In Labrador there are two aboriginal languages which are still spoken as a first language. These are Labrador Inuktut, a member of the Inuit language family which stretches from Siberia to Greenland, and Innu-aimun, a member of the Algonquian language family which stretches from Alberta to the east coast of Canada and down into the northern United States. As is often the case with minority languages, both these languages are politically separated (in this case through provincial boundaries) from neighboring communities which speak very closely similar dialects. These political boundaries tend to dissipate human energy and financial resources that could otherwise be harnessed for a common purpose.

In this article we will provide a brief outline of the history of these languages with respect to formal schooling and describe the history and current status of the academic programs at Memorial University of Newfoundland which are designed to provide training to Labradorians to teach the general provincial curriculum to northern public school students. These programs also aim to train teachers to teach cultural and language subjects particular to Labrador. It is this latter function which we will address in this chapter. Our discussion is intended not as a how-to, but instead as an overview of issues that confront academics at a university level who are involved in programs for training native language instructors. Our goal is to provide a useful frame of reference for other people, both inside and outside the university, to exchange ideas for making the best possible program the university can provide. Indeed, the first and most basic question is whether the university should be involved in training native language instructors. We think that the answer is yes: the university has a level of research expertise and resources that can be useful to communities that are struggling for the first time with the issue of language maintenance. However, this does not mean that the traditional structure of university courses should not be modified to take into account the background and culture of aboriginal students—clearly, we feel that modifications can and should be made.

BACKGROUND TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN LABRADOR

It is important to note the distance (approximately 750 air miles) of northern Labrador from the provincial capital of St. John's on the island. In addition, travel to and within northern Labrador, where Inuktut and Innu-aimun are spoken, is mainly by air, which is expensive. No roads exist between the communities, and although water and land travel is possible, it is slow and dangerous. This distance has resulted in Labrador's having a different, more autonomous history than that of the island. On the island of Newfoundland, European settlers predominated to the extent that the original native peoples disappeared. In Labrador, however, European settlers lived amongst, married, and shared culture with the Labrador Inuit. The descendants of these intermarriages are known as the Kablunângajuit (literally, "those resembling white people") or Settlers; they form a large and prominent part of modern northern Labrador society and live alongside the Labrador Inuit. The Labrador Inuit Association is made up of both groups. The Innu, on the other hand, have had relatively little contact with Europeans until recently. There has been very little intermarriage and they have consequently maintained their traditional lifestyle, language, and culture.

Naturally, before European contact, there was no need for language education in either Inuktut or Innu-aimun, as these
were monolingual communities. With the coming of Europeans, missionaries, and Western concepts of education, there were many changes. For the Inuit, the first of these educational initiatives was conducted entirely in Inuktut. The Moravian missionaries, who had started a mission in Greenland in 1733, came to Labrador in the late 1700s speaking the West Greenlandic dialect (now called Kalallit oqasii), which was probably more similar to Labrador Inuktut then than it is now. Nevertheless, West Greenlandic still had some differences from the Labrador variety. The Moravian missionaries, having received formal training in West Greenlandic, would have been somewhat perplexed at differences found in the Labrador speech and in all probability would have considered the Labradorian dialect to be somewhat nonstandard. A reaction to the encounter of a new dialect is often negative. This would lead to a false notion of there being a standard language against which the Labrador dialect would not compare favorably. 6

Under the Moravians, Labrador Inuktut was the main language of instruction for Inuit children, while at the same time settler children were learning English. All of this changed when the province of Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949. It became obligatory for instruction to be in one of the official languages, English or French, and English was chosen as it was the language of the rest of the new province (see Borlase 1993, 276–82). Watts (1996) states that the change in language took place “without prior preparation or input from the Inuit.” As a result of Canadian and provincial educational policies, Labrador Inuktut was effectively removed from the system.

Another historical change that affected Labrador Inuktut was the social upheaval caused by the resettlement of two more northerly communities of Inuit (Nutak and Hebron) into the more southern Inuit communities. Government and health officials felt that the Inuit inhabiting small northern communities needed to be relocated to communities where they could be provided with more adequate health, welfare, and education services (cf. Brice-Bennett 1977). As Watts (1992) points out, “[T]hey were told that the government store would be pulling out within the year and that the (Moravian) church would follow. They were promised, like others, better things, including housing, which was very late, in the end, in coming.” This move took entire groups of people, who traditionally lived in small family hunting camps and followed a more or less seasonal nomadic lifestyle, to communities which were unable to provide the same degree of subsistence or even to accommodate the influx of such a number of monolingual Inuktut-speaking people into the existing community patterns. This move increased the number of monolingual Inuktut-speaking people in the three coastal communities where they were resettled but introduced yet more dialects in those communities. Over the past 40 years, Inuktut has been undergoing a decline to the extent that it has dis-

appeared in some communities and is threatened in those in which it remains.

Because of the lack of contact between the Innu and Europeans, Innu-aimun was not affected until 1949. Innu-aimun has remained in a healthy state; it continues to be the first language, with English being learned as a second language.

We can see that the Inuit and Innu have very different language issues to contend with. The Inuit are facing language loss and are trying to both maintain and revitalize the language, while the Innu are wrestling with the question of what role English should play in the future of their communities (where English currently has a small but growing presence).

- The issue of standardization and the effect it has on related dialects is a common problem in languages around the world.” This problem becomes further compounded when the language in question is a minority language under duress.

PROGRAMS FOR LABRADOR TEACHERS AT MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Early Years: The TEPL Diploma

The Labrador Inuit Association held an education conference in 1977 which motivated the introduction at Memorial University of Newfoundland of a new program to train Inuit and Innu language and culture specialists as teachers’ aides in the classroom. As a result, the Teacher Education Program in Labrador (TEPL) was established in 1978 with the help of federal/provincial funding for post-secondary native education (see the section below called “Financing”). The program courses were offered primarily off campus in Labrador for Innu and Inuit who were often mature students whose family obligations required that they remain in the community. Aboriginal students who did choose to study on campus were quite isolated culturally and did not have much support within the university or the community of St. John’s. The main problems with the program were twofold. One was that the courses were offered infrequently, leading to frustration on the part of the students. They felt that not only were they not completing the program in a timely fashion, but they could not be expected to remember the content of related courses over long stretches of time. The second problem was that the subjects offered within the TEPL program were not oriented to teaching aboriginal language and culture but instead to general educational practices and subjects. The only courses oriented toward Inuktut and Innu-aimun were two linguistics courses, whose focus was not pedagogical. Each student would take one such course. The only language-teaching instruction they received was from an education course on the topic of teaching English as a second language.