

MY TURN | BY THERESA PERRY

Piano and the Brain

We're gifted with research that shows a connection between playing a musical instrument and intellectual development. Still, many parents — and customers — don't know that musical training can literally give their children higher IQs and better-functioning brains. Here's some key information that music retail management and sales personnel can use to generate more sales and music lesson sign-ups at their stores.



HIGHER IQS

In an excellent article on Forbes.com, "Sorry, Kids, Piano Lessons Make You Smarter," E.J. Mundell explores the direct link between piano playing, voice lessons and IQ. The article focuses on studies conducted at the University of Toronto. Participants were tested before and after attending first grade. The first grade students who received piano or voice lessons scored approximately 39-percent higher in IQ measurements.

MUSIC PHYSICALLY ALTERS THE BRAIN

Studies have documented brain development from participation in music, and now technology can measure it. Building upon the work of Dr. Frances Rauscher, a recent study at the University of Munster, Germany, demonstrated practicing the piano in early childhood literally alters the brain's anatomy. Germany's University of Konstanz researchers have reported that exposure to music rewires neural circuits. By using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology, researchers have been able to link the effects of music practice to cortex development.

BETTER MATH TESTING

University of California, Irvine researchers worked with public school elementary-grade children in Orange County and Los Angeles. They found that children given only four months of piano keyboard training and time with newly designed computer software scored 27-percent higher on math and fractions tests. The results were not nearly as significant among those without the piano training. And the program helped children regardless of income level, boosting the achievement of all students, including those in low socioeconomic settings.

Like other brain circuits formed early in life, the ones for music endure. The long-lasting effects of early music training are evident in high school music students' SAT scores. According to information compiled by the National Association for Music Education in 2001, SAT takers with coursework and experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 41 points higher on the math portion than students with no experience in the arts.

LONG-LASTING IMPACT

There are myriad physiological, intellectual and emotional developments linked to acoustic piano learning in particular. Just a few of these include improved coordination; the ability to learn and interpret a new symbolic language, and coordinate symbolic language cues with mechanical targets along a horizontal plane; fine muscle development from required independent and simultaneous action of 10 individual fingers; and control of speed, touch and volume of each finger independently and simultaneously.

There's no doubt anymore of the value of a musical experience. It has been measured. And when you explain these points to parents and customers, they will be more willing to invest in the piano lessons and the products that you offer. **MI**

BENEFITS OF PLAYING PIANO

Theresa Perry is the CEO of Hailun Distribution.

Increase sales, lesson sign-ups by boosting customers' awareness of music's power over the mind and body