

How to Share Related Arts Without Becoming a Related Artist

It ain't easy being an elementary school parent. As if you didn't have enough to do, every time you turn around your kid is handing you a sheet to sign. More than half of them are requests by the teachers for you to support the curriculum.

That's all right with Math. You can do elementary math. Hopefully. Language arts, probably you're okay. Social Studies? Well, there's always the internet.

But what do you do when your kid comes home and tells you she just learned about how many quarter notes there are in a whole note? You might not even know that she's talking about music! How are you supposed to support her in that, when you gave up piano lessons twenty-nine years ago?

Before I answer that, let's first talk about why you should support your Related Arts Teachers' curricula.

One: *Your kids need to know you care about these subjects.* By supporting the teaching of the arts, health and language, you're letting your kids know these things are important. If you don't show them, then no matter how much you care about music, art, culture and fitness, they may pass these things up for other choices.

Two: *You already know what you need to know.* How many people know about Dr. Spock? No...not the Vulcan on Star Trek. Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote a book on babies and childcare in a time when doctors were telling parents not to pick up their babies if they cried, and parents were too scared to argue with them. Dr. Spock believed that parents actually were capable of raising their children, and he told parents: "You know more than you think you know." That's what I'm telling you about the arts. You listen to music. You see visual art every day. You have an active knowledge of sports and fitness. You are an expert in your own language. You know enough.

Three: *You don't need to know.* Your child doesn't care how much you know. Your child just wants to have a conversation with you. Even if you know nothing about what your child is telling you, they'll be happy just to tell you what they've learned.

So now you know that it's important for you to support the Related Arts curriculum, that it's possible for you to support it, and that it's easier than you think. The following is a list of ways you can support your child's discovery of the related arts without going back to school and getting a degree.

Music – This is the one that scares people the most. You rarely hear people say that they took painting lessons when they were nine, and had a terrible teacher, but they wish they'd stuck with it. You may be one of those "music casualties" that loves music but doesn't feel qualified to talk about it. Hey! Remember what I told you?

Talk about your favorite music with your kids! They're little, and they'll listen to you! Once they're teenagers, they won't care about Bruce Springsteen or your favorite Bluegrass band. But now, they want to share things with you. Take them to a concert. If you're worried about their behavior, take them to a festival where it doesn't matter how they act. If you're feeling a little braver, bring them to a free indoor concert and leave as soon as they get bored. You may think that five or ten minutes isn't worth much, but in ten years they'll remember that concert like they sat through the whole thing.

Art – Of course you can always take your kids to museums and galleries. But if that thought gives you an automatic headache, you can do something easier. There's absolutely

nothing wrong with looking through art-books with them. These books are always on sale in used bookstores. You don't have to be an expert to look at beautiful paintings. But don't stop there! Ask kids questions about the pictures they see. Their observations will surprise you. You don't have to have all the answers. Just have a conversation, and be interested in what they say!

In the eighties and nineties when Comic-book artists were beginning to attract large crowds at conventions, they developed a kind of publicity stunt. They would sit at a table with one another and draw a single picture together. This was known as "jamming," since it resembled musicians playing together. You can "jam" with your kids too. Draw a picture with them. If they won't let you draw on their art, then watch them draw and get them to tell you what they've done. It means more to them than you realize

PE – This one is perhaps the easiest to fulfill, although often times we fall short of it. I recently acquired a book, written in the 1950's, which is a compendium of games that people used to play like "Button, button" and "Marbles", and which are largely forgotten. The most interesting chapter was the one addressed to "Dads."

Now, being written in the Fifties, the book was addressing fathers who, by and large, were going to work, then coming home and having a drink, and that was it! What it advises them is trite, but has a kernel of truth which is worth sharing: The book implores Dads to play sports with their boys to teach them valuable skills. That way, when the other kids pick teams, their boys won't be chosen last! As funny as that is, the truth of the matter remains: Our kids learn from us, and our absence in particular parts of their lives has real consequences.

So if you're an athlete, play sports with your kids! It doesn't have to be anything fancy. It's enough to throw a ball, to run across a field, or to swing on the swings with them. Watch sports with your kids, and talk to them about the games.

The hardest part of supporting the PE curriculum is setting a good example in your health and fitness. But the easiest way to support the PE curriculum is to provide good meals for your kids, and to keep a conversation about health going. And if you don't know, ask them. They learned something today.

Language – This is the one that can really throw people. How can you support a Spanish Language program if you don't speak Spanish? The answer: indirectly.

The Spanish Language curriculum is, at its base, a study of language in general. You are an expert in your native language, and anything you do to help kids understand their own language will make other languages easier to learn.

Teach them how to use the dictionary. Show them the excitement of learning new words. Play games with words: Riddles, puns, crossword puzzles. Play hangman, scrabble, even word-searches with them.

In the end, your involvement will make the difference between your kids thinking Related Arts are an "extra" subject, and them recognizing how important the Related Arts are to all areas of their lives. Given how much the Related Arts can support their growth and learning, you can't afford to miss the opportunity. As always, if you need ideas for how to talk to them, give me a call. I'd love to share with you.

Thanks!

Adam Cole