

Kelli Bravo

The Arts in STEM: Advancing Meaningful Integration

Spring 2026

Art Autobiography

Recall

If you would have asked me if I was an artist in elementary, middle or high school, my answer would have been yes. I remember art being a part of almost every single aspect of my life. I loved to sing and dance, color and paint. My earliest memory of doing art is having coloring contests with my grandma and mom in the Poconos, PA, while everyone else was outside shoveling the driveway. I loved coloring inside the lines, and changing the pressure I was putting on the crayon to make the colors more vibrant or muted. I also loved being a better colorer than my mom, so I would always win! Art continued to be something I enjoyed as I got older. I asked Santa for a coloring book every year for Christmas, and eventually got started in oil painting. My parents invested in an oil paint set and various sized canvases and an easel. I also enjoyed drawing in my sketchpad with pencil. A lot of my free time in middle school and early high school was spent creating drawings and paintings. When I got to high school, I was on the accelerated track for art, which ended with AP Art in senior year.

In addition to traditional art (painting and drawing), I also participated in theatre growing up. In elementary school, I participated in Random House Kids theatre, a theatre company that catered to kids' performances. The performance I remember the most was "The Secret Garden". We went through weeks of rehearsal before putting on the show for our friends and family. We had costumes, wigs, make-up artists and microphones. It felt like a surreal experience. This led me to continue pursuing theater in middle school. The play that stands out to me the most was "The Wizard of Oz", where I was one of the background singers. We got to stand on the stage for the entire performance, providing background vocals for the main characters and providing comic relief to the audience.

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My favorite part of theater was singing and dancing. I was singing from as young as I can remember. I would write songs and give performances to my family. As I got older, I would video myself singing and even record myself, pretending that I was a recording artist. This was around the time that YouTube started to become popular, so I spent a lot of time watching kids my age posting themselves singing covers to popular songs. My love of singing led me to join chorus class in elementary school and participate in the chorus afterschool club. I remember auditioning for solos and even having a solo when we performed at our town Christmas tree lighting, which is commemorated by a picture on the wall of our local Applebees! I took dance classes since I was four years old, and eventually transitioned to hip hop focused classes. The singing and dancing portion of theater is the part that brought me the most joy and excitement. Acting was something I also enjoyed, but it didn't come naturally to me. As a kid, I took acting lessons through the local library and continued to participate in theater shows. I also enjoyed going to see Broadway musicals and listening to the soundtrack after seeing the show!

Reflect

As you can see from the previous section, the arts were a major part of my childhood growing up. In addition to enjoying the arts, I was (and still am) a perfectionist. As I got older, that perfectionism changed how I viewed myself as an artist. I always felt that I was good/above average at art, but never the best. I, like everyone, have had multiple experiences that have solidified the fact that I was not the best.

There were many experiences growing up singing that made me feel like I was not good. I remember Demi Lovato was a guest singer on Dancing With The Stars, and my parents said "even you are better than her." My parents meant this as a compliment, but I took it as an insult.

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They were talking about how bad her performance was, and then compared my singing to hers.

This made me feel like I wasn't a good singer. Like I mentioned in my recall paragraph, I would also video myself singing, with the intention of posting on YouTube. I would show my mom the video, and she had told me on multiple occasions that it probably wasn't a good one to post. As an adult, I know that my mom was trying to protect me from posting on the internet as a kid, and all of the dangerous things that come with posting minors, but as a kid, I took that as her telling me that I was not good enough. This was compounded with not always getting the best solo in elementary school chorus class. For some other kids, this probably would have been motivation to keep working, but for me and my perfectionism, this led me to eventually give up on singing, and only sing for my own enjoyment in the car and shower.

I also had a similar experience with my theatre career. Participating in the Random Farms Kids Theatre production of "The Secret Garden" was my first experience with a real production, with auditions. It, of course, was my goal to get the lead role. I remember on the day the parts were assigned, we were all sitting in the main rehearsal space, and the director was calling out the assignments, starting with the smaller roles, and working up to the lead. There were only two roles left, and my name hadn't been called. I thought for sure I was going to get the last role, which was the lead. I was wrong - my name was called for the second to last role, which was the grandfather. That was definitely not the part I was going for, yet, I tried my best in that role. I had to dress like an old man, wear a gray, short wig and had a wheelchair. It was safe to say that that experience did not make me want to continue with the theater world. Instead of participating in Random Farms Kids Theatre, I transitioned to the middle school play. I got a role, as mentioned above, in the background singing group, which had no acting. This solidified for me

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that maybe my acting was not my strong suit. In high school, we needed to decide whether we wanted to play a sport or do the play, so I decided to play volleyball. This was the right choice for me, especially since I now coach as an adult, but it was the end of my theater career.

My experience with traditional art (drawing and painting) was along the same lines. I continued taking art classes up until junior year. I was not the best artist in the class, but I was well above average and it was definitely something I really enjoyed. I was on track for AP Art, and was working with my teacher on what my portfolio would look like. At the end of my junior year, I had to decide whether I wanted to take AP Art or AP Physics. I knew that I wanted to be a science teacher, so I thought that taking AP Physics would look better for college than AP Art. I ended up having to take physics in college, so AP Physics helped prepare me for that, and I graduated with a degree in Biology and am certified in Bio and Chem, so choosing AP Physics was a good choice for me. However, I really struggled through the class and always wondered how different my senior year would have looked, and even time in college, if I left time and space to pursue my passion for art, even though it was not what I wanted to do with my career.

Art is still something I enjoy, though I am very out of practice. I participated in my school's Monster Art show this year, and had to recreate a monster based on an elementary school student's drawing. I was really excited to participate, until I started drawing and realized I was not as good as I used to be. I elicited some help from my students and created a cute monster (shown to the right), but it was not a drawing like I originally thought. It was a sculpture, which is outside of my comfort zone. It was a great growing experience, and a fun way to get back into art.



My monster art, 2025

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My current definition of art and my definition of art growing up are different. Growing up, I would have said that art is drawing and painting, or sculpting; anything where you were creating something in a conventional way. Now as an adult and an educator, I view art as a means to create something, to share a message and to express yourself. I have really tried to incorporate art into my lessons, by giving students the space to demonstrate their learning in a way that allows them to express themselves. Some of my favorite assignments that students have handed in have been in a media of their choice. For a chemistry assignment about radioactive elements, I had a student create a video game where the character had to move through and destroy a nuclear powerplant, and he described the information as he went through different areas of the powerplant. I had another student create a podcast style video about the same nuclear assignment. This student's passion is film making and editing, so he was able to put his own twist on the assignment, while still learning the material.

My past experience in art has given me so much respect for my students who pursue art. As discussed above, I gave up on my passion for art because I felt like I wasn't good. It is my goal as a mentor and educator to make sure that none of my students feel this way and give up on what they are passionate about. I try to make sure I leave room in my content for students to express themselves and take risks. I always try to make it to their theater performances, art shows and poem readings. Sometimes I feel these events are not given the same emphasis as sports events, but the students are working just as hard on what they are creating as the athletes on the field or court. It is my intention to continue to grow and improve how I incorporate art into my teaching, and how I support my students who are pursuing art!