

## The Audience in Authentic Performance

### How can the consideration for an audience enhance performance teaching and learning?

As an emerging teacher I had a strong passion for project-based teaching and learning. I taught the life sciences, and this strategy made a great deal of sense to me. My students were engaged and were mostly interested in the classroom content and using it to help develop their products. I did not realize my issue with this strategy until years later as a facilitator of professional learning. My problem was that whenever I assigned a project, my students were creating this product for me. I had neglected an important aspect of project-based learning; the audience.

As part of the teaching process, I would provide the students with an overview of the task and products to be completed. I would share the rubrics with my students before beginning so they were aware of the expectations for themselves and their products. During this conversation, the students knew what was to be done, how it would be assessed, and for who they were creating their products; me. Creating a meaningful audience would have provided a deeper learning experience that could have provided relevance for performance tasks, thus helping to create authentic tasks with a purposeful audience.

### Audience as Part of the GRASP Template and Authentic Tasks

My current work involves the use of the *Understanding by Design* GRASP's template (Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, and Products) for the development of performance tasks. These tasks can become more authentic through the inclusion of a specific audience based upon real world connections. Defined STEM performance tasks become authentic based upon career relevance and the inclusion of a specific audience that students must consider when developing their products. Following are a few examples of Defined STEM performance tasks featuring diverse audiences.

- Earth Scientist: Geothermal Energy (Grade 9)
  - [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=3E5BE3AA-6640-49D3-A4E1-C70D3C009F11](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=3E5BE3AA-6640-49D3-A4E1-C70D3C009F11)
- Baseball Bat Analyst (Grade 7)
  - [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=34779E64-03FE-452B-BACC-5B9200F2748B](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=34779E64-03FE-452B-BACC-5B9200F2748B)
- Assembly Lines (Grades 3-5)
  - [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=BD6B366D-5AAD-4875-A290-655CFC31D21E](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=BD6B366D-5AAD-4875-A290-655CFC31D21E)

Through consideration for the audience, students are required to look at the information, content, and concepts through an alternate lens (that of their audience). Students will need to apply their knowledge of the topic to create products specific to the needs of their audience. Knowledge is much more than just reciting information. Cabrera and Colosi (2012) defined knowledge as, “actionable information used to solve a problem, navigate a situation, or figure something out. It is the way we use information and how we activate it.” It is the last part of this definition that connects with the audience. Students need to activate their knowledge to provide products for their audience. Doing this extends their understanding and allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

## Practices and Capacities Addressed Through an Audience

Reviewing a graphic from the National Science Teachers Association connecting practices and capacities across sets of academic standards including Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) find processes enhanced through the development of an audience. Following are some of practices and capacities strengthened through the use of an audience. These are by no means the only connections that can be made.

The CCSS Standards for Mathematical Practices expect students to:

*M2: Reason abstractly and quantitatively*

*M3: Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others*

The NGSS Scientific and Engineering Practices expect students to:

*S4: Analyzing and interpreting data*

*S6: Constructing explanations and designing solutions*

*S7: Engaging in argument from evidence*

*S8: Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information*

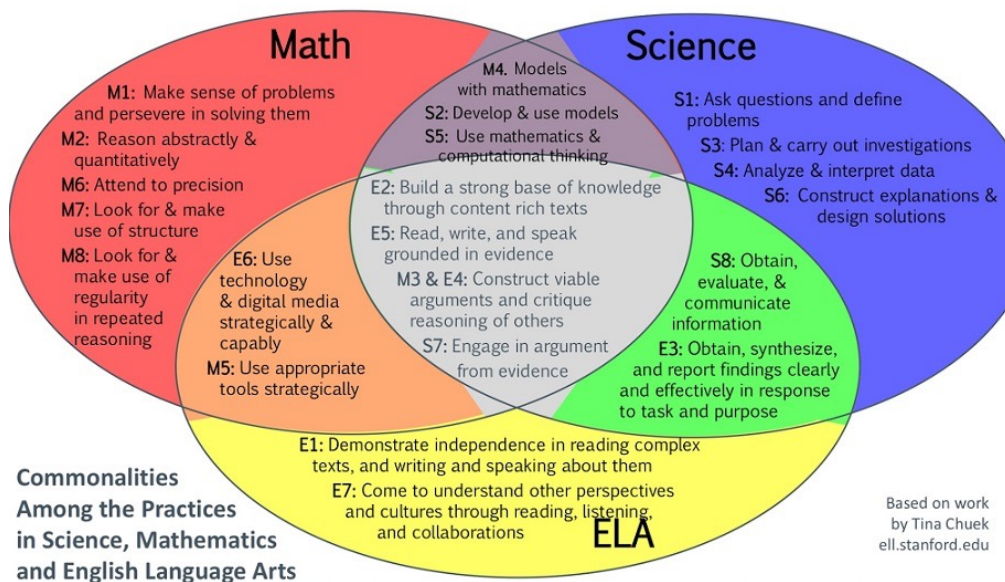
The CCSS Capacities expect students to:

*E3: They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.*

*E5: They value evidence.*

*E7: They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.*

The diagram below shares many relationships across the subject areas, all which require students to apply their knowledge and skills (Cheuk, 2013). Through authentic tasks, these practices and capacities have more relevance, as consideration must be given for the specific audience and the purpose intended.



## Audience and Entrepreneurship

This idea brings forth connections with entrepreneurship, as well as creativity and innovation, two attributes commonly referred to as critical 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As part of this process, entrepreneurs must determine their audience and quite frequently their specific target audience. Any task involving an audience requires the person conducting the task to determine the audience and critical attributes of that audience. Who are they? What are their wants and needs? How can I engage them? As students design and build products such as prototypes, models, brochures, and multimedia presentations, the creative process includes strong considerations for the wants and needs of the target audience.

Entrepreneurs have the daunting task of building a product or service from scratch that in some way solves a problem that exists in our society. Communicating the problem and the solution to varied audiences will be an important step in the success of the endeavor. This communication requires the sharing of information to help inform decision-making. It also often involves argumentation and persuasion to convince the audience of the value of a product or service.

Entrepreneurs are first and foremost problem solvers. Johnjoe Farragher is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Defined Learning and an entrepreneur who is constantly considering his target audience. During a conversation about Defined Learning work, he shared the following,

“One critical piece of the communication process for entrepreneurs is the audience who is receiving the message. I find these five questions help me make sure my message is on point and is specifically crafted to the audience.

1. Who is in the audience and what types of decision makers are they?
2. Will they be able to see the problem that I'm solving and the need to produce a solution?
3. What are their needs in listening to this communication?
4. How will they process the information I'm giving them?
5. What is the Ask? What do I want them to do after the presentation?”

These questions can help students determine the best way to apply content and skills to meet the need of a particular audience. The following task refers to the audience as a focus group. Upon first glance this focus group is anything but focused. This is done intentionally to help the educator consider a wide range of people who may be the target audience for a backpack. The task may be edited to create a target audience. In many instances teachers will create multiple versions of this task to address multiple target audiences. This strategy allows students to consider the common design process and make specific decisions related to all aspects of the backpack based upon the specified audience. What audience would you select for your students? Or would you let them select their own target audience?

- Backpack Designer (Grade 7): [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=76BC1F59-4018-4C9C-A68C-7BE395B68FEF](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=76BC1F59-4018-4C9C-A68C-7BE395B68FEF)

During a professional learning experience, a middle school social studies teacher shared his idea for using this task in his classroom. He taught an introduction to eight historical, world cultures during his class. He

suggested that during the year his class would build eight backpacks, one for each culture. To do this he would ask the students to consider three questions for each culture:

- What materials are available to build the backpack?
- What types of things would people from this culture put in their backpack? and
- Where are they going to go with their backpack on their back?

These are great questions and he explained that the answers were critical aspects of his units. Creating backpacks for the people of each culture would provide something tangible for the students and would help them understand the geography, society and culture of this group. It would extend the students' thinking beyond what they are familiar with and how things are done in their "world."

### Considering the Value of a Global Audience

Creativity, entrepreneurship, and global competence are the new basic skills that will bring the "coming prosperity" to the world (Auerswald, 2012).

Many authentic tasks can be created for a local, national, and/or global audience. Our students need to create mental relationships for their existence in a global, interconnected world. Topic and audience can help to create the situation and require students to utilize practices and capacities, adapting as necessary for a global audience and/or an audience somewhere other than where they are familiar.

JT Rehill is the Managing Director of LEAD Turkey, a professional training and coaching organization in Istanbul, Turkey. His work takes him to many different countries including the United States. I asked him to consider the questions he asks about his audience when preparing a written, oral, or formal presentation. His answer follows and he shared that he does this so frequently that it has been a while since he truly considered specific questions. "His wants and needs were fairly subconscious as he prepared products for each specific audience.

1. What's in it for them? (In other words, what should they walk away with? This is what I base my purpose on and figure out my key messages/conclusion.)
2. Why should they listen to me? Presenting helps me know where to begin and to build a personal connection - and some credibility - from the start.)
3. What do I want them to question? (This stems from the root of "What might they already know?," but if I can get them to think critically about a topic then I'm fulfilling my purpose.)
4. How can I make it stick? (What will reinforce the intended messages throughout? In a presentation this might mean more meaningful stories, reflective questions, or dramatic pauses. In a workshop it relates to planned activities or discussion strategies, depending on the group. In writing, this has to do with formatting and writing style, but largely follows the same narrative style as presenting)."

Regardless if your audience is local, national, or international, an authentic experience must consider these questions. Additionally, as someone who presents and creates products for a global audience he was asked how "culture" impacts the products he develops.

"Culture is an essential element in considering any audience - and it's far bigger than one's nationality or identification with any demographic sub-group - which means understanding core beliefs, familial and

societal rituals, taboos, language, behavioral norms, sense of humor, etc. You have to consider what you know about commonalities within an audience so you can make the necessary personal connection.”

Yong Zhao, the Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education at the University of Oregon, provides critical insight to this point:

“With over seven billion people living different economic, social, and cultural settings, some of which do not necessarily share the same values or interests, we must be concerned about how to get along and what we can equip our children with to make the world they will occupy peaceful and sustainable. They have to be educated as citizens of the world beyond citizens of a nation. A global perspective and genuine concern about the well being of others are essential for citizens in the age of globalization.” (Asia Society, 2008; Zhao, 2009)

In many instances, authentic tasks can be developed and utilized that are similar, addressing the same audience, yet with different roles. They can be beneficial in addressing an issue from alternate points of view requiring the use of practices and capacities across the standards areas. The audience must be informed and persuaded based upon the claims made and evidence provided. This evidence must be communicated and presented to the audience in a way in which the audience will understand and benefit. The two tasks below are an example of this idea based upon Southeast Asia. Before students can address the issues they must learn about the location and the culture of the people involved.

The following examples promote the idea of a global audience:

- Hydroelectric Engineer: The Xayaburi Dam Project and the People of Laos
  - [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=74BEFBFF-A1CB-4C79-84CB-A447C905356B](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=74BEFBFF-A1CB-4C79-84CB-A447C905356B)
- Project Analyst: The Xayuburi Dam and the People Downstream
  - [http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset\\_guid=9B1265A8-52D9-4BB0-9379-5FD0A935A4DB](http://www.definedstem.com/tasks/index.cfm?asset_guid=9B1265A8-52D9-4BB0-9379-5FD0A935A4DB)

In this example, the products are similar and intended for the same audience. The content knowledge is somewhat different based upon the role assigned. The practices and capacities utilized by the students in their respective roles remain the same. Each role must understand the audience and communicate the message effectively to be successful. In this example the content is similar but the perspective is different and the audience must understand the perspective and why it matters.

Educators may use these authentic tasks independently or they may use both in the same classroom with groups of students involved and perhaps having the debate with students assigned to be the audience. These students will review the products and listen to the debate making a final decision. Often, the students serving as the audience will have a deeper learning experience as they review and question both sides and their roles.

## Conclusion

To be authentic, students need an audience. Determining the audience is an ongoing part of task development through the GRASP template. As part of this process the educator will want to consider many variables:

- How is the audience connected with the critical content and skills?
- How is the audience related to the problem, issue, process under consideration for the task?
- What resources are available to help students learn about the task and the audience under consideration?
- What is the goal for this audience when considering the role the student(s) will be assuming?
- What will the student(s) be providing the audience?

I am reminded of a comment made to me by an undergraduate ecology professor when I indicated my concern about teaching the content that I was learning in his class. He suggested that through teaching it a few times and having to determine how best my students would learn what was necessary, I would become much more knowledgeable about the content and theories. Sure enough, he was correct and years later, I realized that by having to consider my audience, I became much more knowledgeable about the subject matter and how to apply it in diverse situations. My students were my audience! And I hope that by meeting the needs of my audience I became a better teacher.

By considering the needs of their audience, students can become deeper learners. This deep learning will require students to think strategically, communicate effectively and apply interdisciplinary content and skills in meaningful ways.

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