

The Art of Collaboration: Librarians Share Their Success

Feature



by Valerie J. Colston, October 2018

School librarian duties have expanded to include art programming, graphic design, visual literacy, makerspaces, and even art history. Consider the trend toward makerspaces. The most likely place you will find a makerspace in a school is not the classroom but the library. At the same time, library schools rarely prepare librarians for the art tasks they are required to perform. School library teachers and school librarians are overcoming those challenges by pursuing professional growth opportunities, developing their own intuitive talents, and, most importantly, engaging in collaborative projects with art teachers and other art experts.

Diana Rendina says that part of her motivation in creating a makerspace was "bringing art back into our school," and she advises other librarians to collaborate with art teachers in creating makerspace projects and showcasing the results (Rendina 2018).

Recently, a number of librarians who have participated in successful arts collaborations shared their experiences with me.

Librarians' Stories

Dr. Margaret Lincoln

District Librarian, Lakeview Schools District, Michigan

With creativity, Dr. Lincoln solved a common problem for school libraries: what to do with weeded books? She collaborated with art teachers on an altered book project, transforming discarded books into works of art.

Dr. Lincoln's most memorable collaboration has been with Holocaust artist and survivor Dr. Miriam Brysk. Along with presentations, the partnership included writing a book together titled *The Stones Weep: Teaching the Holocaust*. The book project has received outstanding reviews and includes the history, art, illustrations, and lesson plans related to the Holocaust from a personal and emotionally moving perspective.

Pamela Verfaillie

Library Associate, Valdez High School, Alaska

Many school libraries accommodate large annual art shows. Verfaillie does this with over one hundred pieces each year. It's a collaborative venture with the art teacher, art students, graphic design class, and the library in which everyone has a part. There is furniture to be moved and arranged, art to be displayed, flyers to design, announcements to go onto the website, social media promotion, and signage to be made. There are many opportunities for student learning as they take on the roles of artist, curator, graphic designer, and art space organizer. The exhibit grand opening is a public showcase with the music department performing. Verfaillie does a remarkable job of transforming an art class into a learning experience to teach students the business side of art through collaborations with the librarian, students, and the art, music, and design teachers.

Consider the benefits of a collaboration between school and a local museum. Verfaillie partnered with the Valdez Museum, which invited Alutiiq artist June Pardue to the library. The students were able to learn and participate in gut sewing and their projects were displayed during the STEAM fair.

Tina Nelson



Contest Rules:

1. Stop by the VHS Library to sign up and to be given a blank frame for your base. The first 24 people to come to the library will receive a frame.
2. Find a book or e-book that is in the VHS Library and select a quote to highlight.
3. Decorate your frame and quote.
4. You MUST include a quote, the title of the book, and the author and they must be visible in the finished project.
5. All entries are due March 30th and will remain property of the VHS Library.
6. Prizes—1st place \$50, 2nd place \$30, 3rd place \$20.

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Library Coordinator, San Mateo Office of Education, California

Library staff often collaborate on assignments, including working with students on research. Nelson collaborated with fine arts teachers by co-teaching in the classroom and introducing research methods on various artists at Los Gatos High school. She also gave students a picture of the local art scene and resources by including information about local museums and art experts. Students became familiar with art resources in their own neighborhoods and became better at locating resources for term papers.

LeighAnn McCready

Teacher Librarian, Milpitas High School, California

Many of the educators I interviewed worked with their art teacher using weeded books. Discarded books can be transformed into sculpture, inspiration for book covers, and innovative artworks. McCready collaborates in an interesting reading and art program with the art exploration teacher. During the Read across America program, they collaborate to inspire teens to turn discarded books into sculptures that will appeal to children. They then share the sculpture and a book with elementary age children. It's a win-win for everyone. She has created a wonderful Facebook site to accompany and promote the projects where smiles abound at

https://www.facebook.com/pg/milpitashighlibrary/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10155927951016368.

Elsa Ouvrard-Prettol

Library and Media Instructor, Natomas Charter School, California

Ouvrard-Prettol along with the middle and high school visual arts and English language arts teachers and students transform aesthetically challenged book covers into works of art. She is proud to report that many of the resulting book covers were submitted to a public library contest, where many of the students won. If a similar project doesn't exist near you, consider collaborating to develop one in your community.

In another collaborative cover project, Ouvrard-Prettol shares design tips with students to reinforce the instruction of their art teacher. Students vote on the winning design, then designs are painted onto tiles dispersed and displayed throughout the school.

Mary Jane Villalovos

Library Media Technician and Art Teacher, Aspire Firestone/Gateway Academies, California

Mary Jane Villalovos saw a need and filled it. If she is not in the art classroom, she is in the library. Even when she is checking out books, she has students doing creative art projects while they are waiting to give their minds an "oasis," as she puts it. Fantastic! Villalovos uses storybooks such as *It's an Orange Aardvark* by Michael Hall, *Mouse Paint* by Ellen Walsh and *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Elbert as starters for teaching basic art concepts. Her students learn basic color terminologies, using construction paper to create rainbows, weavings, and placemats. Mixing colors is learned by using three crayons (red, yellow, and blue) to create additional colors and color pictures of fruits and vegetables. The follow-up exercises also give students a chance to use scissors to cut paper and hold a pencil to draw. All activities help with fine motor skills, something that the kindergartners need. She teaches concepts, theory, and critical thinking skills through art to all grade levels with projects that use children's book and illustrations. As Villalovos explains, she "uses the idea of art as a reference for learning reading comprehension. That's how I am able to integrate it seamlessly with library instruction."

Dr. Judi Moreillon

School Librarian, Corbett Elementary School, Arizona

Dr. Moreillon, a literacies and libraries consultant and author of *Maximizing School Librarian Leadership: Building Connections for Learning and Advocacy* has also been involved in art projects. Previously, as a school librarian, Moreillon worked with mural artist Martín Moreno and with other school librarians, school administration, teachers, and students who were inspired by the school's Building Bridges for Literacy project. The final mural project titled "Arizona Authors and Illustrators: Building Bridges for Literacy" is an outstanding example of what students can learn and how they can benefit from collaborative art projects. Students saw a real-life example of adults working together on an important project, learned how to conduct research, and how to plan and paint an important artwork. Along with learning hands-on painting techniques, the fifth graders who painted the mural also received lessons about the purpose and history of mural making. At the final dedication of the mural, the celebration included musicians and dancers, and books written by students and added to the Corbett Library collection.

Kathy Lester

School Librarian/Technology Integrationist, East Middle School, Michigan

Collaborative projects can be a positive for fundraising ventures in more than one way. Lester shared her experience with the Students Rebuild Facing Difference Challenge, which asked students to submit self-portraits to generate funds in support of youth peace building in areas of conflict

(<https://www.studentsrebuild.org/facingdifferencechallenge>). She was able to work with the art teacher to create student self-portraits and a follow-up video. Helpful

resources provided by the Students Rebuild organization were used and Students Rebuild received matching funds from the Bezos Family Foundation for an important cause. Students learned about giving as well as what goes into a self-portrait. The teaching approach was simple. They advised students to not be as concerned about art skills as discovering what made them each unique or different. Basic art terms and art techniques for creating a self-portrait were outlined. Examples of other young people's self-portraits played a key role in the instruction and were shown on You Tube and Pinterest.

What I Learned about Collaborations

Collaboration can range from simple cooperation to in-depth collaboration.

Libraries often share their space, especially if they have a particularly large space. It is this way with high school district librarian Sharon Taylor at Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine. Her library is large enough to display totem poles and colorful mobiles. Or, cooperation could be between the school and the community college. The school library provides college art students a place to exhibit and art instructors a place to introduce the community and the college to each other.

Collaborations are mutually beneficial. Students benefit from collaborations. For example, a student learning about the artist Vincent van Gogh gains more from a collaboration between the art teacher and school librarian than from just writing a traditional paper. In addition, the library needs a wide assortment of graphic designs and the students need projects to create. Katie Voss, head librarian at Mulloch Library in Missouri, collaborates with the graphic design class that shares promotional posters with the library. What a good opportunity for both. Imagine how rewarding it is for students to see the flyer or poster they created displayed in the library. The collaborative skills of an art teacher and school librarian can combine the possibility of video making or website design with art history. Technology and art goals are blended and met in an interesting and efficient way.

There are also those who collaborate tremendously through their writing and teaching. Joyce Valenza, a former school librarian and now an assistant professor at Rutgers University, brings a unique perspective in her collaborative art projects she shares in her LibGuides and on her blog NeverEndingSearch. The Internet is her classroom for school librarians who could use a little advice on art, information literacy, and other topics. Collaborative art projects she has produced and shared on her LibGuide at <http://sdst.libguides.com> include sculpture critique, visual sketchnoting, and Greek pottery.

Are there opportunities to collaborate with your art teacher or local art experts? You just need to ask to start the process.

Work Cited

Rendina, Diana. "The Arts and Makerspaces: Creativity for the Win!" Ideas + Inspiration from Demco <http://ideas.demco.com/blog/arts-makerspaces-creativity-win/>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

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