
The “Mozart Effect”

Separating Myths from Facts about Early Childhood Development

Music is a powerful source of inspiration and enjoyment, but can it make people smarter? Several years ago, a University of Wisconsin researcher reported the results of a study in which college students’ reasoning abilities improved while listening to Mozart.

Subsequent media coverage called this the “Mozart effect”, suggesting that parents and educators should take note of the potential positive effects of classical music on brain development. This gave rise to a host of books, CDs, and even Web sites devoted to the phenomenon.

More recently, two new studies have questioned the validity of the so-called “Mozart effect”. Researchers at Appalachian State University tried to replicate the experiment and found that music had little impact. Furthermore, a Harvard psychologist who analyzed 16 scientific studies on the Mozart effect found that music offered no significant benefits in terms of improving intelligence.

While simply playing classical music for your baby or toddler will not make him or her smarter, many experts do believe that a rich, stimulating environment filled with sights and sounds is important during the first three years of life. In the past few years, early childhood experts have stressed that the stimulation you provide by talking, singing, reading to, and playing with your baby is essential at a time when the brain is developing quickly.

The “I Am Your Child” public education campaign and a White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning emphasized that such early interactions improve children’s ability to learn and develop throughout their life.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you can stimulate the brain growth of babies in many different ways, including:

- Giving warm physical contact.
- Talking and singing to children during everyday activities.
- Reading books to children, engaging in face-to-face talk, and playing on the floor with them.
- Providing a stimulating, safe environment where children can roam and explore.
- Being attentive to their rhythms and moods.
- Introducing them to other children and parents.

So if you have been playing Mozart to your baby, feel free to continue. It may not make your baby smarter, but it will still provide stimulation and enjoyment for both of you!