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Prompt B

## How My Life Experience Has Prepared me to Teach

Growing up in the small, beautiful, and generally sleepy town of Livingston, Montana was in most ways a blessing, even though at times it came with an acute sense of cultural isolation. While Montana is by no means a homogeneous monoculture it's evident that in many regions the population lacks diversity. This absence of ethnic diversity was reflected in the cultural expressions that I experienced around me and so art became my first window into a larger worldview.

As a child of two busy working-class parents, I was lucky to be enrolled in daycare through the state-provided Head Start program. While I can remember little of my time at Head Start, I vividly recall that my first artistic experience took place there. Sitting at my kid-sized table with a pair of safety scissors, I cut geometric shapes from colorful construction paper, and then carefully and consciously glued these shapes together into abstract compositions. I remember the novel satisfaction that I derived from creating my first deliberate artwork. It was a feeling that would follow me to adulthood and shape the essence of how I understand and perceive myself and the world around me.

After September 11th, 2001 while our nation was hurtling towards war, a couple of close high school friends and I decided to paint a large mural at a popular public swimming spot that was both a remembrance for the victims of the attack and a call for peace. Making the mural was cathartic and It helped each of us to process the confusion of the moment while putting forward a positive message of unity and tolerance that spoke visually to, and in some ways for, our community. This mural remained intact for almost a decade and even years later people would tell me how much they appreciated it long after it was gone.

From this experience I came away with the knowledge that the value of art is often interpersonal, and that what you do, and what you make, ripples out psychically through time and space far beyond what you may be aware of. In my professional life, I've been fortunate to have worked with diverse groups of students from a variety of economic and social backgrounds on sustainability, naturalism, and arts education. It is my feeling that these teaching experiences also have a similar profound rippling effect and I have numerous amazing teachers and professors to thank for my own development in the arts.

It was the influence of these incredible teachers that helped me to develop my talents and cultivate my skills. The fifth-grade teacher who noticed my artwork and then

recommended me to a talented and gifted program for middle school students, the middle school art teacher who encouraged my work by suggesting that I had college-level drafting abilities, the high school art teacher who prompted me to enter a watercolor I had just finished into a school auction where it received the top bid of the night, the college professor who pushed me to go bigger and bolder with my work which won me 1st place in the undergraduate juried show that year. In each instance there was a teacher looking out for me, encouraging me, leading me towards better outcomes. I feel the best way for me to grow professionally is to honor their gift and give back to others as a teacher myself. It's all these experiences that have imbued a passion to teach inside of me beyond just the necessary skills for it.