



MUSIC: KEY TO RAISING KIDS' IQ

By Sharon Burch

In past generations, singing and playing instruments was an integral part of family life. It was a great way to express and entertain yourself and others. We did not realize it, but we were also exercising our brain while we played. This was causing us to be creative, more vibrant, more intelligent, etc. In our current generation, we tend to be passive listeners and consumers, and as a result, we are shortening our mental development and stripping our children of the opportunity to reach their full mental potential.

Humans are “wired” for music. Until recently, scientists did not know how music affected the brain. The advancement in technology allows scientists to actually “see” brain activity via PET

scans and MRI imaging by scanning the blood flow in the brain. Our brains are “wired” with neural pathways. Most activities only cause a portion of the brain to “light up” with activity; thus, the saying about “right brain/left brain,” and so on. But there are actually four parts to the brain and music makes ALL of the areas “light up” and creates new neural pathways as a person is learning and playing an instrument. Those neural pathways remain in tact and can be used for other things besides music.

Norman Doidge, in his book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, shares case after case of people forcing their brains to change and adapt either voluntarily with discipline, or involuntarily due to odd incidences. Studies confirm that our brains have plasticity.

“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is proven to be a case of “don’t want to,” rather than too old to change. Daniel Levitin passionately explores the connection between music and the brain in his book of the same name. Google his name, watch video clips on YouTube, or go to his website. It is an exciting time of discovering how little we know and how much there is to learn.

There is definitely enough evidence to recognize it is not in a music teacher’s imagination. Music has a huge impact on activity in the brain. You can physically see the growth and changes that happen inside the brain. The possibilities are endless. The implications for music therapy and music education are profound. Just check out PBS video “The Music Instinct.”

Neurologist and author, Oliver Sacks, relays a true story from his book, *Musicophilia*, where a man was indirectly struck by lightning through a telephone and three weeks later was composing and playing the piano for the first time. Sacks believes the man was “rewired” through that experience. The list goes on and on.

Even if you are still skeptical about music making kids smarter, let us look at the other benefits. Socially, music is an ageless hobby, creating interaction with great people. Take a look at any school band, orchestra, or top-ranking choir and you will find a huge percentage of the members are in the top ten percent of their classes and

are college bound. Striving for excellence is a given in a musical group. Everyone has to perfect their parts for the group to perform at their best, therefore nobody “sits on the bench.” Everyone has to pull their own weight or the whole group suffers. Creativity, especially in jazz groups, is developed, honed, and embraced. Who could not use more creativity in their workforce? Creativity is what makes the difference and gives any company the cutting edge.

There are many benefits of being involved in making music, but the neural pathways drive home the point and that gets our attention. Scientists are reluctant to state that playing a musical

instrument makes you smarter, but all the indicators are there, so let us look at it from the opposite angle. Instead of trying to prove that music makes you smarter or is good for you and your child, try to prove that it is not. I can not think of a single reason how learning a musical instrument is detrimental, can you?

Give your child every opportunity and advantage you can. Enroll them in music lessons and watch them grow and mentally develop as they play, create, express, and struggle through the rigors of the discipline of mastering an instrument. You will discover a more creative, brighter, and mature person in the making.

