

TAB Lab?

(Teaching for
Artistic Behavior)

How Collaboration between Media Specialists and Art Teachers Could Change the Future of the “Lab” Space in School Libraries

BY LAUREN GRAY

Library and Information Science graduate student, Lauren Gray, detects the emerging collaborative opportunities available for elementary art teachers and school library media specialists.

By combining forces between the art classroom and the library, students can develop strong research skills at younger ages, familiarize themselves with library tools and resources, and express themselves in nontraditional, individualized ways.

Libraries are now, more than ever, transforming into places where artists and learners of all ages can truly *discover*, *explore*, and *play* with their ideas.

Fabrication labs (i.e. fab labs) and makerspaces of all shapes and sizes have recently been sprouting up all around us in our libraries, schools, and communities. Their open-access concepts give users the ability to freely enter these spaces, utilize their preferred supplies, and create personally interesting and individualized projects.

Freedom of choice, personal expression, and open access are all ideals that have

allowed fab labs to rise exponentially in popularity.

Interestingly, these ideals are also heavily emphasized in an up-and-coming art education classroom model. This timely overlap of principles between libraries and art classrooms has created a bounty of possibilities for media specialists and art teachers to collaborate on deeper levels.

TAB

Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) is an art education practice that has been gaining momentum for the past four decades. Art teachers Hathaway and Jaquith define TAB as a “grassroots movement [developed] by art teachers frustrated by

convergent and prescriptive approaches in the school art style” (27).

TAB (or “choice-based”) classrooms are often set up as art studios separated by medium, which commonly include clay, collage, digital art, drawing, fiber arts, painting, sculpture, and printmaking. Rather than receiving a specific project assignment with prescribed instructions and media, TAB students have the autonomy to work within any available medium, and to create anything they would like, dependent upon individual research interests. Choice-based art rooms can be found in grades K-12, but are more common in elementary settings. Additionally, instead of being graded on artistic ability, TAB students are often evaluated based on effort and/or attitude.

Like Fab labs, TAB classrooms are *open* spaces. Students make their *own choices* about to spend their time with the available supplies and resources.

TAB and the School Library

While the TAB method provides students with the power to make individual decisions about their artwork, it also opens up important doors that school media specialists should be aware of.

When students in TAB art rooms get ready to start new projects, the most essential first step to their artwork involves *research*. Whether they are studying artists, movements, styles, or techniques, the library is a potential treasure trove of information for TAB art

students.

TAB gives young learners the opportunity to implement research about *significant*, personalized subject matter. Because students have the opportunity to personally connect with their topics, they will hopefully utilize libraries and research processes with much less hesitation. This classroom methodology has the ability to introduce basic research processes through meaningful explorations at younger ages.

The American Library Association asserts, “Students achieve more academically when their teachers and school library specialists plan and deliver instruction collaboratively.”

In order to examine the potential collaboration between TAB art teachers and library media specialists, I recently spoke with elementary art teacher, Brianna Hobbs and her school’s Library Media Specialist, Kerry Ossian.

Hobbs began implementing TAB in her classroom this school



Example of a TAB “Inspiration Station”(1)

year. As she began transitioning her art room, her collaboration with Ossian enriched her students' experiences.

Interview with TAB Art Teacher, Brianna Hobbs & School Media Specialist, Kerry Ossian

Lauren Gray (LG): Tell me about what you do. What is your position? Who are your students and how often do you see them?

Brianna Hobbs (BH): I am currently the Art Specialist at Logan Elementary and Jane Addams Elementary in Moline, Illinois. I teach Kindergarten through 5th grade once a week with 45-minute classes.

Kerry Ossian (KO): I am the Library Media Specialist at Logan and Jane Addams schools in Moline, Illinois. I see 25 classes each week (which is an all time low for me). Our max is 29 classes. We see each class for one 45-minute class period per week. I see kindergarten through 5th grade students. It all adds up to about 700 students each week.

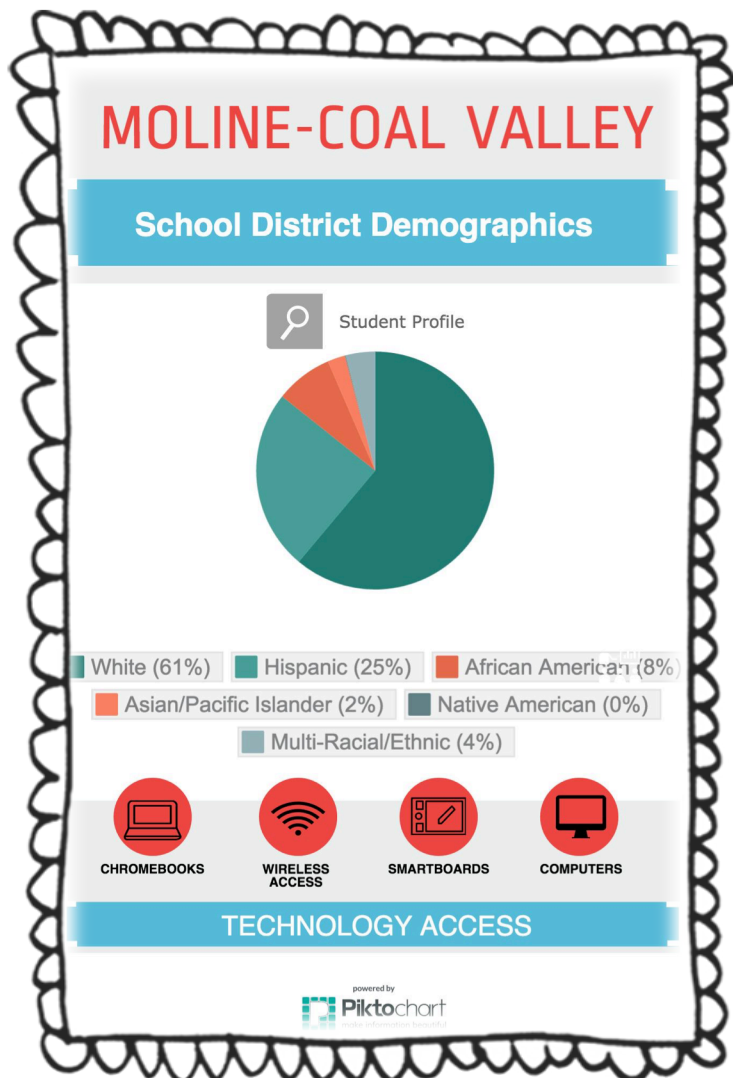
LG: How have you collaborated with your school's librarian/media specialist?

BH: Luckily, my librarian was assigned as my mentor for the school year. We have developed a close working relationship due to this.

Once I began TAB I quickly realized my students were going to need more resources. We have an "Inspiration Station" within the studio space but the books are limited due to budget and the various ages of the students I see. I asked students to bring in resources if they needed them, but several students did not have the means from home. I brought the issue to my librarian's attention and

we both decided the students could bring in resources from our library. The students are in the library once a week for 45 minutes as well, so they can use this time to help find the resources they need in order to dig further into their artistic interest.

KO: Currently, I am helping students research topics related to their TAB projects. I have also started various



Moline-Coal Valley District Demographics (2)

author/illustrator studies with each grade level and while learning about the author/illustrator we are discussing the mediums they use.

LG: How has your classroom changed since you began to collaborate with your school's media specialist?

BH: We're still in the beginning stages of the collaboration so I'm just now seeing how it is working. My students and I discuss what it means to have "studio habits," and one portion of this is researching and making with a purpose. Once I spoke with my classes about utilizing the library to accomplish this habit they were very excited. I was surprised to see how often the children use books to help brainstorm and guide their work. Several students get caught up in the book while in the art space and I have to remind them it's time to make. I encourage them to research outside of class and bring the books more as a guide. However, it is nice to see how excited they are about reading.

LG: How did you and your media specialist decide to collaborate? Do you meet regularly?

BH: We meet once a week because she is my mentor. We decided to collaborate because the students needed more resources, and she loves collaborating with classroom teachers.

LG: Would you recommend this type of collaboration to other art teachers?

KO: Yes, I would. We are always looking for ways to make our lessons more meaningful to students and to demonstrate just how important information literacy and literature appreciation are. Anytime we can validate that it's a good thing! I think the biggest challenge with respect to collaboration among any teachers is lesson-planning time. We have experimented with a variety of tools like sign up sheets, Google docs, and email.

Anytime collaboration occurs between the library and any classroom setting learning is more meaningful and efficient. It allows students to have real life, meaningful application of their information literacy skills as opposed

to me teaching those skills in isolation or with random topics that don't mean as much to them.

BH: I would absolutely recommend this type of collaboration to not only art teachers but other teachers as well. Not only does it help students understand the beginning steps of conducting research, but it also gives them a purpose, based on their own interests, while in the library. It may be a little tricky to have the students conducting their own search if they are in a traditional art program. However, I do believe that research and spending time understanding your subject matter is key to developing a realistic art practice.

Hobbs teaches in a tiny classroom, but it is constantly bustling with energy and students hard at work. Ossian has limited technology access (only nine Chromebooks), but has taken the time to organize creative, engaging lessons that highlight information literacy skill building. Both Hobbs and Ossian see each of the *700 students* at Jane Addams

Elementary School *every, single week.*

Because these educators give their students the ability to make independent decisions, the library has become a new type of lab, a **TAB lab.**

Art Teacher/Media Specialist Collaboration

Partnerships between classroom teachers and school media specialists are not a new concept. For instance, Ossian locates and suggests materials for the classroom teachers in her school on a daily basis.

However, art teachers have started to increasingly utilize the library as a crucial step in every artistic process. As more art rooms take TAB on, and begin to transition from the traditional “make and take” approach, the need for school media specialist support will grow significantly. Rather than simply assisting in pre-existing plans, more library media specialists can create their own curriculum and special modifications to align with TAB.

To gain a more generalized sense of how school

librarians are currently collaborating with their art teachers, I posted in the popular Facebook group American Library Association (ALA) Think Tank and the responses were overwhelming:

“We collaborated on a project where I taught advanced hs art students how to use curation tools to develop and share idea/inspiration “walls.” Showed them Pinterest, art.sy, and they showed me ‘I heart it.’ ☺ “

“Our summer reading lists for the k-6th grade go out with a full color cover made up of 24 tiny ‘book covers’ created by the 5th grade class. They work with the art teacher and the librarians to select a favorite book, and to make a book-cover for it as a 4x4 inch illustration...”

I am working on improving the collaboration with all of the departments at my school and art is definitely one of them.

The benefits of art teachers working together with school media specialists are evident. Students are able to gain a fuller understanding of their artwork and channel their information literacy skills through creative and personalized outlets.

Collaboration on any level is easier said than done. The key to a lucrative collaborative relationship is **good communication.**

First Steps on the way to Collaboration:

Communicate with your colleagues.

Utilize **Professional Groups.**

Take time to **reflect** upon your lessons and classroom strategies.

Continue to be an **active learner**, along with your students.

Creating a TAB Lab

What exactly do I mean by TAB Lab?

While I realize that TAB has only recently become popular among art teachers, this classroom practice lends itself incredibly well to library use. By joining forces with the creative minds in our schools, library spaces can take on the “lab” mentality, even without access to extravagant or cutting-edge technology. Opening up the school media center’s doors to applicable, personal research can show students of *all* ages how their library investigations can develop into tangible, satisfying, artistic results.

While I am primarily interested in collaboration with art teachers, librarians can (and should!) partner with any and all classroom teachers to create worthwhile research experiences for students of all ages.

Effective research habits are often not emphasized until early middle school. However, with the right motivation, access, and support, elementary-aged students are more than capable of applying their information awareness in art projects and classroom assignments. I am certainly not advocating for rigorous research projects in elementary school. Instead, I am suggesting that more school media specialists make their resources and spaces available and welcoming to younger students for research inquiries. Designing displays, highlighting lists of applicable reading suggestions, or even re-designing shelving layouts and genrefying by class could make library spaces more accessible and suitable for elementary students looking for research materials.

Rather than underestimating what our students can do, let’s give them the tools and lab spaces to push themselves and their research experiences to fuller, more creative potentials.

Further Reading:

Coming Together as Readers: Building Literacy Teams
by: Donna M. Ogle

Emerging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom

by: Katherine M.
Douglass and Diane B.
Jaquith

ALA Advocacy &
Legislation Resources:
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/advocacyuniversity/additup/6to12/anntk_13

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Images

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(2): Created using
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