

Museums and Constructivism

Museums have always provided high-interest opportunities for learning. In the 21st Century, modern museums like the West Virginia State Museum add more dimensions to those opportunities. The design of the modern museum raises inquiry and intrigue through its specially designed discovery rooms and show path. Artifacts and human interest stories project themselves at the curious learner and the avid visitor. The museum is relevant to every West Virginian and for our visitors who are interested in the special fabric of West Virginia, its people, and its history.

The West Virginia State Museum Education Team welcomes you and your students to investigate, discover, and “own” the learning before, during, and after your visit. Much of the curriculum that has been designed has taken a constructivist approach at providing students with engaging lessons that raise historical inquiry. The constructivist approach to facilitation and learning allows students to scaffold experiences into concepts. In museums learning takes place best through historical inquiry and student imagination. This idea is at the very root of “the perfect marriage” between museums and constructivist teaching and learning.

At the root of constructivism is inquiry, or the ability for students to ask their own questions about what is relevant in learning. Inquiry is the basis for Project-Based Learning and its close partner, Problem-Based Learning, an effort to take real world problems that tied to the families of West Virginia. Children in the 21st Century have access to tremendous amounts of information, which is difficult to synthesis. By utilizing Project-Based Learning in these middle school units, teachers will be able to tie into students experiences through a process for learning that students can utilize to make concepts out of previously acquired information. This is all done with a standards based approach. Teachers using this type of learning in a museum setting can set the stage for students being in charge of their own learning.

The West Virginia Department of Education, in partnership with the 21st Century Skills Initiative has integrated the 21st Century Skills into the Content Skills and Objectives at all grade levels. These skills are addressed in all Inquiry-Based, Project Based, and Problem Based lessons and units in this curriculum guide. Students thinking critically, communicating, collaborating, and applying their learning to new experiences is at the core of the 21st Century Skills. Constructivist facilitation and learning can address all of these standards consistently.

Ultimately, experiences that students have and should build on following their visit to the museum encourage the building of the museum’s new learning community of teachers and students. In today’s technology rich schools and with the emergence of

technology savvy instruction, opportunities exist that can keep students and teachers connected to their new learning partners at the West Virginia State Museum in dynamic ways. The Education Team is happy to have you onboard as we investigate the past in order to secure a strong future for our school children.

Constructivism
Instructional Philosophy that utilizes scaffolding in the learning process. Inquiry is embedded in ALL types of learning tied to Constructivism. Inquiry, Project Based, Problem Based and Case Based Reasoning all fall into this philosophical school. Students build indexes/personal libraries in their minds metacognitively that have been encouraged by their own questions. In Constructivist classrooms, students are in charge of their own learning.

