



Summary of discussions held during Workshop 3 – Music Education & Impact

14th May 2013


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Arts & Humanities
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PHILHARMONIC

The network held its third and final research workshop on Tuesday 14th May, in the congenial surroundings of In Harmony Liverpool's rehearsal space at The Friary in West Everton. This was the perfect venue to consider and debate the research theme of 'Music Education and Impact', including the pedagogical characteristics of In Harmony Liverpool, and their causal relationship with the outcomes identified by the commissioned evaluation of the programme, as discussed during our previous workshops. Kerry Wilson (Principal Investigator) opened the session with a brief **project introduction** for those colleagues new to the network; a synopsis of our earlier workshop discussions on 'Cultural Capital in the Community' and 'Healthy Communities'; and aims and objectives for the day. These included the collective consideration of various relevant topics such as children's motivation to learn and educational attainment; holistic learning environments created between artists and teachers; and music education leadership, professional development and practice.

This was followed by a **presentation on the In Harmony Liverpool programme** by Peter Garden, Executive Director of Learning at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (RLP). Peter's presentation included an overview of the programme to date in relation to its operation, impact and learning outcomes for RLP as the lead organisation. Peter offered insightful, reflexive ideas on how emerging research questions can also shape the future development of RLP as a learning organisation and iconic cultural institution, and how this compares to the orchestra as a learning environment, including its individual and collective sense of achievement. Peter commented for example on the skills required from RLP musicians when working as part of In Harmony Liverpool, including the obvious technical mastery of their instruments, combined with the interpersonal, highly empathic skills and characteristics required to motivate and engage participating children. As the success of In Harmony Liverpool is based on relationships at several levels – between musicians on a day-to-day basis, and at a more strategic level between collaborating organisations – understanding the learning process is critical to its future development. For RLP as the lead organisation, this includes its own philosophical and practical approach to the future professional development of its musicians and staff, and the professional culture of the organisation as a whole.

Such impact on the learning culture of organisations is also reflected in the experiences of Faith Primary School, where In Harmony Liverpool (IHL) is based. Such is the immersive quality of the programme, the school has now reached a stage where participating teachers are starting to critique IHL practice and put their own ideas forward. Similarly, IHL has always been part of the whole school curriculum and experience for some younger children, and is therefore 'normal' to them, prompting changing levels of expectation and engagement. As such, Peter was keen to stress that IHL is "not a static model", as it needs to be able to respond flexibly. At the same time, there is also a desire to protect the programme due to the level of trust established between RLP and the West Everton community – IHL is not seen as part of 'the state' or the public sector and associated services. In this context, it is important that the programme does not become a "Trojan horse" for other sectors. This raises interesting questions on the educational leadership of RLP as an iconic cultural institution, in relation to the association, respect and trust invested in it from the community (compared by the community to being taught to play football by Liverpool Football Club). There are implications therefore for the public value of the RLP and the cultural sector as a whole, within and beyond the city.

We were then delighted to welcome Jonathan Govias, a Sistema practitioner and consultant based in Boston, USA. Jonathan is a graduate of the Sistema Fellows programme at New England Conservatory, and developed his own model of Sistema in 2010. Jonathan gave a lively, analytical presentation on his Sistema experiences, and how these have shaped his own interpretation of the phenomenon, which he describes as a 'statement of intention' rather than practice. Jonathan has previously written on the five fundamentals of Sistema – social change through the pursuit of

musical excellence; ensembles; frequency; accessibility; and connectivity – and argues that it is the explicit social change ‘intent’ that primarily defines the movement, as the other four qualities can be applied to all or any model of music education in the US. The aspirational aspects of the model however can be problematic and misleading – the consistent use of descriptive terms such as ‘joy’ and ‘passion’ imply that these are somehow missing from other models of music education. Following on from Peter’s presentation, the implications for the professional development of musicians and music educators was also discussed, with the observation that Sistema practitioners must be multi-skilled, multi-faceted, professional musicians, social workers, performers and teachers, potentially leaving many new graduates “behind the curve” in relation to teaching and artistry. In this context, Jonathan discussed some of the social conditions within which Sistema and its professional characteristics has most relevance – its native Venezuela for example does not have access to the same network of health and social care professionals as compared to the western world. As the model is adapted globally, the ‘professional composition’ of different projects and practitioners may vary considerably.

In seeking to define Sistema’s ‘impact’, Jonathan commented on its ‘magical’ element, influenced by the rhetoric surrounding the movement and its influence, creating an assumption that it cannot be explained, deconstructed or replicated. This is compounded by a lack of systematic evidence on its impact, pointing to a failure on Sistema’s behalf to realistically and sufficiently differentiate itself, despite the ‘magic’ surrounding it. Referring to Sue Hallam’s study ‘The Power of Music’, conventional indicators of the impact of music education and participation on children were discussed – improved confidence, academic achievement, cognitive development and community building. These resonate with IHL evaluation findings – but Jonathan points to a need for Sistema and inspired programmes to more clearly articulate their specific value if not significantly different to other music education approaches and initiatives. With the UK’s music education system being “the envy of North America”, perhaps IHL and the In Harmony Sistema England programme provide the perfect platform to begin to make this distinction. Using a ‘Higgs-Abreu’ analogy, Jonathan ended with the incentive that the idea of social impact through music is ‘universally compelling’. He also provided a link to an inspiring video of his own practice – notably not described as ‘uniquely Sistema’ – demonstrating social learning in action: [Scaffolding Collective Efficacy](#)¹.

Enhancing our consideration of the role and value of Sistema initiatives within contemporary UK education policy and practice, Dick Hallam MBE then gave an informative presentation on how the In Harmony Sistema England programme fits within the trajectory of music education policy from the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. The act included music education for all children aged 5 to 14 but had many limitations in practice, which led to a number of initiatives under New Labour designed to make music education more accessible and inclusive, including Wider Opportunities (2000; 2006) and Music Manifesto (2004; 2007), with the pilot In Harmony programme (Liverpool, Lambeth and Norwich projects) accounting for 1% of the music settlement 2008-2011. Despite a retraction in music funding in recent years, the In Harmony Sistema England programme has expanded to 6 projects, funded via Department for Education and Arts Council England, and featuring in the National Plan for Music Education. **In Harmony Sistema England**² has differentiated itself so far by setting out to impact upon the child, the family *and* the community, with a genuine philosophy of equality and equitability. Dick summarised by observing that UK music education policy and Sistema have a lot to learn from each other in terms of pedagogical practice, as they share many of the same core values in relation to access, aspiration and teamwork.

¹ <http://jonathangovias.com/liverpool/>

² <http://www.ihse.org.uk/>

Finally in the last of our invited presentations, Connected Communities Leadership Fellow Professor George McKay gave an **overview of the network's umbrella funding programme**. We are now one of 250 awards funded by Connected Communities, and one of a small cluster of projects focusing on community music. Others include a folk music project led by Fay Hield (University of Sheffield); a **community music research network** led by Mark Rimmer (University of East Anglia); and a major project led by Conservatoires UK exploring the **health and wellbeing of performing musicians**³. Following a summary of his recently completed AHRC-funded literature review on **Community Music: History and current practice...** George kindly offered to help join the dots with other music-related Connected Communities projects, and has since **blogged**⁴ about the Music Education and Impact workshop.

During 'questions for speakers' Peter was asked if he has encountered any surprises as In Harmony Liverpool has progressed – to which the answer was “many”! The overwhelming commitment from the West Everton community came as a surprise, including the community's fearlessness in wanting to 'get on with it, not talk about it'. There are surprises and challenges on a continuing basis in relation to educational practice and professional development, including finding the time and protecting the space for professional musicians' development, particularly when funding is reduced, and more recently accommodating increasing parent involvement and curiosity. Rod Skipp, In Harmony Liverpool Artistic Director commented that the sacred outcome of 'music as a part of everyday life' has been achieved by In Harmony Liverpool, but this creates new challenges in itself, as the programme is no longer a novelty, and the team is constantly looking for new ways to keep the children engaged.

Dick Hallam commented that expertise and teamwork are the strongest elements of IHL, and the whole Sistema England programme is small and manageable enough for musicians who “get it” to maintain collegiality and shared agendas. Usually passion or professional motivation of this kind is quite isolated, or found in pockets, such as a single Head of Music and a handful of dedicated children. The programme is filling a gap in expertise at primary school level – primary qualified teacher status (QTS) means that teachers are able to teach 'across the board' of national curriculum subjects. Continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities are designed to strengthen certain subjects as careers progress, but this often doesn't happen due to the prioritisation of key targets in numeracy and literacy, or core subjects. In the case of In Harmony Liverpool, where 4.5 hours of curriculum time are now dedicated to music education, evaluators were originally interested to see if academic attainment was being maintained, but it has actually improved since the programme started (e.g. according to latest Ofsted report, performance in maths at Faith Primary has improved by 21%). This has implications for general classroom teaching and learning – what is different about children's experiences in the rehearsal room and in the classroom? Children seem more ready to learn, and teachers are beginning to evolve in their own practice.

Following lunch, participants considered the following questions during our afternoon discussions:

How do we consider and evaluate the particular impact of playing in an orchestra, compared to that of other activities, such as singing, dancing, and sport, or indeed non-classical music?

What are the benefits/problems of group or ensemble teaching and learning, compared with individual instrumental lessons?

³ <http://www.rcm.ac.uk/cps/musicalimpact/>

⁴ <http://connected-communities.org/index.php/in-harmony-liverpool-ahrc-research-network-meeting-report/>

How do we capture and assess musical progression in a 'social project' such as IHL, especially from primary through secondary school?

What are the implications for professional musicianship and music education sector development and how can these be researched alongside or separate to 'social impact'?

The session was Chaired by Professor Michael Spitzer, Head of Music at the University of Liverpool. Michael opened the discussion by reflecting upon some of the points raised by Dr Geoff Baker during our **Cultural Capital in the Community** workshop, suggesting that it has become 'too easy' to identify outcomes of Sistema-inspired programmes with such an ambitious ideology attached to them. Michael recommended that research in this area needs to be deeply ethnographic in order to understand the particularities of communities, and also much more mindful of the repertoire in music education terms, arguing that any gravitation towards classical music will be instructive in character. Dick Hallam responded that Geoff's research focuses on one particular model of the orchestra, and that the issue is one of communication within Sistema ideology. Jonathan Govias commented that Geoff's work has been refreshing due to its alternative interpretation of Sistema, which has been subject to considerable "fanaticism" and little critical debate.

Ed Milner of **In Harmony Newcastle Gateshead**⁵ agreed that other models of musical participation are more social than the orchestra, and that the 'magic' of El Sistema needs to be compared to other international music interventions (giving Brazil's **AfroReggae**⁶ project as an example) , to establish if the same or different social outcomes are achieved. Carol Reid of **Youth Music**⁷ observed that other musical forms and initiatives do not have the same infrastructure as orchestral or classical music, with Michael adding that Beethoven will always have a universal, bourgeois cache compared to other musical forms that usually require much more persuasion! There is also an important distinction between repertoire and orchestra – by learning to read music children create meaning from another symbol system, reading music from a common language. This has significant implications for literacy and educational development. Repertoire is important in this context – children would not acquire the same skills and abilities from improvisational jazz for example. Scalability is another factor in the orchestra versus other musical forms debate – the orchestra is stable, replicable and has repertoire, qualities that are not necessarily present in other cultural forms. Dick commented however that it is important to separate the idea of repertoire, as the orchestra is still an adaptable and flexible form that provides access to repertoire via different ensemble forms (e.g. string quartet; wind band).

On a provocative note, George McKay asked if In Harmony is really about the control and promotion of western orchestras. Ed responded that there is a 'fine line' between social control and social impact, and the political conditions behind Sistema/In Harmony are relevant – the current UK government was mostly privately educated within the centre-right; their expectations are very different to that of Hugo Chavez! Peter Garden argued that through In Harmony we are witnessing a 'reinvention' of the orchestra. In the long-term, participating young people will grow up with different understandings and perceptions of the orchestra – in response orchestras may have to adapt and evolve to survive. The discussion then turned to the learning outcomes of In Harmony for other music interventions and arts and cultural forms, including the benefits of its immersive approach. Peter commented that traditional conservatoire forms are outdated and immobile compared to other forms of arts education – for example fashion/design students use their final

⁵ <http://www.sagegateshead.com/about-us/in-harmony/>

⁶ <http://www.afroreggae.org/>

⁷ http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/index.html?gclid=CJyr7Y_bp7gCFe_LtAod80kAyA

shows as a mark of innovation and the future of the industry. Jonathan remarked that symphonies continue to audition based purely on candidates' ability to play – the RLP however is beginning to consider other candidate qualities and expectations during the audition/interview process, including a question on what training they may require for a portfolio career.

For RLP as an orchestra and cultural institution, In Harmony Liverpool has raised awareness on communication with the audience, and is having a growing impact on the organisation's artistic direction, although Peter acknowledged that there is still a 'long way to go'. There has been a profound response to the evaluation findings regarding the orchestra's potential contribution to the city. There is a genuine interaction with and care for the participating young people. Ed commented that he is noticing the same professional learning characteristics with In Harmony Newcastle Gateshead. This programme uses a chamber orchestra structure (described as smaller and easier to manage), but Ed explained that it is "beginning to liberate musicians from the toil of orchestral life", and use skills that usually lie dormant or are only exercised through tuition. They are starting to see a 'blossoming' amongst participating musicians.

In a professional development capacity, some musicians can potentially "sit in third violin for 30 years and never be noticed" – In Harmony is encouraging the development of leadership skills. Michael asked how the approach differs from conventional outreach initiatives, recognising education programmes as an existing tradition in the sector. Furthermore, George asked how the practices of In Harmony musicians differ to other outreach and social inclusion practices. Conversation turned again to the ethos rather than the practice of Sistema, indicating that it is still difficult at this stage to articulate what is 'uniquely Sistema' both in terms of music education practice, and approaches to social inclusion and community engagement. Michael suggested that a study of different practices within the same spectrum (e.g. artists in residence schemes) would be interesting in relation to the pool of expertise. The group then discussed various professional barriers that need on-going examination, including the role of conservatoires as artistic 'hothouses'; and musicians' contractual restrictions and limitations. Jonathan commented that there is an embedded 'transactional' culture within professional orchestras, both with musicians and audiences. Similarly, historical outreach programmes have been transactional and tokenistic, and are usually the first elements of a programme to be dropped in the US when a major patron is lost.

The question for Sistema is how the movement can make the sector less professionally transactional, and make relationships between communities and professional and amateur musicians more fluid. The move away from a charismatic model of individual tuition was regarded as the first step in achieving this. This is especially true as In Harmony Liverpool is now evolving to include more input from the young people, including their own ideas and suggestions and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Jonathan stressed that this is crucial to Sistema in moving away from the traditional master/apprentice model and regarding the orchestra as a social learning environment. Ed explained how the UK education system had helped in this context, especially initiatives developed under New Labour including Every Child Matters. There is an established group learning culture within the school working with the In Harmony Newcastle Gateshead project. The point however is not to position group learning or the Sistema model as better than any other method, but to consider their comparative benefits and mutually beneficial qualities.

Socially and politically, a key benefit of In Harmony programmes is that they are free of charge – traditionally music tuition comes at an extra cost. In social inclusion and access terms, this has obvious social advantages. Problems arise when young people move on to several different secondary schools and the level of institutional support is dramatically reduced. The transitional problems are vast, socially and culturally. In Harmony Liverpool is seeking to overcome this with the

Super String ensemble. The hope is that parents will start to place more demands on secondary schools in relation to musical education when they see what their children are missing. The challenge however of the transition to secondary school cannot be underestimated. The important objective is to establish the primary goal of In Harmony Liverpool in relation to the relative educational baseline, and the significance of musical progression through secondary school. It could be enough for young people to be more socially engaged and active learners by the time they leave primary school.

The group concluded that it is the social change element of the programme that is the most exciting and professionally inspiring, and it is this objective that justifies its public funding. Jonathan made an important comment on how this is captured in terms of improved self-interest, and how self-interest is expressed. Sistema claims to reduce crime – a music education programme cannot reduce criminality. It can perhaps help to create a world where self-interested individuals refuse to be victimised. Peter explained that this is achieved by having social aims but not explicitly addressing them – communities are not told that their capacity for self-interest is being actively addressed. It is about enabling children to make better choices for themselves through music, that moves away from a therapy mentality of intervention that has little resonance with children.

Research opportunities relating to Music Education and Impact:

- There is an appetite to discover what is ‘uniquely Sistema’ – or in this case what is uniquely In Harmony Liverpool – in music education terms. To date this is mostly understood or communicated through the philosophy of the movement and its social intent, rather than its pedagogical practice.
- There are also emerging questions on what is unique in terms of approaches to social inclusion and community engagement, set within the context of a tradition of outreach and education programmes within orchestras and other cultural organisations.
- The political contexts within which musical education policies are developed and delivered, including In Harmony Sistema England, should be acknowledged.
- Comparative studies that compare different group musical/artistic forms, and different approaches to socially engaged practice, will be particularly beneficial, especially when considering the professional characteristics involved.
- An ethnographic approach is necessary to accommodate various contextual issues around political environment and social conditions, especially to ensure an effective comparative study.
- Potential learning outcomes include the socio-economic implications of improved educational attainment through music participation, and community resilience through improved self-interest.

Kerry Wilson, June 2013