H. Williams Art Autobiography

Recall:

My first experience with art was listening to my mother teach piano lessons in our home. She also had a guitar and violin that I can remember opening the cases and looking at them from time to time. It was always the piano that was central, as we were a military family we moved often. Every house was chosen based on where we would put the piano. I never learned how to play the piano. My mom wanted me to learn to read music first. One day while playing at my grandmother's house, I found my aunt's clarinet. I asked if I could learn to play it. So I began taking clarinet lessons in 4th grade. I continued through high school with band and various experiences with marching band, state band, and multiple orchestras. My mom was very supportive and was able to accompany me on the piano for my clarinet solo performances. My connection with this form of art was integral for me as it was a way for me to instantly connect with a new friend group each time we moved. I believe that this was a positive thing for me because my mother and I shared a common interest and she was very involved in all of my band endeavors.

I do remember learning to sew and knit in first grade. It was a required skill in Scotland for both girls and boys. For boys, they had to be able to mend their socks and repair their uniforms in the military (I still find this funny). My mom often provided opportunities to be artistic. In our travels as a military family, we often visited art museums and churches that had many beautiful pieces of art and were in their structures a work of art. The Vatican was one of the most impactful places we visited. I can remember being in such awe of how the ceilings were covered in beautiful art. I

remember one trip to Westminster Abbey to do brass rubbings. We learned about how the brass was made and were able to take a class in rubbings. Not exactly like leaf rubbings but a very cool experience. My "formal" fine arts experience was not positive. I can remember in middle school being teased about my art by my peers. I was never good at drawing or sketching. I have no real memories of taking classes or doing art in school. However, my mother still has her favorite "masterpieces" from my childhood framed in her house.

Reflect:

I think art was a meaningful experience for me because it was a source of comfort and connection to others in my life. I do think that while some of my experiences were not positive, I have been able to draw on these experiences in teaching. More recent experiences are memorable because I know that I can't draw very accurate diagrams. My biology students get a lot joy out of my "drawings". I have embraced the fact that I can't draw and look at it as a way to laugh at myself. I think that my students need to see that we are not great at everything we try. I have also used my inability to draw to help my students get involved by doing the drawings for me. I have become someone who appreciates art rather than creating art. Both of my children are very accomplished artists in their own mediums. I have seen how their fine arts abilities have served them like my music did when I was their age by connecting them to others like them when we moved. Art is both an outlet and therapy for both of them. My son spends hours drawing and creating beautiful sketches. My daughter enrolled in an art class at college just to have some “down time” from studying.

Connect:

Art is an outward expression of a person's thoughts, feeling or abilities. Art is very personal and I think it has to be defined by its creator. Art can be expressed in so many ways. Whether you are technically great at art or not, I think each person has some element of artistic ability. Unfortunately, most people are super hard on themselves and are easily turned away from the arts because it is something that is "judged" by others. I see art as more universal. Art is in every aspect of life. It can be what you see in nature out your window to what you create. I think my 15 year-old son said it best: "Art is any creative outlet that a person shares with those around them". He added that the artist themself is the worst critic. He looks at art as a therapy as he navigates this world day to day. My daughter defined art as an extension of ones feelings. Her art she thinks is an outlet of her emotions good, bad and mixed. For me art is what you make of it and it can help connect people in many different ways. I want my students to have another outlet to express to me what they have learned. A paper pencil test should not be our only marker of knowledge.