Want Smarter Kids? Teach Music, Not Coding, According to MIT

The latest neuroscience shows that learning a musical instrument increases brain power.

BY GEOFFREY JAMES@SALES SOURCE

If there's been a theme to the technology industry's plans to reform education, it's that every child should learn to code. This is supposed to allow children to better adapt to a world where computers are omnipresent.

However, there's not much, if any, connection between coding and today's point-and-click environment. Almost nobody in business, for example, requires much programming skill beyond, say, creating a spreadsheet.

Furthermore, the basic coding skills taught in K-12 bears no resemblance to how professional programmers produce code. The "teach kids to code" movement therefore justifies such instruction because it supposedly improves math and language skills.

However, that appears not to be the case, according to a December 2020 study conducted at MIT, which found that: "Understanding computer code seems to be its own thing. It's not the same as language, and it's not the same as math and logic."

By contrast, what actually does increase other skills and brain power is teaching kids to play a musical instrument, according to a January 2021 study conducted at the University of Zürich and published in *The Journal of Neuroscience*.

A summary of the research (which involved scanning the brains of both musicians and non-musicians) published in Inverse explains that

> „musicians' brains were vastly more structurally and functionally connected than non-musicians, especially in areas of the brain responsible for speech and sound (especially the auditory cortices of both hemispheres). ... The musical group also showed stronger connections from the auditory cortices to other brain areas in the frontal, parietal, and temporal cortex known to be involved in the control of higher cognitive functions like memory, working memory, and executive functions."

This increase in brain power and functionality remains even if the child does not continue to play the instrument. "The earlier the musicians had started with musical practice, the stronger these connectivities," says professor Simon Leipold, a co-author of the study.

In short, if you want your kids to be smarter, you're better off having them learn a musical instrument or take music education in school, rather than teaching them to code.