

The Arts *are* Learning

Dyslexia, more than an anecdotal story. A few years ago I was coaching a teaching artist who had a young son in elementary school who was extremely dyslexic, like his mother, and dysgraphic. The TA being a visual artist, we talked about her using the visual arts as her primary means of expression. She mentioned her son was also interested in drawing. I told her about a program called Book Builder, which is a combination speech-to-text way of creating books that one can illustrate and self-publish. We went over how to work with it and she used it with her child. Much to everyone's satisfaction, her son started creating books that they self-published, started thinking of himself as a writer and found language – written and spoken – to be a friend of his. The upshot was that he began doing very well in school. Interestingly, his mother stopped being a TA, became a full time certified special education teacher and a poet performing readings internationally.

There's a very important dynamic that's basic to the Arts and all Art making here. The Arts build from the inside out. The Arts very much start with you as the maker of meaning. This is the heart of the matter.

(Warning, I'm going old school now.) Initially, Math, Science, English (ELA/Language Arts), Social Studies were ways of making meaning out of the world and our place in it – which is to say, they were verbs, long before they became subjects.

The Arts, on the other hand, have stayed verbs. They live at the very heart of Literacy, if one considers literacy to be *making, understanding and expressing meaning*. It's a Literacy that's not just germane to ELA, but what it means to be literate in all the other academic disciplines – Math, Science, etc. This is because the Arts' core skills and processes are the very core skills and processes necessary in the *doing* of Math, Science, etc.¹

Which is why we say, *It starts with the Arts*.

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The Arts raise the bar on Literacy. They do so because there is an audience, always an audience. Making, understanding and expressing meaning is not enough. One needs to make, understand and express meaning *clearly*. That opens the door to and provides a powerful reason for refining content, wedding intention to articulation, considering others, developing empathy. In other words, participating & communicating more effectively in the world.

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¹ EG: Memory, Retention, Sequencing, Recognizing patterns, Flexibility, Analyzing, Extrapolation, Synthesizing, Concluding The list goes on.