



B.C. First Nations Head Start Summer Science Program

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IN THE SUMMER OF 2001, HEILTSUK HEAD START HELD IT'S FIRST SUMMER SCIENCE PROGRAM. Our idea was to offer a summer camp project for younger children, and it seemed natural to base it on our community's biggest natural resource—the ocean.

The Summer Science Program provides fun and educational activities focused mainly on the ocean environment surrounding our community of Bella Bella. The targeted age group is three to six years, but we often have younger and sometimes older siblings attend too.

In highlighting our community's positive role with our ocean environment, as well as Heiltsuk uses of the ocean, we do field trips to various local entities. We also have community leaders and Elders visit our sessions. Field trips have included visits to the band-operated Salmon Enhancement Facility, where we've watched the tagging process of salmon fry, to our Heiltsuk-owned and operated processing plant, and beach trips where our Chief Councillor has demonstrated a scuba dive and brought deep-sea creatures for the children to view.

We've also had visits from Elders who have shared Heiltsuk stories of ocean creatures and tales, as well as a Heiltsuk archaeology student who has come in to teach us about fish traps, and even accompany us to view an actual fish trap.

We often do beach walks, and each child has their own age-appropriate microscope and see-through buckets for the beach adventures. Healthy snacks are provided at each session, usually based on the ocean as well—for example, salmon sandwiches and herring eggs might be provided.

Some of the specific science concepts/themes we have explored in the program have included the lifecycle of salmon, mammals vs. fish, plankton, underwater geography, and volcanoes. We also include a focus on boating/water safety, because it's a necessity for our children to learn the importance of lifejackets and general ocean safety.

Over the years, we've had excellent parent participation. One helpful mom baked a wonderful ocean treasure cake. Some parents have graciously done photography for us. One parent used her amazing basket-weaving skills to do lessons with the children, and another parent provided

us with CD burning of children's ocean songs.

Oceans Canada has been a great resource for helpful materials, such as tattoos and stickers, as well as certificates and posters.

Parents find this program ideal for the summer months when school is out, the community appreciates how the program highlights the strength and independence of the community and its resources, and Head Start staff enjoy a creative opportunity to incorporate Head Start components into a science-focused program which builds on our community's rich relationship with the ocean.

Jessica Schooner

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Feel free to contact Jessica if you are interested in starting up a program like this and have questions.

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