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classical music and brain development

by jody capehart

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE IS ARDUOUS AND REQUIRES HARD

WORK, a strong level of commitment and high expectations. What parent doesn't want smart children? What can we do to facilitate that goal?

Plato said, "Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education. Children should be taught music before anything." My husband,

the classical symphonic musician, says that his parents played classical music in his room and he remembers his mother cleaning to classical music. Could there be a connection?

Contemporary research tells us "yes", the richer the learning environment, the richer the brain network. What is really great is that this "rich" doesn't always require money, it requires a concerted effort on the part of the parents to provide a learning environment for their children that contains a wealth of quality literature and music. With the quality of libraries, museums and free concerts, you can provide this with a shoestring budget. I have written volumes on the importance of reading quality literature to your children and now I want to focus on the classical music aspect of enriching our children's brain development.

Think for a moment back to your own childhood. Do you remember those "dot to dot" pages you did? Think of the brain as a series of 'bazillions' of dots and we want to 'connect the dots' in our child's brain. What most effectively provides the structure, organizes the system and connects the dots? Classical music is emerging as a pathway and stimulant to intellectual growth.

Why? Because there is structure and order in classical music. When our middle son went from being passionate about math to becoming passionate about classical music, he commented on the 'order and structure' of the music. It is no coincidence that people who are good at math are usually good at music as well.

You may have heard about the "Mozart Effect." Dr. Gordon Shaw, a physicist at the University of California at Irvine and Dr. Frances Rauscher, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, did research on what facilitates neural brain development and they called their findings "The Mozart Effect."

David Merrell, a high school student, did an experiment and his findings support this research. He took 72 mice and ran them

through a maze. It took the mice an average of ten minutes to get through the maze. Then for four weeks, he had three groups of mice continue going through the maze with the following differences:

Group 1: no music

Group 2: classical Mozart music

Group 3: hard rock music

After the four weeks, he recorded the following results:

Group 1: could get through the maze in five minutes simply because of sheer practice.

Group 2: could get through the maze in 1½ minutes.

Group 3: could barely stumble through the maze in 30 minutes!

Our children are not mice, but I think the results are noteworthy. Classical music is an important part of the educational training of our children at home and at school.

When do you begin? When your child is in the womb. It is never too early to start. And, likewise, it is never too late to begin. If you haven't started, begin today. There are CD's available that are called "The Mozart Effect."

What else can you do? Play classical music around the house. Take your child to live concerts. The Dallas Symphony Orchestra is very committed to being a 'child friendly' orchestra and they put on many free concerts a year. They also provide ticketed concerts simply for children. Educational materials are available to help teachers and parents in training children in the value of classical music. Create simple instruments with your child, if you are on a limited budget. Provide lessons for your child, if your budget will permit. Sing with your child. Dance with your child. One professional dancer said that she began dancing in the womb! An interesting concept! Turn on music and watch what your toddler does. No one taught him and yet he moves to the music. Let's build upon those natural, God-given gifts.

Perhaps Governor Zell Miller of Georgia came up with the best idea yet as part of his state budget. He made \$105,000 available so that each newborn child in the state (10,000 per year) would be sent home from the hospital with a CD or tape of classical music. He believed this would be the best investment towards a better education for each child in his state. Governor, we applaud you! It will be exciting to see the results. Meanwhile, find that classical station on your radio and begin the journey today!



Jody Capehart has been an educator for over thirty years, primarily serving as Head of School or principal. She is the author of 12 books on education and parenting, and she is Head of School at Legacy Christian Academy.