



B.C. First Nations Head Start **Environmental Education in Our Backyard**

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Made possible by funding from Health Canada under the Community Mobilization Committee of Lumby, B.C., the Okanagan Indian Band has created a wonderful opportunity for teaching children environmental education—and much more—through its community vegetable garden project. This is the garden's second year. With grant money, the Head Start program bought seeds, soils, tools, and plants.

The children have had many opportunities to explore the garden in its various stages. Some helped dig up the soil, and many took advantage of this work to see what lives in the soil. On a daily basis in the early spring, they would go into the garden in search of the creatures that lived there, and found worms, beetles, earwigs and many other life forms. This was very popular!

In conjunction with the outdoor garden, the children worked in the classroom learning about seeds, plants and other garden components. They planted an indoor garden and were able to transplant some plants to the garden outside. They learned that not all plants transplant very successfully and did comparison experiments by direct sowing of seeds and transplanting.

They have planted lettuce, beans and peas so that there will be a constant supply of produce well into the fall. The children weed and water the garden, and are taking care of the plants on an on-going basis. This has provided even more opportunities for learning how to care for plants and discussions about what all living things need in order to survive. Parents and elders help out, and vegetables are donated to the Okanagan Elders New Horizons program.

The community garden is an ideal setting for experiential learning – learning by doing. The children participate in planning, planting and taking care of their garden. They see how to grow healthy food for their families. As they play in the soils and touch different textures of the plants and vegetables, they develop gross motor skills. They learn about the cycles of nature, and about what the land can support in their own back yards.