

Music lessons help young child memories



By Jennifer Kwan

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Parents who spend time and money to teach their children music, take heart -- a new Canadian study shows young children who take music lessons have better memories than their nonmusical peers.

The study, to be published in the online edition of the journal *Brain* on Wednesday, showed that after one year of musical training, children performed better in a memory test than those who did not take music classes.

"(The research) tells us that if you take music lessons your brain is getting wired up differently than if you don't take music lessons," Laurel Trainor, professor of psychology, neuroscience and behavior at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, told Reuters.

"This is the first study to show that brain responses in young, musically trained and untrained children change differently over the course of a year," said Trainor who led the study.

Over a year they took four measurements in two groups of children aged between four and six -- those taking music lessons and those taking no musical training outside school -- and found developmental changes over periods as short as four months.

The children completed a music test in which they were asked to discriminate between harmonies, rhythms and melodies, and a memory test in which they had to listen to a series of numbers, remember them and repeat them back.

Trainor said while previous studies have shown that older children given music lessons had greater improvements in IQ scores than children given drama lessons, this is the first study to identify these effects in brain-based measurements in young children.

She said it was not that surprising that children studying music improved in musical listening skills more than children not studying music.

"On the other hand, it is very interesting that the children taking music lessons improved more over the year on general memory skills that are correlated with nonmusical abilities such as literacy, verbal memory, visiospatial processing, mathematics and IQ," she said.

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