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Art Autobiography

Art has been a medium that I frequently appreciated and participated in during my early years. Growing up in Brooklyn, I loved sketching and drawing during elementary school. My art teachers were engaging and proficient in their instruction. However, I was timid and hated showing my work to my teachers or close friends for fear of ridicule. I usually kept my work and coloring pages to myself. As the middle child in my family, I felt the propensity to share everything with my older and younger siblings. If I felt an intimate connection to my work, keeping it safe in my drawing pad was exciting.

I fell in love with puzzle-building and Lego engineering in middle school. This was something I did with my father. My spatial reasoning was potent, and I loved the mindfulness of putting pieces together. Middle school was also when students with artistic talent became hard to miss at my school. Viewing all their exquisite drawings only made me retreat more into my peaceful world of building at home. Unfortunately, my middle school was not known for its robust art department. My classmates undoubtedly felt this void due to their untapped creative abilities. We often segregated ourselves into the typical cliques without room for movement. I was not in the "artsy group," so I assumed it was not for me. Reflecting, I wish there were substantial outlets for students to participate and excel in

more artistic ventures. Instead, everything was standard academic achievements and the three years droned on for many of us.

My high school experience was more of the same. Creating art was not an enterprise that my circle of friends enjoyed. Our school's law program started to warm my heart and participating in Moot Court and Mock Trials became an avenue in which I excelled. Unfortunately, my solitary art pursuit ended poorly and reinforced my dissatisfaction with that world. I assisted in painting the backdrop for our school's SING musical performance. The set became tumultuous due to disagreements among the student directors. Ultimately, this caused one director to criticize the work I was doing publicly. This was a profound setback, and I began to harbor contempt for all artistic endeavors. My sanctuary was the law program, and I gladly withdrew into my safe zone.

College was the first place I found my people—the friends who supported each other's interests, and it was my time to flourish. I revisited my interest in art and theater within my major, Mass Communications. My professor for costume design was incredibly attuned to her student's needs without making them clones. I realized how essential a quality art teacher was in the motivation and progress of their students. Her classes were enjoyable, and the stress of sharing personal work evaporated. The nurturing and responsive atmosphere rippled through all of us. She set high standards for expectations and positive peer responses.

As I reflect on my artistic history, I appreciate that my encounters improved over time. Any negative feedback became ingrained in my soul due to my young age. The influence of a high-quality art teacher helped me overcome those setbacks. There was no longer dread in reviewing or sharing my work. She elevated the conversations, and the emphasis on competition disappeared. My college classmates took on her outlook and personality. This made a substantial improvement not only in my work but my peers. We were able to share techniques and revisions to become better artists. I currently feel successful, not because my artwork is perfect but because I am willing to share it with others without hesitation. I am proud of my work and open to constructive advice.

I can connect my past to my current teaching experiences. In many ways, I emulate my college teacher's classroom culture. For example, I will conduct lessons on how to respond to each other's work appropriately. My elementary classes typically have 32 students, and managing their personalities and responses is critical. I try to foster an environment of open-mindedness and appreciation. My school is located in Queens, NY, and language or cultural differences can be a source of peer ridicule. Many of my STEM and Computer Science lessons begin with exploring different cultures. Frequently, my students begin to feel included and start to contribute their work meaningfully. Setting the initial tone for our classes is always essential.

Lunar New Year was our topic last week. Many of my students loved learning about the traditions and customs performed during the holiday. We started with the fundamental elements of the holiday. As a STEM teacher, I aim to allow student-choice in their culminating activity. Students have one-to-one devices, enabling multiple choices by the week's end. They were given options in creating an origami rabbit, coding a dancing dragon, drawing, and engineering a rabbit/dragon with Flexi-blocks. My students are profoundly excited when I walk into the room because we are also amidst intense test preparation. They love the ability to sit with friends and choose the art medium they want to create together.

All of my past experiences have benefited me as a sixteen-year teacher. I have realized how classroom climate and shaping positive informed responses are essential in keeping students motivated. STEM and Computer Science build critical thinking skills through arts integration. They develop problem-solving skills and the ability to innovate through perseverance. Finally, meaningful integration allows for a more equitable learning environment for all students by providing multiple access points. This is the teacher I have become and expect to improve upon as the years continue.