

## Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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### Music

Our approach considers that music education is crucial for childrens' all round development. Clear examples indicating the benefits of music education are Finland (<http://members.cox.net/tei/teiPages/FinlandMusic.htm>) and Venezuela (<http://members.cox.net/tei/teiPages/Venezuela.htm>). Please visit these sites for detailed explanation although a brief synopsis is given below.

#### Finland

In Finland children do not start school until they are seven and understandably they are poor readers at that age. A considerable number of children learn to read music before they learn to read words. At fifteen Finnish students are the best readers in the world and they also excel at mathematics and science.

What has this to do with music education? The main reason why Finnish students receive an outstanding music education is not for any emotional or moral uplift although this no doubt occurs, but because their educators regard it crucial for neurological development. However, music is also regarded as essential not only for personal development but also for cultural and civic sustenance. The results are there for all to see.

Helsinki, a city of 500,000+, is home to five symphony orchestras. Nationwide, there are 21 more, as well as 12 regional opera companies. All this in a country of just over 5 million. At least eight world-class conductors, including the Minnesota Orchestra's Osmo Vanska and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Esa-Pekka Salonen, were raised and trained in Finland. More than 30 full-time classical composers live and work there. Two-thirds of a total 250 Finnish operas were composed after 1975. All this occurs because, initially, students receive an excellent music education.

#### Venezuela

Throughout Venezuela, 250,000 children are spending six afternoons a week, from 2pm to 6pm, intensively studying classical music. The System or El Sistema as it is called, provides an instrument and music education for any child between 2 and 18, assigns each an instrument and organizes children into groups with instructors. Typically practicing for two, three or even four hours every day, the children are performing recognizable music virtually from the outset (+Saturday morning) for years on end.

One of the most remarkable features of the System is that children begin playing in ensembles from the moment they pick up their instruments. The principle is that students are learning to behave as much as they are discovering how to make music. As Igor Lanz, the executive director of the private foundation that administers the government-financed sistema says, **"In an orchestra, everybody respects meritocracy, everybody respects tempo, everybody knows he has to support everyone else, whether he is a soloist or not .... They learn that the most important thing is to work together in one common aim."**

There are 200 youth orchestras and 246 centres (known as nucleos) nationwide. The success of the System has resulted in continual funding from successive Venezuelan governments whether the oil-rich country's economy is doing well or otherwise.

Jose Abreu, the creator of sistema says, **"In those cases, it's not just the lack of a roof or of bread; it's also a spiritual lack, a loneliness and lack of recognition. The philosophy of the system shows that the vicious circle of poverty can be broken when a child poor in material possessions acquires spiritual wealth through music. Our ideal is of a country in which art is within the reach of every citizen so that we can no longer talk about art being the property of the elite, but the heritage of the people,"** and perhaps most importantly of all, **"An orchestra is the only group where people get together to reach agreements and they reach those agreements producing something beautiful."**

Supported by the government, the System has started to introduce its music program into the public-school curriculum, aiming within five years to be in every school and to double its enrolment to 500,000 children. Javier Moreno, general manager of the System, relates how the it is doing far more than teaching children music however much this is important in itself, **"We're interested in creating citizens with all the values they need to exist in society, responsibility, teamwork, respect, co-operation and work ethic. Many of the facilities are situated in some the poorest barrios in the biggest cities as well as far distant villages."**

Inter-American Development Bank, which helped underwrite it with a \$5 million loan, is now advancing \$150 million for the construction of seven other regional centres. Luis Carlos Antola, a representative of the bank in Venezuela says, **"There are those that believe that classical music is for the elite. In fact, the bank has conducted studies on the more than two million young people who have been educated in the sistema, which show that two-thirds of them are from poor backgrounds. Other studies link participation in the program to improvements in school attendance and declines in juvenile delinquency. Weighing such benefits as a falloff in school dropout rates and a decline in crime, the bank calculated that every dollar invested in the sistema was reaping about \$1.68 in social dividends."**

In Venezuela everything is communal, everything is about the team. In the System, all practice is supervised. As Sir Simon Rattle, the principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic observes, you also immediately notice a different feeling among these children from the competitive, individualistic atmosphere that prevails in the UK. The culture here is one of mutual support. The point is not to be the best, but to be the best you can. The height of achievement for these children is to be part of the national youth orchestra; in other words, to be part of a group, an ensemble. **In addition, Rattle says the sistema "is the most important thing happening in classical music anywhere in the world."**

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that there are considerable personal and societal benefits to students receiving a thorough music education and we assume that the above information is more than sufficient as evidence of the importance of for this to occur. Tragically for children the initiatives described above are the exceptions so what follows are recommendations where those facilities do not exist. Our approach also regards music education as crucial for childrens' development and the following provides some guidelines as to the teaching of music throughout the elementary school.

Children in grade 1 still want to imitate and this can be used extensively to develop the innate musical sense that all children possess to some degree. The pentatonic scale is used, as far as possible, in grades 1 to 3. Initially the emphasis is on singing but as soon as possible each child progresses to the recorder. Different tones and rhythms are experienced in movement, speech, singing and with the recorder. Later, in grade 3, simple rhythmic patterns and pentatonic melodies are written. Note reading and the staff are also introduced and the students also have their first experience of harmony.

In grade 4 there is a continuation of singing and recorder work. There is also some progression by some children to other musical instruments. Gradually there is some change of emphasis from a "child-centred" approach to subject based; developing and nurturing musical experiences which are aesthetic and artistic. In grades 5/6 there is still emphasis on singing and recorder. In singing, the students work with two or three part songs. Simple harmonies and the development of note reading are introduced. Many children will belong to junior orchestras or groups playing certain instruments. Our approach recommends that singing should occur in all grades throughout the Lower School. In grades 5/6 students should be able to sing harmonies; perhaps even a few four part songs. By grades 7/8 each student should be able to play the recorder and there may well be classes for beginners, intermediate and advanced. A junior orchestra may have been formed composed of pupils playing strings, wind and percussion instruments. Gradually, but far too slowly for the many children in countries like the USA and UK, we are realizing that music and art are crucial for childrens' wellbeing and learning. Countries such as Venezuela, Finland and New Zealand are showing that these subjects are not only crucial for balanced neurological development, but of enormous benefit to society. It is especially important for countries like Venezuela where there are large numbers of poor, that it can assist, even determine, that a child from the poorest and deprived background can realise his worth as a human being to himself and to society.