Our team

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Background to El Sistema

- Began in 1975;
- Context – few opportunities for young musicians to develop orchestral skills; emphasis on theory before instrumental skills;
- Social reform goals grew as the programme grew;
- 370,000 children;
- Network of núcleos;
- 17 hours per week, 40 weeks per year;
- Emphasis on western classical music;
- ‘Spiral curriculum’;
- Produces own teachers.
Core principles

• Uses the collective practice of music to address the social development goals of the community being served;
• Learn through ensemble;
• Inclusivity and accessibility;
• Frequency and intensity;
• Connectivity;
• High aspirations;
• Joyful music-making.
Methods

Searched:
• Electronic data base searches;
• Sistema networks;
• Music education networks;
• Personal contact.

• Included:
  – Documents about programmes that identified themselves as ‘El Sistema’ or ‘Sistema-inspired’
What we found

- 277 programmes representing 58 countries;
- 130 documents, including theoretical papers, critical accounts, blogs;
- 85 research and evaluation papers, representing 44 Sistema or Sistema-inspired programmes in 19 countries.
## Types of document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number reviewed</th>
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<td>Books</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical or critical papers and blogs</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Research designs

• Cross-sectional surveys;
• Longitudinal designs with pre and post measures;
• Quasi-experimental designs;
• Case study designs;
• Ethnographies.
Research methods

- In-depth interviews with children, parents, teachers, leaders, stakeholders;
- Non-participant and participant observations;
- Document analysis;
- Children’s drawings;
- Sentence completion tasks;
- Rating scales;
- Value-for-money calculations;
- Qualitative and quantitative surveys.
Key findings

• Methodology and rigour of the reviewed research varied greatly;

• positive effects at an individual level:
  – Personal development;
  – Psychological well-being;
  – Social skills;
  – Protective social networks;
  – Gains in academic achievement;
  – Musical progression;
  – Enhanced verbal memory skills.
• Considerable variation in the ways that these constructs have been conceptualized;

• More research is needed about:
  – School attendance;
  – Community engagement and impact;
  – ‘Cultural Capital’;
  – Pedagogy of peer learning and teaching;
  – Barriers to participation (visible and invisible).
Many critical debates ...
Who owns the ideology?

- It is not new;
- UNESCO Seoul Agenda –
  - Access;
  - Excellence;
  - Social development;
- Symphony orchestra is not the only musical medium for social transformation.

Sistema programmes play important role:
- in reinforcing wider view that society should not tolerate economic barriers to high quality music education;
- in serving a range of historically under-serviced populations.
Venezuela and local contexts

Key issues:

• **Funding**;
• Organisational structure;
• Socio-economic and cultural differences;
• Diversity of musical genres;
Programme needs and community needs.

• Any attempt to use music to effect social development or change must be in response to local community needs;
• Portraying a local community within a deficit model may be unethical;
• Complex issues have been noted, relating to the distinction between community desires for itself and the programme’s view of what might be best for the community.
Potential risks - investment in Sistema projects may undermine other well-established music education programmes.

School-based programmes:
May be overly-dependent upon musicians brought in from outside of school;
Possible under-use and under-development of classroom teachers’ own expertise and ideas in music;
Time taken by the project has meant that no other music was taught in school.
• Reciprocal exchange amongst high achievers and young people at all levels is crucial in mediating the ‘inclusion vs expertise’ discourse.

• Further research:
  – The role of the highly competitive ‘high achiever’ track within El Sistema;
  – Socio-economic trajectories of participants;
  – Quantity vs. quality: what are the implications?
  – Tensions between artistic or educational quality and the imperative to present impressive performances with popular appeal?
Group and individual pedagogy

Significant benefits of the central role of the ensemble:
- A social space for peer learning;
- Nurturing positive sense of citizenship;
- Joy of the collective sound.

• Individual creativity?
• Are all individuals ‘okay’ just because the group is functioning well?
• Individual support is valued;
• Disciplined, rote learning approach – progressive?
• Opportunity within a hierarchical orchestral structure for collaboration or dialogue?
• Privileging the ensemble in music education is not a novel idea.
• The evidence to date comprises a valued contribution to the wider literature concerned with the power of music;

• El Sistema and Sistema-inspired programmes provide a rich context for further research;

• Partnership working is a key to success;

• Investment in teacher development is fundamental to achieving the dual aims of social and musical development.
Thank you:

For copies of the review:

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