

Music key to raising kids' IQ

BY SHARON BURCH

In past generations, singing and playing instruments was an integral part of family life — a great way to express and entertain yourself and others.

We did not realize it, but we also were exercising our brains while we played, causing us to be creative, more vibrant, smarter, etc. 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, etc.

But there are actually four parts to the brain, and music makes all of them "light up" and create new neural pathways as a person

learns and plays an instrument. Those neural pathways remain intact and can be used for other things besides music.

Adaptive organ

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 brain has plasticity.

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/visually see the growth and changes that happen inside the brain. The possibilities are endless.

Lightning strike

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

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. Look at any school band, orchestra or top-ranking choir and you will find a huge percentage of the members are in the top 10 percent of their class and college bound.

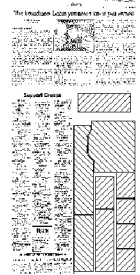
Playing together

Striving for excellence is a given in a musical group. Everyone must perfect their part for the group to perform at their best. Nobody "sits on the bench." Everyone must pull his or her 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? Creativity is what makes the difference and gives any company the cutting edge.

Many benefits drive from making music, but the neural pathways drive home the point and get 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 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 children 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 mastering an instrument.

You will discover a more creative, brighter and mature person in the making.

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. She may be reached online at www.FreddieTheFrogBooks.com.

