



The Michif Language Early Childhood Learning Project 2013

An educational concept which began in the fall of 2012 has now turned into reality and with its launch an imaginative learning tool for young Michif learners.

The Michif Language Learning Project began with the concept that the younger you are the easier it is to learn language. Repetition is required and access to Michif speakers can be problematic in many communities. It was this lack of early learning resource that prompted Marilyn Bean and Jan Ovans of the Cowichan Valley Métis Association, to apply for a Canadian Heritage grant, to develop an early childhood Michif immersion project.

Jan and Marilyn wrote script and Métis elder Stella Johnson provided the translation. Crucial to the project was the art and animation needed to appeal to this age group which was provided by Earlene Bitterman.

Earlene Bitterman stated, “There is a shortage of Michif learning tools that attract the interest of young learners, and what better a medium to teach youth but with cartoons. I watched two weeks of tutorials; the Animate pro software was easy to learn. I notice a lot of mistakes, but they say artists always criticize their work the most, this project was a pleasant and fun learning curve.”

With the basic art and animation done, Stella Johnson, provided the audio for the video’s main character, Kokhum. Stella also taught the children the song, Grandpa has a Farm. Stella has nothing but praise for this talented group of children who rehearsed to get the pronunciations right. Stella with Victoria Pruden also co-wrote and sang the Birthday Song. Stella has often said that language is the heart of Métis culture.

It is our hope, that we obtain the next year’s grant as an application was completed for another project in 2013, to provide not only more expanded vocabulary but interactivity, as the Métis youth of today are exposed to technological learning tools where learning is a hands on experience.

"I would love to delve into another aboriginal education project; it has been the most significant project I have ever worked on, and with creative enthusiastic community members. I see this tool has the ability to adapt to any aboriginal language, and it just may be the instrument we need to preserve our aboriginal languages, that so desperately needs to be taught to our children. With every generation we are losing our language, and in my family Michif and Bungee was spoke in our home. It was a secret language. I'm saddened that Michif was never taught in schools as a second language, and with resources such as these perhaps it's a new beginning," said Earlene Bitterman



The project team would like to give special thanks to Stella Johnson who provided the inspiration to create this video.

The DVD is now in print, and will be made available through various BC Métis organizations. You can also view individual segments on www.michiflanguage.ca

Bios

Earlene Bitterman is a Métis traditional artist who lives in northern British Columbia. Earlene was born in Pouce Coupe BC to a traditional Métis family. Her passion is Métis genealogy and community history studying her own history Whitfords, Sansregrets, Collins and Bremners and her families' pre-confederation ties to the Fort St John-Dunvegan Forts in Northern BC.

In a few short months after acquiring animation computer equipment the challenge for Earlene began as she taught herself the Toonboom Animate Pro 2 animation program, Adobe Premier Pro, and Adobe Photoshop CS6.

Stella Erasmus Johnson provided the Michif translations for this project. Stella is a Cree/Michif language instructor, and an Elder in Residence at Vancouver Island University. The daughter of a Cree/Métis mother and a Cree/Métis father, Stella was raised in McLennan Alberta, by her paternal grandmother, Margarite Erasmus. "My Kohkum often told me stories about her father Joseph Noskey who moved to Alberta after getting scrip in 1875. She also used to talk about her mother's family, the Ghostkeepers: just the sound of that name was exciting".

Raised as one of nine children in post-war Alberta, Stella and her family utilized the natural resources around them to sustain livelihood. This hands-on experience of daily Métis lifestyle, Stella's skill with Métis arts and crafts, her ability to speak both Cree and Michif, has been an asset to Stella and her community.

Courtney Campbell wrote the Cowichan Métis Reel specifically for this project and provided the musical scores for this project. Courtney has been playing music nearly all of her life, and loves every minute of it. Along with playing piano, guitar, and fiddle, she also plays banjo, accordion, and saxophone, and is a very talented singer. Courtney lives in Shawnigan Lake, BC, teaching private music lessons and directing a small ensemble of young fiddlers during the week.