

## Educational Program Curriculum Overview

Outdoor Environmental Learning (OEL) is well supported by the new curriculum. The curriculum changes present an opportunity for SD44 and Cheakamus Centre (CC) to provide leadership in supporting innovation and excellence in teaching and learning, and to further implement the goal of sustainability practices across the district and the province.

At Cheakamus Centre, the learning process uses the environment as a starting point to teach concepts in subjects across the curriculum. Programs are aligned with the new curriculum in a variety of ways:

Firstly, teachers connect environmental field studies and **indigenous** cultural studies with the Big Ideas, content and curricular competencies to develop a cross-curricular learning experience. *"Students will develop place-based knowledge about the area in which they live, learning about and building on Aboriginal knowledge and other traditional knowledge of the area. This provides a basis for an intuitive relationship with and respect for the natural world; connections to their ecosystem and community; and a sense of relatedness that encourages lifelong harmony with nature."* (Science Goals and Rationale, BC Curriculum).

Secondly, programs are closely aligned with the core competencies, as student **inquiry** related to **place** provides opportunities to develop critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills. Students 'learn to do' (curricular, core competencies) and 'learn about' (Big Ideas, content) at the same time. In this way, knowledge, skills and process are tied together in a meaningful way.

Thirdly, **community**-living experience, an integral part of Cheakamus Centre programs, fosters the development of personal and social proficiencies. These are key elements of the [core competencies](#) found in the new curriculum.

*"Student's develop awareness and take responsibility for their social, physical, and natural environments by working independently and collaboratively for the benefit of others, communities, and the environment."* (Personal and Social Development Competency, BC Curriculum).

Finally, CC programs support **personalized**, student-centered learning, as students **inquire** about concepts, topics and issues relevant to their lives and **community**.

CC programs support the intended outcomes of the redesigned curriculum, including: to enable students to apply their learning in a real world context; to prepare students as life-long learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and finally, to equip students as active (& ecologically literate) citizens in their local and global communities.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### PLACE

Place-based learning involves hands-on, real-world learning experiences grounded in the environment and local community (Demarest, 2015). The critical elements of place-based learning include: focus on learning in place and of place; cross-curricular (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000); inquiry-based (LaBlanca, 2014); and learner-centered (Smith, 2002). A place-based approach increases academic achievement; helps students develop stronger ties to their community; enhances students' appreciation for the natural world; and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active contributing citizens (Sobel, 2004, p.7).

### COMMUNITY

Community-living experiences (may) help learners to develop [personal competencies](#), such as personal awareness and responsibility. *“Personal awareness and responsibility includes the skills, strategies and dispositions that help students stay healthy and active, regulate emotions, respect their own rights and the rights of others, manage stress, and persevere in difficult situations. Students who demonstrate personal awareness and responsibility demonstrate self-respect and express a sense of personal well-being”* (BC Ministry New Curriculum docs).

Community-living experiences (may) help learners to develop [social competencies](#) such as social responsibility. *“Social responsibility involves the ability and disposition to consider the interdependence of people with each other and the natural environment; to contribute positively to one’s family, community, society, and the environment; to resolve problems peacefully; to empathize with others and appreciate their perspectives; and to create and maintain healthy relationships”* (BC Ministry New Curriculum docs).

### INQUIRY

Inquiry is a student-centered approach, where student questions play a central role in what is studied (Smith, 2002). In place-based learning, ‘place’ is the context for inquiring and making connections with the real world. Students ‘learn to do’ (curricular, core competencies) and ‘learn about’ (Big Ideas, content) at the same time. In this way, knowledge, skills and process are all linked. Students inquire about concepts, topics and issues relevant to their lives and community. Student inquiry related to place provides opportunities to develop critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills.

### PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

The learner’s relationship to the natural world is often referred to as ecological identity. The development of ecological identity involves a direct experience in nature, inquiry and reflection. A learner’s ecological identity is said to inform future decision-making (Thomasshow, 1995). Additionally, exposure to the natural environment improves mental health and well-being, and promotes social-emotional skill development (Louv, 2008).

### FIRST PEOPLES’ PERSPECTIVES

In place-based learning, students develop knowledge about place, learning and building upon aboriginal knowledge and other traditional knowledge of the Coast Salish People. First Peoples’ Principles of Learning are inter-woven throughout place-based learning experiences. *“Students are expected to be able to apply First Peoples’ perspectives and knowledge, other ways of knowing, and local knowledge as sources of information”* (Science 7, Curriculum Competency, BC Curriculum).

## References

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