



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, causing us to be creative, more vibrant, and smarter. In our current generation, we tend to be passive listeners and consumers as a society, and as a result, shorting our mental development and our children the opportunity to reach their 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 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, right brain/left brain. There are actually four parts to the brain. Music makes ALL of the areas “light up” and create 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.

In his book *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Norman Doidge shares case after case of people forcing their brain to change and adapt either voluntarily with discipline, or involuntarily due to odd incidences. Studies confirm that our brain has plasticity. “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is proven to

be a case of “can’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’s 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 and visually 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



Music is *Key* to Raising Kids' IQ

By Sharon Burch

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 composing and playing the piano for the first time. Sacks believes the man was "re-wired" through that experience.

Even if you are still skeptical about music making kids smarter, let's 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 class and college bound. Striving for excellence is a given in a musical group. Everyone has to perfect their part for the group to perform at their best. Nobody "sits

on the bench." Everyone has to pull their weight or the whole group suffers. Creativity, especially in jazz groups, is developed, honed and embraced. Who couldn't use more creativity in their workforce? It 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 drives home the point and gets our attention. Scientists are reluctant to state that playing a musical instrument makes you smarter, but all the indicators are there, so let's 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't 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.

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Nationally regarded music education teacher and advocate, Sharon Burch is the author of Freddie the Frog® - a fantastical 4-book with companion CD series that helps young children learn musical concepts while they are duly immersed in Freddie's colorfully illustrated adventures.

www.FreddieTheFrogBooks.com.