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Art Autobiography

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I am really thankful to have grown up in a family that supports art education and the arts. My mother has her MFA in ceramics and for the majority of my elementary school years, she was working toward her PhD in Northern Italian Renaissance Art. My grandmother and I got to go with my mother during one of her trips to Italy and find the small churches where some of the paintings she was studying were located (and eat a lot of gelato). Since then, she has been the Art Historian at a small liberal arts college. My dad is a science teacher, and a woodworker, so we always had interesting maker supplies around the house and in the workshop, and were encouraged to “make” things all the time. I remember when I turned 10 we hosted a print making birthday party and all of the guests made their own linoleum cuts. As a mother of my own 10-year-old, I now see the magnitude of 20 kid guests with carving tools, and it appreciate my parents’ energy and commitment. They are not afraid to be messy or try new ideas and materials. My mom and dad are now grandparents and my kids are always thinking up projects to do when they visit nana and grandpa. In addition to art at home, every vacation or trip we ever took as children incorporated in a trip to a museum. Any time my parents visit us in New York City, we always end up at an art museum, and the way that my mother tells us the stories of the artwork, and incorporates in popular culture, always draws a crowd of interlopers.

Visual art in my elementary school was subpar, and mostly consisted of prescribed projects that were rarely open-ended. Starting in elementary school, all the way through high school I sang in the choir and played the baritone horn in the concert band and jazz band. I

enjoyed the camaraderie of creating something together as a group. In high school we were forced to choose between music and studio art, so I didn't have room in my schedule to pursue the art classes that I would have liked. After college, I moved to New York City and discovered the fashion district in Manhattan. I was so excited by the rows and rows of stores dedicated to ribbon and beads, and began to delve into jewelry making. This is something that I still love to do and hope to get back to with more fervor once my kids get older and my weekends are less scheduled.

Upon reflection it's apparent that my parents created an environment that fostered creativity and placed a value on art and expression, even if we were not experiencing the same thing at school. My brother and I never saw art as something we had to do, but it was something that was always available and exciting. I distinctly remember my mother wearing homemade necklaces to work, and hanging kid art in her office. The pride you feel when an adult validates your work is a lasting feeling. We were never the family that went on a Disney vacation, but I'm eternally grateful for the cultural experiences that we had and feel that it helped to shape me as a creative person, and educator.

There is always a lot of interesting debates around what qualifies something as art. How can one compare works like Michelangelo's David and Koons' Balloon Dog? I believe art is a venue to express creativity and concepts. I think that this definition allows for the most possible access points for a diverse range of people. I love making art, and I love seeing what kids come up with when presented with open-ended, creative opportunities. I cringe when I hear a student say that they are not artistic or creative, and try to find genuine ways to give those students meaningful compliments and feedback on their work. I keep a diverse range of materials in my

classroom for students to use to express their learning, offer kids to take supplies home to borrow if they don't have them, and incorporate examples of artwork into my science lessons. My school is also very fortunate to have two art teachers that focus on everything from painting, to wood working, to clay, to needlepoint, to digital media, and so on, and I am constantly in their rooms brainstorming project ideas and meaningful ways that art can be integrated into my lessons or units. I am excited about this course, and the opportunity to really think deeply about how closely related science and art are, and how they can be integrated to help students develop the critical 21st century skills.