

# **El Sistema and Sistema-inspired programmes: a literature review**

**Sistema Global**





# 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

Type of document	Language	Number reviewed
Books	English	2
Published peer reviewed research	English	10
	Spanish	10
Unpublished academic papers	English	1
Book chapters	English	2
	Italian	3
Theoretical or critical papers and blogs	English	22
Book Reviews	English	2
Student essays, dissertations and theses	English	18
	Spanish	7
	French	2
	German	2
Evaluations	English	39
	Spanish	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>130</b>



# 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.**



# However...



- 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).**

A graphic in the top-left corner featuring a white violin body and black f-holes, with several black musical notes floating around it. The background is a solid red color at the top, which fades into white.

Many critical  
debates ...

A solid red horizontal bar at the top of the slide, with several black musical notes scattered across it.

# 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.



# Relationship with wider music education 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.



# Musical standards/Inclusion



- **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 EI 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.

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- The background features a red gradient at the top. On the left, there is a white circular graphic containing a black violin and a musical note. On the right, there are two black musical notes.
- 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:

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