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Practicing Piano Helps Much More Than Just Musicianship

Many parents have told nearly innumerable children that “practicing builds character.” Even though those children scoffed at their parents, their mothers and fathers had more on their side than just an old platitude.

Recent research from the University of Vermont College of Medicine has shown substantial correlative evidence that studying piano, and, by extension, practicing, not only produces boosts in organizational and spatial reasoning skills but also reduces overall anxiety, aggression and other emotional problems.



Because such musical instruction helps build executive reasoning and helps focus children with cognitive disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, one would think that it would be front in center in almost every curriculum. Sadly, this is not the case. Many times, it is music, or other arts curricula, that are cut first. Additionally, the United States Department of Education reports that fully 75 percent of American high-school students either do not study music at all or experience it rarely. All of these facts contribute even more to the sadness of the situation than otherwise because students who study music are also more socially adept than their peers who do not.

The beneficial effects of music instruction

Ever since the controversy surrounding the “Mozart effect” study by Rauscher et al., in 1993, scientists have sought correlation between music, its instruction and intelligence. The University of Vermont study, performed by 56-year-old psychiatrist James Hudziak, doesn’t show proof of number increases, such as, “Johnny’s IQ just went up 10 points because he played a **Clementi sonatina.**” Instead, it uses hard science to show actual physical changes in the brains of children who have studied music and then applied the children’s actual performances on spatial and organizational tests as bolstering data to the hypothesis that music instruction has beneficial intellectual and social effects. Hudziak said that the lack of formal music education in the lives of so many children in the U.S., juxtaposed with the data of his study, indicate the “... **vital importance of finding new and innovative ways to make music training more widely available to youths, beginning in childhood.**”

Abstract:

Cortical Thickness Maturation and Duration of Music Training: Health-Promoting Activities Shape Brain Development