

Art oriented children – The myth that Art doesn't pay / Jerry Cianciolo @WSJ

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“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” – Albert Einstein

What to Do If Your Child's First Love Is . . . Art

It's a myth that a passion for creative expression is a one-way ticket to unemployment.

By

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[The Wall Street Journal](#) ([The%20Wall Street Journal](#))

Nearly every month there's a news story or magazine article proclaiming the high-paying careers of the future. They are usually in fields such as biomedicine, nanotechnology, systems analysis and robotics. The pay sometimes touches six figures for entry-level positions.

For young men and women interested in science, technology, engineering or math, the so-called STEM subjects, the future appears bright. But what's a parent to do, aside from gulp, when his child's first love is . . . art?

It's not a concern in middle school and high school. That's the time to bask in your offspring's talent at recitals, theater productions, dance ensembles or art exhibitions. But as admissions season opens and one digs earnestly into the Fiske Guide to Colleges, the parental attitude shifts from "You're so wonderfully talented" to "Talent's a great thing, but how're you going to make a living?"

The unsubtle message for the emerging artist is "playtime's over."

Two teenagers in my neighborhood were caught in this squeeze. One, a promising pianist, had won a handful of musical competitions. Sit her at the keyboard, with or without an audience, and her very essence flows out.

PHOTO: CORBIS

The other painted canvasses beyond his years. Stand before one of his creations, closing your eyes to the cavernous gym around you, and it is no stretch to imagine the work hanging in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Whether one was a potential Horowitz and the other a Georgia O'Keeffe we'll never know. At the prompting of their parents, the daughter is pursuing a degree in chemistry, the son a doctorate in physical therapy.

In a culture whose *cri de coeur* is "follow your passion," there's a certain irony here. Yet who can blame the parents? They foresee their children clerking at the local pharmacy to support their passion—a hardscrabble life, without means to buy a house, start a family or have the amenities their friends who studied medicine or law will surely have. Parents shudder at the thought of their children gambling their future on something as fanciful as art. (There's the matter of paying all that tuition, too.)

But it may be the parents who are rolling the dice. Say the word "artist" and for many people adjectives like flaky, loner, eccentric and unemployable come to mind. This last one is especially alarming to any mom or dad. But how accurate are these caricatures? Not very, according to a 2011 study (http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/SNAAP_2011_Report.pdf) conducted by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project.

Two findings of this study, involving 13,500 arts graduates at 154 institutions, stand out: 92% of those who sought work after graduation found it, and 66% of these young artists reported that their first job out of school was a close match for the kind of work they wanted. Further, 70% of those employed as fine artists, photographers, dancers and writers said they were "very satisfied" with their job and the creative opportunities it provided, notwithstanding the low pay.

What's striking about these levels of satisfaction is that the obverse is true for other U.S. workers. The Gallup organization, in its 2013 State of the American Workplace report (<http://www.gallup.com/services/176708/state-american-workplace.aspx>), found that, on average, "70 percent of American workers are 'not engaged' or 'actively disengaged' and emotionally disconnected from their workplaces."

Regardless of the field, the level of discontent holds true within a few percentage points. Only 36% of executives said they were engaged in their work, 34% of physicians, 31% of teachers, 29% of sales workers, and a mere 24% of workers in manufacturing.

Let's do the math, then. On average, more than 70% of professional artists like their work, while 70% of executives, doctors, teachers and other workers dislike theirs. Fretful parents, who is better off?

For these reasons, as we might say, we cannot predict or foresee what's best for our children, nor do we, as Marian Edelman said, have the right to rain on their dreams. Life is too messy, too reliant on luck, chance encounters, coincidence and a thousand unforeseeable variables to think we, or our children, can chart a linear path to happiness.

No one will deny there are beleaguered artists who regret the path they took—in fact, rue the day they first pressed middle C, stood before an easel, or danced *en pointe*. But for every one of them, how many mathematicians, engineers and scientists are there still gnawed, many years later, by the fact that they relinquished their first love for the sake of a big house, three cars and a flat-screen TV?

Mr. Cianciolo is chief editor at Emerson & Church Publishers in Medfield, Mass.

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