

[The Things You Can't Teach](#) [1]

February 8, 2016 [Teaching](#) [2]

[Music](#) [3]

[Yawping Wild](#) [4]

TW Column by Steven Lewis

Another Brick in the Wall



Recently, an invitation to a performance by some local kids at a “rock academy” popped up on my Facebook page. Nice, right? Admirable. Sweet, even. Except I simply couldn’t work up the mojo to go see talented children play rock and roll.

Yes, I did feel guilty about not supporting kids in their artistic endeavors. I’ll cop to feeling a bit like a tsking church lady or some shushing librarian. The tightass dad from *Dead Poets Society*. The other tightass dad from *Footloose*. It’s not like me to be such a tightass—me, the guy who wrote *Zen and the Art of Fatherhood*.

And yet, there is just something wrong with adults teaching kids how to be rockers. Those young wannabes should be honing their chops playing loud, clunky, off-key music in nasty garages or dingy basements where parents and other

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adults are not welcome. And it almost goes without saying the parents should be scowling about how it's "nothin' but noise!," or banging on the door and screaming, "Tone down that racket!" (Or maybe later, voices modulated, saying, "Let me play you some Pink Floyd to show what good music really sounds like.")

The roots of rock and roll have always been about rebellion. About confusion and hostility toward...just about everything. It's not about pleasing your parents or grandparents or teachers or audiences who like cover bands. It's about saying it so *f-ing* loud only your friends can hear you. You reach down into your sadness, loneliness, frustration, and rage—and find your own voice.

I know that scoffing at the "education" of rock and roll dates me. My kids and grandkids would say I'm just another hippie who thinks it's all been downhill since the 1960s. But my scoffing also covers a deeper unease about teaching the arts, one that's harder for me to acknowledge as a longtime writing instructor.