

2018

# Student-Perceived Authenticity of Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education

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Student-Perceived Authenticity of Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education

A Thesis by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Educational Leadership

Concentration in Proficiency-Based Education

May 2018

## ABSTRACT

## Student-Perceived Authenticity of Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education

by Brandon Terrill

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of authenticity that students perceive in learning tasks across four subject areas in a proficiency-based public high school: an English research paper, an Art ceramics project, a French writing task, and a Spanish writing task. Student perceptions on tasks they completed earlier in the semester were collected using a 10-question questionnaire. The questionnaire sought student feedback on their perception of the task's selection and value of topic, impact of topic on school, community, and self, focus on expression of ideas vs. focus on conventions, authentic audience, and level of motivation to complete the task. The conclusions regarding the level of student-perceived authenticity are: a) there is a connection between student selection and value of topic and motivation, b) the task's impact on school, community, or self did not impact student motivation, c) focus on conventions did not negatively impact student motivation, and d) authentic audiences are connected to lower rates of student motivation

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## **Introduction**

### **Background**

A hallmark of proficiency-based education is the creation of a set of standards for each course or subject area for which students must show proficiency before moving on to the next level and the next set of standards. Teachers in proficiency-based systems use these standards to give specific targeted feedback to students on their progress towards proficiency.

Proficiency-based schools often take a learner-centered approach to classroom pedagogy in that time frames for reaching proficiency can vary from student to student depending on learning style and learning needs.

### **Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Schools**

A considerable amount of time is spent on the development, revision, and unpacking of these standards in proficiency-based schools, as well as logistical methods of tracking and reporting out on student progress towards proficiency. Scoring scales to denote targets for proficiency, partial proficiency, and proficiency with distinction are developed for every standard, and the scale is tied to a taxonomy of cognitive skills to ensure proper levels of rigor. Considerably less time has been spent investigating what teachers in proficiency-based schools actually have their students do to show their proficiency or progress towards proficiency on the given standards and scoring scales. This research project set out to study the learning tasks that students in proficiency-based schools are required to complete to show their progress towards

proficiency on a given standard. Learning tasks across four content areas were analyzed and students were surveyed to investigate the learning tasks in four areas - choice of a valued topic, focus on expression of ideas over conventions, impact on school, community, or self, and authentic audience. The study strived to survey students in a proficiency-based school to gauge these four areas in the required learning tasks, to find commonalities, to study whether a connection between these areas and student motivation could be found, and if found to use those connections to make recommendations to teachers in proficiency-based schools when creating new learning tasks that students will be motivated to complete.

### **School Setting**

Hall-Dale High School in Farmingdale, Maine serves approximately 600 students in grades 6-12. Hall-Dale has used a proficiency-based grading system and learner-centered classroom pedagogy since the 2009-2010 school year. Most of the students in this study have spent nine years in a proficiency-based school system. The 12th-graders in this study have been in a proficiency-based environment since they were in 4th grade, the 11th-graders since 3rd grade, and the 10th-graders since 2nd grade. Many of them could not remember much of learning in any other type of school system. This makes the sample of students from Hall-Dale High School some of the most experienced students with the proficiency-based approach that could be found in the state of Maine, and perhaps in the United States. This makes them an ideal set of students to survey regarding student-perceived authenticity of learning tasks in proficiency-based schools.

### **Literature Review**



Engaging with authentic learning tasks leads to higher student achievement (Newmann et al., 1996). Newmann defines authentic learning tasks as having three key components: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school (Newmann, 1996). In the proficiency-based education movement in the state of Maine, the focus has been on developing descriptions of the base knowledge and skills that all students must demonstrate proficiency on in order to advance levels and graduate high school (Stump & Silvernail, 2014). There is no method to verify that the learning tasks required of students to demonstrate proficiency and advance through levels are intellectually challenging.

Previous research has established that when students engage with learning tasks that contain the three key components of authenticity, students produce work that demonstrates higher-order thinking, contains elaborated written communication, and applies to life beyond the classroom (Newmann, 1996). Research has shown a link between students who engage with intellectually challenging tasks and students who perform highly on standardized tests (Newmann, et al., 1996). Furthermore, research shows that the biggest difference between teachers who score high on value-added measures and teachers who score low on value-added measures is the level of authenticity or intellectual challenge that they require of their students on learning tasks (Alston & Brown, 2015).

Building on the work of Newmann et al., researchers have asked who should determine the level of application to life beyond the classroom. Often times in previous research, the measurement of relevance or application to life beyond the classroom was made by the classroom teacher or curriculum coordinators. Now, researchers are asking students themselves for their perceived level of authenticity on writing tasks, or the student's opinion on how

connected the tasks are to their lives beyond school and their funds of knowledge, including community and global relevance, personal relevance, and academic relevance (Behizadeh & Engelhard Jr, 2014). The perceived level of authenticity in learning tasks has been found to increase intrinsic student motivation (Behizadeh & Engelhard Jr, 2014).

A hallmark of proficiency-based education is the defining of standards that students must show proficiency on in order to advance levels and graduate from high school (Marzano & Kendall, 1996). Students are scored not on their overall performance in a course like in the past, but instead students are scored on their progress through learning targets. These targets are arranged in proficiency scales in increasing order of cognitive complexity (Marzano et al., 2013). However, the learning tasks that are required of students in order to demonstrate proficiency on these targets are left up to individual teachers and curriculum groups to develop. There is no method of scoring the resulting required learning tasks for their level of intellectual authenticity. Furthermore, the focus of these groups that have developed the standards-based grading system upon which much of the proficiency-based education movement in Maine has been based have focused entirely on the base targets students must meet in order to demonstrate proficiency (Marzano, et al, 2013). Targets involving higher levels of complexity are not addressed in the literature and again are left to teachers and curriculum groups to create on their own without scoring mechanisms to ensure their level of intellectual challenge.

Studies that have focused on student achievement as a result of proficiency-based education are scarce. The studies that have been conducted have found no significant improvement in student achievement as a result of proficiency-based education (Stump & Silvernail, 2014). There is no research specifically looking at the level of intellectual challenge in

the tasks that are required of students to demonstrate proficiency or the tasks that are optional for students to go beyond base proficiency.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the level of intellectual challenge in the tasks that are required of students and the higher-level tasks that are optional for students in proficiency-based systems, and to examine the number of students who engage with each level of tasks. Through this work, we can discover the level of intellectual challenge in tasks that students are engaging with in proficiency-based systems. We can offer a method of assessing and increasing the level of intellectual challenge in proficiency-based learning tasks, which based on the research will correspond with an increase in intellectually complex student work and an improvement on standardized test scores. Administrators, curriculum coordinators, and teachers can use these recommendations and scoring methods to increase the level of intellectual challenge in the required learning tasks in their proficiency-based systems.

### **Authentic Learning Tasks**

Authentic learning tasks are defined as requiring the construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school (Newmann, 1996). When constructing knowledge in authentic learning tasks, students must organize, synthesize, interpret, explain, or evaluate complex information. Furthermore, students must consider alternatives in addressing a concept, problem, or issue (Newmann, 1996). When conducting disciplined inquiry, students must show understanding and the use of ideas and theories considered central to the specified content area. Disciplined inquiry requires students to use methods of research or communication central to an academic or professional discipline (Newmann, 1996). Furthermore, students are expected to elaborate on their understandings and conclusions through extended writing (Newmann, 1996).

When learning tasks display value beyond school, the tasks ask students to address a concept or problem that they are likely to encounter in life beyond the classroom and to communicate their knowledge to an audience beyond the teacher, classroom, and/or school building (Newmann, 1996).

Behizadeh and Engelhard Jr. (2014) have challenged the notion that the measure of relevance or connection to life beyond school in the previous authentic learning task literature should be determined by teachers, curriculum coordinators, or administrators. The researchers argue that the relevance of tasks to life beyond school can only be determined by the students themselves, since they are the ones who are completing the tasks and connecting it to the lives they live beyond their school walls (2014). Behizadeh (2014) found three major factors emerge when she studied the reasons why student-perceived authenticity increases: choice of a valued topic, writing for impact, and dominance of expression over conventions. These three factors, along with a fourth: the students' need to share their work with an audience, correlate with an increase in student motivation to complete the writing task. These findings have led to a sea change in the literature on authenticity as the onus for determine connection to life beyond school is removed from the teacher or administrator and is instead placed on the students themselves.

Alston and Brown (2015) examined the writing tasks that high value-added teachers and low value-added teachers required of their students. The measure of value-added was dependent on their students' improvement on their standardized test scores. The researchers found that the biggest difference between teachers whose students improved their scores on standardized tests and teachers whose students did not improve their scores as much on standardized tests was the

level of intellectual challenge asked of their students on writing tasks according to Newmann's definition of authentic work. The typical tasks of teachers in the top quartile of value-added measure were more likely to require extended writing and disciplined inquiry. Lower quartile teachers' typical assignments were less demanding (Alston & Brown, 2015).

In a quantitative study of 24 public schools implementing innovative change efforts, Newmann and his associates examined 234 assessment tasks and 3,128 samples of the resulting student work from these tasks (Newmann, et al., 1996). The authenticity of the assessment tasks were combined with an examination of the level of authenticity of classroom instruction to assess the level of authentic pedagogy in the study. Newmann and his associates (1996) found that when authentic assessment tasks are combined with authentic instruction, an average student would increase from about the thirtieth percentile to about the sixtieth percentile. This effect of authentic pedagogy was observed across all grade levels, subjects, and demographic indicators. The researchers did not parcel out the individual effects of authentic assessments and authentic instruction within their definition of authentic pedagogy. However, it can be inferred that authentic learning tasks that require students to construct knowledge, conduct disciplined inquiry, and connect their work to life beyond school increases the level of quality in student work.

Newmann discusses school innovation that reflects an interest in active learning in his book *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality* (1996). Newmann concedes that school innovation efforts that emphasize active learning result in students showing more animated participation in learning activities (Newmann, 1996). However, Newmann warns that even active students can produce work that is intellectually weak. Without standards to

measure the intellectual quality of learning, reform efforts focused on active participation is misguided (Newmann, 1996). Student participation cannot become an end in itself regardless of the intellectual quality of the students' work (Newmann, 1996). In the results of a 1996 study conducted by Newmann and associates, the researchers suggested that school innovation efforts led to resistance on the part of educators and parents because active learning was emphasized more than intellectual quality. The researchers contend that if the implementation of student-centered practices were guided by explicit standards for authentic intellectual quality, then student performance would benefit, and educators and parents would be more likely to embrace student-centered school innovation efforts (Newmann et al., 1996).

In a 2007 report prepared for the Iowa Department of Education, Newmann and associates put forth a series of rubrics that were used to measure the level of intellectual complexity of assessment tasks, instruction, and student work. In 2014, Behizadeh and Engelhard validated a scale to measure student perceived authenticity of writing tasks. However, after a review of the literature, no such system of measurement exists for proficiency-based education schools in the state of Maine to measure the level of intellectual complexity or authenticity in their required learning targets and tasks.

### **Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education**

In their early work advocating for standards-based grading systems, Marzano and Kendall (1996) argue against the use of standardized tests to measure proficiency on standards. Instead, Marzano and Kendall argue that performance tasks, or authentic tasks, should be used as much as possible to assess student progress. Marzano and Kendall (1996) reference the work of Newmann and associates to define authentic tasks as situations in which students must construct

responses that demonstrate an application of real life knowledge. The authors describe these authentic assessments as requiring a great deal of time and effort (Marzano & Kendall, 1996). In fact, the authors claim that veteran teachers can usually only accomplish one authentic task per academic semester (Marzano & Kendall, 1996). This leads the authors to argue in favor of a standards-based structure with a small number of important standards and a small number of authentic assessments (Marzano & Kendall, 1996).

However, once the common core state standards (CCSS) were released, Marzano and associates released a book that advocates for the use of proficiency scales to measure the level of proficiency for each student on each standard. The CCSS standards were transposed into measurement topics, and measurement topics were given steps. Each step of each measurement topic was given three learning targets: the level two target contains the basic vocabulary and processes, the level three target is taken directly from the common core standards for what students need to demonstrate for skills and knowledge in order to advance, and the level four targets are meant to take the standard to a deeper level (Marzano et al., 2013). For English language arts classes, Marzano and associates advocated for creating between 32 and 35 measurement topics at each grade level (2013). This means that students would be required to demonstrate proficiency on 32 to 35 measurement topics each academic year, as measured through Marzano's proficiency scales. This seems to be in direct conflict with Marzano's earlier assertions that assessments should be authentic, and it might be only possible to conduct one truly authentic assessment per academic semester.

### **Highly-Complex Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education**

In Marzano and associates' 2013 book *Using Common Core Standards to Enhance Classroom Instruction and Assessment*, the authors advocate for the creation of proficiency scales to measure student progress towards proficiency on every measurement topic. The level two and level three targets, including the basic knowledge up to the level of analysis, are provided in the work. Complex targets are not included; instead, the authors use the language "in addition to score 3.0, the student demonstrates in-depth inferences and applications that go beyond what was taught" (Marzano et al., 2013). The authors advocate for a process of students individually moving from the level two knowledge to the level three targets on each measurement topic, leaving the complex level four targets as optional. The authors suggest that these complex level four targets should be developed by individual educators along with their students. The authors also suggest that this is easily done (2013). However, in their 2014 report, researchers from the University of Southern Maine describe the proficiency-based education movement in the state of Maine (Stump & Silvernail). The report (2014) details several different interpretations of the proficiency-based tenets of students needing to demonstrate proficiency before moving on and the ways in which students can demonstrate their proficiency on the base targets required of all students. On their website titled "Education Evolving", the Maine Department of Education advocates for a learner-centered approach to demonstrating proficiency on specific and rigorous standards (2014). Neither Marzano and associates' work (2013), the Stump and Silvernail report, or the Maine Department of Education website offer advice for educators on how to develop learning tasks with a high level of intellectual complexity in order to demonstrate proficiency. None of the sources indicate a suggested method of scoring learning opportunities for their intellectual complexity, nor a method of collecting student perception of



authenticity. Instead, the researchers have focused on students demonstrating the level of base proficiency required of all students before moving on to the next target.

## **Conclusion**

Newmann's work (1996), suggested that if students were exposed to highly complex learning opportunities more often, then their level of corresponding work would be of higher intellectual quality and students would score more highly on standardized tests. Behizadeh's work (2014) suggests that if students themselves see their required tasks as authentic, rather than the instructor determining authenticity, then student motivation and interest in the task will increase. Because of the lack of clarity in the literature on what highly complex learning targets and learning tasks are in proficiency-based education, educators often focus only on their students' progress through the basic levels and required levels of each measurement topic. There are no systems to measure the level of student-perceived authenticity in required learning targets and tasks in proficiency-based education schools in Maine. This research study will attempt to apply Behizadeh's findings (2014) to skill-based tasks being used in proficiency-based high schools in the state of Maine to determine the level of student-perceived authenticity, and support teachers in their development of highly complex learning targets and tasks.

## **Research Design**

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to investigate student perceived authenticity (SPA) of skill-based tasks in proficiency-based education systems to determine its connection to student motivation. Teachers in proficiency-based systems report a struggle to motivate students to complete their required tasks once they are allowed to go at their own pace without firm

deadlines. In response to this identified issue within the proficiency-based pedagogy, educators have worked to increase the intrinsic motivation students feel by enhancing the level of relevance or authenticity in the tasks we require students to complete to show their proficiency on our standards (Newmann, 1996). However, educators themselves have often been the ones who make the determination about a task's level of authenticity to students, students' current lives beyond school, and the life students will encounter beyond graduation (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2014). In this research project, I seek to remove the onus to determine the level of authenticity from the teacher and instead place it on the students. In the end, it doesn't matter if educators believe a task is authentic if the students who must complete the tasks disagree (Benizadeh, 2014). In this project, I seek to establish a system whereby students can report their perceived level of authenticity for any task, and both students and educators can use this reported level to inform the creation of future tasks.

### **The Research Question**

The research question for this study is: how can the level of student perceived authenticity be used to design skill-based tasks?

The first step in answering this research question is to establish whether or not there is a correlation between the level of student perceived authenticity for a skill-based task such as writing or painting and the level of motivation the student feels to complete the task. If the level of student perceived authenticity does indeed correlate with higher levels of student motivation, then teachers can use the SPA scale to revise and create skill-based tasks that students will be more motivated to complete. The four factors of the SPA scale - choice of valued topic, writing for impact, dominance of expression over conventions, and authentic audience - can be used as a

helpful guide for teachers to assess their own task creation. This is important because of the lack of guidance available for teachers in proficiency-based systems. While the standards or expected outcomes of learning are readily available in publications, the tasks that students must complete in order to show their proficiency on said standards are often left up to individual teachers to create and develop. If the SPA scale shows correlation with the level of motivation as it has in previous studies (Behizadeh, 2014), then the scale can become a helpful tool for teachers in proficiency-based systems to create and develop tasks that not only display proficiency, but will also motivate students to complete them.

In previous research studies, researchers have focused on personal narrative writing and compare/contrast writing (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2014). This research study attempts to broaden the scope of skill-based tasks to include not only writing tasks from English language arts classes, but also skill-based tasks from art, physical education, and foreign language classes. In addition, previous research studies focused on student perceived authenticity have used student responses from eighth-graders. This study will use responses from eleventh and twelfth grade students. This study will investigate whether the correlation found between SPA and motivation present in eighth-graders can be reproduced using responses from eleventh and twelfth graders. This will focus on whether the four factors of student perceived authenticity increase student motivation for only middle school age groups of students, or whether their correlation to motivation holds true for older students as well.

### **Core Concepts**

There is a great deal of research and guidance available for teachers on developing standards to show achieve basic-level proficiency in proficiency-based education systems.

However, there is a lack of research or guidance when it comes to creating the tasks students must complete to display their proficiency. There are a handful of resources to support teachers in creating tasks to show basic-level proficiency, but when it comes to highly-complex tasks to go beyond basic proficiency, there is a lack of guidance. Robert Marzano, in his 2013 book *Using Common Core Standards to Enhance Classroom Instruction and Assessment*, suggests that these complex level four targets should be developed by individual educators along with their students; he suggests that this is “easily done”. However, in practice, teachers in proficiency-based systems have found that the creation of highly-complex tasks is anything but easy. The question of what it is that makes tasks highly-complex has not been addressed in previous proficiency-based literature.

In their research at the University of Wisconsin, Fred Newmann et al introduce four factors to assist teachers with the creation of highly-complex tasks. These factors are construction of knowledge, elaborated written communication, relevance, and student choice. This research helps fill the gap of limited guidance for teachers in creating highly-complex tasks for proficiency-based systems. However, Benizadeh in her research (2014) claims that the previous focus on authenticity to create highly-complex tasks is misguided. Instead of focusing on authenticity as determined by the teacher or creator of the task, the onus should instead be placed on the students themselves to determine whether a task is authentic. Benizadeh (2014) introduces four new factors for teachers to consider when creating highly-complex tasks: choice of valued topic, writing for impact, dominance of expression over conventions, and authentic audience. It is these four factors that this study will use to attempt to guide teachers in creating tasks that go beyond basic-level proficiency to highly-complex tasks that students will be

motivated to complete. However, Benizadeh's research (2014) was conducted using eighth grade students and only two genres of writing. This research project will attempt to confirm the usefulness of the four factors of SPA when creating highly-complex tasks for eleventh and twelfth grade students in English language arts as well as foreign language, physical education, and art.

### **Approach**

To complete this research study, I will recruit three teaching colleagues to participate. I will request each teacher to supply me with a copy of a write up and scoring guide for a skill-based task they completed with students in the 2017-2018 school year. I will recruit a teacher in English language arts, a foreign language teacher, a physical education teacher, and an art teacher to participate. Once the task write ups and scoring guides are collected, I will schedule a time to go into their classrooms to survey students. I will provide each student who completed the selected skill-based task with a 10-question survey to complete. The survey will include two questions each on the following factors - choice of valued topic, writing for impact, dominance of expression over conventions, authentic audience, and motivation to complete the task. For each question, students will respond by selecting a number on a continuum of 1-5. Each selected number will indicate the level to which the student perceives each factor to be present in the selected skill-based task. The results will then be analyzed to determine a student perceived authenticity score for each task as well as the level of motivation students felt to complete each task. The data will then be analyzed to determine whether tasks that score highly on the four factors of student perceived authenticity correlate with the tasks that students felt a high level of motivation to complete. If the correlation is confirmed, then the four factors can be used by

teachers to guide their development of skill-based tasks across subject areas that are both authentic and lead to increased student motivation.

This approach is similar to the approach undertaken by Benizadeh and Engelhard (2014). However, it differs in that it attempts to confirm the usefulness of SPA when creating skill-based tasks in subject areas beyond English language arts and beyond middle school grade levels. In addition, Benizadeh and Engelhard (2014) used different factors in their research project - community/global relevance, personal relevance, and academic relevance. This study will instead use four factors used by Benizadeh in a 2014 research study focused not just on relevance, but rather on overall authenticity - choice of valued topic, writing for impact, dominance of expression over conventions, authentic audience.

This approach is a logical extension of the previous literature by drawing parallels between writing tasks in English language arts classes and skill-based tasks in other subject areas such as painting in art class or speaking in foreign language class. If the SPA factors can be found to be a helpful guide for creating writing tasks, then it is logical that this usefulness can extend to other subject areas with skill-based tasks as opposed to knowledge-based tasks.

The potential issues or weaknesses of this approach are mostly logistical in nature. Finding a common time when the participating teachers and classes of students meet when I am available could be a challenge, as well as the potential of students to be absent or unwilling to complete the surveys with seriousness and honesty. Whereas the 2017-2018 school year is only three months old, it could also be an issue finding the exact type of skill-based tasks I'm seeking. To counter these potential issues, I will explain to students prior to completing the surveys what I am attempting to do with my research, and how it can directly benefit them and their teachers. I

will provide extra copies of the survey for teachers to administer to students who are absent and follow up quickly to collect them. I will also seek out teachers well in advance of the survey date to make sure I can find tasks that meet my criteria.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

A quantitative study will be used in this research. This study will focus on tasks collected from myself, one other English language arts teacher, one art teacher, one physical education teacher, and one foreign language teacher and then responses from students who have completed these tasks. A class of students who have completed these tasks will be given a ten-question questionnaire to complete.

Responses to the questionnaire will be analyzed using a scale. The responses will indicate the level of student perceived authenticity in the four factors of SPA and the level of student motivation to complete the tasks. The advantage of using a questionnaire is its effectiveness at measuring SPA and student motivation in numerical terms, which can then be compared to other responses in a more objective manner than written responses. These numerical scores can be used to compare the skill-based tasks and guide the creation of future skill-based tasks.

This method of quantitative study will allow teachers to re-create the questionnaire in their own classrooms in order to derive a numerical SPA score, which can be used to inform the creation of future skill-based tasks. In addition, teachers will be able to tell whether their tasks lead to increased student motivation.

### **Research Methods**

**Setting**

I will be conducting my research at Hall-Dale Middle/High School, a grades 6-12 school in Farmingdale, Maine. Hall-Dale Middle/High School has committed to be a proficiency-based student-centered school for nine years, making it one of the first schools in the state of Maine to commit fully to the approach. In this proficiency-based student-centered context, I aim to study the types of tasks that teachers request of students to show their proficiency. I work at Hall-Dale High School as an English teacher and I have reached out to colleagues in the language arts, art, physical education, and foreign language departments who have agreed to participate in the study.

**Sampling/Participants**

While Hall-Dale Middle/High School serves approximately 600 students in middle and high school, this research project includes only 11th and 12th grade subjects. Students who are participating in this study have been in Hall-Dale's proficiency-based approach since they were young children and a lot of them have known nothing but standards-based curriculum and grade reporting. They are some of the most experienced students with the proficiency-based student-centered approach that could be found in the state and perhaps the country. This makes them an ideal pool of subjects to question about the measure of Student Perceived Authenticity (SPA) in proficiency-based skill-based tasks. My sampling strategy depends on my teaching colleagues to recommend a task and group of students to participate. The teachers may naturally want to choose a task that went especially well or a group of students who performed especially well. The questionnaire is only ten questions, and students don't have to do any additional work other than thinking about the task they completed and answering the ten questions.



## **Methodology**

I have asked four of my teaching colleagues to select a skill-based task they have completed with 11th or 12th grade students in the 2017-18 school year. My colleagues presented a copy of the skill-based task description and scoring guide to me for review. I will then set up a date to come into my colleague's class and administer the questionnaire to every student present who completed the skill-based task selected for the study.

The questionnaire will give me quantitative data to study for correlations between SPA and student motivation and characteristics of skill-based tasks across multiple content areas for upper-level secondary school students. I am choosing this method in order to study skill-based tasks across multiple curriculum content areas. I want to study the SPA of skill-based tasks in proficiency-based systems regardless of content area.

The method will lend itself naturally to teachers selecting tasks that went well or a group of students who performed well; no teacher wants their work reflected poorly in a research study. Additionally, I work in the building and have a positive rapport with most of the students who will likely be participating in this study. The students in the study may answer the questions more affirmatively if they perceive that I want them to. The students may also not want to admit that the task was not authentic in their view if they think it will reflect poorly on the participating teachers in my study.

## **Operational Measures**

My work is based on the work of Benizadeh (2014) and Benizadeh & Engelhard (2014). Their work established a link between SPA and student motivation by studying eighth graders and their perceived authenticity of two writing projects, a compare and contrast essay

and a personal narrative essay, in their language arts class. It is this same correlation that I hope to study in a proficiency-based student-centered context, and not just for writing tasks, but for skill-based tasks across content areas. In her work, Benizadeh notes, “Further research is needed at other grade levels...another limitation is the restriction of writing tasks to two types of essays...other writing tasks and writing genres should be examined” (2014). My research study builds on this work by studying a different sample of students - 11th and 12th grade students rather than 8th graders - and studying not just other genres of writing tasks but other forms of skill-based tasks in addition to writing such as painting, speaking a foreign language, and creating a personalized workout plan.

I am asking each student who is present on the day of the questionnaire who also completed the selected skill-based task a series of ten questions, two questions each asking students to give a 1-5 rating in the following five categories: choice of valued topic, writing for impact, dominance of expression over conventions, authentic audience, and motivation. The resulting data can be used to analyze the link between the four components of SPA and the level of motivation students felt to complete the skill-based task. The data can also be used to examine skill-based tasks in proficiency-based student-centered systems for levels of SPA and student motivation.

### **Data Collection**

I have contacted four teaching colleagues at Hall-Dale High School: our art teacher, our physical education teacher, our Spanish teacher, and an English teacher. These four colleagues have agreed to select a skill-based task they have completed with students in the 2017-18 school year, students who they still have in their class who will remember the task clearly. These

teachers have provided me with a write-up of the task description and scoring guide. I will get consent and assent forms to the participating teachers to distribute and collect prior to the questionnaire administration. I will personally collect these forms from the participating teachers. I will set up a specific time to come into the class, explain my research project, advise the students of the anonymous nature of the questionnaires and how the rating scales work, and distribute the questionnaires. I will then sit with the participating teacher off to the side of the room and give one of the students a folder. When the students are finished with the questionnaires, I will ask the student volunteer to collect the questionnaires, place them in the folder, clasp the folder, and turn them over to me.

### **Data Analysis**

I will have ratings on ten questions from as many students as I can get to participate. Some students may not answer every question on the questionnaire. I will use quantitative procedures to analyze the data for each of the ten questions to get descriptive analysis of what the numbers say about the level of SPA for each of the skill-based tasks, as well as for how each of the first eight questions correlate with the last two questions on student motivation. I will then look at how the ratings for SPA and student motivation to the tasks themselves and what each task asked students to do. I will look for commonalities amongst tasks that elicited high ratings in SPA and in tasks that elicited low ratings in SPA.

### **Expected Findings**

I expect to find that the tasks my teaching colleagues select for my research project score high overall on the SPA scale and the student motivation ratings of the questionnaire. I expect the high ratings because of my teaching colleagues choosing their best tasks, the students

wanting to please both the participating teacher and myself, and the experience of Hall-Dale teachers and students in creating tasks in upper-level high school courses in a proficiency-based student-centered environment. I expect to find that tasks that score high in the four ratings scales of SPA that those tasks will also score high on the student motivation rankings. I expect to find if any tasks score low on the SPA ratings that those tasks will score low on the student motivation rankings. I expect to find tasks that score highly on the SPA ratings and the student motivation rankings to be tasks that establish why the skill needed for the task is important beyond a grade or for that class.

### **Potential Issues and Weaknesses**

The potential weaknesses are low numbers of students who participated in the task due to small class size in some upper-level courses at Hall-Dale High School. Also, some students and parents may not sign and return the consent/assent forms. Teachers may select only their best tasks for the study and students may give false positive ratings to be nice to the participating teacher and myself, or false negative ratings because the student is mad at the participating teacher or myself. Students who completed the task may be absent, or may refuse to complete the questionnaire.

### **Research Narrative**

The first step of the research project was connecting with four of my teaching colleagues and securing four learning tasks to use for my project. I spoke to each colleague about my need for a skill-based task where the students had to create a product. I was interested in looking at tasks from across multiple subject areas, not like the Benizadeh (2014) study where only two English tasks were used. Each teacher was able to provide me with a learning task that would

work for my purposes - an English research paper, a writing task in Spanish class, a writing task in French class, and a final ceramics project in Art class. My teaching colleagues provided me with write-ups of each task including scoring guides.

My four teaching colleagues involved in this research study and I work at Hall-Dale High School within RSU 2. Hall-Dale has used a proficiency-based, student-centered approach to education for ten years. Therefore it is an appropriate site to research skill-based learning tasks within proficiency-based contexts. Each of the teachers in this study are veterans of the proficiency-based grading system and approach to crafting learning tasks to display proficiency and allow for feedback on specific learning targets. For the purpose of this study, I was focused on the task themselves and what they were asking students to do and the audiences the tasks were being crafted for.

After I selected the four tasks and secured the task write-ups and scoring guides, I scheduled times in early January to go into each teacher's classroom to administer my questionnaire. In the meantime, I had the classroom teachers hand out and have their students complete the assent forms and had the consent forms sent home to their parents. I collected the consent and assent forms and added them to my locked filing cabinet drawer at my home office. The classes were mostly small, ranging in sample size from four to ten students responding to the questionnaire. Students ranged in grade level from tenth grade level to twelfth grade level. The English classroom and the two foreign language classrooms consisted of the typical classroom setup in that students were arranged at desks either in rows or in two cases a horseshoe arrangement when completing the questionnaire. The art classroom consisted of large tables in

the middle of the room, with additional workspaces scattered throughout the room. The students were at their various workspaces when they completed the questionnaires.

I had intended to have the study use solely eleventh and twelfth grade students since the Benizadeh (2014) study had used eighth and ninth grade students. However, the English teaching colleague participating in my study claimed that the best fit for a skill-based task that she had to offer for the study was a task she had conducted with a class of tenth graders. Since this was still different from the Benizadeh study, and since the task, a research paper, did in fact fit my requirements, I agreed to use one section primarily consisting of tenth-grade students.

It was important that I was able to make it into each class by the end of the first semester in mid-January, because I wanted the same class of students with the same teacher who had conducted the learning task so their memories of the tasks were still fresh in their minds. That said, most of the students had completed the learning tasks they were asked to respond about on the questionnaire anywhere from weeks to months prior. In each case, the classroom teacher took a moment to remind the students about the learning task.

In an effort to minimize the impact that myself and the classroom teacher would have on the students and their responses, we both stood off to the side of the classroom while the students completed the questionnaires. I reminded the students that the questionnaires were anonymous and they should answer truthfully and not in a manner that thought I or the classroom teacher would want.

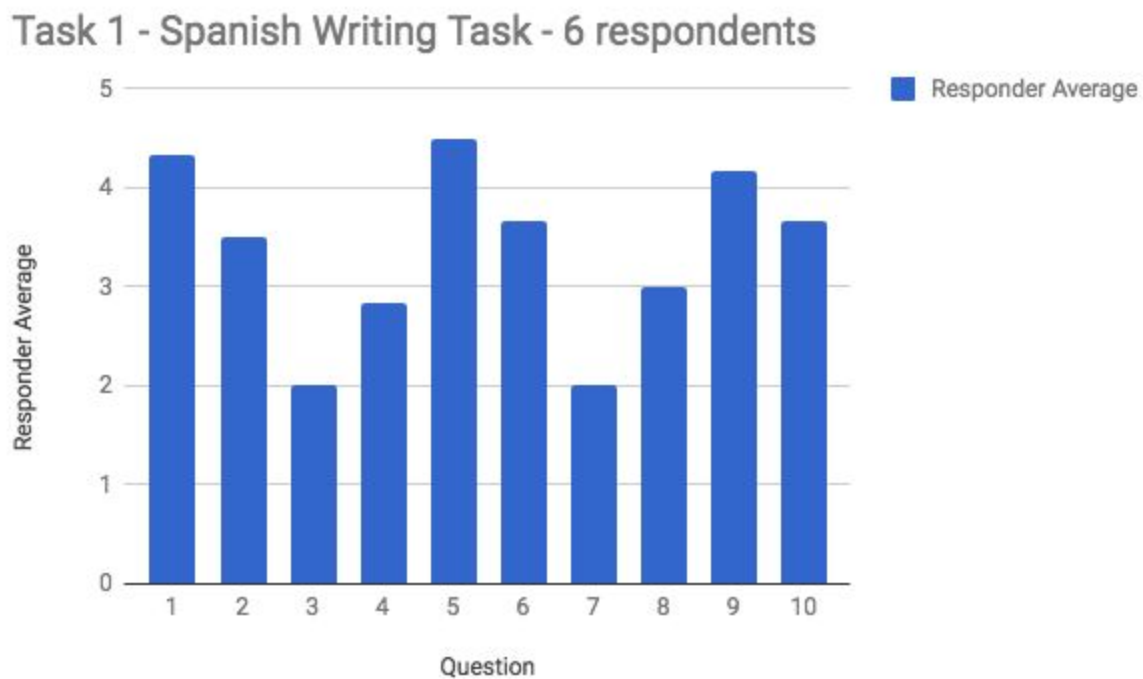
Once the students completed the questionnaires, I chose a student at random to collect the questionnaires and place them in an unmarked manila folder for me. I then added them to my

locked filing cabinet drawer at my home office. Once I had the questionnaires collected, I compiled the data into Google sheets and generated charts to help interpret the data.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

#### Task 1 - Spanish Writing Task

For task #1, the Spanish writing task, the student questionnaire response data is presented in the following table (fig. 1):



Students were motivated to complete the Spanish writing task as evidenced by a 4.17 average on question 9, which asked students how motivated they were to complete the task. Task #1's 4.17 average score on question 9 was the second highest average on question 9 of the four

tasks measured. It is fair to say the six upperclassmen in the advanced Spanish class were highly motivated to complete this assigned task. Looking at the other high scores for task #1 can give an idea of which components of student-perceived authenticity were important for these students, who were highly motivated to complete this task.

Question 1 and question 5 have the highest average. Question 1 has a 4.33 average. Question 1 asked students the level to which they felt they had choice in the topic for this learning task. This data points out a relationship between students having choice and students feeling motivated to complete the writing task. Clearly, students enjoy having a say in what they write about.

Question 5 has a 4.5 average, the highest average of the ten questions measured for the Spanish writing task. Question 5 asked students how much this task was focused on the expression of their ideas. This high result taken with the high level of motivation to complete the Spanish writing task suggests that there is a connection between allowing students to focus their task on creativity and expression of ideas over merely executing a function, in addition to the importance of choosing their topic, as expressed in the analysis of question 1 above.

Question 3 and 7 response averages are clearly lower than the other question response averages. Question 3's response average is 2.0, clearly the lowest in the results along with question 7. Question 3 asked students whether they felt the task had an impact on their school or community. Students reported that the Spanish writing task had little to no impact on their school or community, yet the students were still highly-motivated to complete the task.

Question 7 asked students how much the audience for this learning task connected to life beyond school, part of building an authentic audience for student learning tasks. Students



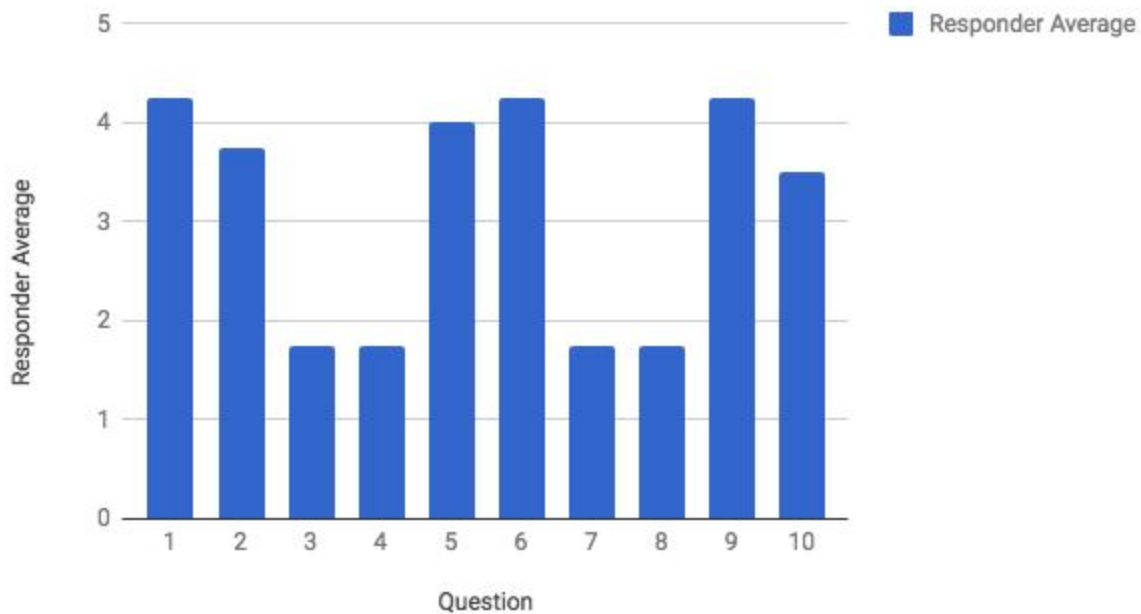
reported a low average response for the audience of their work being connected to life beyond school, which makes sense given their low response average to question 3 above. The low response averages of these two questions suggests that to these students, having an audience and a topic that connects to their school, community, or life beyond school were not important factors in their level of motivation to complete the task.

The results to the questionnaire for the Spanish writing task shows that for these students, being able to choose a topic that interested them personally and being able to focus on their ideas over conventions were more important than having an audience connected to life beyond school or having the work impact their school or community.

### **Task 2 - Art Ceramics Project**

For task #2, the Art ceramics final project, the student questionnaire response data is presented in the following table (fig. 2):

### Task 2 - Art Ceramics Project - 4 Respondents



The student response data shows that these students in an advanced art ceramics class were highly motivated to complete their ceramics final project. Their question 9 response average of 4.25 is the highest level reported for any of the four tasks in this research project.

Looking at the high response averages for question 1 and 2, students were again allowed to choose the topic of their task and they had a high value for the topic of the task. The response average for question 2, 3.75, was the highest of the four tasks in this research project, which shows a high level of value for the topic of this task. The students clearly valued their final ceramics project, which was to create a set of eight usable ceramic items that go together as a set. The autonomy that students were given in how they achieved this seems to connect to the high level of motivation the students felt to complete the task.

The high response averages for question 5 and question 6 suggest that students felt the ceramics final project demanded that students use a high level of the expression of their ideas

and the use of the conventions of their discipline, in this case coil, slab, pinch, or pottery wheel techniques. Both of these demands were correlated with a high level of motivation to complete the project, suggesting that students enjoyed the demands of a project that necessitated both an execution of the subject area's fundamentals, but also an expression of original ideas to create their own set of ceramic items.

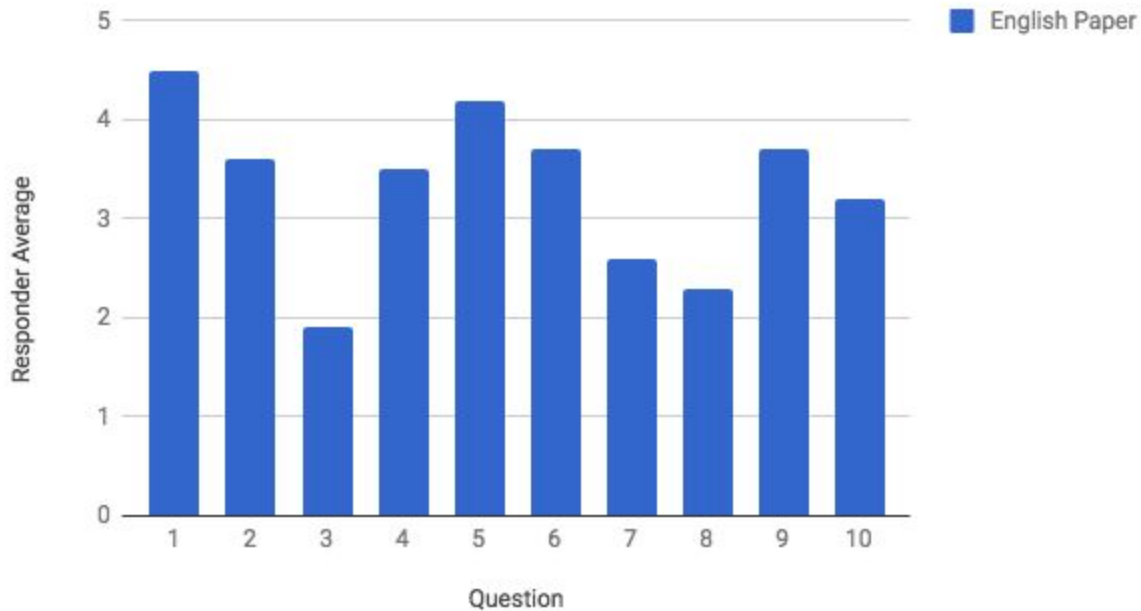
The low response averages for questions 3 and 4 (1.75 each) for the ceramics final project suggests that it was not important to the students that the project have a larger meaning or impact on their school, community, or themselves. The high level of motivation to complete the ceramics project reflects an engagement with the required task predicated on an interest in the subject matter as an advanced art upperclassman student that does not need a connection to life beyond school to sustain motivation to complete the task.

The low response averages for questions 7 and 8 further reinforce the idea that there is no connection to an authentic audience beyond the classroom needed for this level of student to feel motivated to complete their required learning tasks. Question 7 (1.75) and question 8 (1.75) present the idea that perhaps work on an authentic audience might even have the opposite effect of the students becoming nervous to display their work and therefore feel less motivated to complete it. There is more research needed in this area. At the least, it suggests the importance of building scaffolding towards exposing student work to an authentic audience before believing the audience alone will elicit high levels of motivation.

### **Task 3 - English Research Paper**

For task #3, the English research paper, the student questionnaire response data is presented in the following table (fig. 3):

### Task 3 - English Research Paper - 10 respondents



The level of motivation to complete the English research paper task by responder average is presented in question 9 at 3.7. This is the third-highest responder average for question 9 of the four tasks measured, meaning that two other tasks motivated students to complete the task than this one. However, the 3.7 average mark means the overall level of motivation to complete the research paper is above the halfpoint mark on the questionnaire scale, meaning close to high motivation than low motivation as reported by the 10 respondents in this class.

The responder average to question 1 (4.5) is the highest average response to question 1 for the four tasks measured. This high rating average on the questionnaire suggests that students had a very high level of autonomy in selecting a topic to write their research papers about. This high level suggests that selecting their own topic is a factor in the high level of motivation these students felt to complete the research paper.

The high responder average to question 2 (3.6) suggests that students valued their chosen topic on the research paper, suggesting that work by the teacher to support students choose their own topics that are valued by the student is valuable and might be helpful in raising student motivation.

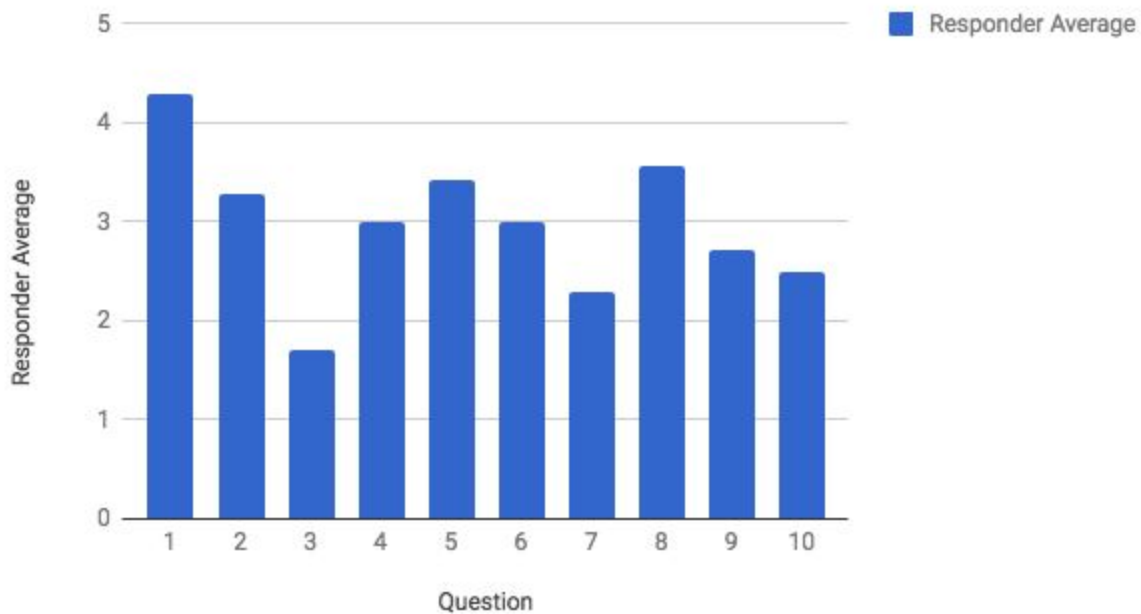
The high responder averages to questions 5 (4.2) and 6 (3.7) are similar to the results from the Art ceramics project in that students reported a high level of both the fundamental conventions of the subject area and the ability to be creative and express their ideas when completing this task. This suggests a connection to the high level of motivation, particularly the ability for students to express their ideas through writing.

The low responder averages in questions 3 (1.9), 7 (2.6), and 8 (2.3) support the results from the previous two tasks that students did not feel that their research paper would have a big impact on their school or community, nor did they feel like their audience would connect to life beyond school. Since they felt motivated to complete the task anyway, the results suggest that students might not care as much about having an authentic audience or connecting their work to their school community as much as they care about choosing their own topic that is valued to them personally. This would suggest that teacher work to implement an authentic audience without appropriate scaffolding might actually have a negative impact on student motivation, but more research is needed in this area.

#### **Task 4 - French Writing Task**

For Task #4, the French writing task, the student questionnaire response data is presented in the following table (fig. 4):

### Task 4 - French Writing Task - 7 Respondents



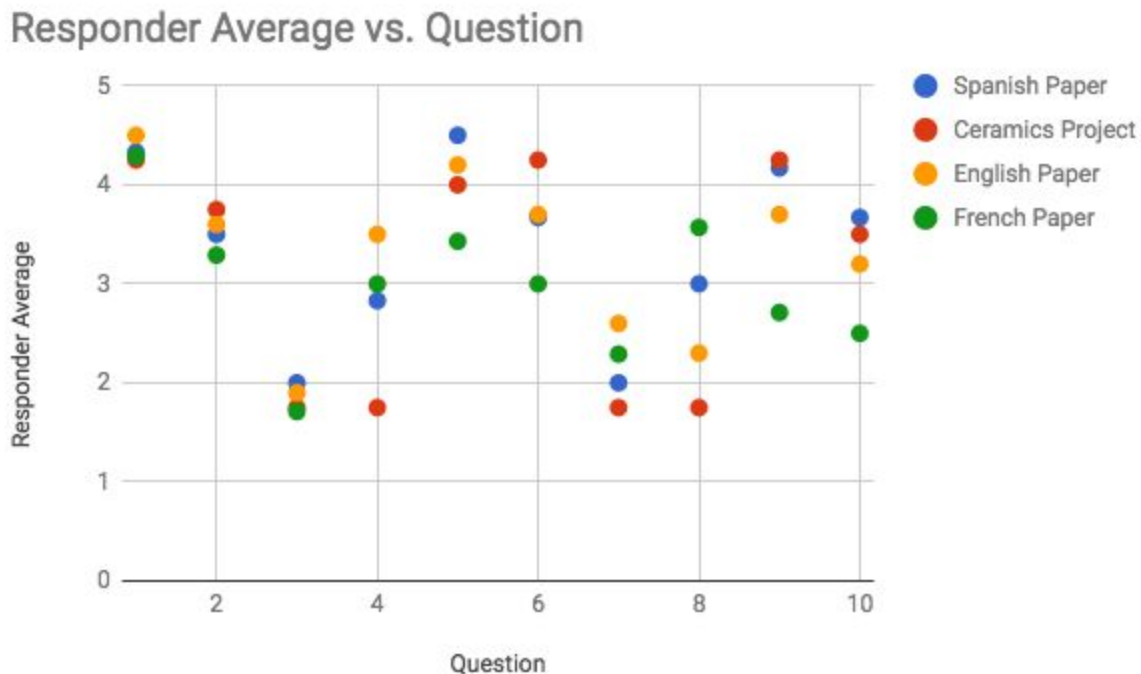
The responder average to question 9 (2.71) is the lowest average of any measured for the four tasks in this research project. It is the only responder average to fall below the halpoint of 3.0, making the response average closer to low motivation than high motivation on the questionnaire scale.

The response averages to question 1 (4.29), question 2 (3.29), and question 5 (3.43) all fall above the halpoint of 3.0 on the questionnaire scale. This suggests that students still felt a high level of choice in their selected topic for their French writing project, and they still felt a high level of value for their chosen topic despite the lower level of overall motivation. They still felt like the learning task allowed them the opportunity to focus on the expression of their ideas over the conventions of their subject. The choice of topic, value of topic, and expression of ideas seem to be connected with what motivation there is for this task.

The response average to question 7 (2.29), while still below the halfpoint of 3.0, is the second-highest responder average of the four tasks measured. The response average to question 8 (3.57) is the highest responder average to question 8 measured in this research study by a notable margin. This suggests that the students felt the audience for their French writing task was going to connect to life beyond school and the student considered the audience while completing it more so than during any of the other three tasks. The fact that this task has a lower responder average for motivation to complete the task than the other three suggests that the work to present the French writing task to an authentic audience may have actually worked against it when trying to generate student motivation.

### Combined Responder Average Data

The responder average data is combined for all four tasks in the following table (fig.5):



This table confirms the trends discussed in the data analysis section. The tasks with the highest levels of motivation as reported by responder average to question 9 are the tasks that are also among the highest in responder average to questions 1 and 2, suggesting a relationship between choice and value of topic and level of motivation.

The tasks all report low levels of impact on the school or community for these four learning tasks. More research is needed for tasks with high levels of impact on the school or community to see if it would connect to high or low levels of student motivation. The results of this study suggest that these tasks do not connect to school or community life beyond school and it does not seem to be a hindrance to student motivation.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The research question for this study is “how can the level of student perceived authenticity be used to design skill-based tasks?”. After the analysis of the data received from the questionnaires administered to the students in this study, the following conclusions can be made.

First, there is a consistent connection in the data between high levels of choice and value of the topic of the learning task and a high level of motivation to complete the task. All four of these tasks were crafted and conducted in a proficiency-based, student-centered school where student voice and choice is valued. This hallmark of proficiency-based education is reflected in the learning tasks of this study, as each one had a high responder average for level of choice and value of topic. Since three of the four tasks also reported a responder average with a high level of motivation to complete the task, it is concluded that the high level of choice and value of topic had some role in motivating these students to complete these learning tasks. This confirms a



point that Newmann (1996) makes in his research study that learning tasks with topics that are valued by students, those student feel more motivated to complete the tasks.

Second, among the tasks with a responder average indicating a high level of motivation to complete the task, there were consistently low scores in impact the work had on the school, the community, and the students themselves. The students reportedly did not feel like their work would have a large impact beyond completing the task for their class and teacher, however they were for the most part highly motivated to complete the tasks anyway. These findings suggest that at least some teachers in this proficiency-based environment do not value impact on school, community, or self as much as other factors when developing their learning tasks. It also shows us that it not matter if impact on school, community, or self are evident in order for students to be motivated to complete a task. This runs contrary to educational experts who invest large amounts of time building authentic tasks connected to larger issues or current events in their communities or societies at large. Newmann (1996) spends a great deal of time in his literature discussing the importance of tasks having the authenticity of a concept or problem they are likely to encounter in life beyond school. The results of my student questionnaire contradict Newmann's assertion that connecting the task to a valued concept or issue beyond school is needed for students to feel a high level of motivation. Perhaps with more of an emphasis on impact on school, community, and self, and perhaps with appropriate scaffolding, the impact would be larger, and it would perhaps bump the motivation level even higher. More research is needed in this area to test this approach.

Third, the responder averages on the student questionnaires indicated that several of the tasks that students reported feeling a high level of motivation to complete also had a focus on

executing the conventions of the given subject area. Whether it is the conventions of creating ceramic pottery, constructing an effective research paper paragraph, or writing in the foreign language of French or Spanish, the students reported focusing on executing these conventions as part of the task, and still felt a high level of motivation to complete them. While a focus on the instruction of subject area conventions can sometimes be boring or low-motivation for students, these results suggest that students understand the execution of conventions is a requirement of high-level skill-based learning tasks.

Fourth, the tasks that are the lowest in responder average are also the tasks that among the highest in questions about authentic audience. These results suggest an opposite connection than one that the literature and this researcher's experience would have believed, which is that an authentic audience can perhaps have a negative impact on student motivation. More research is needed on this specific phenomenon, but it seems like an authentic audience may actually be intimidating for students, certainly without adequate scaffolding support. Both Newmann (1996) and Behizadeh (2014) tout the importance of building an authentic audience that connects to life beyond school in order to maximize student motivation to complete learning tasks. However, these results suggest that those efforts could be misguided unless work is undertaken to build a desire for those authentic audiences in our students in proficiency-based systems and elsewhere. It is possible that the teachers and students in Newmann's study and Behizadeh's study had already completed this scaffolding work prior to the research project. It is also possible that the particular groups of students in the prior studies just happened to be more comfortable presenting their work to authentic audiences. It is also possible that the sample of students in this study were especially nervous or inexperienced with presenting their work to authentic audiences.

Regardless, the results in this study indicate that teachers, particularly those in proficiency-based systems, should not assume that students will be excited to present their work to authentic audiences that connect to life beyond school.

### **Personal Learning Reflection**

This research project has affected me by having a big impact on the development of my ability to analyze data and draw implications from it. As an English teacher, my days are spent in the realm of ideas and themes and compositions. It is not always conducive to the collection and analysis of raw data. In fact, some English teachers scoff at educational data as cold or reductive. But the ability to put information into numbers and then analyze those numbers for themes that can impact or even improve my classroom practice to me is always a worthwhile exercise, and this research project has really helped teach me how to do this process and how important this process is.

One conclusion of my research project reaffirmed one of my beliefs about the creation of learning tasks, and one conclusion challenged a long-held belief of mine. Both are worthwhile outcomes to this exercise. The fact that one conclusion validated the importance of student voice and choice in personalized proficiency-based contexts will have a lasting impact on my practice and my teaching colleagues' practice who I share the results with.

Similarly, the conclusion challenging my long-held belief regarding the importance of authentic audiences for learning tasks has forced me to re-examine how I construct learning tasks in my classroom and more importantly how I scaffold to build support for authentic audiences. Moving forward, I will not assume that the students necessarily share my passion for sharing my work to audiences in real-world contexts. Instead, I will focus on ways to support students in

building their skills so that they will want to share them with audiences beyond my classroom walls.

Conducting this research project has also improved my working relationship with four of my teaching colleagues. My colleagues appreciated the fact that I wanted to use learning tasks from multiple content areas, not just English. The foreign language teachers, in particular, were appreciative of being included in the study as they often feel overlooked in favor of the core subject areas. The process of organizing the materials, administering the questionnaires, and discussing the learning tasks with my colleagues reaffirmed for me the importance of teachers working together across subject area concentrations.

Finally, conducting this research and presenting my results to my teaching colleagues and my learning community has gained me a certain stature and respect. Just the fact that I was willing to take the time to conduct this study and organize this project in such a way as to have a benefit on my school community, my teaching colleagues have appreciated it. I feel like a larger contributor to my school community and I feel appreciated as someone who cares enough about my practice and my students to dive into this issue and study it closely.

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Appendix A  
Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Brandon Terrill and I am an English teacher at Hall-Dale High School. This year as part of my master's program in Educational Leadership at the University of Maine at Farmington I am conducting a research project on authenticity of learning tasks. I am interested in researching whether this idea of authenticity can help teachers at Hall-Dale and elsewhere develop learning tasks that students are motivated to complete. I will be coming into your child's class in either English, art, foreign language, and/or possibly physical education. I will ask your child to complete a ten-question questionnaire regarding their opinions of a learning task they recently completed in that class. These questionnaires will be anonymous and kept in a locked file cabinet at my home once completed. There will be no punishment nor decrease in the quality of your child's education if you or your child chooses to not participate in this research project.

Thank you for considering to allow your child to participate in this project. I believe that it could help students understand why they are or are not motivated to complete certain tasks in school, as well as help teachers develop tasks that create higher levels of student motivation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you again,  
Brandon Terrill  
Hall-Dale High School  
(207)622-6211 x335  
[bterrill@kidsrsu.org](mailto:bterrill@kidsrsu.org)

By signing this you give your consent for your child's participation in this study:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(printed parent name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(printed student name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(parent signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

Appendix B  
Student Assent

Dear Student,

I am doing a study on the authenticity of learning tasks here at Hall-Dale High School. This is a very important topic to me because I believe it can allow students to have a better understanding of what motivates them to complete some tasks and why they sometimes feel a lack of motivation to complete other tasks. It will also make recommendations to teachers for how they can create tasks that motivate students.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a ten-question questionnaire regarding a task you recently completed in English, art, foreign language, and/or physical education class. Your names will not be recorded and your responses will be kept confidential.

There will be no penalty for not participating in this research study. Your grade will neither be positively impacted nor negatively impacted by this ongoing activity. The risks involved are that you might feel uncomfortable answering questions evaluating your teacher's tasks. The benefits are that you might gain a deeper understanding of why you feel motivated to complete some tasks but not others.

If you sign this paper, you are assenting to participate in this study and complete the questionnaire. You may end your participation at any time you wish.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

Appendix C  
Teacher Consent Form

Dear Educator,

The purpose of the research is to investigate the student perceived authenticity of skill-based learning tasks in a proficiency-based educational system. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to submit a description and scoring guide for a skill-based learning task completed with students in the 2017-2018 school year.

**Confidentiality**

The Parental Permission forms, Student Assent forms, Teacher Consent forms, and Administrator Consent forms will be collected by the researcher and will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's home. Any data and assignments collected from the questionnaires will also be kept in separate locked files in the researcher's home. The data will be kept until June 2018. The researcher understands the importance of the protection of educational data as both a classroom teacher, and as a graduate student.

**Risks**

The activity to complete the student perceived authenticity questionnaire will take place during your class time. You will lose some of a period of class time for this purpose.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to the participants. However, the participants may gain a deeper understanding of how to develop learning tasks that contain high levels of authenticity through the analysis of student responses. The teacher participants will also get the chance to use the student perceived authenticity questionnaire to assess the level of authenticity of other learning tasks. The student participants may gain a deeper understanding of why they are motivated or unmotivated to complete skill-based tasks.

**Voluntary**

Participation is voluntary . If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time with no repercussions to your teaching contract.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have carefully listened to and fully understand the purpose of this research and the procedures to be followed. I understand that my records will be kept confidential, my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also recognize that I may skip any step of the process I don't wish to participate in. Results of this research may be shared in publications or presentations. If I have any concerns or inquiries about my rights as a subject or the manner in which this research is conducted, I understand that I can contact Dr. Christopher Strole, [christopher.strole@maine.edu](mailto:christopher.strole@maine.edu) or (207)897-8489. By signing below, I assert that I fully understand the above and give my consent to serve as a subject in this research.

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(Date)

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(Signature)



Appendix D  
Administrator Consent

Dear Superintendent,

As part of my Educational Leadership program at the University of Maine at Farmington, I would like to conduct a research project in our district, RSU 2. The purpose of the research project is to measure the level of student perceived authenticity in skill-based learning tasks across content areas by having students answer a questionnaire about tasks they have completed in the 2017-2018 school year. Through this questionnaire process, we can gain insight into how the authenticity levels of our learning tasks can be increased, and perhaps how our level of student motivation can be increased.

I am seeking your approval for this research to occur. I will ask English, physical education, art, and foreign language teachers at Hall-Dale High School to participate. Each teacher who agrees to participate will be asked to submit a description and scoring guide for a skill-based learning task they have completed with students in the 2017-2018 school year. From the submissions, I will select four tasks to use in this research project. I will then schedule times with the teachers of the selected tasks to come into their classes and administer the questionnaire to the class of students who completed the skill-based task. I will then analyze the results to determine the level of student perceived authenticity in each task, as well as the level of student motivation to complete the tasks. Through this analysis, recommendations about how to increase authenticity and motivation will be made. I will share the results as my capstone presentation to complete my M.S.Ed. Educational Leadership program. I will also share the results with the my school and my colleagues.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact the course instructor Johanna Prince (207) 778-7066 johanna.prince@maine.edu, or Karol Maybury, Institutional Review Board chair, at karol.maybury@maine.edu.

Thank you for considering this request to conduct research.

Brandon Terrill  
Teacher, Hall-Dale High School  
Student, Educational Leadership Graduate Program  
University of Maine Farmington

I have reviewed the research plan for “Authenticity of Learning Tasks in Proficiency-Based Education”. I give my consent for the researcher, Brandon Terrill, to conduct this research project involving teachers and students at Hall-Dale High School. I understand that no identifiable information regarding the teachers and students involved or the district will be used in publications or presentations that result from this work. I am aware I may ask to view the report at the end of the study.

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Date

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Name

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Position in District

Appendix E  
Participant Questionnaire

Student Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge regarding the learning task you completed during the 2017-2018 school year. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

**Choice of Valued Topic**

1. How much choice in topic did you have for this learning task?

1	2	3	4	5
Low choice				High choice

2. How much did you value the topic of this learning task?

1	2	3	4	5
Low value				High value

**Creating for Impact**

3. How much did this learning task impact your school and/or community?

1	2	3	4	5
Low impact				High impact

4. How much did this learning task impact you personally?

1	2	3	4	5
Low impact				High impact

**Dominance of Expression over Conventions**

5. How much did this learning task focus on the expression of your ideas?

1	2	3	4	5
Low expression				High expression

6. How much did this learning task focus on the execution of conventions?

1	2	3	4	5
Low conventions			High conventions	

**Authentic Audience**

7. How much did the audience for your learning task connect to life beyond school?

1	2	3	4	5
Low connection			High connection	

8. How much did you consider the audience for your learning task when completing it?

1	2	3	4	5
Low consideration			High consideration	

**Motivation**

9. How motivated were you to complete the learning task?

1	2	3	4	5
Low motivation			High motivation	

10. How motivated were you to show your learning task to your audience?

1	2	3	4	5
Low motivation			High motivation	

## Appendix F

### Combined Data by Responder

Responder:	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10
S1	5	4	3	3	5	4	3	3	4	3
S2	4	3	2	3	3	2	2	4	5	4
S3	2	2	1	2	4	3	2	2	3	2
S4	5	4	2	2	5	5	1	1	3	4
S5	5	4	2	5	5	4	3	4	5	5
S6	5	4	2	2	5	4	1	4	5	4
A1	4	4	3	2	4	4	1	2	5	2
A2	4	5	1	1	5	5	1	3	5	5
A3	4	3	1	1	2	4	2	1	3	3
A4	5	3	2	3	5	4	3	1	4	4
E1	5	4	1	4	5	4	1	2	5	4
E2	5	4	2	3	4	4	2	3	4	4
E3	5	4	3	4	5	5	3	3	5	3
E4	4	3	2	3	4	3	3	1	2	4
E5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4
E6	3	3	1	4	4	5	2	1	4	2
E7	5	4	2	3	5	4	2	1	5	3
E8	4	2	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	1
E9	5	5	1	3	4	3	5	3	4	4
E10	5	3	2	4	3	3	2	3	3	3
F1	4	3	1	3	4	3	3	3	2	2
F2	5	3	1	1	2	4	1	2	1	1
F3	5	5	3	5	3	1	4	2	5	3
F4	4	3	3	4	4	5	3	5	1	1
F5	4	5	2	4	4	4	3	4	5	4.5
F6	3	2	1	3	4	3	1	4	3	5
F7	5	2	1	1	3	1	1	5	2	1