

## **Another Way to Play- Why Learning to Play a Musical Instrument is Better for Children than Playing Sports**

When reflecting on my childhood, my favorite memories have to do with the hobbies that my parents involved me with. I often think about how these hobbies shaped my childhood, but recently, I've been thinking about how my hobbies shaped me as a person. During these moments of reflection, I find that almost everything comes back to the fact that I spent the first 13 years of my life learning to play musical instruments. While at the time, I was frustrated that I was stuck inside practicing the violin while my peers traveled across the city for sports games, I now realize that I gained lifelong skills and an appreciation for cultures in the music room that could never be replicated on a sports field. For parents, choosing hobbies for children will have a great impact on their development, and I believe that learning a musical instrument is the most beneficial hobby for developing children.

One of the most significant benefits for children learning to play an instrument is the positive effect it has on cognitive development. USC's [Brain and Creativity Institute](#) found that musical experiences in childhood can accelerate brain development in terms of language learning and reading skills. This makes sense because when you are learning how to play music, you are essentially learning a new language. There are different rules and patterns that you have to follow and apply when playing songs and reading sheet music, just like if you were learning a new language. Growing up, my violin teacher always emphasized the importance of learning how to read music. As I grew older and began taking courses in foreign languages, I noticed the similarities between the two. Having had the experience of learning the treble and bass "languages", I was able to translate those techniques to learning foreign languages

Additionally, the [University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine](#) states that playing instruments activates nearly every part of the brain, especially the hippocampus, which is responsible for our memory. Part of learning to play an instrument is constantly having to memorize chords, notes and songs. Over time, this strengthens your ability to pick up things. Having to memorize many songs as a child definitely helped me in academic subjects like math and history, which required a lot of memorization.

Learning to play an instrument also promotes discipline and perseverance. It is a prime example of how regularly devoting time to a craft will lead to great improvement. Learning an instrument is no easy task. It takes time and effort to master songs, and there were times when I wanted to give up on a song. However, the sense of accomplishment that came with progressing and eventually mastering a piece was a powerful motivator for me to continue, and I craved the satisfaction that came with playing a piece without flaw. I established a practice schedule early on that I stuck to for years. Learning the discipline of devoting time every day to improve upon something taught me the value of hard work.

In addition to cognitive and disciplinary benefits, music also has cultural benefits. Music is the universal language. It is one of the few things that anyone can access regardless of nationality, religion or socioeconomic status. Learning instruments gives children the opportunity to learn about the songs they play and the culture that those songs belonged to. Whether we realize it or not, all songs have a historical and cultural context, often commenting on the issues of the time they were made. Learning to play these songs and making connections to the context in which they were composed allows children to expand their worldviews and appreciation for other cultures.

It is understandable that parents are skeptical to enroll their children in music lessons. A major argument is that playing an instrument emphasizes the individual and lacks the benefits that children may gain while playing on a sports team. I would argue that collaboration and teamwork in the music space reap greater rewards than any sports team could achieve. Some of my fondest memories while playing the violin came from group lessons and orchestra rehearsals. I loved my weekly group lessons because my friends and I got to learn songs that we could perform together. While we sometimes got in trouble for being silly during practice, this satisfied our need to be social. During orchestra rehearsals, every player has a purpose. While we all play different instruments, and even different parts within the same instrument, we all work together to create a harmonious sound. Playing in a group requires the same coordination, teamwork and understanding of the group's strengths as being on a sports team. Overall, children who learn to play an instrument learn the discipline and dedication of mastering a song on their own and the collaboration and support of being part of a team; the best of both worlds.

Overall, mastering a musical instrument has a wide range of benefits for developing minds. The dedication and perseverance of learning songs, along with the potential for a creative outlet are great ways for children to grow as learners and human beings. The social, cultural and cognitive benefits of learning to play instruments can't be replicated in any other activities. This is why I advise more parents to hand their children a violin bow instead of soccer cleats.