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# Young parents

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**MUMS  
-TO-BE,  
TAKE NOTE!**  
FLIP-FLOPS  
HURT YOUR  
BABY!

**BRAINY KIDS SPECIAL!**

## Smart Start!

- ✓ Talking At 3 Months, Reading At 1 Year — Clever Or Crazy?
- ✓ Best Thinking Games
- ✓ Mind Your Supplements



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**MAID ≠  
PUNCHING  
BAG**  
STOP HIS BAD  
BEHAVIOUR





Brainy Kids Special

# FIRE THE TUTOR



HIT THE KEYBOARD INSTEAD

**A good music teacher may be what  
you need to help Junior score in school,  
as ELISA CHIA finds out.**

**F**orget the maths enrichment class. To boost his test scores, maybe you should sign your kid up for piano lessons instead. Sounds incredible? That depends on which research study you support.

Ever since the famous Mozart Effect study published in 1993 (see *What Effect Again?* on page 38), many scientists have explored the connection between music and brain development, perhaps in the hopes of debunking it. But what's indisputable is this: Listening to the likes of Mozart and Beethoven may not necessarily make your kid smarter, but he has lots to gain from learning music.

In a 2004 study by the University of Toronto, a group of six-year-olds were randomly assigned to learn keyboard, voice, drama or nothing. After a year, kids who got keyboard or voice lessons showed a three-point IQ boost on average over those taking drama or no lessons at all.

Two years later, another study by Canada's McMaster University found that the brain responses of children attending Suzuki music school were two to three years more mature on average than those who didn't take lessons. Suzuki has a tightly structured instrumental training method, and the kids involved were between four years old and six.

Learning to make music engages and demands coordination among many brain regions, including those that process sight, sound, emotions and memories, Dr Gottfried Schlaug, a neurologist at Harvard University, told the *Los Angeles Times* recently.

Take a violin class, for instance. "The child has to hold the instrument, remember where to place the fingers on the strings, pull the bow, read the score and count the rhythm – all at once," explains Christopher Tan, principal at music school Magic Fiddler.

Because he has to practise a piece over and over again, your little one also develops better concentration, discipline and determination. All that is going to make him better at learning, says Dr Lee Pei Ming, an assistant professor in piano pedagogy and performance at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music in the National University of Singapore. She is also the curriculum founder of a music school called Staccato!

Other studies also suggest that those

## LEARNING TO MAKE MUSIC ENGAGES AND DEMANDS MANY BRAIN REGIONS TO WORK TOGETHER.

who began musical training before the age of seven showed the most pronounced differences, suggesting that an early start might rewire the brain most dramatically.

London-born Peter Moore, a guest conductor with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), explains: "The rate at which babies learn and develop is astounding, and any input is likely to be most effectively absorbed during the early years." For eight years, he has conducted at SSO's popular annual Babies' Proms, which is tailored for children six years old and younger.

So, should you rush out to sign Baby for a music course? How do you select the right instrument? *Young Parents* gets expert tips.

### **Q** How can I get Junior to embrace classical music?

**DR LEE PEI MING** Exposing your child to music may not necessarily mean dragging him to classical concerts and forcing him to sit still. It can be tortuous if he is unable to do so. You can play classical music before sleeping or during meal times, which can be relaxing, too. Or why not take your kid to music classes?

### **Q** Would it be too early to send a one-year-old to classes?

**PETER MOORE** It is never too early, as long as the class and the parents do not ask him to run before he can walk! Perhaps it should be more a case of giving your kid opportunities. It is important that the classes are for the benefit of the kid – not the parent.

**DR LEE** Once your baby is able to support his head, he is ready for music classes. A recent research from the UK – published in March this year – supports that babies aged between five months and two years old can already detect beats. They also smile more when they are able to synchronise their movements with the music. It's never too early to see a happy baby!



# Brainy Kids Special

## **Q** What makes a great first instrument?

**DR LEE** The piano is the best instrument, in my opinion, because it has specific pitches, which help your child to develop aural skills. It is also a good tool to learn about harmony, since we are able to play a chord on the piano, while many other instruments allow us to play only a single-line melody.

**PETER** I think your child will often let you know what instrument he might respond to. How do you achieve this? Meet and talk to teachers about their instruments, as well as teaching styles and expectations.

Most importantly, the teacher must really know his instrument. The world is full of students who started on the wrong instrument. The problem is that, right from the beginning, the teacher must be aware of “the end game” – the highest level this particular instrument can be taken to – and are they able to teach it? So many students, often by dint of their own abilities, will try and develop as fast as they can – only to find out later that progress has been made, but not in the way that will enable them to reach their full potential.

## WHAT EFFECT AGAIN?

Want to score better? Get your kid to listen to a Mozart sonata for 10 minutes before taking his exam. That’s the premise of the famous – some say notorious – study that was first reported in 1993. The Mozart Effect study found that college students who listened to a piano sonata written by the 18th century musical genius did better than those who took the test after listening to a relaxation tape with spoken words, or no music at all.

The notion that babies would be smarter if they listened to classical music was born out of this hype, setting off a media frenzy. Even Frances Rauscher from the University of California at Irvine, a co-researcher of the study, says her group’s findings were “grossly misapplied and over-exaggerated”.

## **Q** What else should I look out for when picking a music class?

**PETER** Is the teacher engaging with the children? Are the children laughing? Are you – as an adult – able to identify with what the little ones are expected to do? Try to find a teacher who works a lot from the aural perspective – one who extracts a lot of responses from the children.

Learning should be the result of a variety of stimuli. Just as children learn positively at an amazing rate, they also learn negatively at the same rate, and the degree of dislike can be equally as strong and long-lasting. If your child doesn’t want to go back, don’t force the issue. Try somewhere else. ★



Introduce the joy of music to Baby with fun instrument toys. Turn to page 128 for our recommendations. And share your views with us at [magyoungparents@sph.com.sg](mailto:magyoungparents@sph.com.sg).

