Learning Within and Beyond the Classroom:  
a 21st Century Model for Teaching and Learning  
Campus Calgary/Open Minds

Communities of practice were pioneered by modern corporations that needed to support, strengthen and nurture new leaders. “Some of the core questions have been: How can people most quickly learn new skills? How is knowledge developed and shared within an organization? The concept ‘community of practice’ was developed to illuminate that learning is a social experience. We humans learn best when in relationship with others who share a common practice. We self-organize as communities with those who have skills and knowledge that are important to us... Communities of practice demonstrate that it is natural for people to seek out those who have knowledge and experience that they need. As people find each other and exchange ideas, good relationships develop and a community forms. This community becomes a rich marketplace where knowledge and experience are shared. It also becomes an incubator where new knowledge, skills, and competencies develop... workers learn complex skills in rapid time when seated next to those who have the skill... workers reach out electronically across the globe with a question to colleagues, and receive back immediate, expert advice... people learn best in community, when they are engaged with one another, when everyone is both student and teacher, expert and apprentice, in a rich exchange of experiences and learnings.”

Finding Our Way – Leadership for an Uncertain Time  
Margaret Wheatley, 2005

“I hear the soft sound of birds in the distance, but I cannot tell what bird it is. I can hear more than one. I hear the gentle wind quietly rushing past the bushes where I sit. I can slightly hear the sounds of a little cricket jumping around in the distance. I smell the fresh scent of the trees around me. I hear the sound of a hawk rising through the air. If you listen ever so carefully, you can hear the bugs busily rushing to their homes. All these sounds put together and you get the sound of the spirit of the forest.

Grade 5
Background

Campus Calgary/Open Minds (CC/OM) is a dynamic, leading force that goes beyond the conventional thoughtscapes of institutionalised education. In collaboration with corporate Calgary and local community venues, the Calgary Board of Education has lead the development of this unique educational model that addresses the needs of 21st century learning. These diverse groups share the common vision of enhancing student learning within and beyond the four walls of the classroom. Since its inception as a weeklong experience at the Calgary Zoo in 1993, CC/OM has expanded to 12 sites within the City of Calgary:
- Chevron Zoo School
- Chevron Museum School
- Chevron Science School
- Chevron Cross Conservation School
- University School
- Petro-Canada Bird School
- COP School
- City Hall School
- Stampede School
- Aero Space School
- Talisman Centre School
- Fire School

Currently, 225 teachers and more than 6,500 students in Calgary annually reap the benefits of these rich learning experiences.

Campus Calgary/Open Minds creates opportunities for students and teachers to move their classroom into the community for an entire week. These sites are fascinating, educationally rich environments that engage students in exploration and discovery. Each of the eleven sites offers a unique lens with which to examine the curriculum. Eleanor Duckworth talks about the value of encouraging children’s curiosity, or as she puts it – “the having of wonderful ideas is what I call the essence of intellectual development” (p. 1) She says that teachers can provide occasions for those ideas by being willing to listen to children’s ideas and by “providing a setting that suggests wonderful ideas...as they are caught up in intellectual problems that are real to them” (p.7). These experiences create unique opportunities where “students will acquire the skills, attitudes and knowledge to achieve personal highest potential.” (CBE Ends 4)

At the site, students are involved in hands-on learning and spend extended periods of time observing and reflecting within an authentic
setting. They have the opportunity to make informed choices about their learning which allows them to be active participants in their educational experiences. These opportunities deepen student appreciation and play a significant role in helping to foster attitudes and understandings of cultural awareness, civic pride, community responsibility, and stewardship. The CC/OM experience truly opens the minds of students, giving them a clearer idea of how they fit into the big picture, and the role they play within it. They become an informed and involved member of their community. Once back in the classroom, students apply their learning when they take up current issues which push their understandings beyond their local setting to national and global communities. (CBE Ends 3) Being engaged in their learning encourages regular self assessment. This ownership creates the ability for students to see their own growth over time helping them recognize that they are in charge of their success.

The week on site is a catalyst for a long-term, interdisciplinary study that embodies the Alberta Program of Studies. The experience encourages and promotes inquiry, problem solving and critical thinking for students, teachers, parents and community organizations as they interact with experts at each site. As students learn from and share their knowledge with these experts they not only gain academic awareness but they also develop a strong sense of respect and fair treatment of others. When they prepare themselves for working in the community they begin to develop “the charter to do what is right, act morally with wisdom, and balance individual concerns with the rights and needs of others.” (CBE Ends 5)

The program length, the deep thinking about first hand experiences that transcend curricular lines and the time to slow down and reflect transform learning to its highest levels. In 2002 Cathy Cochrane’s research for her Master’s Thesis focused on the ability of students to communicate ideas through writing. The study was designed to investigate the impact that the CC/OM program has on the quality of reflective writing of Calgary students. The results clearly illustrate the significant impact this program has had on student learning.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Scores &amp; Percentages</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test (October)</td>
<td>Post-test (February)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>2.5/5.0 50%</td>
<td>2.8/5.0 56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CC/OM Program</td>
<td>2.5/5.0 50%</td>
<td>3.7/5.0 74%</td>
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The results of this study support the notion that education can and should take place in a variety of settings and in collaboration with experts in the community. “The opportunities for long-term exploration, student ownership, social construction of knowledge, inquiry, and on-going journal writing provided within the context of the CC/OM program have a significant impact on student writing performance.” (Cochrane, 2002) The CC/OM program encourages teaching practice to become personalized; aligned with student strengths, interests and needs. The result is that “each student will possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for academic success and be effectively prepared for life, work and further learning.” (CBE Ends 2)

Each of the available weeks are a full five days in length. In Gillian Kydd’s recent Doctorial Thesis she outlines the importance of this amount of time. “Time is a crucial factor in the learning that occurs with our program. We observed right away that the behaviour we saw on Monday changed dramatically as the week went by. Monday is the ‘surfing’ day, when the students are getting used to the site…Tuesday they are beginning to be calmer...The following days provide more and more ownership…By Friday...their thinking has become more and more fine-tuned which is evident in their writing and their conversations and questions.” (p.70) Site coordinators use the four day weeks in the school calendar to pilot new innovations, plan for upcoming weeks, further their contacts within their community organization, take advantage of professional learning opportunities and as a group participate in CC/OM meetings.

Classroom teachers work closely with their chosen site coordinator and the CC/OM team to plan their week, which is the focus of many months of school-based study. The site coordinator at each community site acts as a resource guide and facilitator for the classroom teacher in designing and implementing their program of studies. They provide innovative and creative ways for students to gain a deeper understanding of and sensitivity to the world around them. Classroom teachers committed to quality learning within the community and their own classroom are instrumental in the success of the Campus Calgary/Open Minds Program. These mutually respectful relationships result in intense, individual professional learning for teachers. Incorporation of current best practice, school board initiatives and provincial educational directives combined with this support throughout the year ensures continued growth and development for all participants.
The following illustrates the support and process for a teacher as he or she prepares for a CC/OM experience:

**General Information Meeting (usually held in late January):**
- Designed for teachers new to the CC/OM experience
- The philosophy of the program and the application process are presented so that teachers gain an understanding of the program and expectations
- The site coordinators and CC/OM staff are introduced

**Application Process (applications are submitted in late March):**
- Teachers write a proposal that indicates what their big idea or question for the next year might be. Although the proposal is not definitive, it does allow teachers to begin to formulate their long range plans for the following year
- Teachers are chosen based on a variety of different criteria:
  - The congruency of the proposal with the CC/OM philosophy
  - Balance between new and experienced teachers with CC/OM programs
  - Balance between CBE, CSSD and Independent schools
  - Balance between elementary, junior high and senior high classes

**Site Specific Information Meeting:**
- Provides initial opportunity for site familiarization and the development of relationships that could lead to mentoring within the program
- Presentation of expectations and some basic logistics involved with a week in the community

**Summer Inservice (held in early July or late August for 2 or 3 days for all teachers attending a specific site):**
- Immersion in the Campus Calgary / Open Minds philosophy, and in the rich resources of the site
- Creation of relationships that build throughout the year as the mentoring process develops
- Provision of professional learning for teachers and site coordinators through a sharing of knowledge by all involved. Current best practices for teaching and learning are explored and utilized
- Ideas and resources are shared among participating teachers

Planning Meeting (held approximately 6 to 8 weeks prior to the scheduled week in the community)
- Facilitated by the CC/OM team and the community site coordinator, this meeting allows teachers to examine their big idea or question for the year. The conversations are rich and provide opportunities to explore many aspects of the Alberta Program of Studies. Curriculum connections and site possibilities are examined with the thought of meeting the needs of the teacher and his/her class to develop a custom designed week at the site
- Logistical items and forms are addressed to ensure that all policies and procedures are in place
- A supportive relationship with all stakeholders is further enhanced

Scheduling Meeting (held approximately 3 weeks prior to the scheduled week)
- Held at the site between the teacher and the site coordinator
- Allows the teacher to examine the site one last time
- A basic framework for the week is presented by the site coordinator and with teacher input a schedule is developed for the week
- The teacher ensures that the educational needs of his/her students will be met by the learning experiences that have been designed

Week in the Community
- Teacher driven as the teacher knows his/her students
- Site coordinator facilitates the utilization of the physical and human resources available
- CC/OM Education Coordinator visits during the week
- Thinking begins about a possible action that the class can take to celebrate the learning and to cement the experiences into the students’ learning
Post Week

- Site coordinator maintains contact with teacher, updating them regarding issues and what’s happening at the site
- Teachers and their classes share their learning with their school community and parents

The Campus Calgary/Open Minds program has been built on relationships. When Margaret Wheatley speaks of the ‘new story’ she speaks of relationship building that will divert us from the notion that “uncertainty became our insistent twenty-first-century companion, where leadership strategies have taken a great leap backward to the familiar territory of command and control.” (p. 4) She writes: “that life needs to link with other life, to form systems of relationships where all individuals are better supported by the system they have created.” (p.25) “Simultaneously, the process of organizing involves developing relationships from a shared sense of purpose, exchanging and creating information, learning constantly, paying attention to the results of our efforts, coadapting, coevolving, developing wisdom as we learn, staying clear about our purpose, being alert to changes from all directions. Living systems give form to their organization and evolve those forms into new ones, because of exquisite capacities to create meaning together, to communicate, and to notice what’s going on in the moment. These are the capacities that give any organization its true aliveness, that support self-organization.” (p.27)

In the CC/OM model funding partners, community sites and education institutions collectively share the responsibility and privilege of ensuring that the philosophical tenants of the program are upheld. These groups are inextricably linked such that if one group wants to make a change, the ripples of that change are felt by the others. Open communication between all members of the collaboration is essential. The following chart indicates the benefits to each partner:

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<th>Education</th>
<th>Community Site</th>
<th>Corporate Calgary</th>
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<td>o Students become responsible citizens by being informed and involved members of their community</td>
<td>o Community site interacts with Calgary’s youth</td>
<td>o Corporate sponsors are proud to be involved in CC/OM programs – often referred to as ‘flagship’ initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Students possess knowledge, skills</td>
<td>o Community site increases its understanding of how people learn resulting in</td>
<td>o Increased awareness of</td>
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and attitudes required for academic success and preparation for life, work and further learning
- Students gain a heightened awareness of career choices
- Student learning improves
- Students are motivated to reach their highest potential
- Teachers are empowered to take the learning gained from their CC/OM experience and put it to use in their classrooms
- Teachers learn new skills and the professional development gained allows teachers to mentor colleagues in the schools
- Teachers implement current best practices at CC/OM weeks such as journaling, inquiry, object based learning, use of literature, sketching and reflection, assessment strategies, differentiation, brain-based learning
- Significant influence on other professional development opportunities within school districts
- Mentoring opportunities within schools
- Mentorship with implementations of high quality educational programs and resources creating more effective programs for the community at large
- Community site increases its awareness of the Alberta Program of Studies so that its education programs more closely align with specific curricula
- Community site incorporates current best practice into all of their educational programming to further engage the community at large with the site (eg: Chevron Learning Pathway at Prince’s Island)
- Further educational development and opportunities through mentorship with education professionals
- Effective education within the community
- Innovative way for corporations to be involved directly with the community and Calgary’s youth
- Employees are energized about working with students, and take ownership of the program
- Public relations for the funder is enhanced
- Employees share their experiences with CC/OM with colleagues and morale within the company is raised
- Community relations ideas and concepts are shared amongst companies
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Campus Calgary/Open Minds continues to grow and evolve with the strong commitment from each of these stakeholders. As well as expansion within Calgary, the program has been replicated at five sites in Edmonton, one in Vancouver, three in Lansing Michigan, one in Moncton, New Brunswick, one in London, Ontario, one in Pender Harbour, BC, and four sites at the International School in Singapore. There is little doubt that there will be more blurring of the boundaries between traditional school settings and the community in the future. It is becoming increasingly evident that education can and should take place in many venues and with many people who are not considered educators in the traditional sense. This move toward non-traditional learning settings is supported by current understanding of how people learn. Children and adults learn best when engaged in interesting experiences that invite purposeful learning. All learners should be given these opportunities and thus programs such as CC/OM can become a basic and valuable component of education at all levels. Moving learners into the community is an imperative, and an inevitability. Creating an accessible International Community of Practice based on this model of teaching and learning will lead the way for communities throughout the world to participate in such rich, authentic learning experiences.

“The way children best learn the complex skills and dispositions of adulthood is through keeping real company with the kind of experts they hope to become (and...through keeping company with the real things of the world).”

Deborah Meier
In Schools We Trust
Bibliography

CBE Three-Year Education Plan 2008-2011


