

Partnership Celebrates Marine Foods in Schools



Kimberly Johnston of the Raincoast Education Society talks about ocean habitat and traditional Nuuchah-nulth foods.

Local children and youth learned more about Nuuchah-nulth traditional foods this year thanks to a partnership between Uu-a-thluk, the Raincoast Education Society, and schools. The partnership, which wrapped up in March, saw educators from both organizations travelling to Nuuchah-nulth communities to talk about traditional foods.

But talking is not all that happened. Schools across Nuuchah-nulth territory hosted educators for presentations, demonstrations,

and games. In total, the organizations delivered 27 programs in eight schools, reaching more than 200 children.

This year's focus was on ocean foods commonly eaten by Nuuchah-nulth people. The bulk of the program focused on intertidal foods, but sessions also incorporated activities about whales, kelp, and harbour seals. Kim-

berly Johnston of the Raincoast Education Society delivered the program with help from Michelle Colyn of Uu-a-thluk.

"I had a table where people could see exoskeletons of the animals and touch them," Johnston said. For the younger grades, she also had a felt mural that encouraged children to apply what they learned during the session by building an ocean habitat scene. "The students learned how to say all of the species in Nuuchah-nulth as well as where each species lives in the ocean. For each species we would learn at least one ecological adaptation as well as the harvesting and cooking instructions," Johnston said.

Although she had hoped to incorporate more harvesting and eating into the program, Johnston encountered some

difficulties. Timing harvests with her visits was often difficult. "There was also a red tide once when we had planned to gather clams," she said.

Despite these challenges, Johnston and Colyn did manage to bring seafood to some of their visits. The topic also struck a chord with children with or without samples. "Everyone could at least share one story about something they eat from the species we talked about. And everyone wanted to learn about the whale hunt. People were really fascinated about that."

Johnston and Colyn also partnered with other Uu-a-thluk staff, Ucluelet Secondary School, and local businesses to deliver a traditional foods feast for students of the Ucluelet school's Culture Class. The feast took place in late 2012 and included some clam digging along with a meal of salmon, shrimp, crab, clams, and oysters. Students from grades 9-12 attended, along with their special guests.

That's when Johnston and others had a big surprise. "Some of the people who were helping prepare the food looked at the oysters and said, 'kids are never going to eat that.' But then [one of our educators] started teaching kids how to shuck. They got so into it, even timing how fast they could open them... They loved them!"

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—Eva Clark, Ditidaht Community School

Teachers also appreciated the classroom portion of the program, which shared both Nuuchah-nulth and western science. "My students were actively engaged from the minute Kim started," said Eva Clark of Ditidaht Community School. "She provided them with hands-on activities...and allowed them to explore pieces of various animals found in the nearby Pacific Ocean. All of this was done while students were practising and comparing words between the First Nation languages of Ditidaht and Ahousaht."

Clark especially liked the cultural aspects of the program. "The connections our students' made to their language and traditional knowledge show how well planned and valuable this program is for students living in First Nations communities."

The program concluded with a visit to Hesquiaht Community School. For more information about the Uu-a-thluk/RES partnership, please contact Michelle Colyn at 250-724-5757.



Youth from Ucluelet Secondary School shuck oysters during a traditional foods feast. The feast was one part of an educational partnership between Uu-a-thluk, the Raincoast Education Society, and local schools that wrapped up last month.



Children build an ocean habitat mural during the program.

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