

# Powell River Salmon Society Classroom Incubators



## *A Volunteer's First Impression*

*by Sharon Shultz*

*Spring 2016*

In the back corner of the Grade 5 classroom at Assumption Catholic School is a tank with styrofoam insulation around it. Lift off the top and - ta da - little salmon fry swimming about. These students have learned a lot about salmon - how the adults lay and fertilize the eggs in a gravel nest, how the eggs hatch, how the yolk sacks nourish the tiny salmon, and much more. Today is another lesson - a bit messier than the previous ones. The students get to watch the dissection of an adult salmon. They are keen to release their salmon into Lang Creek, but that won't occur for another month or so.

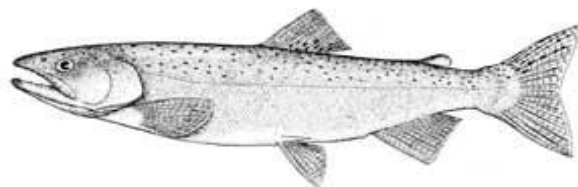
Powell River Salmon Society has made this experience possible for local students. This is a little known program in our local schools but if the salmon dissection that I observed is any indication, this is a marvellous way to expose young students to the science in our backyard.



So let's set the stage: A table set up in the spring sunshine. A partially frozen salmon from the hatchery. An energetic Grade 5-6 class. Teachers as interested as the students. Dianne Sanford, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Education Coordinator for the Sunshine Coast (also known as: the salmon expert), in a waterproof apron. And me, Sharon Shultz, observing from the back.

So what did I see. Well I saw a bit of the dissection but I was more interested in the reactions of the students. Initially they were disinterested and easily distracted. For some cutting open a salmon was something they'd seen before, for others, it was new and a bit gross.

The salmon expert asked questions. What are the different types of salmon? What are the names of the fins? How can we tell if the salmon is a male or a female? These students had learned a lot about salmon in previous classroom visits and from the resident salmon fry in their classroom tank.



There were more questions. "Would you like to see the heart?" This question grabbed their interest. "How big do you think the heart is?" More interest and guesses. The heart was found, shown to the students, placed in a petri dish and

passed around. Then it was on to the kidneys, the gills, the air bladder, the scales.

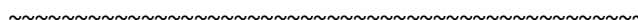
More questions. More curiosity. “Where do you think the salmon’s brain is? Where is your brain located? What protects your brain? What protects the salmon’s brain? How are we similar? How are we different?”

I found myself comparing my anatomy to that of a salmon. There are lots of similarities in the organs that we have - brain, heart, kidney. But there are many differences too. I wonder how differently I would swim with slime on my skin, an air bladder and gills. I could tell the students were making their own comparisons and asking their own questions.

Science, curiosity, and a respect for salmon and our environment - this is what I observed. This is a wonderful example of exposing students to science in their environment. I wish it were part of the required curriculum but since it isn’t, I am glad it is offered through the support of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Powell River Salmon Society, and that some local teachers schools make time for this valuable student experience.



A student releasing salmon fry at Lang Creek



*This program is delivered in Powell River to an average of 8 classes or 200 students annually. Each class gets a classroom presentation on salmon physiology and life cycle, an adult salmon dissection demonstration (optional), a tank for their classroom so they can monitor and watch salmon fry grow, and a field trip to release their salmon fry.*

*The Powell River Salmon Society believes that education is a vital part of salmon enhancement. Their Lang Creek Educational Centre is used for stock assessment, collection of broodstock, eggtakes and many educational experiences. The society also maintains two hatcheries, one at Duck Lake and one at Catalyst Mill.*

*The work of the Powell River Salmon Society is made possible by over 100 volunteers and over 290 business and government sponsors. If you are interested in being a member, volunteer or sponsor of the Powell River Salmon Society, contact us at 604-483-9440 or [prsalmon@telus.net](mailto:prsalmon@telus.net) or visit our website at [www.prsalmon.org](http://www.prsalmon.org).*