Final Report: Evaluation of the Performance Based Assessment Process in Internationals Network High Schools in New York City

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Overview

This study documents the Performance Based Assessment Task (PBAT) practices at two high schools in New York City that are part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools: Flushing International High School (in Queens) and International High School at Prospect Heights (in Brooklyn). International High Schools in New York City enroll 9th to 12th grade immigrant students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than four years at the time of admission and who, as defined by the New York City Department of Education, "are English Language Learners per New York City Department of Education guidelines scoring at the Entering, Emerging, or Transitioning levels on the NYSESLAT, NYSITELL, or LAB-R." These schools are also among 47 schools in New York State that, by participating in special programs from the NYS Regents Board, have a graduation path for their students that is not just limited to standardized Regents exams, but can also include Performance Based Assessment Tasks (*PBATs*) in order to graduate.

Performance assessment, which at times is referred to as *authentic assessment* or *alternative assessment,* refers to the practice of having students complete a task to demonstrate mastery of content or skills, rather than complete a paper-and-pencil test or select an answer from a multiple-choice list. In contrast to one-shot tests, authentic assessments typically align to experiential learning and enable students to demonstrate what they have learned. Authentic assessments allow students to retain content longer, and encourage higher-order thinking, while

they also ask students to employ creative problem solving and develop social skills and academic language.

Portfolio projects, or PBATs, are designed by teachers in each content area to align directly with New York State Standards; they are graded using rubrics corresponding to each content area that are designed to align with these standards.

In order to fulfil their graduation requirements, students at Flushing and Prospect Heights complete four content PBATs, a native language PBAT, and a personal statement, as well as two Regents exams: one in in Math and one in English Language Arts. Students start their Portfolio Project journey in content classrooms where they begin work on open-ended, teacher-designed projects under the guidance of the corresponding content-area teachers who designed the project.

PBATs draw heavily on disciplinary knowledge and skills (e.g., history projects require students to analyze multiple primary sources and synthesize perspectives, while science projects may require experimentation, data collection and analysis to draw conclusions.). Projects are open-ended, requiring that students take the lead in making decisions determining the direction, emphasis, content and form of the project. PBAT progjects also frequently require students to make interdisciplinary connections. After they have begun their project, students are then assigned a teacher mentor (often a faculty member from another discipline), and work with that faculty member to refine and revise their individual PBAT projects. The process culminates with an oral presentation and defense in front of teachers, peers and community members.

This report shares findings from ethnographic case study research that documents how PBATs are implemented and negotiated by teachers and students over the course of a student's high school career, beginning in the ninth grade.

Introduction

This study represents two years of in-depth ethnographic research documenting the PBAT process at two focal schools, the International High School at Prospect Heights and Flushing International High School, within the Internationals Network for Public Schools. At these schools, researchers collected observation, interview, and focus group data. Focal school data was supplemented with observations of the PBAT process at Brooklyn International High School and The International High School at LaGuardia Community College. Principals at both focal schools participated in 60-minute-long interviews. Additionally, we conducted focus groups with both students and teachers at each school. Focus group of 60-90 minutes included 4-7 participants. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In addition to interviews, the researchers observed multiple PBAT panels at schools. During these school visits, we were able to see how each school has aligned assessment to curriculum and instructional practices. We paid close attention to how students learned to participate in the PBAT process from ninth through 12th grade by, among other things, observing group portfolio projects that are completed during the ninth and 10th grade years as well as the graduation-worthy PBATs done in the 11th and 12th grade.

Researchers also observed two or more mentoring sessions at each school and documented the work of three student/mentor pairs. The sample pairs were purposefully chosen to ensure a range of student ability levels, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and grade levels. Due to Internal Review Board restrictions, student participants were over 18. We chose pairs in which one mentor teacher was a veteran, one was relatively new to the International High Schools, and one was an administrator. In mentoring sessions, we documented interactions and dialogue between teachers and students about the PBAT revision process.

In addition, we documented professional development activities for teachers focused on PBATs, one network-wide professional development meeting, two network wide meetings about PBATs of a Portfolio Committee convened by the network staff and with one rep from each of 15 NYC International schools, and two school-based professional development sessions. (In the first of these sessions, teachers presented their PBAT curriculum to the staff. In the second, teachers used a rubric to grade, or "norm," an example of completed student work as a staff) Finally, we analyzed documents, drafts of student work that demonstrate the writing and revision processes, and rubrics that set expectations for student outcomes.

All data were coded and analyzed using ATLAS.Ti, a database specfically designed to help researchers organize and analyze qualitative data. Coding included descriptive and theoretical codes as well as codes from relevant literature. Invivo coding, or the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, like an interview transcript, by using a word or short phrase taken from that data, was used to highlight themes in the data using the participants' own voices. As part of our analysis, we wrote memos to develop themes that emerged from the coding process. In our analysis, we found that although each IHS has adapted the PBAT process to fit their student needs and school cultures, there are several common elements of the PBAT process that we observed at each of the four schools we visited.

Common Elements of the PBAT Process

In this section we provide an overview of common elements of the PBAT process. In the section that follows, we provide ethnographic examples of these elements and identify key areas of impact.

PBAT Preparation Begins in the Ninth and 10th Grade

Students learn and practice elements of the PBAT process in the ninth and 10th grade by working on group projects that mirror the types of projects that they complete independently in the 11th and 12th grade. Ninth and 10th grade teachers design projects and rubrics that align with the graduation rubrics. They may also use the Junior Institute rubrics that were designed by the network to support teachers in the alignment of their curriculum and assessment. Typically, these projects involve identifying valid sources, gathering evidence, framing arguments, and responding to counter arguments. The projects are scaffolded to meet the content and language needs of Ninth and 10th grade students. Often projects in the lower grades are completed by small groups of students. This allows students at different levels of language and content learning to develop knowledge and skills in a peer-supported environment. It is common to see 10th grade students taking leadership roles in these groups and serving as learning guides, translators, and peer mentors to the ninth-grade students.

It is common to see students work together as a group to to write an essay that is similar in style and length to the argumentative essay they complete individually in 11th or 12th grade. Some schools have ninth and 10th grade students complete interdisciplinary group portfolios in which they study the same theme through the lenses of different disciplines. At Flushing International High School, we observed ninth and 10th grade interdisciplinary projects focused on students' cultures and heritages, which culminated with students producing videos, PowerPoints and websites that they presented individually to a panel of peers and teachers. At Brooklyn IHS, we observed how students studied the water cycle in science, created graphs of access to water resources in math, and examined issues of water access over time in their home countries. In their group portfolio presentations, some students choreographed an interpretive

dance about water access, others gave a speech about a social justice issue related to water, and then all of them presented their work from social studies, math, and science using visual aids.

Each school scaffolds the PBAT process in the ninth and 10th grade in order to prime students for success in the 11th and 12th grade. In addition to learning the academic skills required to complete projects, students become comfortable presenting their work in front of their peers and teachers in group and individual presentations. After preparation in the ninth and 10th grade in content, language, and self-expression, students develop PBAT projects in 11th and 12th grade classrooms where they read and write about texts, analyze data, design science experiments, create math models, and engage in historical research. These interdisciplinary projects are designed by teachers to respond to the unique needs of immigrant students. In contrast to standardized tests like the Regents, PBAT projects are open ended and provide the flexibility for students to make choices in how they develop their PBATs based on their learning styles, experiences, and interests. While there is flexibility offered with the PBATs which is important given the diverse experiences and learning needs of immigrant ELLs, the projects are also aligned with state and national standards.

Teachers work collaboratively with their instructional and discipline teams to develop and refine PBAT projects. In addition, they receive ongoing support from the Internationals Network in the form of: instructional coaches, professional development sessions and a Portfolio resource guide. All phases of curriculum development are guided by rubrics that were created by the Network to align with the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

The PBAT Preparation Process is Guided by Adult Mentors

Projects originate in student's content courses and are developed and guided by content teachers. Then, the process of transforming a student's PBAT into a "graduation worthy" final product and presentation takes place over several weeks or months of mentoring. Each students who is actively working on PBAT projects is assigned a faculty mentor to support their work. Mentors include teachers, administrators, counselors, literacy coaches, and social workers from each school. The goal of mentoring is to help elevate a student's classroom work into a finished project that is, in the language of the PBAT process, *graduation worthy*, meaning that it reflects the level of rigor, skill and knowledge that demonstrates college readiness as per the standards in each discipline. This process includes polishing syntax, and grammar, and semantics, tightening arguments, clarifying formulas, detailing procedures and refining conclusions. In a focus group, a student described how he worked with his mentor to develop a paper. He explained, "when you're writing a PBAT it's just not a simple paper, it is college-level writing. You take it to the next level. Your mentor gives you feedback that they think is going to make your paper better and they push you further." With the mentor's guidance, a student is able to extend work that begins as a classroom assignment, further refining academic skills.

While mentors work to meet the individual needs of students, the students themselves drive the pacing and outcomes of the PBAT process. At Prospect Heights, students fill out a checklist for what they hope to accomplish during a mentoring session. At Flushing, students and teachers communicate in a shared Google Doc throughout the week. Mentors expect students to make progress on their PBATs outside of instructional time so that mentoring time can be spent refining projects and setting goals for the week to come. In mentoring sessions, teachers are responsive to students' individual learning styles and draw on their home languages

and cultures. It is not uncommon for mentor teachers who share a language other than English with their students to engage in translanguaging, switching back and forth between the student's home language and English, to engage students in language learning as they speak and write about content.

PBATs Culminate in Panel Presentations

The PBAT process culminates with a student's formal presentations to a PBAT panel (see figure 1 in appendix). The panel is often made up of the mentor, teachers, administrators, counselors and outside evaluators who are all part of the process of engaging in discussions with students about their projects and evaluating students' work. Panels usually include one representative content area teacher from either science and math, and one from the humanities. In some schools, fellow students are also included in the panel either to observe or participate as a panelist. Often a younger student will participate in a PBAT panel to learn about the process the year before they begin presenting PBATs. The panels usually begin with the student making a formal introduction, thanking the panelists for attending, and summarizing their presentation. Next, the student is asked to leave the room so that the panelists can discuss the projects in question. Panelists are given the paper in advance of the panel and often come with questions already generated. The student is invited back into the room and is usually given ten minutes to present their work and ten minutes to answer the panelists' questions. While this is the guide, rich discussions among the members of PBAT panels frequently extend beyond the allotted time. At the end of the presentation, students are also given the opportunity to reflect on their learning process and future goals. In some Schools, like Flushing, students write reflections using a template while they wait for the panel to discuss his or her presentation.

PBATs are Graded Using Standardized Rubrics

The revision process is guided by a set of rubrics[1] that were developed and standardized by teachers and leaders from New York City schools within the Internationals Network for Public Schools. There are rubrics for four mandatory content areas (Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Math,), a native language project, and a personal statement that are used across schools and have identical formats. The network has also developed rubrics specific to engineering, art, and other content areas that may not be offered at all schools. Each rubric spans four possible scores: three passing scores (*outstanding*, *good*, and *competent*), and one failing score (*needs revision)*. Each content area rubric addresses multiple "bands" or performance standards. For example, in the math rubric, the seven bands include: a) Problem-solving and planning, b) reasoning process, c) fluency, d) connections, e) representations, f) communication, and g) presentation. On the rubric, each of these bands is linked to a Common Core State Standard.

It is not unusual for students to generate as many as six drafts of an essay with their mentor before it is considered to be meeting rubric requirements. Together, students and their mentors set goals for the final project grade, using the rubric to guide their revision process. Some students are able to earn a "competent" having provided "limited explanation of how evidence presented supports each argument" while others earn an "outstanding having "thoroughly explained and analyzed the connection between all evidence and arguments being made." The rubrics are written using language designed to encourage students to engage in higher-order thinking. For example, students are asked to explore the "implications" or

[1] Schools within the Internationals Network for Public Schools have adapted the rubrics from the New York Performance Standards Consortium

significance of their project and to make connections between what they learn in school and what is happening in the larger community, country, and world.

Each student's PBAT is evaluated in the final panel presentation using the specific content-area rubric. The panelists (faculty members, community members) use the relevant content-area rubric as a tool to consider evaluation the student's essay and oral presentation on the strength of its thesis, its organization, the variety, relevance and depth of evidence that supports the argument, and the depth of understanding of the specific disciplinary concepts demonstrated by the work. To help determine a student's final grade, panelists generate a list of questions to ask the student when he or she returns to the room about the bands where the student might have displayed weaknesses, or where they would like to hear more detail from the student. The last band on the rubric is for the presentation, which requires students to clearly communicate their arguments. While teachers have read and sometimes evaluated students written work prior to the panel presentation, the presentation provides an opportunity for students to influence their grade. In the presentation in front of the panel, each student has the opportunity to present new evidence, arguments, and analysis that may have not appeared in the written work, which can then move a student's grade up or down significantly in any of the bands. Using the rubric, the panelists engage in discussion and sometimes debate what grade the PBAT merits given the language of each band of the rubric, then agree on one holistic grade.

Key Areas of Impact

In the following sections, we provide ethnographic evidence of the common elements of the PBAT process and offer an analysis of how the PBAT process creates more equitable and meaningful learning experiences for secondary immigrant English learners, impacts teacher and

student relationships, encourages rigor and in-depth study, motivates teacher collaboration, and prepares students for life beyond high school.

The PBAT Process is Rigorous and Individualized

Edmunds, Arshavsky, Glennie, Charles, and Rice (2017) argue that "rigorous assessments should provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate higher order thinking strategies and be aligned to the content and instructional activities in which the students have engaged. They should also provide the opportunity for students to reflect on and revise their thinking" (Edmunds, et al., p. 3).

We found that teachers believe that the process of completing a PBATs is rigorous, and involves extensive revision process that promotes students' understanding of their own learning processes. In a focus group, teachers described how, in comparison to a traditional writing assignment in which a student might complete one or two revisions, with a PBAT, "they come to a mentor who says, 'this could be developed further and… you could continue to develop your analysis, and let's point back to your thesis, and how about developing that conclusion." Another teacher added that the process "develops their growth mindset" because "they learn that it is okay to struggle" through the revision process.

Students reported that their teachers and mentors scaffolded the writing and revision process for PBATs to meet their needs. One student told us:

> The teacher always gives you the next step. They tell you, 'ok this is what you have to work on.' You have the whole week to do it little by little so when you go to them [the next week] your mentor helps you and tells you what you need to do [next]. Sometimes

> they send you an email [during the week] and tell you, 'ok you need to fix this, if you have time, fix this.'

Students also reported that the revision process promoted the retention of what they were learning and an understanding of its importance.

> With PBATs, you have to understand what you're doing, the reasoning why you're doing it, you have to understand why it is important. You have to learn, not only memorize, but learn all of the skills to have to have a perfect paper.

Students quickly learn that the revision process is extensive, but that it ultimately helps them to gain essential academic skills. One student reflected on how she struggled to learn how to cite and reference research in her writing over a period of several months of communication with her mentor. She reflected on how her writing developed through this process, explaining that it is not something you "can just rush in two or three days," but rather a process that takes time.

> My mentor is always pushing me. You need to have someone who can guide you through the process- you just cannot go through by yourself. So it's really cool to have a mentor in your life. Little by little get to know each other so each paper that we work on, she knows my thinking better. Now that I'm working on my last one, it's quick because she knows the way I think and I know what she wants me to do. It's easy for both of us since we know what we're going to do and what's our style.

In her English Language Arts PBAT, the student's mentor focused on helping her with her citations. The student recalls struggling with citations for months but after found her History PBAT much easier to complete because she really understood the process of revision, using evidence from a text, citing sources, and analyzing the meaning of the evidence. She explained:

> I learned some things [from the English PBAT]. I was trying to implement the citation through my words, so not saying 'according to the author', the quote, and then analyzing it. When I was doing that with my history paper, my mentor told me, 'you see you learned, you have now a good structure, your phrases are well organized, and also your grammar is becoming better!'

Similar to the revision process, we observed PBAT panel presentations in which students were asked to defend their work by explaining concepts or applying knowledge to different contexts. PBATs are also graded according to rigorous standards. Once the student has completed his or her presentation, the student leaves the room and the panelists grade each PBAT project band by band, debating the merits of the essay. For example, when grading a math PBAT on tessellations, the math teacher on the panel said, "I had her at a "good" (assessment level)for problem solving and planning because she understood the task, she knew what she was supposed to do. I liked that in her presentation she included a video that walked us through the strategy on how to create a tessellation. Her strategy was efficient and appropriate." In this example, the teacher is offering his analysis of both the written paper and using phrases from the rubric like "efficient and appropriate" to connect his analysis to where the students' work falls on the rubric. The other panelists agreed. In the next band, there was more debate about where the students' work fell on the rubric. One teacher remarked, "I wanted to hear more predictions about her tessellations." Her mentor added, "Yes, I suggested to her that the shape might be too simple." The math teacher said, "My issue is with the second bullet point on the rubric. We were really trying to pull it out of her but I don't think she fully understood the formula. In her paper, the equation is correct but her presentation suggested that she didn't fully understand" The panel ultimately decided that the student did not clearly demonstrate her knowledge of

tessellations in her presentation and decided to give her a "needs revision." Working with her mentor, the student revised the project and successfully defended the PBAT to her committee a few weeks later.

Our findings suggest that overall, in comparison to standardized exams, PBATs require that students develop critical academic skills that they are able to apply across their academic work in high school and beyond.

The PBAT Process is Equitable and Meaningful

Historically, English learners have been disproportionately assigned to lower curriculum tracks and to special education on the basis of inappropriate assessment (Cummins, 1984; Duran, 1989; Lacelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1991; Wilkinson & Ortiz, 1986). More recently, English learners have been linguistically and culturally disadvantaged by accountability systems that rely exclusively on standardized tests to evaluate both English language and content learning (Ou, 2010; Menken, 2008; Miranda & Cherng, 2018), which has been shown to mask how language proficiency in English is often erroneously equated with content knowledge. The consequences of inequitable accountability systems are more extreme for high school students when students' failure to pass exit exams means they are at a higher risk of drooping out of high school and not receiving a diploma. Our findings echo existing scholarship that finds that the use of performance assessment may reduce the negative impacts of high-stakes assessments on immigrant students and ELs (Holme, Richards, Jimerson, & Cohen, 2010; Ou, 2010; Papay, Murnane, & Willett, 2010; Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that meaningful, equitable, and culturally responsive instruction and assessment involve all students in the construction of knowledge, builds on

students' personal and cultural strengths, helps students examine content from multiple perspectives, and makes the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students.

Performance-based assessment tasks at Internationals Network high schools are equitable and meaningful because they emerge from open-ended projects that are designed by teachers with the specific learning needs of immigrant and EL students in mind (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Fine, Stoudt, & Futch, 2005; Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Stoudt, & Futch, 2007; Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2016).

When explaining why they believed completing performance-based assessment tasks was a meaningful learning experience, students often drew a comparison to the state Regents exams, which they are also required to take in two subject areas. One student, comparing his experiencing taking the Math Regents with completing a performance-based task in math, explained.

> With my PBAT, I know how to explain the graph, I know how to show the correlation. My PBAT is about driving accidents related to drugs, alcohol, and sex to see which one has the higher correlation, to see which is the most dangerous. I know what I'm doing with it when I write- I know exactly what I'm doing.

This student reflected on how the completion of the math project enabled him to focus on a deeper learning and understanding of academic content and skills and how this allowed him to develop a sense of academic competency.

Another student shared:

> It's short-term things that you forget after you take [the Regents], like who cares, I passed. With the PBATs it's more like long term, you take something from it. So, you

learn something, and the skills that you learn you're going to take it. Like maybe I didn't know how to cite before, now I know how to do citation and that's going to transfer into college.

Identification and citation of legitimate sources is a skill that is addressed on almost every rubric used to grade PBATs. The Evidence and Analysis band of the English Language Arts Rubric asks students to draw and cite evidence from sources to support argument. This corresponds with Common Core State Standard (W11-12.2.A,B). On the Engineering rubric used in some schools, under the Contextualize the Design Problem band, students are graded on their ability to include both primary and secondary sources about their background research. In addition to its connection to Common Core Standards, this skill is also connected to Next Generation Science Standards (SEP 1; 8).

Teachers also described how Regents exams included content and questions that were written in such a way that they were inaccessible for immigrant students learning English. For example, one Regents ELA exam included a footnote to explain military time, yet the same exam did not include a footnote to provide unit clarification or a conversion into Celsius for a literary excerpt that described a sick child's temperature as "one hundred and four degrees." Another exam required students to read four texts and write an argumentative essay on the primarily North American and European phenomenon of daylight savings time. Teachers cite these examples as evidence of the ways in which the exams were less meaningful and culturally-relevant than the PBAT projects to their students.

In contrast, teachers described how the PBATs responded to students' real-world experiences and prepared them for the future. As one math teacher explained:

> PBATs are meaningful to our students. When we design our math curriculum, we connect it to the real world and students are able to make connections between the concepts and their daily lives. Like functions…they use functions in predicting their future weekly earnings, their investment returns when it comes to their 401k, and their future returns if they invest in real estate or the stock market. The PBAT is helping to better prepare them, not just for daily life but for the bigger picture when they leave high school and prepare for college.

In addition, teachers described how PBATs provided opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences as new immigrants and use their emerging multilingual language skills. We witnessed the multiple ways students use language skills working with peers on PBAT projects, explaining their thinking with their mentors, and defending their work in formal PBAT presentations.

The literature suggests that immigrant English learners are better served by assessments that allow them to learn content and language simultaneously in meaningful ways rather than spending school time memorizing facts and strategies for passing standardized tests. PBATs give teachers and students the opportunity to tailor assessments to meet the specific needs of immigrant students while still meeting the learning goals set forth in the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. This results in an authentic assessment practice that is both more equitable and meaningful for immigrant students.

The PBAT Process Fosters Strong Relationships between Teachers and Students

Decades of research demonstrate the positive impact that strong teacher-student relationships can have on a student's schooling experience. Students who have caring and

supportive relationships with adults at school are more academically engaged and are more likely to feel a sense of belonging at school (Klem & Connell, 1997; Roorda, Helma, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). In this study, we found that the PBAT process deepens students' relationships with mentors who provide in-depth, individualized instruction and support to develop the academic skills and confidence to successfully complete PBATs. Mentoring takes place at a designated time each week. Sudents arrive, grab a laptop, and open up the Google doc of the PBAT they are working on with their mentor. In some classrooms, students sit apart from each other- working independently at different tables, hunched over laptops, periodically checking in with their mentors to ask questions or get feedback. In others, the mentor provides small group instruction to a few students. The relationship that students have with their mentors is in addition to relationships with classroom teachers, providing another person that students can turn to for individualized support. As one teacher explains, "We really get to know students through the mentoring relationship. We get to know their work habits, their weaknesses and we can help them to grow." The mentoring relationship provides a unique opportunity for students to receive individualized feedback and support that encourages their ongoing academic development. As Kevin, the Assistant Principal at Flushing, explained:

> I think if you want PBATs to be a success, everyone needs to work together. Mentors and mentees. The mentor should be part of the writing process from the beginning - as soon as students get the task.

Mentors adapt their mentoring approach to address a student's learning style. We observed one mentoring session in which Mr. Kevin worked with a student who was struggling with her writing. For over twenty minutes, Mr. Kevin and the student deliberated over the wording of three sentences. During the process, Mr. Kevin wrote down her ideas in bullet points as she

spoke and asked her to read them back to him. The student had many ideas but lacked the English vocabulary to fully express them. Mr. Kevin helped her use an electronic dictionary and thesaurus to find the words she was describing. When working on her personal statement, he guided her with questions like: "What is the story you are trying to tell in this piece of writing? What did you learn from your immigration experience?"

In mentoring sessions, teachers are able to be responsive to students' individual learning styles and draw on their home languages and cultures. It is not uncommon for mentor teachers who share a language other than English with their students to engage in translation and translanguaging, switching back and forth between Spanish and English, for example, to engage students in language learning as they speak and write about content. We observed translanguaging in both classrooms and in mentoring sessions. Students were often provided with, or found on their own, texts in their home language that related to their PBAT topic. In the classroom, students would often discuss these texts in their home langauge before writing about what they learned in English. Mentors also engaged in exchanges in students' home langauges to help them clarify questions and explain their ideas before asking students to then articulate those ideas in English.

One student explained how much language support helped him with the writing and revision process, "When I met my mentor one of the most things that I like was that she spoke Spanish and English when I was writing my essays and I needed translation." A strength of the mentor/mentee relationship is that, over time, mentors are able to get to know students' learning styles and tailor instruction to the student's needs. Students also receive emotional support and guidance from their mentors. One student told us that his mentor makes sure he is

on track and follows up with him if he misses school or a mentoring session. Another student explained:

> My mentor is always pushing me...So, it's really helpful because you need to have someone who can guide you through the process... it's really cool to have a mentor in your life.

Mentors often go above and beyond what is expected of them and make themselves available outside of instructional time designated for mentoring. Students reported meeting their mentors at lunch, before school, online on google docs, and even at Starbucks, to get extra one-on-one help with PBATs.

The PBAT Process Encourages Culturally Responsive Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Immigrant students perform better in school when their home cultures and language are treated as assets to build on rather than obstacles to overcome (Garcia, Woodley, Flores & Chu, 2012). Culturally responsive educational reform calls for a reevaluation of how and what content is taught to students in different contexts (Banks & Banks, 1993; Ladson-Billings,1995; Lee, 1994). Smith-Maddox (1998) and Lee (1998) have long suggested that along with culturally responsive content and pedagogy, assessment must also be culturally responsive. Smith-Maddox (1998) argues that the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning and that "the distinctive features of culturally responsive pedagogy have important implications for emerging culturally relevant assessment systems" (p. 313).

In this study, we found that teachers actively engage students' cultural knowledge in multiple ways. For example, many teachers plan projects that compel students to share stories

of their migration journeys, knowledge of their home culture, and experiences as new Americans in a variety of ways. Teachers see the knowledge students have from being speakers of other languages and knowers of other countries and cultures as valuable in understanding global politics, the nuances of literature, and the importance of experimentation. They draw on these experiences when they plan PBAT projects so that students can, for example, draw on their daily experiences of having lived in a country where water access is limited while analyzing graphs about water access in countries around the world.

Teachers at both schools design projects that connect to their students' migration journeys and support literacy in students' native languages and English in the process. For example, 12th grade students at one school read *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and wrote a literary essay PBAT about the text. The book tells the story of Santiago, a boy who travels across borders to pursue his "personal legend". The text resonated with students who had each made their own journey across borders and were contemplating life after high school. The teacher who chose *The Alchemist* as the main text of the year and included other texts that connected to the year's theme of journey. Those included texts like Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and "The Little Prince". Students pulled from all of these texts to write their PBAT. When asked about reading *The Alchemist*, one student responded:

> I think the main idea of the book was that through your journey, you meet many people that teach you new experiences. And your final goal is just as important as all the lessons that you learn through people. All the experiences that you learn, I think it's really important. Santiago was going through something, so he was basically trusting the process and enjoying the journey which leads to improvement in himself and growth.

In addition to acknowledging student migration experiences, teachers scaffolded their instruction to meet the needs of students who were all at different levels of language acquisition and literacy. This teacher did so by providing copies of *The Alchemist* in English, as well as in the home languages of students in the class including Spanish, and Mandarin. He also had the book in graphic novel form in other languages represented by students in the class. The class read the book in English aloud over several weeks, pausing to take notes and gather evidence from the text. Students would later develop these notes into analysis for their final PBAT essays.

The PBAT process provides opportunities for students to connect concepts in the curriculum to their cultural frameworks. For example, one student wrote about the literary elements of symbolism and word choice in two texts, *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez and *The Boy Without a Flag* by Abraham Rodriguez. She identified that the authors used these literary devices to convey a theme of hope. During the question and answer portion of the oral defense of her essay, the student was asked if she could identify with either of the main characters in these texts. She responded:

> I connect my story with Panchito because, as I said before, I also crossed the border and I know that feeling when you are like behind the river and then you say oh, that's America, and that's how I'm going to get my dreams come to true. And even though I was scared about crossing that river, my hope was more powerful than my fears. Like Panchito did-- he crossed the border to get a better life in California.

The flexibility of the PBAT process allows students to choose topics and activities that are aligned with their cultural frameworks and their connections to their home countries and the United States. Mobilizing students' experiences and attachments fosters their deeper engagement and investment in their academic coursework, which also helps them to gain the

academic skills and dispositions that are needed to be successful in college (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

The PBAT Process Fosters College Readiness for Students

Conley (2007) argues that schools support college readiness when teachers encourage students to "work independently and semi-independently outside of class on progressively larger, more complex pieces of work" (p.17) and by modeling the types of assignment that students will likely encounter in college. The preparation process for PBATs requires students to use multiple key cognitive and behavioral strategies related to college readiness. These include critical thinking, problem solving, research and writing, study skills, time management and persistence (Conley, 2007). Further, students tackle large questions in their PBATs that require the evaluation and synthesis of various sources of information and the development of original arguments.

In previous sections, we have identified ways in which the PBATs prepare students for college-level academic work and writing. However, we also found that teachers and students identified various social skills, time management skills, and organizational skills that foster college readiness. In focus groups, students described independent work completing PBATs and how this required that they organize their time, address feedback from mentors and continually revise projects to meet graduation standards. This student describes how in contrast to the process of preparing for the Regents exams, the PBAT process helped him to develop the work habits and skills required for college.

> When you're taking a test in ten days or in one month, you study for one month, and then you read it, you study it, you memorize everything, and then you pass and forget

> everything. However, with PBATs, you have to understand what you're doing, the reasoning why you're doing it, you have to understand why it is important. I think that's the reason why PBATs help us prepare for college…if you have a paper that you can improve with the comments and the time and all those things, I think it will help you improve yourself and it will lead you to the next level, which is college, and also organizing your time.

In addition to requiring that students develop the organizational skills they need to be successful in college, teachers described how the PBAT revision process helped students to develop a growth mindset where students believe their ability and competence grow with their effort (Dweck, Walton, and Cohen, 2014).

> I think it develops their growth mindset. They learn that it's okay to struggle, they may not get it the first time. Maybe the first time they get a *needs revision*, but then maybe the next time it is an *outstanding*. And to have them reflect on that and to be able to struggle and then succeed eventually...we hope that that is something that they develop well enough to be able to apply it in their lives outside of the classroom.

While the writing process teaches students how to conduct research and synthesize their ideas in writing, the oral presentations help students to reach a deeper level of understanding. For example, during one senior's PBAT presentation of a math project in which she demonstrated how different forms of crime contributed to the overall national crime rate, teachers asked her to explain the mathematical concepts she used, "how linear regression is related to correlation" as well as why she thought different states had problems with different forms of crime. Further, this student was asked to explain her process for developing this project as well as her literary

essay. This type of metacognitive awareness, or thinking about how one is thinking, is a key cognitive strategy associated with college readiness (Zimmerman, 2001).

Finally, when we observed an alumni panel at Brooklyn International High School, several current college students explained that their experiences defending their PBATs not only made them more comfortable making presentations in college, but approaching professors during office house. One student explained that through the process of presenting multiple PBATs she learned that it "was less a presentation than a conversation." This ability to engage in critical conversations about her own work and the professor's expectations helped her excel in her college-level classes. Another student on the same panel talked about how, when she received a poor grade on a paper, that she approached the professor who clarified the paper expectations and let her rewrite the essay, attributing this to her discussions with teachers in PBATs. These students' experiences illustrate the ways the PBAT process helps students to gain confidence to approach institutional agents in college and awareness about their own learning processes.

A Focus on Speaking Helps Students with Self-Expression and Self-Advocacy

In addition to supporting the development of students' academic, metacognitive, and organizational skills, the PBAT process supports the development of linguistic skills that students need to be successful in college. The development of oral language skills and the confidence to use those skills to reach out to adults for support is particularly important for students who are recent immigrants, English learners, first-generation college students, and who are unaccustomed to norms of the U.S. education system. School leaders and teachers described how the PBAT process helps students to learn how to express their ideas, self-advocate, and

recruit support from institutional agents, like teachers and principals, who can help them to access the resources that they need to be successful in college.

Teachers assert that the oral and written components of the PBAT presentation carry equal importance for students who are English learners because opportunities to speak and produce oral language spontaneously are often neglected in more traditional classrooms. One teacher explained:

> We implement the speaking component in a way that maybe other more traditional schools...having to defend themselves in front of a panel of three teachers is an intense experience, some of my most favorite or most valued moments in the PBATs are when those students who maybe are quieter and have less confidence speaking in class, empowered [in the PBAT presentation] and they know what they're talking about.

In focus groups, teachers recalled stories of students who were outstanding writers who struggled in presentations, and others who struggled to articulate their ideas in writing but performed well in presentations. Teachers believed that watching their students present helped them to better understand students' strengths and weaknesses in both content and language development. In focus groups, students explained that presenting their work in a panel makes the process more meaningful than simply writing an essay to submit to a teacher.

The oral presentation is an important part of the PBAT process, especially given the ways it provides opportunities to publicly use their developing English skills. Our observations of PBAT panels revealed students engaged in deep learning through writing, revision and research and were able to *perform* what they had learned in this process in the context of the panel. The opportunity to develop oral language skills is an important benefit of the PBAT process, one that is not developed through standardized written assessments such as New York

State Regents exams. Feeling comfortable publicly using emerging language skills is particularly important for preparing immigrant students who are English learners for post-secondary education.

The PBAT Process Encourages Teacher Collaboration and Reflection

The literature on teacher learning explores how teacher inquiry and learning support the collective capacity of schools to design and implement effective practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Little, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). There is broad consensus that effective teacher learning involves a "deprivatization" of practice (Little, 1990). Effective collaboration extends beyond social interactions and involves shared work with teachers working together on schoolwide projects and school improvement efforts. This should facilitate the sharing of teacher expertise across the professional communities of practice to allow teachers to focus on problems of practice (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1997; City, Elmore & Fairman, 2009; Little 1990).

In contrast to the process of preparing students for standardized tests, the PBAT process deepens teacher's work in project-based curriculum design. Teachers repeatedly spoke about how the PBAT process deepened their commitments to project-based learning. They spoke about how PBATs encouraged them to improve projects they have taught in the past to make them more "portfolio worthy," meaning academically intensive and relevant for students. One English teacher explained how she has become more reflective about her the way she designs projects. Creating a PBAT project forces her to ask, "is this project that I've been doing [for years] worthwhile? Is it something that's actually helping students get there or can I enhance it? Or, should I start over and do something different?" Teachers witness how their projects are

experienced, understood, and explained by students in the culminating oral presentation and are able to reflect on whether their projects are addressing students needs and learning standards.

In focus groups, teachers described how the transition from the use of Regents exams to PBATs strengthened their abilities to develop a responsive project-based curriculum to meet their students' emergent linguistic and academic needs. Our research revealed that the work of "becoming a PBAT school" and developing a "PBAT culture" is ongoing. Teachers at both schools in this study described challenges they faced when implementing PBATs but explained that working on PBATs with their colleagues promoted teacher collaboration and curricular alignment. Lara, the principal at Flushing, described how work on PBATs supported conversations across grades:

> I think [collaboration related to PBATs] is making our instruction stronger... better aligned. I think it's a vertical conversation that just has to happen now. Teachers get together and discuss: what are you doing for the PBATs? What are we doing? How does what I do build off of what you're doing? And, what kind of scaffolds are you providing in ninth and tenth grade that we have to pull on in eleventh grade? All of those conversations are happening now, so I think it really helps to just bring people together and then think about how we're all working towards these goals together.

In addition to collaborating within instructional teams and across the school, teachers received supports to implement PBATs from the Internationals Network. The fifteen Internationals Network high schools in New York City share projects that are the basis for PBATs across a digital curriculum library called iShare. In addition, the Internationals Network organizes a PBAT committee with teacher representatives from each of the Internationals Network high schools in New York City to create a handbook for PBATs that outlines network wide

expectations and explanations of the PBAT process. This handbook has nine chapters that include: "What is Mentoring?" and "What are the Student Portfolios and What Purposes Do They Serve at Our Schools? The handbook serves as a guide for teachers new to project-based learning and portfolio assessment and describes the process in detail, from defining the attributes of a good project, to the role of the mentor, to outlining the process of paneling and revision. New teachers shared that they received support developing PBAT projects from new teachers at other Internationals Network NYC high schools during network-wide professional development events and from staff working at Internationals Network. This type of cross-school collaboration provides essential supports for newer schools to more effectively implement PBATs.

Conclusion

The qualitative findings presented in this study highlight the ways that the PBAT process within the high schools in the Internationals Network for Public Schools is a more equitable form of assessment that is aligned with the needs of recently arrived immigrant English language learners. Given the intense demands of meeting the complex academic, linguistic and emotional needs of recently arrived immigrant students within a student's high school career, this alignment allows students to access more of the content and skills that they need to be successful in completing high school and in post-secondary settings like the workplace and college. In comparison to standardized tests, the PBAT process is aligned with students' needs and with the model of project-based teaching and learning within the schools. As such, it encourages deeper learning at the schools and PBAT presentations provide opportunities for faculty to reflect on instruction.

In addition to the benefits for recently arrived immigrant students, this study indicates that designing and continually developing and refining the PBAT process, reflecting on student work on PBATs, and developing the projects that become PBATs encourages teacher's individual and collective capacities. Consistent with the Internationals Network's commitments to "One Learning Model for All" in which adult and student learning processes mirror one another, the PBAT process is continually developing within schools as teachers reflect on how to make the process more aligned with students needs and more rigorous. The Internationals Network has been instrumental in bringing leaders and teachers together across schools to refine the process and to share best practices and examples of projects across schools, thereby increasing the capacities of the schools to effectively implement the PBAT process.

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Figure 1. The PBAT Presentation Process