

**Art Autobiography**

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The Arts in STEM: Advancing Meaningful Integration

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### **Part 1: Recall**

As I reflect on my early art experiences in Casper, Wyoming, I realize that there were not many. During elementary school we had art, music, and PE at least once a week. The art and music teachers would come to our classrooms for their lessons. This indicates to me that the arts were not a high priority, given the infrequency and the lack of devoted spaces.

Most of the visual art we completed was prescribed as we all followed the same steps to achieve the same result. We had several music performances throughout my elementary years, but I don't remember experimenting with music much. In fifth grade we could begin playing an instrument. I wanted to play the violin, but my dad insisted that it was too squeaky. So, the cello it was! My sister and I both played for four years. My poor mother, who was a teacher, had to figure out how to get us to and from school with our giant instruments. I do remember enjoying being part of an orchestra, but I did not spend much time practicing because I wasn't fully invested. There may have been some faking during our performances.

I am the youngest of four and there was not a lot of money for extras. I begged for dance or gymnastics classes, but wasn't allowed to take them. As I reflect as an adult, I wonder if my midwestern mom thought it was frivolous, or it was simply an expense we could not afford. My three siblings and I took piano lessons, but as the youngest of four the lessons did not last long. Once the free opportunity to play an instrument at school was a possibility, piano lessons ceased. Honestly, I wish I had been able to continue with the piano as I truly enjoyed it and I think I would have taken ownership of the practice.

Middle and high school offered few visual arts classes, but I continued with the cello until eighth grade. I finally got my way with getting some dance in when I joined cheer in 9th grade and continued through high school. I was interested in choir, but I did not get the sense from my mom that I had the ability to perform well in that arena. I guess she judged from my singing at church, whether in the children's choir or just listening to me next to her. This lack of carrying a tune was affirmed in college during my music methods class. We were required to take this class for our elementary teaching degree. One of the expectations was to hold a tune by ourselves in class. I could not do it! I even asked my friend, who was part of a musical group on campus, to help me. Gratefully, I think the professor took pity on me and didn't want me to fail the class so I escaped with a C.

As I reflect, I wish there had been more of an emphasis on art in the classroom, as I enjoy crafting and making art, even though there is too much negative self talk. One of my favorite projects was creating art from recycled materials. I think I was about 10 and I wonder if this project was to celebrate the very first Earth Day in 1970. I worked with my brother who is 8 years older to create a UFO. He was very creative and I loved the rare opportunity to do a project with him. The newspaper came and took pictures of the contest winners and I was one of them!

Moms and teachers have plenty of opportunities to create and I truly enjoy that. When my kids were young, I always created their Halloween costumes. They would tell me what they want and I would make it happen. For example, I have created the following costumes: peacock, golden eagle, candy cane, and a pencil. I have also enjoyed party planning and decorating over the years.

As a teacher there are so many opportunities to access my artistic side. I have always enjoyed creating bulletin boards, but struggled with in the moment anchor charts as I have never been confident in my “elementary teacher handwriting”. This is why I began creating presentations and activities with Google Slides. Although I am not creating the art on paper, I do feel this is a creative outlet for me to merge my love of teaching and design. I would rather create a teaching slide or presentation than grade a paper any day! In addition to creating the design, it helps me to craft my lessons. I also love to give my students voice and choice in their expression of learning because it always wows me!

While I have had some success with painting through classes, I do not see myself as someone who can draw, especially in front of students. I am a bit of a perfectionist and am not confident in my drawing skills so I seek out alternatives. This may be due to lack of exposure when I was young. I wonder if I would have become more adept and confident if I had been given the opportunity.

I believe art is the visual, auditory, or sensory expression of ideas. While few are artists by trade, I think we are all artists because we all have the ability to create something novel to share our understanding of the world around us. One does not have to be a gifted artist to express themselves through different mediums.