

**Art Autobiography**

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The Arts in STEM: Advancing Meaningful Integration

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## **Recall**

My earliest experiences with art included drawing ,coloring, singing and participating in Sunday School skits. Around age 5, I remember that my mom would buy paint by number, connect the dot and other coloring /activity books. Sunday school at church was full of resurrection re-enactments and mini skits about Biblical characters. In school teachers often allowed students to draw on a piece of paper as a reward after completing required classwork assignments.

At home music was usually played. I remember when I was about 7 years old, my family moved to Kentucky for two years while Dad served in the United States Air Force in Germany. My parents had decided that keeping my Mom, brother and I here in the United States for two years was better than taking the family overseas for four years. Mom seemed to lose herself in music. People drove by where we lived slowly and listened to Mom's music from the street. I still hear Regina Belle singing " You Can Ring my Bell". This absolutely seemed to be Mom's favorite song as she played it over and over again. Visits with my aunt were similar, I remember Rick James and Teena Marie. Songs that still ring in my head, such as Fire and Desire. Of course, as a child I was clueless as to what the lyrics meant. Even into adulthood Mom and I laugh about certain songs, she is surprised that I still remember all of the lyrics. At school, I remember painting and creating clay models of animals in art. Art was fun, but I never thought that I was very good at it. I remember putting an art smock on so that my clothes wouldn't get messed up. Teachers were very concerned about not messing up students' clothes. Prior to Dad going to Germany, I recall that my Dad could sing, sew and play the harmonica, however as my brother and I got older he was more focused on taking a shower and sleeping when he came home from work. My Mom was creative and when I was really small she sewed her own dresses.

My mom had and still has an eye for clothes and accessories that look classy and stylish but are reasonably priced. Mom has always mixed dated clothing with newer clothing to create an entire new statement.

We moved to Florida after Dad returned home from Germany. I don't remember much about art in the upper elementary grades, other than 5th grade. We made paper mache with balloons, newspaper and clothing starch. I also created and tape recorded a play with Nancy Drew Mysteries as my inspiration. Reading books was my escape from real life. I absolutely loved reading.

I don't remember much about art in middle school or high school. I joined the band in 7th grade and from 7th grade until I graduated from high school, band became the highlight of my life. I chose the clarinet because many of my friends played clarinet. My parents and I had discussed playing the saxophone but I followed the crowd and chose the clarinet. My parents rented me a clarinet from Playground Music in Fort Walton Beach Florida. Mom said If I stuck with playing clarinet, my parents would buy me one. Until this day, I still have my clarinet. The band instructor at the middle school that I currently teach at has asked me to join the pep band. I am a special education teacher and it has been difficult to get paperwork done and participate. During college I participated in a couple of church plays/ skits. One play was produced at the civic center in front of a large crowd of people.

My daughter who is now 11 participated in ballet when she was 5 and 6. She then wanted to switch to jazz and she did that for a couple of years. Her last two years of dance there was a mother daughter dance. I participated with her on stage doing dance performances. The first mother daughter dance was to Proud Mary and I was Tina Turner. The second mother daughter dance was to Madonna's Vogue. My adult art experience has centered around my daughter's

interests which have been painting on canvas, drawing, coloring books and of course dance. I started a dance/drama club a few years ago when I was at an elementary school. One student even used his experience to apply for an acting job in How I Became a Pirate play. It was amazing to watch him stay in character on stage and he was only 9! After that this particular student as well as the other students from dance/drama really started to open up and become more verbal in their classrooms. Many of the students were formally very shy and withdrawn. Having opportunities to practice and perform in parades and at events seemed to give students more confidence in other areas. Parents were even commenting about how much their child was starting to communicate with others more.

As an adult I have written poetry, played parts in plays, skits and have done some public speaking.

### **Reflect**

Reflecting on past art experiences, I cannot remember art that was disconnected from other people or taught as an isolated assignment. I vaguely remember art classes, most likely because activities were presented without the same relationship that core content teachers had developed. Art wasn't presented as a project that was connected to other projects. The art assignment was the project. Art that I was most fond of was created within the regular classroom setting with the teacher getting needed supplies or student responsibility for certain supplies. I remember the paper mache project when I was in elementary school because it was tied into other events and became a culminating end product. The mystery that I wrote and created a play about and that was taped was also part of a larger project and the culminating activity was the taping. Another reflection is that I was able to create my projects based on my current interest, not what the teacher prescribed for me. So possibly having the element of choice during classroom projects

may have been more beneficial than anything else. I don't think I have been successful in regular art classes. I always felt that my work didn't measure up to the teacher's expectations. Art teacher expectations have seemed unattainable to me. I have felt insignificant and unsuccessful with traditional art assignments. I have had better success with art related projects where the art is part of a culminating unit of activities. Art has to have a clearly defined purpose. Perhaps that is why I have enjoyed theater, dance and band performances where several practices and other people have been involved. I left these experiences feeling a huge sense of accomplishment.

As a former middle school and high school band member, weekly practices, summer band camp and the weekly field or stage performances kept my interest. Band wasn't just a semester or grade period class filler. Band was something that happened continuously and yesterday's experiences were an opportunity for growth. After Friday's half time football performance, on Monday the band director would replay the half time performance. As a class, we would watch the performance. The band director would point out areas that were good as well as areas that needed improvement. The after school practices would focus on areas that needed to be improved especially if it was before band contest time. Practices focused on section improvement not just individual improvement. To do an exceptional job reflected not just on me as an individual but it was a reflection of the sections, woodwinds or sometimes more specifically the clarinets, saxophones, flutes, percussion or flags.

A similar interpersonal connectedness happened every time I was in a play or did public speaking. Typically for plays there was a theme and a group of people met weekly to practice the parts. While there was usually a set script, there was also some freedom of expression to make the character your own, to become the character. Freedom to dress for and act like the character. One play that I was in during college was called Church Do You Have It? It was performed at

the Fort Walton Beach Florida Civic Center. The play highlighted in a comical way how some people act while at church. My character was Ms. Attitude. It was hilarious! After the play people came up to the stage to talk to different members of the play. I was told I was absolutely nothing like the character I played. Ms. Attitude was scratchy, abrasive, blunt and somewhat rude to other church members. Ms. Attitude talked to people in church as her name suggests, with an attitude.

Public speaking performances had less practice or sometimes no practice but usually my speaking was at an annually occurring event. The annually occurring event had a set theme, example "Black farmers" in local history, honoring Veterans on Veterans Day, Credit Education.

### **Connect**

Connecting my viewpoint of art to my past experiences, art is something that allows for expression outside of the traditional confines of logical thinking. Art can be any expression of individuality. Anyone can express themselves, therefore anyone can do art. Some people are able to express themselves in different forms than other people. For example I am a good public speaker and performer, but I cannot draw, paint or do any paper/ canvas type of art. So any movement, dress up, speaking, reading, improvisations I have been successful in and feel confident with.

Conversely, drawing and painting leaves me feeling inadequate. I have drawn a few animals from a book that had specific instructions on how to draw them. I was pretty successful! I tried Japanese origami and even with instructions I could only make the simpler animals. Art definitely has a place in education and in life in general. Art breaks the monotony of the expected and allows for individuality. Presented correctly, art can become a

lifeline for students who normally don't participate in other activities such as sports or clubs as well as an addition for students who are involved in other activities.

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