



A Speech-Language Pathology Support Personnel Pilot Project for  
Aboriginal Communities on the West Coast of Vancouver Island

In the fall of 2008 several stakeholders in the delivery of SLP services to aboriginal communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island attended a meeting in Courtenay, BC. There were representatives present from the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the Office of the Provincial Paediatric Therapy Recruitment and Retention Coordinator. Participants of this meeting discussed an alternate model of delivering SLP services to several remote aboriginal communities on the Island, a model that involved training a community member to support the delivery of SLP services. The expectation was that such a model would build capacity within the community for the speech and language development of pre-school aged children.

Gisele Martin, an individual from the local community who is Nuu Chah Nulth, was hired to make visits to 3 preschools to carry out speech and language activities recommended by the supervising Speech and Language Pathologist. The qualifications for this position included personality characteristics such as dynamic, outgoing, fun, energetic, creative, and knowledgeable of Aboriginal culture.

In order to weave cultural sensitivity throughout this project and to ensure a feeling of safety, the "Five F's" were used as a guiding principle:

- o No **Formal** testing
- o No **Forms** to fill out
- o No **Files** to be written in
- o Make it **Fun** and **Funny**

To document outcomes, informal interviews and qualitative storytelling were used as storytelling respects one of the key traditions of First Nations people.

To provide Gisele with a general knowledge base in the area of speech and language, she received the "Articulation" and "Early Language" Training Modules of the *Partnerships in Communication* course, presented by Anne Gardner and Morgan McCririck, Speech and Language Pathologists.

Mentorship and on the job training by Anne Gardner, SLP, was provided on a bimonthly basis. This included observation of the program in use; consultation surrounding individual children and their speech and language needs (i.e. working on specific sounds, building single word vocabulary, using prepositions); discussion and modeling of language facilitation principles and strategies such as following the child's lead, interactive book reading, building imaginary play skills, introducing vocabulary and modeling language at the child's level; and weekly phone calls to discuss progress, brainstorm new ideas, and cooperatively problem solve barriers.

As a recognized resource for its effectiveness in stimulating early speech and language growth within Aboriginal culture, the primary tool from which the speech and language activities were drawn was the *Moe the Mouse™* Speech and Language Curriculum Box. This program was developed for the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCAACCS) by Anne Gardner, SLP and Margaret Chesterman, SLP and is described by BCACCS as "an innovative early speech and language curriculum box that uses Aboriginal toys and stories to enhance language development in children ages 3-5. The activities and materials in the curriculum box help parents and educators provide opportunities for children to practice language skills in natural settings. Doing these activities helps children develop the following speech and language skills: social language use, comprehension of spoken words, vocabulary, discrimination of speech sounds, ability to pronounce speech sounds, knowledge of preposition words (e.g. above, beside), and the ability to express feelings and ideas. These activities become part of the regular early learning and child care program curriculum and do not require specialized clinicians nor do they need to take place in clinical settings." ([http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files\\_new/moe-the-mouse-TM.html](http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_new/moe-the-mouse-TM.html)).

Prior to the commencement of this position, Gisele received the *Making the Most of Moe* Training Workshop presented by one of its authors, Anne Gardner, SLP.

A full description of this project and its outcomes is presented in "**A Mouse's TALE: Traditional Aboriginal Language Experience**".

# A Mouse's TALE: Traditional Aboriginal Language Experience

By: Anne Gardner and Morgan McCririck, Speech and Language Pathologists

Vancouver Island Health Authority



Hello, my name is Moe the Mouse, and I would like to share the TALE of my Traditional Aboriginal Language Experience.

I was created from the imagination of two senior Speech Language Pathologists, Anne Gardner and Margaret Chesterman, each of whom have more than three decades of experience. I was designed to be the perfect guest in a childcare setting, one who could be used to help overcome shyness, speech and language barriers, and reluctant participation.

With the help of my human friend, I tell stories, sing songs, and I even go home on sleepovers with each child I meet. With the assistance of my animal friends, I help children develop speech and language skills. I am a plush, cuddly and talkative little mouse who can stay in the childcare centre and also visit the child's home and, if I get lost, no problem, there are more of me.

In November 2008, I met Gisele Martin, a youthful and energetic West Coast First Nations woman. Together, we travelled to the preschools in three West Coast Aboriginal communities: Hitatsoo, Esowista, and Opitsaht. There, I had the pleasure of meeting Vicky and Grace, the preschool teachers. We made weekly visits, and on average, there were between seven and ten children at each center.

Gisele explained that, together, we were part of a pilot project that would run until the end of June, 2009. We both wondered if we could make a difference in the lives of these young aboriginal children in just eight months.

As storytelling is very important to First Nations people, we will honour this tradition in telling you the TALE of our adventures. This is not just my TALE, but also that of Gisele, Vicky, Grace and the children.

## Gisele's TALE



I started in early November and finished in June 2009. I went to Hitatsoo the most, and Esowista (Long Beach). Visits to Opitsaht were pretty sporadic because it was often closed.

When I first went to the preschools, a lot of the kids were quite shy. Some of them didn't talk at all; they would just barely nod at you. Some of them would barely look me in the eye. I didn't really know if it was because I was a new person or if they were always like that. I was told that they were always like that. But they started to become animated when Moe came out. I would arrive at the preschool and they would all light up and chant, "Moe Moe Moe." They would run around and rush to their seats. Some of them would try to help me bring the box in and pull out my chair, and everyone would sit down. They would all be talking excitedly about Moe and what we were going to do, and it progressed from there. I definitely noticed the kids becoming more verbal, louder, braver, and trying to make different sounds. I noticed them becoming more confident and also becoming much more understandable too.



**WOW!** Isn't it great that we found a way to excite the children, improve their self-confidence, encourage them to be more talkative and help them speak more clearly.

At first I had a routine where I would show up, we would sing, Moe would come out of his house, all of his friends would come out and we would make all of the sounds for each of the animals. We would read a book, maybe we would play a game, then we would make the animal sounds as we put the animals back in the bag, and then I would leave. With the repetition and consistency, the kids got really used to the animal sounds and which sounds went with which animal. One day when the beaver came out and made the /v/ sound, one kid pointed out it should go to Vicky, because Vicky has the /v/ sound in her name. That was a really neat surprise. Once the kids were really comfortable with this routine, Moe's friends became more interactive, I went with the flow, and we ended up doing a bunch of fun things.



**I've heard that listening to sounds and learning to say them accurately is a great way to prepare you for school and learning how to read. I think they call it phonological awareness. It looks like these kids are on their way to learning a lot about sounds.**

One time Moe went for a sleepover with one of the children, got lost and didn't come back for a week. When Moe finally did come back, we asked him what happened and he told us he had gone on an adventure. He had gone out on the ocean. There was a storm and the ship sank, but then he met a whale, and the whale became his friend. So he brought the whale to preschool that day. Then I had to think of a sound the whale made because each of the animals had a distinct sound. I thought of this old whale song from a Nuu Chah Nulth song album. There are two elders and the song starts with them going, "brbrbrbrb"

(sounds like the raspberry sound), and so the whale made that sound. It was kind of funny how that progressed, because as the weeks went by, we had a book for each animal and their sound. All the kids would look at the pictures and name them. For example, in the raccoon book, all the pictures were of words with /s/ because the raccoon sound is /ssss/ when he is scared. One week one of the kids said, "What about the whale book?" I was thinking in my head, "We don't really use the /brbrbr/ sound in our language," but I asked them, "What words can you think of with the /brbrbr/ sound in them?" They all looked at me funny, and then we all started thinking of these funny words using the /b/ sound, but with /brbrbrbr/ sound like, "Brroccolli, Brrrycen."



**Thank goodness the whale saved me in that storm. Did you know that having strong imaginary skills in your preschool years provides a solid foundation for language learning and academic success? Gisele sure did a good job of following the curiosity of the children and turning it into a speech and language experience.**

An owl friend was introduced, and he wanted his own book. I took a page and drew an owl on one side and squares on the other. The kids themselves thought of words that had the owl sound, "hoo hoo". They were all yelling out words that started with the /h/ sound. It was really fantastic to see because at the beginning of the year I don't think they would have gotten that at all. There was one boy who still didn't get it. He was yelling, "Tweezers, running shoes," anything that popped into his head. Even though they weren't words with the /h/ sound, he was talking; going from really quiet and barely understandable to yelling out words was really great.



**Once again, following the child's lead, phonemic awareness and vocabulary development. Do you see the confidence rising? I think we are making a difference.**

Another day the raccoon, which makes the /s/ sound when he is scared, went skydiving. On that day, there was a new boy who was younger, and really quiet and shy. Sometimes I like to associate the animals with different kids, so while I didn't point out that the



raccoon was like him or anything, I tried to make the raccoon more scared than the boy. I told the kids, "The raccoon is sooooo scared, but Moe says it is good to be brave." We and all the animals cheered the raccoon on. We chanted, "Yeah raccoon, you can do it, you can go skydiving, and you can do anything you want." I looked around, and behind me there was a toy plane. I grabbed the plane and it took off with the raccoon holding on tight. It went way up and circled over the kids' heads. All the kids were staring up, with their mouths open. The raccoon was so scared; he didn't want to jump. The plane went around and when it was time to jump, we all started cheering for the raccoon. We cheered, "Go, go jump." The raccoon was still too scared, so he circled around again until that one really shy boy started cheering. He said, "Yeah jump! jump!" With this little boy's cheer, the raccoon finally jumped into the bag where the animals were being put away.



**Talk about building imagination and encouraging the non-talkers to join in the communication. My visits are starting to build trust.**

Another time, the beaver had a /vvv/ sound like a vacuum. One day Moe came out and his house was really dirty, so the beaver decided his house really needed to be vacuumed. He went inside Moe's house and VVVacuumed, and everyone was VVVacuuming in there, cleaning it. This experience helped one of the boys really get the /v/ sound. He didn't have it at all before, but every single time after that when the beaver came out of the box he would say, "The beaver likes to VVVacuum."



**Wow! What an accomplishment. /v/ is a hard sound to make.**

One day I went to Opitsaht and the kids from Esowista at Long Beach were also coming to practice the paddling song. It was time to do the paddle song that we were practicing, but the kids weren't entirely into it. During one of the breaks a little girl came up to me and said, "Where is Moe? Is Moe going to come out?" I told her Moe was hiding in his house and that he came to watch them do the paddle song. Moe then stuck his nose out from the door of his house and said, "Hi, I can't come out right now because you have to do the paddle song, but I really want to watch you do the paddle song." Moe kept just his



nose and beady eye poking out the door, and when it was time to do the paddle song all of the kids lined up so well. They did the paddle song perfectly because they thought Moe was watching them in the corner. It was amazing to see.



**With each visit, my relationship with the children is growing stronger, they are starting to really like me and care about what I think. As a result, I was able to motivate them to focus on a task and give it their best effort. Listening and learning is always easier for children when they're having fun using their imagination.**

When I went to the preschools, I would always read a story. I had three books that I read a lot, including, *The Paper Bag Princess*, *No David No* and *Quick as a Cricket*. We had a blast when we read these books. A lot of the time it was very interactive. I would read a page, and then the kids would talk about what they saw on the page, or what they thought was going to happen. In *Quick as a Cricket*, the boy compares himself to all of the different animals (i.e. "I'm as quiet as a clam"; "I'm as brave as a tiger"). When we came to the page, "Brave as a tiger," we had a discussion about being scared. It was so cute. The kids started telling us about different times when they had been brave or scared. One boy told us that one night it was dark and he was scared, but he had a shield. I said, "Me too, I have a shield *and* a feather duster so I can tickle the monsters." When we finished reading, we began drawing, and I drew a shield and a feather duster. Soon all the kids were drawing shields and feather dusters. Then we decided to make feather dusters, so we got out popsicle sticks, string and tape. While we were making the feather dusters all of the animals were sitting at the table. We started tickling the animals and they each laughed in their sounds while they were being tickled (i.e. the crab laughed by saying ti-ti-ti). It was feather duster chaos, and all the kids wanted to take their feather dusters home to tickle their families.



**Gisele took her cue from what was important to the children: being scared. She guided them in discussion, problem solving, decision making, and then made props to extend and expand the experience into imaginary play.**

**Early literacy, language experience, and imaginary play all at the same time. Talk about bang for your buck!**

Each day when I brought the animals out of the bag, we would practice their speech sound and I would also introduce the Nuuchah Nulth name for the animals that I knew (i.e. wolf, salmon, frog, raven); but there were also some animal names that I didn't know in Nuuchah Nulth (i.e. dragonfly, crab, loon). One day when the raccoon came out, one of the kids said, "What is the name for that one?" To which I said, "I don't know." Because we didn't know the Nuuchah Nulth name, Moe decided we should have a naming ceremony for some of his friends, and that we should have a potlatch. To have a potlatch we had to prepare. The next time Moe came, he had a dancing shawl and some things for making food. We all made food, we invited all of the guests, and everybody came to the potlatch. We made fruit salad out of this funny play dough styrofoam stuff. Then we had the naming ceremony for the raccoon and the loon. We did a dance, and all the animals danced. We sang the animal song; a Nuuchah Nulth animal song. All the kids held the animals, and made them dance. Moe gave presents to all the witnesses, because that is what you do at a potlatch. He gave away little containers of bubble blowers. Then we put the animals away so they wouldn't get soapy, and everyone blew bubbles. Now when we take the animals out, the kids know the traditional names for the raccoon and the loon. I have finally learned their names as well.



Didn't Gisele do an amazing job of following up on the child's question? How better to figure out the name for the raccoon than through a traditional potlatch. I can't think of a better way for the children to learn

**about their culture and keep their traditional language alive than through imaginary play.**

I have had a few parents contact me and ask me what I am doing with Moe the Mouse, because they caught little glimpses of it as they were stopping by the preschool. They would then email me later or ask me later, "So what is Moe the Mouse?" When I explained it to them, they would say, "Oh, that is so great. Anything you can do to reinforce anything to do with Nuuchah Nulth culture and language, I would be so grateful for. Thank you so much for doing this." A spin off benefit came when one of the parents asked me to go to National Aboriginal School Day to do Moe the Mouse for three different kindergarten groups.



**Notice how, slowly but surely, we got the attention of the children's parents. If you can link learning in the preschool to the home it is a win-win situation.**

The kids really liked Moe the Mouse coming in. I think it was a really good way for them to have fun, start to verbalize and get loud. At the beginning of the year, if someone needed the washroom or they didn't have a chair, it was a bit hard to communicate with them. They were shy and more reclusive. They maybe wouldn't look you in the eye, and they wouldn't respond verbally other than maybe a small mumble, or else, they would just nod or raise their eyebrows like we do in our community. I think this little mouse was a good way, a comfortable way, for them to start interacting more. It was way too much fun to miss out. I always hated school but I think if there had been a Moe the Mouse, I would have been really into it.



**I think that sometimes it's easier for kids to talk to a little mouse like me than a big person. Maybe that's why they were so comfortable interacting with me and my animal friends. Children love to use their imagination, they just need a little encouragement.**

## Grace's TALE



Hi my name is *Grace George*, from the *Clayoquot First Nations Preschool*. Our center is called *Quecha Children's Center*. I really love *Moe the Mouse*. *Moe the Mouse* has been in our school with *Gisele* all this year. The children really like him, especially when they get to take him home for a sleepover. That is the big thing, taking him home.



**I love the sleepovers too because it gives the children a chance to introduce me to their families. I meet their pets, I sleep in their beds, and play in their yards. The parents and kids make up a book where they write and draw what we did. Back at the preschool, this book gets read to the other children. We get to know each other a lot better.**

When *Gisele* started coming, I had a couple of kids that were a little scared to come to school. I don't know if scared is the word, but they would only come once in a while. With *Gisele*, I found that she brought them out of their little shells. *Moe* did actually, *Moe* and *Gisele's* personality. They were participating more in the program and wanting to come to school. When they knew it was *Moe's* day, they were quite anxious to get to school because of all the different games she played with them, and the stories. She sang songs with them, and they were traditional songs that the kids knew. She dressed up *Moe* with a traditional *Nuu Chah Nulth* cape and a cedar headband and the kids thought that was just great. She said, "Well, *Moe* likes to do this," and as soon as it was *Moe*, the kids got right involved.



**Wow. I helped encourage participation. I think Grace called it, “bringing them out of their little shells.”**

Gisele came every Wednesday all winter long, no matter what the weather was like. She was very reliable and I could really depend on her to show up when she said she would. Every week the kids looked forward to her arrival, they knew she was coming on that certain day and they were happy to see her. Just before two o'clock, they knew Gisele would be there and they'd watch the clock, “Oh, Moe's coming soon,” they would say. There were a couple of weeks when Gisele was unable to attend due to illness, and I had to tell the kids Moe was sick and their faces got all sad. They kept asking, “Is Moe still sick? Is Moe coming?”



**I think I built trust with the children because I showed up when I said I would. I followed a routine that the children became familiar with. They anticipated my coming and all the fun we would have, and they were happy to learn from me.**

When Gisele first started with Moe, I had a set of twins who were three at the time. They were young kids, and the one girl was not interested in school at all. She would say, “I don't want to go to school.” She would come here and cry when she got dropped off. When Gisele introduced her to Moe and “Moe's sleepover,” she said to her mom, “Mom, you've got to get us to school more often. We've got to take Moe home with us.” Because they were twins, we got twin Moes for them to take home. They really enjoyed that. That was her way of coming to school; that was the reason she wanted to come, because of Moe. Before that she wouldn't come to preschool. Well, she would come, but she would cry, cry, cry. With the weekly visits from Gisele and Moe, she quit doing that. Instead, she would say, “We've got to go to school because we've got to be able to take Moe home.” She wanted to come to school.





**I love how I helped the twins get excited about coming to school.**

I think the kids have come a long way. There is one child in particular that I had great difficulty understanding. After he started saying some of the sounds, I am now able to understand him. I am so glad Moe was there to help him with sounds because before, I'd be sitting there thinking "Ahhh...What is he saying?" but I didn't want to say anything because I wanted him to speak more often. With Moe, he got more confident with his sounds. He was saying the sounds the animal makes. He got very good at his sounds that way because he was able to relate them to Moe and all of the different animals Moe brought with him. The more reluctant kids were all trying to say the sounds too. One of the things I encouraged them to do was when they all wanted the animal, I would say, "Well you've got to say the sound if you want the eagle." "What does he say?" "Sssshhhh." Well say "shhhh", and they would say it if they wanted to hold that animal. So you know I liked that aspect. It got the reluctant kids saying something if they really wanted that little animal cause they all have their favourite animals. That's neat.



**Looks like we really made a difference in the speech and language skills of these kids. My animal friends helped encourage them to talk more clearly and Grace got some new ideas on how to help children practice speech sounds.**

I have tried to incorporate Moe the Mouse into my program, and I've brought it to the Kindergarten at Wickaninnish School where they were really excited about Moe. Next year, the kindergarten teacher wants me to bring in the animals and do their sounds to help with learning the alphabet. When he is introducing his letter sounds he wants Moe's animals to be there. So we are going to work on it more next year, which I think will be good because my kids from here will go to kindergarten next year and they will be familiar with Moe, and able to carry that learning forward. It was not only the First Nations children at the Wickaninnish School, it was also the other children there who were all excited to see Moe and wanted to bring him home. I think it is a really good stepping-stone because the First Nations culture is also in there. We always tell the kids, "It is our language and this is the way we say it." Through Moe, our kids will be able to teach other children some words from our traditional language.



**A partnership between the preschool and kindergarten class. Neat! I bet the common focus and building on what they already know will really help them succeed in kindergarten.**

Every week, Gisele brought many books, but the kids had special ones that they all wanted to listen to. They all wanted to hear *No David No*. Gisele wanted to take it a step further and do *No David No* in the Nuuchah Nulth language. Gisele, who was really keen on learning the traditional language, was learning right along with the kids.







### **Favourite books and traditional language...what a great connection!**

Here is another thing that *Gisele* and *Moe* did. When I started bringing in our traditional food for the kids to eat, they didn't want to try it. Then *Gisele* said, "Well, *Moe* wants some." As soon as *Moe* wanted to taste the clams, the kids were all eager to try because they saw *Moe* doing it. Before, they were all putting their noses up to it.



**It can be hard to get young children to try new food and traditional food can be even harder. It seems that I've become a positive role model.**

It was very important for *Gisele* to come every week for the children to know there was something consistent that they could do. They knew it was *Moe* time and they got their little minds into it.



**She is right. Repetition and consistency are the key.**

I would love to have *Gisele* back. There are a few things we didn't get to do this year that we had plans on doing. So it would be great to carry on with our plans for *Moe*. We want *Moe* to have a potlatch, just like he did with *Gisele* at *Hitatsoo*, and give all the children a First Nations name, just a little celebration. Not only here, but *Ucluelet* and *Opitsaht* too because we are all close, and can easily get together. So we want to incorporate all three schools into the potlatch. *Gisele* has brought pictures of other preschools to show us what the other kids look like and what they do with *Moe*. So it would be neat to get together after seeing all these different people and get to know each other.



I want to come back too! Grace's idea of bringing all three preschools together is unique. Sharing and learning from each other – sounds like we're "building capacity".

## Vicky's TALE



Good morning! We are at Hitatsoo preschool and I am Vicky Touchie. I run the center along with my assistant Connie. We are an Ucluelet First Nations-run program. We are a fully licensed, multi-age daycare with children aging from birth to five and a half years, a good range for this area. We started receiving the Moe the Mouse program in pieces two to three years ago, about every month to six weeks. This past November, Gisele began coming in to deliver the program weekly. This made a big difference in its presentation and continuity. Having this regular schedule for the kids gave them something to look forward to.



**It's good that Gisele and I were able to provide this regularity and continuity.**

This has made a huge difference for our children. Before, we had four children with great big speech delays who were barely speaking. Once they started interacting with Moe and

Gisele consistently every week and had Connie and I pressing, reminding and working with them throughout the day along the same lines, it gave them a focus. They were able to pronounce the sounds much more quickly than without Moe, and with just Connie and I trying to do our best. The children also started reminding and wanting to help each other all the time..."It's a sticking out your tongue word, la la la."



**Sounds like I've become a member of the classroom, so much so that even when I wasn't there, the kids remembered and practiced what they had learned from me. I think their articulation skills have improved.**

Having Gisele come at a specific time during the week set up a routine that the children really looked forward to. In the morning, we would say, "Oh Gisele is coming today; we are going to have to watch for Gisele." They would start getting excited and would ask, "Is it time yet?" Once she arrived, they would say, "Oh Gisele is here; we have to clean up, clean up time, clean up time." Her arrival was a signal for them to put everything away and then come sit at the table with eyes and ears on Gisele. She also signalled the children nicely when she was winding up, with the same weekly routine at the end. When she started putting the animals in the bag and handing out the stickers, this meant they were almost done and it was time to clean up and go downstairs. It was really good to have the steps to follow consistently, which helped them focus.



**Having a routine helps children be successful and feel good about themselves. They come to know what to expect and what to do. I am glad Vicky noticed how effective routines are as a tool for learning and developing focus.**

I found it easier having Gisele come in to deliver the program weekly, rather than trying to piece it in ourselves. I think the kids absorbed more by bringing more focus to them. They knew that Gisele was coming, and it was going to be for 45 minutes. They would actually sit still and listen to what she was saying. They also participated more because otherwise they tended to wander off.



**Vicky and Connie are busy enough running the preschool. It sounds like having a guest visit regularly helped the children to participate and focus.**

It was also very important and helpful that Gisele was from our area. She spoke our language, and her pronunciation of the words in our language was clear which the kids recognized. They also recognized that as a First Nations person, she was knowledgeable about things in our environment. For instance, she mentioned to them that when bears first wake up they eat skunk cabbage, and that was something they didn't know before. It is so common for them to see the bears around here, and she built on what was in their environment. So it worked really well because they recognized that she was knowledgeable.



**It was special that Gisele could pass on her knowledge of Nuuchah Nulth culture to the children, and in doing so, introduce them to relevant vocabulary in their native language.**

Gisele always watched what the children were doing, and what they talked to her about when she first came in. As she got ready, she took a minute to watch and listen to the kids as they were all yakking at her really quickly and enthusiastically. She brought what they were talking about into what she was working on for the day. She would mention something that a child had said about one of the animals, and then expand on this. She also expanded on the program itself. Not only did she use the animals included, but also she added other animals, animal sounds, and traditional animal names. The addition of the owl making the "hoo" sound was a really good example of this. (The program does not include an animal to go with the /h/ sound). After adding the owl, one of the kids said, "Where is the owl book?," and she said, "Oh, let's make one." She got out a paper and pen and drew pictures of things with the "h" sound in them. The kids really enjoyed telling her what they wanted to have on the pictures. She traced one of the children's HANDS, and asked, "What goes on this HAMBURGER? How much HAIR? Where is his HAIR going? Is

it going on the top of his HEAD?" That was something she brought in. Her ability to adapt to what the kids were curious about was really good.



**Vicky noticed the effectiveness of taking a minute to observe the children and noticed what they were interested in. Following the child's lead is a critical piece in successful learning.**

The kids were so enthusiastic about Moe and his friends, and after Gisele had gone they continued to play little games with them. They built caves, cages, and little houses; they made zoos, and created pet stores where they sold all of Moe's little friends. They did a lot of pretending they were in a forest kind of play. During this, we could practice with them the Indian names of the animals and the animal sounds. As they were moving the animals, they made the same sounds Gisele used to match the animal, and often carried the animals around with them.



**Nice to hear that the imaginary play initiated by Gisele continued after she left.**

Gisele read books with the kids every week. They enjoyed *The Paper Bag Princess* and *Quick as a Cricket*. They really liked those books, and would get excited about hearing them. She would not just go by what the book said, but would talk to the children about what they saw.



**Getting excited about reading and talking about books ends up laying a foundation for literacy. That's a very good thing.**

One day, Gisele brought Moe and he looked a little different. She had put a little cedar headband on him and a little shawl. The children were like, "Oh, what's Moe about today?" She piqued their interest with Moe's costume, and then explained they were going to have a potlatch and a naming ceremony for some of the animals. Because a potlatch involves sharing of food and gifts, she did that too. She pulled out play dough and we made foods that the animals would like to eat. They all made little treats for the animals, and then we put them all in a big pile and shared it between all of the animals.



**The potlatch was such a special event for the children, as it highlighted an important cultural ritual through play – one of a child's most powerful ways of learning.**

I am really hoping this continues. It has been fun and exciting for the kids. It kept their focus really centered. It's an early intervention thing. Our little one and two year olds know the sounds now and are practicing them. They are not leaving the sounds out now, so we don't have to fix it later, but can work on it now while they are learning.



**It's exciting to hear Vicky say that because we wanted to see if we could make a difference in these children's lives, and it seems we did.**



## Summary



Once the 6 month pilot project was completed, we had the opportunity to look back to see if our goal of building capacity within the community was met. Reflecting on some of the feedback from the preschool teachers led us to feel that indeed this was the case:

I had a couple of kids that were a little scared to come to school. I don't know if scared is the word, but they would only come once in a while. With Gisele, I found that she brought them out of their little shells. Moe did actually, Moe and Gisele's personality. They were participating more in the program and wanting to come to school. When they knew it was Moe's day, they were quite anxious to get to school because of all the different games she played with them, and the stories.

She wanted to come to school.



**A stimulating speech and language program delivered on a regular basis had the effect of improving attendance and the motivation to be present at school. Improved attendance and motivation combined with a regular speech and language stimulating activity means these kids have the opportunity to improve their speech and language skills. Building capacity within the community.**

I noticed the kids becoming more verbal, louder, braver, and trying to make different sounds.

He was talking; going from really quiet and barely understandable to yelling out words was really great.

After he started saying some of the sounds, I am now able to understand him. I am so glad Moe was there to help him with sounds because before, I'd be sitting there thinking Ahhh...What is he saying? but I didn't want to say anything because I wanted him to speak more often. With Moe, he got more confident with his sounds.





**The consistent sessions dedicated to the development of speech and language skills really facilitated the ability of these kids to communicate more effectively. Building capacity within the community.**

I found it easier having Gisele come in to deliver the program weekly, rather than trying to piece it in ourselves. I think the kids absorbed more by bringing more focus to them. They knew that Gisele was coming, and it was going to be for 45 minutes. They would actually sit still and listen to what she was saying. They also participated more because otherwise they tended to wander off.



**Preschool teachers are busy. They have plenty on their plate in the day to day operations of a daycare, and often they don't have detailed training in the delivery of speech and language stimulation activities. By training someone within the community specifically for this purpose we were able to ensure therapeutic and consistent speech and language stimulation activities were being delivered to the preschool aged children in these communities. Building capacity within the community.**

Anything you can do to reinforce anything to do with Nuu Chah Nulth culture and language, I would be so grateful for.

She spoke our language, and her pronunciation of the words in our language was clear which the kids recognized. They also recognized that as a First Nations person, she was knowledgeable about things in our environment. For instance, she mentioned to them that when bears first wake up they eat skunk cabbage, and that was something they didn't know before.



Powerful comments on just how important it is that services like these are delivered in a culturally safe manner. There is really no better way to ensure services are delivered in a culturally safe manner than by having them delivered by a member of that community. Building capacity within the community.

I was really proud to be part of this innovative pilot that brought together a variety of stakeholders in the delivery of SLP services to these communities. I would like to thank the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Provincial Paediatric Therapy Recruitment and Retention Coordinator for supporting Giselle and I as we delivered the program. We certainly feel that this pilot was a success, and we look forward to working with stakeholders to find a way to turn the pilot into a regular program. We also look forward to sharing our tale with the rest of BC. Thanks for listening!