

Kristen Bonnici
Arts in STEM
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Art Autobiography

I can remember experiences with art very early on in my life. I have distinct memories of doing arts and crafts with my mom, specifically making hair bows and creating puffy paint sweatshirts for myself, my brother, and my cousins to wear. My mother was a stay at home mom at the time and arts and crafts was a part of our daily routine in my pre-school years. As I entered Pre-K and Kindergarten, art was part of my daily school routine as well. I can remember I loved to create and decorate letter pages in my alphabet notebook. I think that those early years of having designated set aside times every day to do art and be creative set the stage for who I am today.

Sadly, during my grades 1- 8 school experience I never had an official art class. Depending on the teacher I had, they may have incorporated art projects for holidays or certain topics we were learning. However, our penmanship workbook always contained a coloring page and that was something I always loved doing because it gave me a chance to relax and express myself. Even though there was no formal art curriculum in school, I continued arts and crafts outside of school. I was always making clay sculptures, jewelry, latch-hooking, and getting my hands on any arts and crafts set I could get. When I entered high school I was given the opportunity to take art class, and I quickly seized the opportunity. The class was mostly focused on drawing and painting still lifes. I learned that lack of elementary school art classes had me at a disadvantage as I did not know the basic techniques and skills of drawing that my classmates had. This had me feeling left out, frustrated and behind. These early feelings pretty much sum

up my formal high school art classes, my teacher would only focus on drawing and shading and not offer much assistance or instruction, so I left high school with a bad taste in my mouth about art - that I wasn't good at it, and my passions for arts and crafts were not considered real art. I always felt successful and that I could excel when given the opportunity to make something with my hands, but that was rarely part of the curriculum. While I entered my initial class with such excitement and high hopes, I left feeling defeated and un-interested in pursuing art in college.

While art at school was a negative experience, I continued to do art at home. I still would do projects with my mom, she taught me how to sew, and my grandmother taught me how to knit and crochet. To me these were such positive and memorable experiences. Having someone to learn from, and continuing on a family tradition felt good. I was always told about the women in my family who were pattern makers, and seamstresses, and made beautiful hand designed crafts. My mom and grandma would let me see and have what these women made and show me pictures of their work. This always pushed me to want to do the same.

In college I tried art again, this time taking a sculpture class. This was much more my speed and renewed my interest in art. The class was very inviting to students of all abilities and art was presented as a social and encouraging process. It also demonstrated that art is much more than drawing and painting. We were encouraged to use all types of media in projects and I was not made to feel like there was a right or wrong way to do art. In fact this art experience put emphasis and value on creativity, which was something I always identified as.

Now that I am well beyond the school years and taking formal art classes. I continue to be creative and work with my hands whenever possible. To pay for my Masters in Education I took a part time job as a cake decorator. I loved that job because it gave me a chance to work on

the design process and it always offered up so many problems and challenges to solve. How can we get what you want on a cake that has limited size, structural and temperature constraints? Unfortunately I no longer that the time to work on cakes, but I still continue to challenge myself creatively by choosing my difficult knitting projects, and even designing my own patterns. I find this still creatively challenges me because there are always problems to solve and you always need to determine how to work around some constraint whatever it may be.

While I do not consider myself an artist, I do see myself as someone who is creative. I think I will always be working on various projects as I get older, because I love and appreciate the challenges that come along with it. I like being able to flex my mental and creative muscles. In addition I like the feeling of completing a project and the satisfaction that comes along with solving problems in a tangible way.

Over the years my definition of art has changed. Initially as shaped by my educational experience, I thought art was a way to express yourself but it was what was traditionally hung on walls like paintings and drawings. Now that I am older and have had more experiences, I have come to appreciate that art can come in all forms, and all forms should be taken and treated seriously. I agree with the definition provided by Vande Zande that “artists represent an idea, concept, or object through a medium...The outcome may be sculpted, painted, or photographed” (Vande Zande 2011). While there was a time when my art education experiences impacted me negatively, my overall art experiences have been positive. I think that it because I was engaged in the creative processes at a young age and I learned how to be creative with and from the women in my family in such a positive way. I think that having positive role models and having

my family place value on the artistic process has pushed me to continue to find a place to be creative in my everyday like.