



Although fall means “back-to-school” for most British Columbia students, there are some Vancouver Island youth who spend a portion of their summer holidays learning about science and culture at educational camp.

For five years running, Uu-a-thluk and the University of Victoria have combined their resources, skills, and talent to organize and execute Science Venture camps in several Nuuchahnulth communities. This year was no exception, with camps taking place in Ahousaht, Hittatsoo, Esowista, Hot Springs Cove, and Henderson Lake.

“This year we had the shared goal of incorporating traditional knowledge into the camps as much as possible,” says Uu-a-thluk capacity building coordinator, Norine Messer. “Nuuchahnulth elders and cultural teachers play a big role in these camps.”

Messer was pleased with record turnout numbers for all five camps, citing an average attendance of 30 youth. Ahousaht boasted 50 attendees to its science camp in mid-August.

The goal of the camps is to show students how science exists in everyday life. Science Venture

Camp partners University of Victoria graduate students with Uu-a-thluk staff. The teachers then travel to participating communities to engage students in the magic and beauty of science within a cultural context. The camps invite elementary-aged school students and older youth to participate.

“Our goal is to get kids excited about science,” says Messer, “We also try to marry that with validating, honouring, and including Nuuchahnulth beliefs.”

University of Victoria teacher, Steven Lonergan, believes that the science camps bring a unique opportunity to the communities for students to learn about science in a setting unlike a formal classroom.

“What we bring is the chance for kids to

think about how science applies to their life and how they might be able to use science in the future,” he says. “By getting them to think about science at a young age, we can open lots of doors for when they want to continue with their education later.”

Messer agrees.

“We hope that some of these kids will be future biologists,” she says.

To help make that happen, camp instructors led campers through a series of activities that explored the properties of water. Campers learned the difference between salt and freshwater by making a rainbow parfait in a test tube. Other water experiments helped explain how salt can be used in preserving foods. The campers also explored engineering concepts by building mini cherry pickers using tubing and syringes for hydraulics.

Uu-a-thluk intern and Ahousaht member Damon Rampanen helped integrate Nuuchahnulth practices with camp activities. His role was to bring culture to the students in the form of prayers, song, dance, and pit cooks.

“Having Damon involved allowed us access to an amazing story-teller so that we could also pair some of our activities up with relevant cultural stories,” says Lonergan.

Lonergan gives the example of Rampanen telling the story *How Raven Stole the Sun* while camp students learn how to “make” their own star constellations.

“Damon’s stories were always a perfect compliment to our activities,” he says. “They always brought the lesson home for the kids.”

Rampanen was also responsible for introducing and helping with traditional pit cooks during the camps. In Esowista, camp participants were taken on a day trip to Echachis via boats. There Tla-o-quiath member, Carl Martin, taught them how to pit cook using seaweed. Martin also demonstrated fish filleting for a traditional salmon barbeque.

“Everyone worked together to harvest traditional foods,” Messer says. “Much of the Esowista community came out. The campers had the opportunity to include and invite family and friends. They cooked for them, fed them, and showed them things that they had learned at camp.”

Looking forward to next year, Messer says that Uu-a-thluk and the University of Victoria intend to involve more elders in the execution of the science camps, incorporating even more traditional knowledge and use.



Science campers undo a pit cook.

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University of Victoria instructor, Steven Lonergan, holds up a filleted salmon for barbequing.