Bringing in the Village: Supporting Educators and Connecting to the World

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I sensed a dynamic shift in educational thought the moment I walked through the door. The teacher and artist were really collaborating, truly team teaching. All students were engaged. They were dancing, acting, sculpting, and songwriting. They were developing skills in cultural awareness, empathy, and character development; not to mention language arts, math, and chemistry. This was not the usual residency program. This was true integration. A chance to see what could happen if teachers and artists were given the time to plan, collaborate, and teach together.
The Teaching Artist Institute (TAI) is a seven month training program to help professional artists acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become more effective and more collaborative teaching artists in schools, where they may play a more meaningful role in education.

In discussions with educators and administrators across the state, we learned that while many schools are enthusiastic about having artists work in their schools, these schools felt most teaching artists lacked: 1) an understanding of how school culture has changed due to standards-based reform; 2) effective classroom management skills; 3) an understanding of child development; and 4) the ability to plan and evaluate lessons in partnership with teachers. TAI is designed to enhance artists’ and teachers’ ability to develop arts integrated lessons that include meaningful and effective tools for assessment.

Each artist is partnered with a teacher experienced in arts integration. TAI introduces artists to the Maryland State Curriculum in the fine arts and other academic areas (such as reading and writing). The TAI staff helps participants find authentic connections between an artist’s art form and the teachers’ curriculum. Artist and teacher work together to develop, design,
deliver, and assess a residency that addresses both a fine arts standards and other academic standards. This kind of residency is made up by a series of arts integrated lessons.

At the completion of TAI, its graduates are able to:

. Articulate what students will know and be able to do after participating in their residency and how this learning addresses the Maryland State Curriculum.
. Develop an arts integrated residency program that increases student skills and knowledge both in the arts and other content areas.
. Understand the context in which they are teaching (school culture, child development).
. Collaborate with classroom teachers to deliver arts integrated residencies.
. Evaluate their ability to achieve their arts integrated residency goals.

These objectives are met through the following instructional strategies:

. Group instruction across artistic disciplines – including a three-day retreat and two one-day training sessions.
. Small group instruction within artistic disciplines.
. One-on-one coaching with master teaching artists, curriculum specialists, and school teachers trained in arts integration.
. Opportunities for artists and teachers to present their work to one another and receive and give feedback.
. Opportunities to pilot residencies in the classroom with master teaching artists and school teachers observing and providing feedback.
. Opportunities to reflect with their peers and teachers following the pilot to assist with refining their residency.

The need for teaching artists with arts integration experience and effective teaching practices has greatly increased with the launching of several school districts arts integration initiatives including Anne Arundel County, Baltimore
City, Cecil County, and Montgomery County to name a few. In fact, many trained through TAI have gone on to become integral to the creation of entire lesson units in these school districts.

There is currently no other professional development opportunity in the state that matches TAI’s offerings. Since its inaugural year, more artists applied to participate in TAI than were accepted. Teachers from across the state are now on a growing waiting list to work participate in the program. Anne Arundel County Public Schools has become a leading partner with TAI, incorporating the program into its district-wide arts integration program.

The unexpected result of TAI, which was originally conceived to help artists, is that it is also helping teachers. Teachers who are constantly being bombarded with demands to teach the curriculum handed to them “with fidelity”, to “focus on tested skills”, many times being forced into situations where they feel they must “teach to the test”. If teachers could complain openly about the curriculum, perhaps their concerns would echo student voices we hear each day stating, “This is boring” or “Do I have to write another Brief Constructed Response?” The opportunity to participate in the collaborative and creative process of TAI has empowered teachers to use their craft. Teachers who take Maryland State Standards and their schools’ curriculum and connect it in innovative ways to an art form transform lessons into real world applications that students actually implement. TAI gives them the support, reflection time, and a valuable partner to help them accomplish the monumental task of educating our students for the future.

It is the role of the teacher to prepare our students to be knowledgeable and involved citizens of the world. It is the role of the artists to develop, create, and express our human interpretation or human reaction to the world as it is today. By connecting the two groups, we are providing our students with a whole world perspective, one that builds on the past to develop a foundation
while looking to the future to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

**For more Information on the Teaching Artists Institute:**

**Websites:**
Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance (AEMS) [www.aems-edu.org](http://www.aems-edu.org)

Young Audiences/Arts for Learning [www.yamd.org](http://www.yamd.org)

**Watch our YouTube video:**
Teaching Artists Institute:
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5JfyThd-B8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5JfyThd-B8)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools 21st Century Institute:
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cleFL1LxEHg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cleFL1LxEHg)

Listen to a TAI artist-teacher experience on WYPR’s “The Signal”
[http://www.signalradio.org/?m=201002](http://www.signalradio.org/?m=201002)

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