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The Wonder of a Child

Shraddha Chaplot

Advisor to The STEAM Journal

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The Wonder of a Child

Abstract

A personal piece on the wonder of childhood and the continuation of curiosity into adulthood.

Keywords

childhood, wonder, freedom, art, science, STEAM

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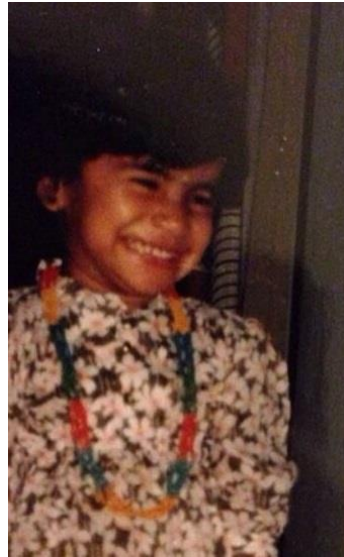


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The Wonder of a Child

Shraddha “Shr+ha” Chaplot

A few months ago, I went to one of my favorite local cafés to escape the forever-hovering, never-ending responsibility of cleaning my apartment. I convinced myself that going there would be productive: I would draw out a few more of my mathematical ponderings of patterns I had discovered and created earlier that day. Once complete, I could return home to ~~continue~~ start cleaning without feeling like I had wasted the day.



So, I drove to the café, bought a cup of black tea, sat down at a two-seated table in the back, and pulled out my colorful ink pens and a stack of blank papers.

The moment I selected and uncapped the first magical, colorful ink-wand, my brain commenced its unstoppable journey of wide-eyed wandering, disregarding the entire purpose of me being there. My routine distraction became a full-on PTZ (pan-tilt-zoom) observation of the high-ceilinged café, something I had done many times before.

There! There was the wall of brilliant marigold - my favorite color - straight ahead of me. There! To my right, another wall, filled from left to right of shelves and shelves of books, grouped and organized by the color of the book cover. And there! This same wall had a staircase that led to a sliver of walking space up top, where a knight-in-shining-armor stood guard. (No real humans were used.) And behind him? Brown painted rectangles bordered by white lines to mimic a rustic brick wall.

As I completed my 360° in-depth analyzation of the café, I brought my gaze back to my blank paper. Finally, first distraction aside, I began to draw.

In a matter of minutes, (a good) distraction struck again. I heard a boy, perhaps six or seven years of age, walk by with the most determined pitter-patter. His mother followed closely behind, as he firmly plopped himself onto a seat next to mine. But this was not any seat; it was the seat to a majestic, black piano.

Yes, I forgot to mention that by the book-filled, knight-guarded, faux brick-lined wall was a grand piano for all to play. And I happened to be sitting right next to it.

Back to the little boy. He played one key. Then another. And another. And then a couple more at the same time. He was most certainly enjoying it. As he started his newfound exploration of those 88 keys, I broke away and looked up from my “mathsterpiece”-in-progress to see what discoveries he was making. However, his mother misunderstood my glance as an indication of my annoyance. She felt embarrassed and told her son to stop bothering me with the racket. I smiled and said, “Oh please, please let him play! I don’t mind at all!” I wanted this child to continue feeding his curiosity and I definitely did not want to be the one to stop it. The mother smiled back, relieved. The boy continued, and though he was not Beethoven or Bach (yet, at least), he had a passion and interest that clearly shined through. He played for a few minutes, and the mother’s worry of annoying others almost immediately diminished.

A few more minutes later, the barista announced her order was ready and the mother told her son to finish playing. As they both walked past me, she said to the boy, “Maybe we get you some piano lessons? That was really great for your first time!” The boy, without a doubt, was as thrilled as I was to hear this suggestion.

She looked at me with one final smile, and they both walked out the door.

Every single time I think of that experience, I think about the power of curiosity, discovery, and exploration. And I think about how we must encourage it, not discourage it.

That boy almost did not get a chance to try something new because his mother, who was only being considerate and thoughtful of café patrons, thought he would disturb others. But it made me think of how many times, as growing adults, we tell others that things are not possible, that we should not wonder or experiment new ideas.

Maybe this boy ends up pursuing his newfound passion and becomes a pianist in an orchestra or starts an electro-punk band or merges mathematics and music together. Who knows? Maybe he absolutely loathes it and wants to do something else. But sometimes (perhaps many times), telling someone not to do or try something exploratory inhibits the future of amazing things we can do and create.

It is a well-known fact that many individuals who excel at STEM are avid musicians. Allowing ourselves to be free and to have no expectations is one way that the brain can make new connections, by exploring something we have never seen, touched, or been immersed in before. Children do this naturally as their brains are wired to be fearless to try everything.



As we get older, so much of our childhood imagination and experimentation begins to be bounded and limited. We become adults and to some varying degree, are expected to stay in certain boundaries,

follow certain rules, and not play as much as we did when we were children. STEM fields need creativity, and art making is about expression of play. I believe every person has the power and capability to fuse these together and convert their imaginative wonder into reality. I may not be that wide grinned child anymore but I still find time for wonder, and I still carry that childlike playfulness with me in all that I do.