



# Early Learning Digest

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## The Role of Music in Brain Development

Children who grow up listening to music develop strong music-related connections in the brain. Some of these music pathways actually affect the way they think.

Music seems to prime our brains for certain kinds of thinking. Researchers think the complexity of classical music is what primes the brain to solve spatial problems more quickly. Classical music has a more complex musical structure. Babies as young as 3 months can pick out that structure and even recognize classical music selections they have heard before.

This doesn't mean that other types of music aren't good. Listening to any kind of music helps build music-related pathways in the brain. And music can have positive effects on our moods that may make learning easier.

Learning to play an instrument can have longer-lasting effects on spatial reasoning. In several studies, children who took piano lessons for six months improved their ability to work puzzles and solve other spatial tasks by as much as 30 percent.

Parents can help nurture children's love of music beginning in infancy. Here are some ideas:

**Play music for your baby.** Expose your baby to many different musical selections of various styles.



**Sing to your baby.** Hearing you sing helps your baby begin to learn language. Babies love the patterns and rhythms of songs.

**Sing with your child.** Setting words to music actually helps the brain learn them more quickly and retain them longer. That's why we remember the lyrics of songs we sang as children, even if we haven't heard them in years.

**Start music lessons early.** Most 4- and 5-year-olds enjoy making music and can learn the basics of some instruments. Starting lessons early helps children build a lifelong love of music.

Source, "Building Babies Brain: The Role of Music," Dr. Diane Bales, Associate Professor and Extension Human Development Specialist, September 1, 2014, <http://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.cfm?number=C1053-06>.

## Process-Focused Art for Preschoolers

Young children are naturally drawn to art and use it as a form of expression. It is through the process of doing art that children develop language skills, mathematical understanding, problem solving, and self-expression. Process art focuses on the process rather than the end product and allows unstructured time for children to experiment and be creative.

### Tips for Leading Process-Focused Art:

- Provide a variety of materials and allow the child to direct the art experience.
- Allow enough time for each child to complete projects.
- Let a child come and go from their art at will.
- Encourage the child's ideas and reinforce that there is not a right or wrong way to do the project.
- Provide new and interesting materials.
- Play music in the background so children can relax.
- Let each child choose what to do with their art.

Children who participate in process-focused art are given opportunities

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## Dramatic Play and Imagination

Most children love dressing up. It's their way of learning. It's a way for them to walk in another person's shoes, so they understand what someone else is going through. So when your child is at home playing house, she's not only imitating the actions of the people around her, she's actually coming to understand what it's like to be a parent.

Encouraging dramatic play encourages social and emotional development as well as helps with skills for academic learning.

**Dramatic play promotes abstract thinking.** When children use a prop to stand for something else, they are learning to think using symbols. For example, a block may symbolize a phone, and abstract thinking is the basis for just about everything children will learn in school.

**Dramatic play encourages empathy.** If children are playing with others, it builds social and emotional skills; learning about other peoples' feelings and perspectives, negotiating and cooperating. Children can be anything they want just by pretending and that is emotionally satisfying and builds self-esteem.

**Dramatic play builds language skills.** Children will use language to plan their play with others and language supports the roles they adopt.



They can experiment with language and learn to use it appropriately.

Adults can encourage dramatic play by providing time, space, materials and props. Good materials that children can adapt in their own way include: hats of different kinds, stuffed animals, purses/wallets, a cash box and play money, a telephone, a child safe mirror, a tote bag, small blankets, clothing that children can manage independently and containers of various sizes. Remember to include materials that support literacy, such as books, paper, and writing tools.

*Source: Retrieved from "A Place of Their Own: Dramatic Play & Imagination" Ann Barbour, Ph.D., Early Childhood Education Professor, [http://aplaceofourown.org/question\\_detail.php?id=341](http://aplaceofourown.org/question_detail.php?id=341)*

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to relax, focus, feel successful and learn how to express their feelings. As they paint, write, cut or glue, they are developing fine motor skills and have opportunities to compare, predict, plan and problem solve. When a child is encouraged to talk about their art they are developing language skills.

Children gain confidence and feel a sense of competency when they create something based on their own ideas and efforts.

*Source: Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/process-art-experiences>.*

## Test Your Knowledge!

- 1) T F Dramatic play encourages social and emotional development as well as helps with skills for academic learning.
- 2) T F Through the process of doing art children develop language skills, mathematical understanding, problem solving, and self-expression.
- 3) T F Children who took piano lessons for six months improved their ability to work puzzles.



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or go to [www.helpmegrowmn.org](http://www.helpmegrowmn.org)