

## AUTHENTIC LEARNING 101

1) *What is authentic learning?*

2) *How is it achieved?*

3) *Why is it a great way for kids to learn?*

4) *What is your role in authentic learning?*

### 1) What is authentic learning?

**Authentic learning is real-life learning.** Students solve real life problems and present their findings to audiences beyond the classroom.

Examples:

- High-Tech High School in California, where students create machines, write plays, design new technology and more to answer problems – even historical mysteries! The results of their research are shared with their parents, friends and community at events at the end of the school year.
- A middle school held a medieval trade fair where students researched trades, traders and economies, then took on the roles of traders, dressing the part, producing items they would trade, building market stalls and trading when the community was brought in for the fair.

### 2) How is it achieved?

**Four steps to authentic learning** (adapted from *Educational Research Newsletter and Webinars*)

- Authentic learning activities involve solving real-world problems, ultimately findings may be presented beyond the classroom. Students choose ways to address the problem, and are responsible to stakeholders outside the classroom for the results.
- Use of open-ended inquiry, creative and critical thinking, and metacognition (knowing what skills or processes to use to solve a particular problem). Students will learn skills that can be applied in other aspects of life.
- Students work in groups as a community of learners. Kids cooperate, share ideas, divide up tasks as they see fit.
- **Students direct their own learning.** You or they may set the goal, but they figure out how to reach it, with appropriate content guidance.

### 3) Why is it a great way for kids to learn?

**Authentic learning focuses on the process, not *just* the results.**

- Much of the current educational system is focused on memorizing factual content, which uses only about 3% of the brain, according to educational psychology studies. This approach worked well to prepare workers for industrial age jobs, where there was a premium on following instructions and repetitive tasks.
- With today's internet an entire world of content is instantly available. And though it is still important to understand the basics of history, science and math, content memorization is not as critical as it once was.
- The skills that are most in demand now and in the future involve not just knowing information, but knowing how to find it, knowing how to synthesize it and how to use it to solve problems. Authentic learning helps students practice these skills.
- Examples of this that we are most familiar with may be the Model U.N., 4-H Club projects, and National History Day.
- When students have to access community members, visit local community sites, organize shows or presentations, and make presentations that stand up to public scrutiny, they have invested intellectually and emotionally, and may have learned several new skills.

### 4) What is your role in authentic learning?

**You become a facilitator, not a dictator.**

- As a museum educator for an authentic learning experience, you will provide the challenge, necessary content, criteria, time restraints, materials and support for students to achieve success.
- At that point you become a nurturer, a facilitator, and a guide. When asked questions, prompt students with ideas to find answers. Don't give answers, as tempting as it may be! **The emphasis becomes the quality of the process and innovation.**

**What are the 5 C's in Virginia education?**

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Citizenship
- Communication
- Collaboration