

The Arts in STEM: Advancing Meaningful Integration

Erica Green

Art Biography

January 18, 2020

As far back as I can remember, the arts have been a part of my life. My family has always valued the arts, encouraging any and all forays into the creative world. Music, photography, painting, dance ... if my sister and I wanted to try it, we were given the support and encouragement to do so.

Recall

When I think back to my earliest memory of having the arts in my life, I remember being in preschool when I was three. My preschool was small and privately owned, located in a house on Long Island in the town where I lived. This preschool, entitled Colgan's after the woman who owned and ran the program, was constantly providing opportunities for children to play and explore. I recall painting at the easel – the easels set up each and every day with white paper and paints in cups at the bottom. The smocks hung near the bathroom, and after checking to see if a space was open, I would often make my way over to the easels to paint how I saw fit. We played, we sang, and most importantly, I felt safe at this preschool.

Fast forward a year or two, and music became part of our family picture. My dad, a banjo player, joined the folk music society of Huntington where there were weekly practices and sing-alongs, as well as monthly concerts and parties at different houses. One particular night, the party after the concert was at our house – people playing instruments and singing, and one

couple clogging (dancing) in the middle of our living room. Again, the feeling of safety and warmth came over me as I was put to bed, and fell asleep to the sound of the banjo, violin, guitar, and stomping feet.

As my sister and I grew older, we picked up different mediums as a way of expression. My sister, who is older, began playing the flute at age six and went on to go to Juilliard Pre College, followed by Peabody and Oberlin. She is currently a professor in the music department at the University of Massachusetts. As for my own path, I picked up the violin in third grade, and played into high school. I played in the All District Orchestra as well as other local competitions. In high school, I left orchestra to be on the school kickline, after which when I decided I was going to become a photography major in college, I moved on to use my time for art classes. Throughout high school I took life drawing, painting, and sculpture, as well as photography and graphic arts. Although I left photography after two years of college and changed my major, I still stayed true to my roots, and learned how to play guitar and to with friends. As an adult living in Colorado, I finally learned how to play cello, an instrument I have always loved.

My path to working as a kindergarten teacher in Vermont has been a long and winding one. Though my profession does not strictly have to do with the arts, it is part of my classroom each and every day.

Reflect

When I think back on my life and how the arts have played a big role, it is that feeling of warmth and safety mostly connected to when I was a young child. There were crafts and music and dance lessons, and in those activities we were encouraged and supported. As I became older

and decided to pursue a career in the arts, the stakes became higher as my work was critiqued and judged. Once a college student with a major in photography, I discovered how difficult it would be to have a fulfilling career. One particular memory that stays with me from so many years ago is a college professor who did not support my drive to become a nature photographer for National Geographic. I was told it was virtually impossible and the only chance I would have would be to sell my photographs to stock photo agencies. Be that as it may, I felt that the one path I wanted to follow was out of my reach, and I changed my major. This is one of the areas of the arts that I did not feel successful in my life, as I let one professor's opinion dictate my future and I did not feel I had the energy and drive to continue.

Connect

For me, the arts include any medium in which a person can express herself. The arts are an important part of life both in and out of school, as it allows for the exploration and discovery of who we are through activities such as music, dance, and paint. Now that I am a kindergarten teacher and have been for many years, the arts play a large role in my classroom and how my children are engaged and taught. We use a variety of mediums, from wood working, to oil pastels, to song. I truly believe that all children (and all people) are able to learn, and through that philosophy, I try to incorporate as many modalities as possible. When teaching a class of 18 children, some who have suffered significant trauma, others who live with grandparents, and still others with a "typical" family situation, it is my belief that I will use what I need to engage and reach each and every child. When I think back to my own childhood and how I felt when engaged in artistic activities, whether it was painting as a three year old or singing with the folk

music society, it brings me joy and happiness. My goal is to provide those experiences to others, and to help them explore and experience the world in a safe and creative manner.