Why is everyone talking about STREAM and STEM?

For years, you have heard the term STEM within education and early learning, however, STREAM is the new curriculum. What is the difference?   STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focuses on math and science, while STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) concentrates on the "whole" picture, including creative and critical thinking skills.

The U.S. Dept of Labor Statistics projects employment in STEM occupations to grow more than 13% or 9 million by 2027. Despite the statistics of the projected job growth, the emphasis on early learning and college majors is still not STEM or STREAM-related. So how can we get more kids involved in STREAM learning?

One of many roadblocks for young learners is the attitude that one type of learning fits all; but not all children learn the same way. The concept of STREAM is to encourage their curiosities and do their own explorations. STREAM is beneficial to better learning for a variety of reasons. According to School Tutoring Academy, most students and young learners in this generation are visual learners. They learn better by imagining what they are learning by using pictures, videos, maps, hands-on activities, etc. Teachers and parents are encouraged to help their young learners determine which learning style works best for them. Once a learning method has been identified, it allows the student to view problems differently and in a way they will understand. They can see the "big picture," which helps a student increase their interest in the topic of learning. It also increases the student's confidence which allows for better learning retention.

Living in an innovative world, it is critical for young learners to have the opportunity to explore all subject areas. STREAM learning also helps young learners apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations by establishing a holistic approach to learning. Having a holistic viewpoint is an important, necessary component of critical thinking. Critical and creative thinking involves students thinking largely and intensely using skills, behaviors, and inclinations such as reason, logic, imagination, creativity, and innovation at school and in their lives beyond. Visual learning means that people need to *see* information to learn it, and this "seeing" takes many forms, from spatial awareness, photographic memory, color/tone, brightness/contrast, and other visual information. When using our eyes for learning, we are literally open to new ways of seeing, observing, and learning. This type of approach helps a student start to think in a more creative and open-minded way. STREAM learning aligns with this concept well.

Parents and educators ought to encourage visual and STREAM learning. Take advantage of visual resources like a computer, three-dimensional models, and illustrations in books or textbooks. The major benefit is keeping the young learner interested and motivated to learn in a way they enjoy. Have fun creating new ways to keep learning interactive! Free Spirit Publishing has a wonderful list of STREAM-related activities!