

I like to reflect and ponder on the learning sequences that we offer to the three, four and five year olds every Wednesday through the Early Literacy Drop-In sessions offered through the Nanaimo Aboriginal Learning Centre. We thought it might be of interest for educators, parents and all those community partners that are focused on early literacy to join in on our conversations. I have put together the thinking behind the lesson sequence. The idea is that we want to demonstrate is that our teaching is **strategic and has a purpose**. We want you to know where we are going and how we can provide learning opportunities that will help early learners to master important concepts about how print works.

### **The Set up for the “Three Stories for the Day”:**

**Are You Hungry Little Bear, The Journey of the Dog Salmon, Salmon to Share (and the” Down by the River “song)**

**This part of the lesson is all about “connecting”. I need to get the kids engaged and prepared for new learning and vocabulary that I will present. Asking children to think about what they already know about salmon was important because it helps me quickly assess their background knowledge. I also think about ways to engage and motivate all our emergent readers. Using actual artifacts that they will encounter in the story is always a good way to get them thinking about what they story might be about. It also helps me introduce new vocabulary. So today’s story bag included real canned salmon, blueberries, scarves, stuffies-Mama Bear and Baby Bear and salmon and my pictures from the Adams River Sockeye run.**

The last two sessions were focused on salmon and their important journey up streams and rivers. I chose this topic because I recently travelled to the Adams River to view the huge run of sockeye returning to their birthplace to spawn and complete their life cycle. I couldn’t wait to tell the kids about the river full of splashing red and green salmon. I never hold back my enthusiasm for a topic and the kids definitely picked up on the idea that sockeye salmon are pretty interesting. I had gathered beautiful pictures and brought salmon coloured scarves to represent sockeye . I wanted to bring home the idea that the salmon faced **a long hard journey**. Melanie and I created a bit of an obstacle course in the multi-purpose room. ( easily replicated outdoors but it was raining cats and dogs). The kids waved and wiggled the scarves as they went up the long river (obstacle course with chairs and blocks to climb over or through). While they ran and hopped and leaped we kept encouraging them with the words “Sockeye salmon never give up. Even when it is hard, they keep on trying to get to their birth place. “ All of the kids chanted “Run Sockeye, Run Sockeye, Run Run Run.”

Now that the kids were panting and out of breath, I brought home the idea that a **journey** was a long trip. We talked a little bit about how salmon lay their eggs in the river where they were born . The life cycle of the salmon wasn't the big teaching idea, rather the importance of their journey and it is their way of being. We are proud of the salmon that work so hard to travel up the long river. We talked about when things are hard we have to keep on trying, just like the sockeye salmon does...They never give up!

Our focus text was **Journey of the Dog Salmon** by Bruce Martin. Bruce is a Nuchunaalth Elder who is an excellent story teller. He has shared many of his stories with young people in Nanaimo. I mention this because emergent literacy programs can build on oral traditions by using stories that reflect the children's family, community relationships, environment and culture. Some stories are sacred and protected by protocol. Other stories describe everyday events or provide a teaching. Bruce has provided this story for all the children to enjoy and we raise our hands in thanks.

The story was a big hit. One of the first events in this story involves Dog Salmon blocking his relatives from going up the river. We were able to identify Dog Salmon's behavior as inappropriate. When Dog Salmon wouldn't allow his relatives to travel up the river the children fully understood that this was a very big problem indeed! The solution to this story involves the group of salmon relatives teaching Dog Salmon about their important life journey. (We solve our problems using our words).This plan worked because Dog Salmon now understood how important it was for all salmon to reach their birthplace and he let them pass. The ending seemed to fit for the children and it made sense to them that Dog Salmon was now the last one to travel up the river because of his poor behavior.

The kids easily retold the story when I provided simple prompts.

The story **Are you Hungry Little Bear?** was a good second story because it brought home the concept that the sockeye help feed many animals and even help the trees in the forest .

The story was a natural for Readers' Theatre. This approach to the story made it more interactive and language rich. Half of our group were assigned the Mother Bear part and the other half, Little Bear. I had real blueberries, fresh green grass, mussel shells and a salmon stuffie toy for props. After Mother Bear offers Little Bear different things to eat, she finally remembers what Little Bear likes to eat more than anything else...SALMON!

Our third story **Sharing Salmon** supported our focus on early number concepts as well as a fun way to practice using Hul'quimi'num words while we were counting. It was also a natural lead up to the "Down by the River" song that Melanie had made come alive with prepared salmon and animals to use while we sang the song. She posted the words on the home page and gave the little kit to the teachers so they could use it throughout the week.

The next part of our morning is all about **processing** the new information. We want to provide learning stations that ask each child to take an active role in constructing meaning and integrating the new learning concepts we presented. A balance literacy lesson sequence includes storytelling, retelling, reading aloud/and engaging in related texts, shared writing and frequent opportunities to draw write and explore all the concepts presented. All of the educators helped coach the kids at each station by modeling and adapting the activity so that success was experienced by all.

Melanie posted some pictures of the stations. I will just clarify the purpose and the intent for each station.

**The Make Eggs and Connect with Blue Highlighters Station:** I used long strips of paper and provided round stickers and markers so kids could practice making circles and long lines. They were encouraged to connect the “eggs” with a long line “river”. This idea was first presented to me by my friend Betty Shultz. Betty wrote a fabulous book called “**Basic Tools for Beginning Writers**”. She tried out many of her ideas in Nanaimo classrooms. This station helps the very young child **develop fine motor skills**. Making a straight line is no easy task. By connecting the eggs the children happily practiced their pencil grip and control of the felt marker. Many of the children filled the long strip with countless circles (eggs) and created a river bank by making thick green lines with the green highlighter. (Melanie and I encouraged the day care staff to follow up with this activity by providing a bit of structure at the painting easel station by asking the kids to make big thick lines wavy lines, zigzag etc.)

**The Match the Letter Rocks into a Round Cluster Station** -that represents the salmon eggs (the redd): This station is all about scaffolding letter recognition while staying within the skill level of the emergent reader. Three and four year olds are big fans of **matching** and this is what the kids were basically doing. We made a big deal of the letter S and B...you guessed it... S for Salmon and B for Bear. Referring back to the stories helped make more connections.

**The Salmon Mural:** Melanie helped guide a beautiful art project where all the kids contributed to the making of the river mural. The kids glued sticks down to represent some of the obstacles salmon might encounter and arranged countless salmon. One of our ideas was for the kids to create **the pattern** red and green using those circles that you can lick or glue. This pattern would represent the colourful sockeye with the green head and the red body that was so nicely photographed by moi at the Adams River. The mural is a work in progress and the day care and kindergarten kids were encouraged to keep adding to the river until it was stuffed with sockeye.

**The final part of each lesson sequence is all about **transforming and personalizing** the new information. We are asking the kids to apply, reflect and integrate their new learning into their schema. (The kid's schema is their entire knowledge about salmon.) This is where kids are challenged to demonstrate their understanding of the ideas presented.**

Melanie and I had a short amount of time to share some ways that the kids might extend their new learning in the day care and kindergarten settings. They might be encouraged to act out or retell the stories using simple props. The "Down by the River Song" could be acted out at circle time. The basket of salmon stories and related books about salmon should be made available for the kids to look at. The Are you Hungry Little Bear? Story could be presented to the Grade One class through the Readers Theatre format that we introduced during the story hour.

Melanie and I had a great conversation about the morning. We thought the kids were engaged and successful. We would love to hear from you. Join us in our reflections after our Wednesday Literacy Session. We decided Ravens, Seagulls and Eagles would be the focus for our next theme.

Happy Reading and remember "Three Stories a Day...That is the Way!"

Donna Klockars

Retired Literacy Teacher

P.S. All of the resources we referenced are available through [strongnations.com](http://strongnations.com)