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Vermont-made Arts Proficiencies: An Introduction

By Emily Titterton

This issue of the Arts Newsletter includes art or music proficiencies with performance indicators from four different supervisory unions. One piece of feedback I consistently hear from arts teachers is that they want to see models and to hear about the process of designing proficiencies from other places in Vermont. In this newsletter, I have tried to touch different geographic parts of the state, as well as a variety of grade levels and arts disciplines. Developing proficiencies and indicators, while also transitioning to the [National Core Arts Standards](#) and Proficiency-Based Learning, has been a learning experience for all. None of these models are being shared under the pretense that they are “the best” or that they are finished. These models are simply a diverse cross-section of what proficiencies look like in Vermont art classrooms right now. It is my hope that others might be encouraged to share and share alike and to increase our collective understanding and improving arts programming for Vermont’s student.

If you have any questions about what has been included in this newsletter or would like to share some of the work from your supervisory union, please contact emily.titterton@vermont.gov.

Castleton State University High School Fine Arts Program

Students in middle school and high school with a passion for fine arts will have an exciting new opportunity starting in the fall of 2019, thanks to an innovative new program at Castleton University. [The Vermont Academy of Fine Arts at Castleton University](#) is designed to provide students with an immersive experience in developing their passion for art, creative writing, music, or theater. Students who meet specific qualifications through portfolio review or auditions can enroll in the academy their senior year of high school. The academy will also provide summer courses and camp experiences for middle and high school students who may wish to consider the academy part of their personalized learning plan in the future.

“An art course, whether visual, performance-based or writing-based, requires students to be active participants. Students take initiative, engage with their peers, problem solve as a group, demonstrate creativity, and take risks. These are desirable skills employers are seeking in college graduates. By cultivating these skills through the passionate exploration of fine arts, it provides students with a holistic learning experience....This program shines a bright light on our commitment to cultivating the arts, to exploring unique delivery models, and to increasing opportunities for students of all backgrounds. By providing this opportunity for students to immerse themselves in programming about which they are passionate, we can open pathways for advanced learning that were previously closed and prepare graduates for a global workplace.” -Castleton University President Karen M. Scolforo.

Adapted from VtDigger. Read the [full article](#) and [learn how students can apply](#).

The Language of Proficiency-based Learning

By Emily Titterton, with sections adapted from Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union (RNESU) Proficiencies website

New language and wrapping one's brain around that language can be a barrier to understanding how to set up proficiency-based graduation requirements and proficiency-based classroom systems. However, there are great resources to help educators get comfortable with new terms. The Proficiency-based Learning Team has created [a glossary](#). As well, RNEUSU has helpful [descriptions of the various components of proficiencies](#) on their proficiencies website. Not all systems use this language or organize the pieces in this manner, but nonetheless this overview is worth sharing because it describes the "grain sizes" so clearly. I've added examples to the RNEUSU descriptions as well as a classroom level grain size descriptor.

RNESU has designated four grain sizes of expectations.

- The largest grain size will be the all-encompassing transferable skills or "Expectations for Student Learning" (Otter Valley term coined in 2006). Eventually RNEUSU hopes to assess these through student portfolios where students include evidence and reflection on how they are progressing toward these skills. Ideally, all projects should have a clear connection to one or several of these skills. RNEUSU currently using the AOE model as Transferable Skills. [Link to AOE Transferable Skills](#). Clear and Effective Communication and Self-Direction are easily integrated into arts courses and aligned to NCAS.
- Moving down in grain size are the "Content Area Proficiencies." In the RNEUSU model, these are the more specific subject level skills. These are cross-cutting and should be general enough to be covered in any class or genre within this subject. For the most part RNEUSU has adopted standards developed by national organizations or from [the Vermont AOE models](#). In the arts, these are **Create, Present, Respond, and Connect**.
- One size smaller are the "Performance Indicators." These are the specific expectations and/or standards that will be covered in a class. If two teachers teach the same class they should have the same indicators. They may approach the teaching and learning expectations differently for these indicators, but they should have the same expectation of what "proficient" looks like. These can be developed by individual teacher(s), but most will come directly from the national standards. For example, in the sample visual art proficiencies under **Respond** category, one of the 8th grade performance indicators is: *c. Interpret the meaning and mood of art by analyzing technical and aesthetic choices. (VA:Re8.1.8)*. The original wording from NCAS is very lengthy, and is [linked here](#). The performance indicators were developed by looking at NCAS, which is why you can see the coding of the parent standard on the sample document.
- Next are the specific learning targets that tell the students what they have to be able to know or do in order to become proficient. Some of the performance indicators will have many learning targets that help define the skill while some will have only a few. These learning targets can be used for the entire length of a course and dropped into task-neutral proficiency scales. Learning targets for the performance indicator in the example above could be 1) *I can analyze artwork for meaning and mood based solely upon what I see.* 2) *I can identify the ways in which an artist makes artistic choices.*
- The smallest grain size are learning targets tailored specific to an activity or assignment. These are what are most useful during direct instruction with students and assessment of student work. Here is an example based off of the performance indicator and task-neutral learning target in the larger grain sizes above. 1) *I can analyze a variety of paintings by Pablo Picasso for mood and meaning using evidence that I see in the paintings.* 2) *I can identify some of the artistic choices that Picasso made in his paintings.*

Essex High School Arts Proficiencies Interview

Name: Julian Bradshaw

School and Supervisory District/Union: Essex High School, Essex Westford SD

Grades taught: 9-12

Discipline: Visual Arts

Sampling of classes taught: Art 1, Art 2, Art 3, AP Art, Drawing and Painting

Q: What are your proficiency-based graduation requirements for the arts?

A: Visual and Performing Arts Proficiencies

- **Disciplinary Literacy:** Demonstrate arts discipline concepts, skills, terminology, and processes.
- **Creating:** Conceptualize, generate, organize, develop, refine, and complete artistic ideas.
- **Performing/Presenting/Producing:** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- **Connecting:** Relate artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context such as societal, cultural and historical influence to deepen understanding of the arts.

Q: Why did you select these as your proficiencies?

A: We based our proficiencies on the National Core Arts Standards.

Q: How did you go about writing your performance indicators?

A: Each Fine Arts course also has created course proficiencies and performance indicators based on these graduation requirements and the National Standards- we met as a department and used the draft performance indicators created by the state as a resource in addition to the National Core Arts performance indicators.

Q: What has the transition to proficiency-based learning been like in your classroom?

A: Our course syllabuses and rubrics use proficiencies for student assessment. Our school uses a traditional grading system. The art department is moving toward proficiency, performance-based assessment as it aligns well to how we teach.

Q: What has been especially helpful during the transition at your school or in your classroom?

A: Having Emily Titterton as a resource at the state level has been instrumental in helping us transition and understand the new National Core Arts Standards and Proficiency-based Learning. It was so beneficial to work with other art teachers across the state to write the performance indicators during workshops and to see how other schools are implementing them since there isn't an overall template to use.

Q: Anything more you would like to share about how you or your arts program is implementing proficiency-based learning?

A: We are working as a district to finish benchmark performance indicators for K-12 and I would love to see a K-12 "arts" report card that is consistent with the graduation requirements.

Shelburne Community School Music Proficiencies Interview

Name: Tim Buckingham

School and Supervisory District/Union: Shelburne Community School, Champlain Valley SD (CVSD --formerly CSSU)

Grades taught: 5-8

Discipline: Instrumental Music

Sampling of classes taught: Concert Band (1st year), Symphonic Band (2nd/3rd year) and Wind Ensemble (3rd/4th year)

Q: What are your proficiency-based graduation requirements for music?

A: Our PBGRs are not content-driven, they are [transferable skills](#). Students must have .5 credits in fine arts and .5 credits in practical arts. And perhaps these courses have their proficiencies but they have not been shared with the elementary and middle level music educators. Here is a link to [Shelburne Community School's Music Proficiencies](#).

Q: Why did you select these as your proficiencies?

A: These common proficiencies are very broad and are intended to have smaller, embedded learning targets per specific level, class, teacher, etc.

Q: How did you go about writing your performance indicators?

A: All K-8 music teachers worked on it collaboratively.

Q: In what ways are the National Core Arts Standards reflected in the documentation for your courses?

A: We largely used blended proficiency language from NCAS for music classes.

Q: What has the transition to proficiency-based learning been like in your classroom?

A: Our school has certainly been ahead of the curve and our department even more so. Students are very used to seeing learning targets for skill assessment and general habits of learning.

Q: What has been especially helpful during the transition at your school or in your classroom?

A: Our curriculum office, Tarrant Institute, Red House Learning, and the VT-AOE have all been helpful.

Q: Anything more you would like to share about how you or your arts program is implementing proficiency-based learning?

A: While not disrupting autonomy, I wish all these resources above were more harmonious. Arts are the last to receive the help but are the first in being the most authentic in performance. We are the most poorly scheduled but require most time for adequate instruction. We have the most students but the assessments need the most personalization. The irony kills me. I do think this new lens on instruction, assessment, and reporting does help the arts' cause to be a more integral part of the daily curriculum. But easy for us to say!

BFA Fairfax High School Art Proficiencies Interview

Name: Jennifer Hart

Discipline: Visual Art

School and Supervisory District/Union: BFA Fairfax High School, Franklin West SU

Grades taught: 9-12

Sampling of classes taught: Art 1: Foundations, Art 2: Studio, and more...

Q: What are your proficiency-based graduation requirements for art?

A: Students need to show proficiency in Create, Present, Respond, and Connect. [Link to our proficiencies](#). [Link to my proficiency organizer/single point rubric](#).

Q: Why did you select these as your proficiencies?

A: It seemed to make a lot of sense to use the NCAS as a foundation for proficiencies because I am already structuring curriculum around them as well as using these standards for assessments.

Q: How did you go about writing your performance indicators?

A: The way that I approached the process of writing performance indicators was to look at what I was already doing with students and how I was already using the NCAS. Since I am moving towards a more choice-based, student-directed curriculum, I wanted to have performance indicators that reflected students' engagement, creative process, and growth, not necessarily what art skills they show proficiency in, but **in** the steps they took to get there. I tried to write them in a way that students can work on any proficiency indicators in almost any art course, since my focus is on wanting students to show growth, and also be able to think and behave like artists/designers/creators.

Q: In what ways are the National Core Arts Standards reflected in the documentation for your courses?

A: Schoolwide, students use a "proficiency tracker", a digital platform where students submit evidence and self-assess. With this platform, there is opportunity for teachers to provide feedback to students and sign off if a student is proficient (or not) in each indicator. In all of my courses, students are required to keep a digital portfolio of their work (in process, finished product, reflections...) which is their "evidence." Students can work on most proficiency indicators in every course offered because they are written with their individual growth and the creative process in mind.

Q: What has the transition to proficiency-based learning been like in your classroom?

A: School-wide, proficiency based learning was a challenging transition for everyone. However, it makes so much sense in an art setting because students now have opportunities to learn art skills and concepts at their own pace, and can practice as much as they need to without penalty. Because students have multiple chances to work towards proficiency, learning is continuous and doesn't stop at the end of a course. Students can practice as many times as they need to become proficient.

Q: What has been especially helpful during the transition at your school or in your classroom?

A: I think what's been successful in my school is that we are all using the same language and have the same expectations regarding proficiencies so students understand what they need to know and be able to do.

Q: Anything more you would like to share about how you or your arts program is implementing proficiency-based learning?

I would add that the format I came up with is a work in progress, and I am continually tweaking to best fit the needs of my students.

Poultney High School Art Proficiencies Interview

Name: Melissa Kristiansen

Discipline: Arts Education

School and Supervisory District/Union: Poultney High School, Greater Rutland Central SU

Grades taught: 8-12

Sampling of classes taught Digital Arts I & II, Digital Photo (for college credit), Arts Foundation

Q: What are your proficiency-based graduation requirements for the arts?

A: Students need to take one credit of a Visual Art or Music class for graduation. Here are links to the Rutland Southwest SU art [curriculum website](#) and the [Poultney High School Proficiency-based Graduation Requirement High School Performance Task](#).

Q: Why did you select these as your proficiencies?

A: We worked with our curriculum coordinator, Bernie Peatman, to choose our power standards. We also used the NCAS Artistic Processes as a starting point but streamlined them because they were very large.

Q: How did you go about writing your performance indicators?

A: We used the NCAS as an example.

Q: In what ways are the National Core Arts Standards reflected in the documentation for your courses?

A: Students see them in their syllabus, are emailed a copy of the standards that are assessed, have them on project rubrics, and see them hanging in the classroom.

Q: What has the transition to proficiency-based learning been like in your classroom?

A: It has been fairly straight forward because we have been using the NAEA Art Standards for 23 years. We were one of the first high schools to receive the updated Art Standards and we piloted the Digital Media PBGRs.

Q: What has been especially helpful during the transition at your school or in your classroom?

A: The resources from NAEA were fantastic. It also helped to have dedicated time within my district and my school to work on curriculum with my department. We were also able to work outside school time for a stipend since most in my department do not need graduate credits.

Q: Anything more you would like to share about how you or your arts program is implementing proficiency-based learning?

A: The Digital Media Pilot program was a great opportunity to take the NAEA PBGRs and see how they work in the classroom. By having multiple methods of assessment I was able to find the rubric that worked best for me and that my students were most comfortable with. My students enjoyed the assessment, understood what to do, and were very comfortable with reflection on their experience. They liked being able to choose and research a Digital Media Artist that appealed to them and they liked the option of being able to work singly or as part of a team. This gave me a model to follow as I developed the [PBGR Performance Assessments](#) for my other classes. The packet provided by the NAEA is huge with multiple assessments and repetitive information so I streamlined it for my class. My students were annoyed because the assignment said the videos needed to be no longer than 2 minutes. Some of the benchmarks chosen were much longer and my students said they had to edit and work really hard to get their videos under 2 minutes. My Digital Arts students also do more than video and I created two alternative assessments for the students who wanted to concentrate on photography, game design, or 3D printing. It was also rewarding to have [two videos chosen as benchmarks](#).

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Events and Announcements

Are you interested in an art or music resource sharing day?

Do you want to learn about what others are doing in their classrooms? Do you want to collaborate with colleagues from around the state? Topics could include:

- Updating curriculum to align with NCAS
- Transitioning classroom systems to align with proficiency-based learning
- Writing learning targets and proficiency scales
- Revamping rubrics
- Calibrating rubrics and benchmarking student work

Contact emily.titterton@vermont.gov with spaces, dates, questions, and concerns.

2018 Flynn Center Summer Arts Literacy Institute

The [2018 Flynn Summer Arts Literacy Institute](#) will be held from August 14 to 16, 2018 at the historic Clemmons Family Farm in Charlotte; an African-American Heritage Trail site and ArtPlace America grant awardee. The institute is led by nationally recognized leaders in arts and education; Lincoln Center Education's Dacia Washington, Harvard Project ZERO's Aysha Upchurch, and the Flynn Center's Susanna Olson. Register online. [More information and register.](#) Who should attend? ALL teachers, curriculum directors, principals, and those interested in topics such as literacy and global citizenry, place-based instruction, equity and expression, arts integration, and inquiry-based learning and transferable skills. Graduate credit available.

Research Brief: Proficiency-based Grading Practices

Vermont schools are moving towards proficiency-based systems of learning with the expectation that students will graduate in 2020 by demonstrating proficiency in content knowledge as well as transferable skills ([Education Quality Standards](#), Graduation Requirements, 2120.7). As a result, educators are designing new grading systems that communicate where a student is along a continuum of learning. The [Research Brief: Proficiency-Based Grading Practices](#) was constructed with input from numerous Vermont educators in an attempt to inform rather than dictate decisions related to grading practices in a personalized and proficiency-based system. Contact: Pat Fitzsimmons at pat.fitzsimmons@vermont.gov or (802) 479-1425

Arts Bus Educator Workshops

The Arts Bus is offering two adult workshops on Tuesday, July 31, 2018 at the VTC Randolph Campus, Red School House building. Choose one or both workshops. PD credit available. \$50 for both. Includes potluck lunch and door prize raffle. Contact info@artsbusvt.org or (802) 431-6203 to register. The two workshops are *Process-Based Art with Toddlers, PreK and Early Elementary Students* with instructor-Heather DeLeone of [Arts Bus, Inc.](#) and *Trauma-informed and Trauma-sensitive Art Facilitation for Early Educators* with instructor Tracy Penfield of [SafeArt](#).

Workshop: Fun with Wire at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center

In this afternoon workshop, sculptor Bruce Campbell, will guide participants in twisting and joining wire to create whimsical animal sculptures. The workshop will be held July 24, Tuesday, 1-5 p.m. at BMAC in Brattleboro. Space is limited. Call (802) 257-0124, ext. 101 or [purchase online](#).

Vermont Art Teachers Association [Conference](#) will be held on September 28, 2018 at Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee, VT.

Vermont Music Educators Association and Vermont-American Choir Directors Association [Conference](#) will be held on October 8, 2018 at Castleton State College.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

<http://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/content-areas/arts>