

# Music and the Young Brain

*By Nicholas Bakalar*



Many experts and parents believe that exposing preschoolers to music “makes them smarter” — that is, gives them an advantage in cognitive development in other areas. But two new randomized trials have found no evidence for the belief.

In one trial, 15 4-year-olds accompanied by their parents attended six weekly 45-minute classes on musical arts and a matched group of 14 attended classes on visual arts.

In a second test, 23 4-year-olds and their parents were assigned to music classes, and 22 to no classes at all. Children living with professional musicians and those already taking music lessons were excluded, and there were no significant differences between the groups in age, family income, ethnicity, parents’ level of education and other factors. The [results were published in PLOS One](#).

Researchers tested the children after the classes were completed for skills in spatial, linguistic and numerical reasoning, but found no differences between the groups.

The authors acknowledge that they used only one music curriculum, and that a trial with a different kind or intensity of training might produce different results.

“We should be very cautious in making positive claims about cognitive benefits of music lessons,” said the lead author, Samuel A. Mehr, a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He added, “We should teach music because music is important.”

Read more: <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/16/music-and-the-young-brain/>