma isn't there anymore so I'm trying to pass it on to my grandson now. When I travel to places like Iqaluit where the Inuktitut is strong, that's when it comes right back to you again. We're able to converse with people from Nunavik and Nunavut. There might be a bit of a dialectal thing but you can still understand what they're saying and if you don't, all you've got to do is ask. You don't have that stigma, that being ashamed of it anymore. For me, it is who I am.

EY: How did that change? What made the stigma go away?

ST: We used to live in Hebron before it closed down and we were relocated to Makkovik or other communities south of Nain. Our family first moved to Hopedale because our houses weren't ready in Makkovik. We had a little settlement in that area and that's where Inuktitut was the strongest, what they called Hebron End, so that's how I got to keep my Inuktitut. Also, when I went to the Northwest River school there was no phone so the only way to keep in touch with my mother was through letter writing. That's how I kept a lot of my Inuktitut. Even though others lost theirs, I just felt I had to in order to communicate, in order to talk to the elders, to keep my language. It's always been there for me. It's never going to go away from me. That's what I did anyway. I guess you know what I'm trying to say, right? As far as I know too with this stigma thing – as the younger people grew, they wanted to learn Inuktitut and the Inuit realized that Inuktitut was dying out fast because it was not used as much as before so some committees were formed to start using the Inuktitut language again.

EY: About the school in Northwest River: what was the attitude towards the use of Inuktitut?

ST: We couldn't speak it. It wasn't discouraged or anything but we just never spoke Inuktitut. I have no idea why we didn't. Maybe when we were in groups we might have, just coming back from the dorm or things like that. I think it was encouraged, but we weren't really sure. But there were people in the community who didn't really like people from the coast in Northwest River so I think we kind of kept it away. But I worked in the hospital and used to talk to Inuit who were in the hospital. They didn't have a translator back then so I used to go see them, see how they were making out, if they needed anything – if I had anything I would give it to them. That is how I mostly kept my Inuktitut. They also had an orphanage in Northwest River and I used to go see kids there to see how they were making out. I'm sure they missed their parents so every now and then I'd go see them too.

EY: Do you think a lot of people feel the way you do about the importance of Inuktitut in Labrador?

ST: Yes, they're all starting to feel that way now I believe. You can see that more and more. It's mostly because they know that Inuktitut is not very strong the way it was before. We need to keep our language and traditions alive. It's starting to come back a little bit. If their grandparents are able to speak it, I'm sure they'll get that support and learn Inuktitut that way.

Also we now have the Rosetta Stone program that they can use to learn the language at home and that's something a lot of people do now too, if they have access to a computer. All they need is the little CD and they can learn the language that way.

EY: Do they use that in the schools?

ST: Oh yes, whoever wants it has access to it. The cost for that CD is $50 for members but we do have it at the school for anyone who wants to learn Inuktitut.

EY: What other resources are there for supporting people who want to learn Inuktitut?

ST: The technology is playing a big part now, so programs like Photostory can be used as a resource. You can record stories in Inuktitut on Microsoft Word as well, as long as you have a good headphone and speakers, because there's a place where you can record your voice, your student's voices as well. Our Inuktitut teachers were in-serviced on how to use Photostory and they can take photos of their students or community workers, or whatever they want so that the students can learn to speak that way. The students really enjoy this too because it is interactive. Technology is becoming more widespread in the schools. We're using that with the Smartboard. Smartboard is the best way to go because all the students can see and learn at the same time. You can record your voice or the students' voices in Inuktitut and make up little stories that way. Photostory is really good that way and the students love it. They absolutely love that program. That's if they don't have computer problems. If there aren't problems with that, they love to use it.

EY: That sounds very exciting. That's wonderful progress since I interviewed Sophie Tuglavina in the late 90s. All this technology really has come in since then. It's wonderful!

ST: Also, we'll be doing training on the i-pad. We'll be getting that in the schools. Hopefully they'll be there in September. So I want to do some training with our Inuktitut teachers so they can continue teaching Inuktitut through technology. The hardest part is learning the sounds but once you've got that everything opens up for you. It's been really good that way.

EY: Can you think of things we should be doing at MUN to support Inuktitut language in Labrador?

ST: Maybe having a person who can speak Inuktitut, to give students a tour, a person who could greet students coming from Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet – their first time away from home, having someone there that they know to talk to. My son is there for example. They could contact him. It would be good if they had a list of others who are there, who are willing to be called, so they can support each other to stay in school. Sometimes they don't know who else is there. That kind of support would go a long long way. You'd know you're not there by yourself.

EY It must be really lonely sometimes for people who come from the coast.

ST: When I was there with my children I didn't know there were other people there from Labrador. That would have been a huge support. If you had a list of names of people, that could go a long way. And a room, a place where you can study, and that's also a support place.

EY: Why does Inuktitut matter? Why should people keep speaking it? And why should the university support it?

ST: Because if Inuktitut is not supported in Newfoundland and Labrador what would we be left with? If we don't have that support, that connection, it would be like a broken straw, disconnected. Losing the language would be like a disconnect for the person, spiritually, mentally, physically, the whole person, head and body. If I didn't have that, I wouldn't know what to do. No wonder people feel lost sometimes, get into crime. Some people are doing drugs because they don't have that support, because they don't have that connection. To be well rounded you have to have that Inuktitut language and be able to pass that down to others who want to learn. If I hadn't had the support from MUN through a study area and a place to meet, way back when, I don't think I could have completed my studies. I have completed my Masters and through Distance Ed I have my seventh grade [highest level of teaching certification], which was a huge support for me. If this researcher and teacher do come that would really help to enhance and support it. If you don't have Inuktitut, what have you got? You're like an empty shell.

EY: Is there anything else you want to add before we finish?

ST: It would be good for people to know about work that was done before, that is available through MUN. For example, Labrador Inuit Through Moravian Eyes. The choirs singing, the brass bands. That is there for students who need it.

EY: It's archival material?

ST: Yes. A lot of people don't know about the brass bands anymore, or the choirs. If they could also see the names of the people in the bands and choirs, they could see that they are their relatives. If they saw that they might say "oh, that's my grandmother's brother!" or "That's my cousin!" A lot of people don't know their family history anymore. I think that would really perk people up.

I listen to those videos and recordings all the time. I go into Labrador Inuit Through Moravian Eyes, on the MUN website [Note: The website is http://collections.mun.ca/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2Fmoravian]. Dr. Hans Rollman in Religious Studies put them up and we can get access and listen to those recordings. That's a really good resource. Whenever you're feeling down it can really cheer you up.

The setting and context for Innu-aimun in Labrador

Elizabeth Yeoman (Education) interviews Marguerite MacKenzie (Linguistics) about her work in language education with the Labrador Innu:

EY: Could you tell me a bit about your current work in language education for Innu-aimun?

MM: Well, since 2005 we've been funded through SSHRC research grants to create reference materials for Innu language education. The main product is the pan-Innu dictionary which has just been finished. There are English and French versions which document over 27,000 Innu words for several dialects in a common spelling system. We have also been working with staff of *Mamu Tshishkutamashutau*, the Innu school board, to make books and classroom materials for the two Labrador communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, where quite different dialects are spoken. In addition we have been working with organizations to publish glossaries of workplace terminology: family law, criminal law, environmental impact studies and education. We are currently completing one for health.

Although I have been giving courses and workshops in the structure of Innu-aimun and the common spelling system over the years, it has been to a continually changing group of mainly classroom assistants and has not yet successfully been implemented into the school system. We are hoping that the dictionary will assist people with the task of spelling in a consistent way, so that children will learn to read in their language more easily.

Because all but one or two of the Innu people working do not have a Bachelor of Education, we have been using a small team who can address both improving the literacy in the language and classroom delivery skills. There has been no teacher education program for Innu people for many, many years, so it has been problematic to train people to use the materials we create. This past year another linguist and I, along with an experienced primary teacher, were in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu doing in-service for the Innu staff. In the absence of funding on the part of the Innu school board to do teacher training, we're trying to fill in the gaps by holding workshops after school.

The whole issue of trying to implement a common orthographic system is difficult, as people have a tradition of spelling according to the pronunciation of words, and, as the Innu language has many dialects, there is little consistent spelling without training. People who speak one dialect will not necessarily be able to read what someone from another dialect has written, so providing people with things to read that are spelled consistently is important.

EY: You mentioned teaching courses. Are those courses here at MUN?

MM: I taught courses that were part of the old TEPL Program at MUN in Labrador in the 1990s. More recently, whenever there have been Innu students on campus, I've given them, usually on a pro-bono basis, courses on the grammatical structure of the language. For languages like Innu with long words and a complicated morphological structure, it's very efficient and useful to teach people to recognize the parts of the words that have meanings, and to spell those parts the same way every time.

EY: Are you working with the Innu in Quebec as well?

MM: The Innu in Quebec who work at the Institut Tshakapesh are partners on all of my projects and we also work with a linguistic team at Carlton University. The Carleton team has put the dictionary on the web, and is currently creating on-line lessons for vocabulary and spelling. It's basically like producing a movie – people with many different skills contributed. José Mailhot and I were the editors, Marie-Odile Junker at Carleton advised on the database and web versions, an editorial committee of linguists and bilingual Innu made decisions on spelling and definitions, elders were consulted to clarify meanings and pronunciation. We had people working on place names and identification of fauna, a graduate student wrote an MA thesis on grammatical categories while others looked after choosing key words for the English-Innu and French-Innu versions and students did proofreading of the English.

EY: And it's already online?

MM: Yes, it's online at www.innu-aimun.ca/dictionary. Because of the slow internet speed in Labrador, people there don't actually deal with it very much, but the people in Quebec are looking at it quite a lot and sending us comments and corrections.

The people at Carleton and I have already worked on the East Cree dictionary in Quebec, so there is already a template and a protocol for putting things online, which was then used for putting the Innu dictionary online. We recycle a lot of our work with the Cree in our work with the Innu. As the Quebec Innu create online lessons for spelling and grammar recognition in French and Innu, we add in the English, the dialect variants and the Labrador sound files. Producing trilingual materials requires a lot of coordination, but in the long run is the best use of resources.

I think we have a model that works very well for language groups where people still speak their language. I have another project doing assessment of Innu vocabulary in school age children, with Lori Morris, a linguist from the University of Quebec at Montreal. She has taken the model to Ojibway speaking groups in Ontario, and we're extending it to the Naskapi in Quebec. Once we establish a model that works, we offer it to other language groups to see if they'd like to use it, and then revise it for the new language, change the spelling and particular lexical items, but the basic structure is often the same.

EY: So how do you assess the speaking proficiency of young people?

MM: Rather than assessing overall speaking proficiency, we're documenting recognition of nouns and verbs, modeled on the Peabody for English. Children are shown pictures and name or point to the item, if they recognize it and know the word. Our preliminary results show that there appears to be loss of vocabulary among young people. Grandparents tell us that young parents are speaking to their children in English rather than in Innu. This is a very common thing which has been going on for decades in communities where people see that the majority language, be it English or French, is the language which will allow a person to get a job. Parents are under the impression that speaking to children in the majority language will give them a head start in school. They assume, unfortunately incorrectly, that the children will just keep on acquiring their Aboriginal language. There are all kinds of problems with this approach. If the parents are not native speakers of the majority language, they may be passing on a version of English or French that is not fully developed, while at the same time the children are not being fully exposed to their own language from the primary caregivers.

EY: What do you think is the role of the school in language loss or maintenance?

MM: Well, it is much less than people seem to think it should be. The schools, until very recently, were primarily dealing with children who came in speaking Innu. This is changing rapidly, so that a number of the children coming into kindergarten do not speak enough to understand the Innu teacher. So, the rules of the game as far as school goes are changing. The schools now have to assess what the language strengths and weaknesses of children actually are. The Innu school board has received funding under the First Nations School Success Program and now has literacy coordinators who assess the children's English, which we can put together with the assessments of the Innu in order to create a comprehensive profile of the language abilities of Innu children in the primary grades. One might think that a child who is strong in English would be weak in Innu, or vice versa, but that is not necessarily the case. For instance, with the assessments carried out in the Quebec Innu community of Betsiamites, Lori Morris found that in general children who were strong in one language were strong in the other language.

EY: There are a lot of studies of bilingualism in other contexts that have similar findings.

MM: Yes, right. In Betsiamites, where we have been able to assess many more children, Lori presented the findings, and the school actually immediately took on responsibility for communicating to caregivers the best ways of interacting with young children to encourage language development. There is a fear, not just in Aboriginal communities, but everywhere, that children are not being spoken to face to face, because of increased time in front of a screen, and we know from language acquisition specialists that it is necessary to actually interact with a child, to speak to the child in person, for the best language development to take place. I heard a program on the CBC talking about this situation within the general population. There isn't anything inherently wrong with playing video games and watching TV, except that it reduces the amount of time for human interaction, since the best way for children to learn is by talking to real people, and being talked to by real people.

EY: And for the Innu that means being talked to by real people in their own language.

MM: Yes. But I think in general people are largely unaware of what it takes for language to be developed in children of any culture, since in a monolingual society we assume that it's just going to happen. Lack of vocabulary relates to potential problems in reading. We observed a situation in Quebec where children were being successfully taught to read their language using the Naskapi syllabic script. They were fairly fluent readers by grade three, and could decode well but, as it turned out, they often did not know what the word meant after they pronounced it. So, teachers can teach decoding skills, and that sort of thing, but if you don't have the word in your vocabulary you still don't get the meaning. The home environment has a really big part to play, particularly with preschool children, in developing vocabulary.

Lori Morris has set up another project with Kindergarten students in Betsiamites, sending books home and asking the parents to read to the children fifteen minutes every night, in French, or Innu, or even just turning the pages and making up a story. She tested the children at the beginning and the end of the year and found that some had moved out of the at-risk category. Although it is difficult to separate out the effects of giving children extra reading practice from other factors, it is very encouraging, and has led to setting up a well patronized reading centre in the community.

It's very tricky, but I think that probably in a year or two we'll have enough information available to show people in the communities that the children really do need more words. They need be able to describe the world, and to be able to understand what they read.

EY: And if I understood you correctly, in that particular study they were told that they could read to the children in any language, or just tell them stories, so the focus wasn't on supporting the Indigenous language, it was just on language development and literacy in general?

MM: Yes, and this is because there is a dilemma emerging. We can no longer assume every child coming to school speaks an Aboriginal language at an appropriate level for their age, but they have to move into learning to read by grade three because we are told that if they don't learn to read by grade two or three, then their future academic success is at risk.

EY: Well, they just fall further and further behind; it has a compound effect.

MM: So then, the question is 'what can be done for these children'? Do we put all the resources into having them learn in their own language or just teach reading, no matter what the language? In Quebec they are producing Innu language materials, but have gone for a fifty/fifty bilingual approach, so that the children are going forward in French at the same time that they are receiving instruction in Innu. In Labrador, the number of trained Innu people in the school is so small that it is difficult to offer even Kindergarten in the language. However, the classroom assistants, who can interpret what the English classroom teacher is saying, have an important role in ensuring that the students understand what is expected of them.

EY: The program in Quebec is a kind of enriched bilingual program, is that what you're saying?

MM: Yes, that's it. An additional pressure in Labrador is that there is rapid turnover of Innu staff in the school because it's easy to get a much better paying job, with less stress, with one of the mining companies. As you well know, being a teacher is stressful, and unless you're well-trained and committed, why wouldn't you take another job that pays more? So, there is a problem with retaining Innu people in the school system as classroom assistants, and they can't advance in the system because of lack of training. In the meantime, what we can do is put together useful tools and materials.

Take the example of Labrador Inuktitut, which has disappeared in most communities. It is unrealistic to think that the language will come back once it has passed the point where children no longer learn to speak it at home. In Miawpukek (Conne River) there is some Mi'kmaq language taught in school, but it may be largely for ceremonial purposes. Under those circumstances, people will not be able in a position to pass on the language to their children at home.

EY: I think there are some exceptions around the world but it's rare. And it's usually very particular circumstances, like Hebrew in Israel, for example. [12]

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[12] There is much more to say on this topic. See Sarah Townley's interview in this issue for her perspective on Inuktitut education in Labrador. The daycare she mentions was inspired by the language nest program in New Zealand. For more information on that, see an interesting video and article at http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/livingthelanguage/2012/04/201241614163019S978.html and an annotated bibliography at http://www.maorilanguage.info/mao_lang_abib.html .

MM: Exactly. There the nation state looks after it; and then there is Ireland where Irish Gaelic is taught in the school system, but not that many people continue to speak it after leaving school.

EY: Could you comment on the role of the university in Indigenous education?

MM: I can only talk about the Innu because I think that the Inuit in Labrador are taking advantage of Memorial to get their Bachelor of Education and go back as teachers. I worry about non-Aboriginal teachers in Innu schools not having had any training in teaching children who are monolingual or with minimal second language abilities. In northern schools there are children of all levels of ability in every grade, so that every classroom is multilevel. This is less of an issue in the primary and perhaps even the elementary grades, but in the high school grades there are always students in the class who cannot read. Teachers trained for high school don't necessarily learn to teach beginning reading, but that's something they have to cope with. I don't know whether the Bachelor of Education programs contain enough hands-on practice in how to teach reading at any age level and in English as a second language contexts.

EY: I think the answer to that question is that it depends on which program and which specialization the students are in, but maybe it should be across the board.

MM: I am disappointed that the MUNNTEP (Memorial University of Newfoundland Native Teacher Education Program) program disappeared. This was a parallel program for non-Aboriginal students who were planning to teach in Aboriginal schools, introduced when the TEPL program was set up back in the 80s. I still think that would be a useful thing for teachers who are going to go teach in the north.

EY: That is actually something that we are working on now. I don't know if it will be a whole program, but certainly we will address that. There are a number of people in the faculty who see that as a very important piece.

MM: Well, I agree because I spend my time in the two Innu schools in Labrador and I see how a certain number of the new teachers – and there are always new teachers in those schools, any school in the north, because that's where recent graduates can get a job – are in shock because they haven't been prepared for what the students and the schools are like. They need really, really good classroom management skills, to cope with a range of behaviours. They are not always prepared for the situation that different students are absent every day, so a teacher cannot actually count on building on what was taught the previous day. There are a lot of realities that I think the teachers could be made aware of and then given strategies to deal with, with respect to working in northern communities. Perhaps it does not have to be through courses, but through something like the institutes they've set up for French language teachers, something shorter and more focused.

Until teacher training can be funded for the Innu, there are problems that cannot be addressed by the academy, but only by the school board and school personnel. It would, of course, be useful to build relationships with people in the Faculty of Education. Recently, workshops given to Innu staff by a consulting teacher from outside the province, who has lived in northern communities and is very, very experienced in working with Aboriginal teachers, have been successful.

EY: Another thing I wanted to ask you about is how you got into this work and what drew you to it in the first place?

MM: I began as a Masters student in Linguistics. I wanted to do fieldwork, and couldn't afford to go to Africa or India. I met anthropologists at McGill who were working with the Cree in James Bay who said, "We really need a linguist." I was able to get funding to go north and work in one of the communities, and once you get to know people, you just want to go back. People are so nice, and it's just an interesting world to work in. So I just kept on working with Cree language speakers through my PhD. There can be a lot of serendipity in how an academic career works out – you don't necessarily plan everything that happens. As I was doing my PhD, the Quebec Office of Indian Affairs opened up a teacher training program for Aboriginal languages, and hired linguists for a six week summer session. Speakers from every Aboriginal language group in Quebec came together at an old missile base that had been turned into an Aboriginal CEGEP, Manitou College, where we taught courses for a number of years. The rest of the year the linguists traveled to the communities to deliver more courses, since we were working there in the schools. The linguists and those teaching educational methodology or psychology usually did a six week rotation, offering additional courses, courses in a compressed format. That has remained the model for on-site delivery: a 50 hour course delivered over two 4-5 day weekends scheduled several weeks apart. Up until five years ago I was still teaching courses in literacy and grammatical structure in Cree communities.

EY: What do you think about that model for now, or maybe a model like that combined with Distance Education online?

MM: I much prefer face-to-face work, but it depends on the subject. What I was teaching worked well in a compressed format, all set up as short tasks on computer, but other courses which require a great deal of reading and reflection need more time in between meetings with the instructor. Online delivery can be problematic in Labrador because the Internet is so slow, particularly on the north coast. Distance courses are also a problem for students who are not super committed, who need the structure of a class and an in-person instructor. Even people who are very committed to finishing their degree have gone back to Labrador and somehow never quite get around to completing the last few courses. People talk about online and distance as the way to go, but frankly it's not as easy as that. Students without a lot of experience in university-level courses are not necessarily going to be as successful, unless community supports are put in place, as has been done for northern Ontario.

EY: So you've talked about a couple of barriers here in terms of Indigenizing the academy: the combination of people without that kind of history of success and the bandwidth problems. I've covered most of what I wanted to talk about but another question you might have more to say about is: Why do Indigenous languages matter? And why should we care about them? From me personally that's a devil's advocate kind of question, but I think it would be good to talk about.

MM: Well, language is part of a person's personality, and an important part of one's culture. Speaking an Aboriginal language contributes to a person's wellbeing, it's part of themselves, and as Aboriginal languages decline – there are statistics but I can't find a reference – suicide rates increase[13]. As minority languages disappear, access to important parts of the culture disappears. Aboriginal languages encapsulate and encode a huge amount of information about traditional life, the land, the animals, about ways of doing things and ways of seeing the world. With the decline and loss of any language, all of that tends to be eroded and eventually disappear. Then the only way that people have of thinking about and speaking about the world is through a majority language, which provides a very different lens on the world than does an Aboriginal language.

I don't know if I've said much about Indigenizing the academy. There is an issue with teaching Aboriginal language in this academy in that very few people can do it, and we are retiring. John Hewson, who works on Mi'kmaq, has retired and Doug Wharram, who teaches the Inuktitut course, does not have a tenure-track position. It is up to the academy to somehow secure the positions to teach those languages and to implement the process Alanna Johns started many years ago. She trained a number of Inuit as co-teachers for university courses, with the goal of having them hired to offer regular courses. But it proved difficult to retain them as the per-course rate of pay is low and one is tied up for a whole semester.

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[13] See Hallett, D., Chandler, M.J. & Lalonde, C.E. (2007). Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide. *Cognitive Development, 22*(3), 392-399. web.uvic.ca/~lalonde/manuscripts/2007CogDevt.pdf

EY: Even more so for people who are mostly living in Labrador, and would have to move and so on, so it's really not very realistic.

MM: Well, this is it, and also the Aboriginal organizations do not appear to have created positions for people who specialize in language. In other places, they have established interpreter/translator positions, as well as training and positions for people to work on developing materials in the language, but in Labrador I do not believe that has happened in any community.

EY: In terms of Indigenizing the academy, do you think MUN and the Labrador Institute could work with the communities to do some of that?

MM: Certainly the Labrador Institute is very supportive of all these things, but even though it's been excellent for MUN to have me on faculty for all of these years, what happens when I go? Part of the issue is that very few people are being trained in Aboriginal languages through university graduate degrees. It takes a lifetime to set up the kind of relationships where you are accepted and trusted to work in communities. We have not yet been successful in training many Aboriginal speakers in Labrador, partly because the population numbers are low, and very few people from any population are interested or talented in linguistics; then of course there is the question of whether there will be a job for them when they're trained. Innu people in Quebec went through a great one-year program in Innu language and culture at the local CEGEP, but the band councils did not create jobs for them at the end of it, so they just went off to other kinds of jobs. We can see the same thing today in Labrador as people who work in the schools are lured to high-paying jobs with the mining companies. It's problematic and complicated, and we can only do what we can do.

Conclusion by Elizabeth Yeoman

There are many other important issues relating to the role of language in Indigenizing the academy that are not highlighted here: for example, the study of literary and cinematic works in Indigenous languages and an exploration of how such works might "challenge [non-Indigenous readers] to see with a native eye" (Krupat, 2009: 133); the politics of language and of translation (why, for example, grant applications cannot be submitted to any provincial or national funding body in an Indigenous language); the development of university courses and programs taught in Indigenous languages[14]; strategies for recognizing the ability to speak an Indigenous language through course credits, scholarships, credentials and salary increments, to find and hire faculty with this linguistic expertise, and to understand the needs of students and faculty whose first language is an Indigenous one; and connections between language, spirituality and ceremony, and language and the land. It could also be useful to investigate how universities in other parts of Canada and around the world are "Indigenizing" and what we might learn from them. These and many other issues could be explored in future interviews or other research and writing.

Indigenous language education is a complex and vital aspect of Indigenizing the academy. As we in the Faculty of Education work towards the development of a new community based teacher education program for Labrador, we need to be talking to people in the field. Sarah Townley and Marguerite MacKenzie – along with others – have been in the field for a long time and have a wealth of experience. The two interviews presented here are just the beginning of a conversation we hope to continue as we develop the community based teacher education program, design courses for southern teachers expecting to teach in northern Indigenous schools, and consider ways to support Indigenous teacher education on the island of Newfoundland. There is much to be learned from these two interviews and I look forward to continuing the conversation with the interviewees and with others!

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[14] For example, the first PhD thesis in Mi'kmaq was recently defended at York University. It would be useful and exciting to explore this model and possibilities for Memorial. See http://alumni.news.yorku.ca/2010/11/29/phd-student-defends-thesis-in-migmaw-language-a-york-first/

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