

*Full-Length Article***Part 2:****Community Music Therapy and El Sistema: A Multiple Case Design Study Reflecting Music's Empowerment in Marginalized Communities**Virginia Eulacio Cierniak¹¹ Montclair State University, New Jersey, United States of America**Abstract**

Music is an accessible tool that has been used to foster change within people and societies, even in those places facing socioeconomic marginalization due to poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to resources. Social capital has to do with the resources and networks available within a society, which may help confront issues faced by individuals and communities. Community Music Therapy (CoMT) and the music education movement known as *El Sistema** both utilize music—understood as social capital—to address social justice. Part I of this article defines CoMT and examines the purpose and goals of CoMT and El Sistema comparatively, and the ways in which their programs may address the empowerment needs of individuals and communities facing socioeconomic marginalization. Part II reviews the findings of a study that leads toward a suggestion of how these two approaches may be able to work synergistically to achieve their shared goals. Findings reveal many parallels and divergences between El Sistema and CoMT which may be useful in advancing change. This article defines the role of the music, program structure, social justice goals, outcomes, music education practice, areas of intersection, existing scholarly research, and criticisms each has received, in an effort to further advance the understanding and possibilities music's influence may have on society.

Keywords: *CoMT, El Sistema, social justice, social capital, community*multilingual abstract | mmd.iammonline.com*Statement of Purpose*

Musical capital can be a powerful source of change and health in communities and individuals, a fact demonstrated by the values, principles, and outcomes of CoMT and El Sistema. CoMT focuses on the health and welfare of society and its individuals, while El Sistema focuses on artistic excellence, social and emotional change, and well-being through music. While the focus of these programs lies in different aspects of the health care continuum, both CoMT and El Sistema rely on the fundamental positive outcomes that can be obtained when communities and individuals have access to and are able to participate in music-making and culture. There is no literature that comparatively examines the ways in which CoMT and El Sistema programs may address the empowerment needs of individuals and communities facing socioeconomic marginalization and suggests how they may work synergistically to achieve their shared goals. This study was undertaken to begin to answer such questions and provide a basis for further research.

Method*Design*

The study utilized a multiple case study design. This allowed the researcher to learn about CoMT and El Sistema programs from experts with a variety of perspectives. The multiple-case design was comparative and explanatory. All the cases were studied simultaneously. The researcher conducted qualitative interviews, using a constructionist approach, with participants in CoMT and El Sistema or El Sistema-inspired programs. This type of qualitative research was chosen because it allows for enough flexibility to be able to fully explore all aspects of the programs.[44] The information obtained from the interviews was coded and categorized into emerging themes and subthemes. The theoretical sensitivity of the design was evaluated by triangulating with existing peer-reviewed literature, relating to the researcher's personal and professional experience, and by member-checking (i.e., obtaining feedback from participants by sharing the study results after the initial analysis).

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Virginia Eulacio Cierniak, E-mail: veulacio@gmail.com | COI statement: The author declared that no financial support was given for the writing of this article. The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

* *El Sistema* is a music education program founded by Jose Antonio Abreu in the 1970s in Venezuela. From the beginning, the main aims have been to provide access music education at no cost, as well as addressing social goals. Over the years its success stories have spread and many El Sistema-inspired programs have been started around the world.

Participants and Setting

Four participants were recruited for the study. They included professionals who provide CoMT and professionals who work in El Sistema programs around the world. Interviews were conducted in person or via Skype.

Recruitment. Two of the participants recruited were professional music therapists who provide CoMT services. The other two participants were music educators and researchers who work in El Sistema or El Sistema-inspired programs. The sampling method used for recruitment was both purposive and convenience-based; based on prominence in the literature. The participants had to be at least 18 years old to participate. The recruitment process involved an e-mail.

Consent process. All participants were asked to sign the informed consent form prior to beginning the interview. All participants were informed about the study, including its aims and purposes, as well as their role in choosing to participate. Participants were offered the option to receive the results at the end of the study.

Instruments and Equipment

A set of basic questions served as the point of departure for the interviews. All interviews were recorded with a Zoom H2n audio recorder, as well as with an iPhone 6s Voice Memo for backup.

Procedure

The basic questions served only as a guide for the interviews. Interviews were semi-structured yet open-ended. The participants could decide to move on to a different question at any time.

Data collection. Data was collected in the form of interviews. The raw data was transcribed rigorously and culled prior to analysis. Data transcriptions were checked against the original recordings to ensure accuracy and to ensure they captured the original nature of the participants' responses. The researcher compiled a written case summary record for each interview as well as a master inventory of the data corpus for the study. Data analysis alternated with data collection. Member-checking was performed after initial analysis.

Data analysis. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data. The data was approached through an inductive perspective. Due to the nature and goals of these programs, the researcher focused on a constructionist approach. The researcher inspected the themes and subthemes at the latent level. As per thematic analysis procedures set forth by Braun and Clarke,[45] there were six steps to data analysis; these were not carried out sequentially but in a recursive manner. The first step to data analysis was becoming familiar with the data. The second step was separating the interview data into

meaning units, or basic segments and elements, for the entire data set. Each meaning unit was assigned a unique code. Data extracts were copied from individual transcripts, making sure each code was inclusively collated. The third step in data analysis was searching for themes. No themes, patterns, or meaning units were abandoned at this stage. The fourth step in data analysis was reviewing the themes for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Recoding of the data occurred throughout this process, but the coding process ended once refinement of meaning units, themes, and subthemes ceased to add meaning to the analysis. The fifth step in data analysis was defining and naming each theme and analyzing the data within the themes. A visual representation of the themes and subthemes together was developed (Fig. 1), as well as individual diagrams for each theme, subtheme, and their codes (Figs. 2–26). The last step in data analysis was writing the report. Internal validity was assured by triangulation with existing literature, member-checking, and making the researcher's bias explicit. External validity was assured by providing a rich description of the data collected and by means of expert review.

Ethical Considerations and Precautions

The study was submitted to the IRB at Montclair State University for approval prior to recruitment. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants could choose to stop at any time. Interviews were transcribed and coded so there was no identifying information from the participants. All material from interviews was kept confidential. The researcher maintained all digital files and media in a password-protected personal computer, to maintain privacy, security, and confidentiality during and after the completion of this project.

Data Results

Eight themes and seventeen subthemes were generated from the meaning units from all the interviews (Fig. 1). The following themes/subthemes were found: *role of the music (relationship, nonmusical goals, musical quality, music in(as) culture, access)*; *music education (private lessons, trends in music education)*; *outcomes (emotional, social, community)*; *structure (implementations, complex/multilayered, context)*; *social justice (needs, facilitator, access/opportunity)*; *research (longitudinal study)*; *intersection*; and *criticisms*.

Role of the Music

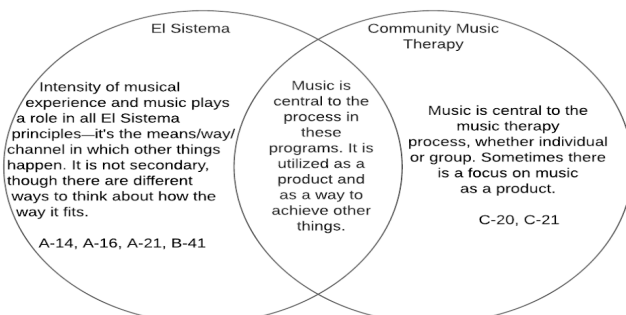
Data on El Sistema and CoMT reveals that they align in considering music as central to the process and as something that can be utilized, whether as a product or not, to achieve other things (goals). (Fig. 2). Data on El Sistema shows that music has a role in all of the basic tenets of El Sistema as it is "the way, it's like the means through which all these other things happen" (Interview A). El Sistema programs also focus on intensity of musical and social experience. While the focus appears to be in a spectrum between social and musical aims,

Figure 1. Themes and Sub-Themes



music is not secondary to El Sistema. Data on CoMT shows that “music is often central to the therapeutic processes” and it belongs to the whole group (Interview C). At times, music as a product in the form of performance and skill acquisition is a focus within CoMT practice.

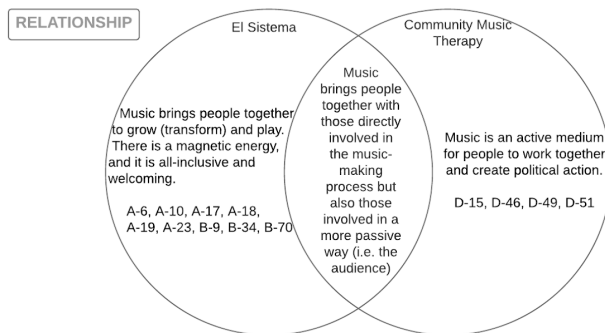
Figure 2. Role of the Music



Relationship. The role of the music in relationships is emphasized in the data for both CoMT and El Sistema, as it brings people together both directly in the music-making process and indirectly for those involved in a more passive way (i.e., families, the community, audiences) (Fig. 3). Aspects of El Sistema practice that deal with relationships include ensemble learning and playing experiences (making music together), radical inclusion, peer learning, family and community involvement, engagement, and bringing people together as a whole. “[It’s about] developing relationships, it’s about understanding that music is about relationships. In my view, the relationships are so important to build because otherwise it becomes these two parts that are coming together, but not” (Interview B). The role of music in relationships also emerges in the CoMT data. Music is an active medium for people to become equal, work together, and create political action. It “is an active medium that you work through, with

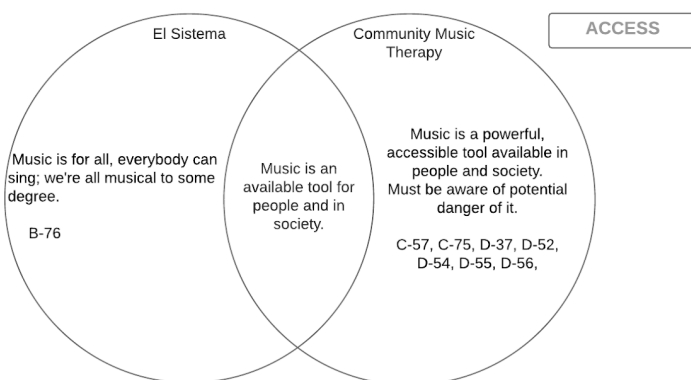
people in action” (Interview D). It can act as a vehicle of communication between groups.

Figure 3. Role of the Music



Access. Data from both CoMT and El Sistema programs shows that music is a readily available tool for people and in society (Fig. 4). Data from El Sistema characterizes music as being for all, as “everybody can sing...we’re all musical to some degree” (Interview B). On the other hand, data on CoMT reveals music as a powerful and “accessible tool” available to people and society (Interview C). Music has a high degree of social and cultural capital, which can be used to promote movement up the social justice ladder. The data also shows, however, that “music can [also] be dangerous, it can be harmful, it can be boring, it can be annoying,” which is important to keep in mind when working in marginalized communities (Interview D).

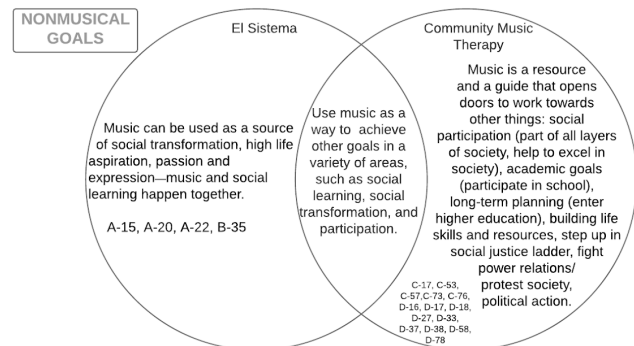
Figure 4. Role of the Music



Nonmusical goals. Data gathered demonstrates the use of music as a way to achieve nonmusical goals such as social learning, social transformation, and social participation in both approaches (Fig. 5). Data on El Sistema shows that music can be used as a resource or instrument of social transformation, high life aspiration, and passion and expression. It shows that music and social learning happen together: “[Y]ou can’t separate it out, like there is social learning over here and music learning over there. They are together, and at the same time” (Interview A). Similarly, data

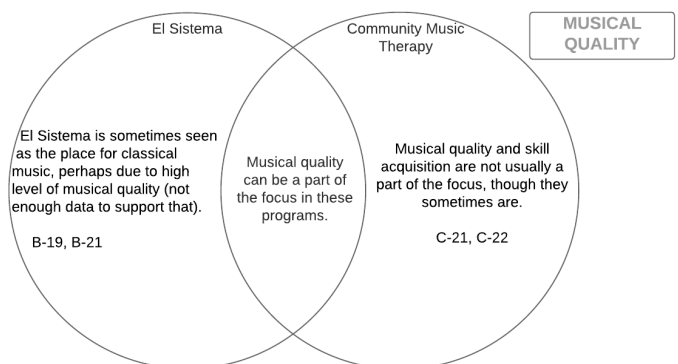
about CoMT shows that music can be seen as a resource and a guide that “opens different doors” (Interview C) and can be used to work towards other things, such as social participation; future planning; building life skills and resources; and moving up the social ladder by getting involved in political action, fighting power relations, and protesting society (Interview D).

Figure 5. Role of the Music



Musical quality. Data shows that although musical quality can be part of the focus in these approaches, it all depends on the needs of the population being served (Fig. 6). Data about El Sistema reveals that it is sometimes seen as *the* place for classical music. This perhaps has to do with people saying: “that there is that rigor in El Sistema, in terms of the musical quality,” yet there probably isn’t “enough data to be able to say that” (Interview B). El Sistema seems to place a much greater emphasis on musical quality, but it depends on the focus of the specific program. Data shows that musical quality is not usually the focus in CoMT: “[S]ometimes there could be more of a focus on the music as a product” (Interview C).

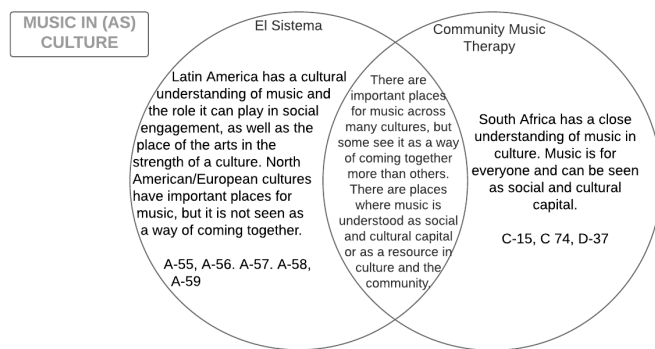
Figure 6. Role of the Music



Music in (as) culture. Data on El Sistema and CoMT shows that there is an important place for music in many cultures but practitioners in these programs place a greater value on music as a way of coming together; there are places where music is understood as social and cultural capital or as a resource in culture and the community (Fig. 7). Data on El Sistema shows

that Latin America has a deep cultural understanding of music and the role it can play in social engagement, as well as of the place of the arts in the strength of a culture. North American and European cultures value music highly but music is not prized so much as a “way of coming together” (Interview A). Data on CoMT shows that South Africa has a deep understanding of music in culture (Interview C), in which music is seen as being for everyone as “music has a very high degree of social capital” (Interview D).

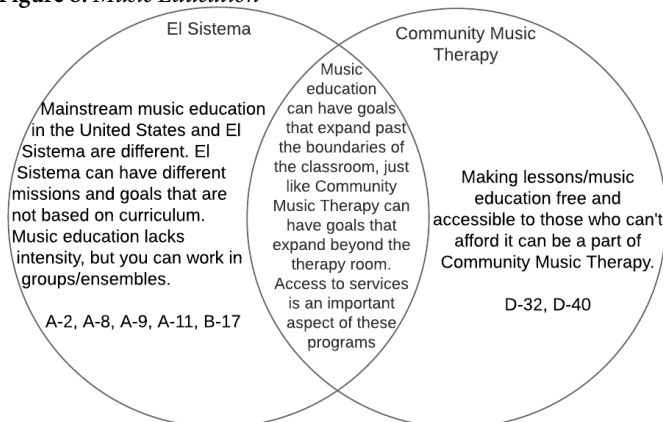
Figure 7. Role of the Music



Music Education

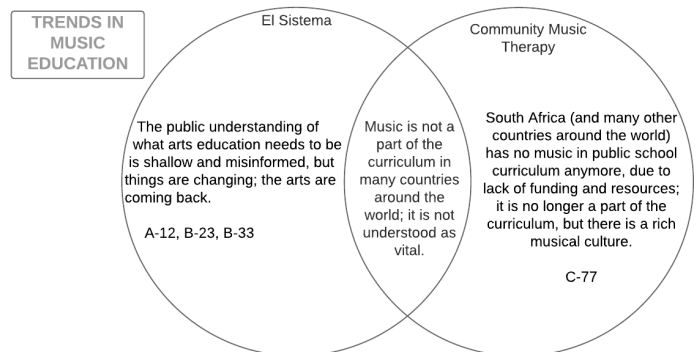
Data on El Sistema and CoMT shows that music education can have goals that expand past the boundaries of the classroom, just as CoMT can have goals that expand beyond the therapy room (Fig. 8). Data on music education reveals that mainstream public music education in the United States is very different from that provided within El Sistema-inspired programs. The main reason for this disparity is that “El Sistema-inspired programs tend to have the ability to afford to have different missions and goals, where in the schools the goals are based on the curriculum and the national and state standards” (Interview B). Further, music education in schools is perceived to lack the element of intensity often found in El Sistema. Data on CoMT shows that making lessons or music education free and accessible to those who can’t afford it can be a part of CoMT, such as by helping “a young man [to] learn some guitar chords, [which he] can easily exchange...into social capital” (Interview D).

Figure 8. Music Education



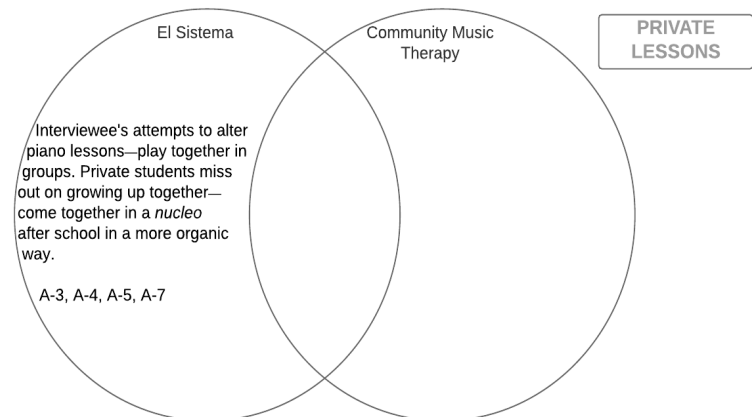
Trends in music education. Data on El Sistema and CoMT reveals that music is not a part of the educational curriculum in many countries around the world and that music education is not often seen as vital (Fig. 9). Data on El Sistema shows that the “public understanding of what arts education needs to be is shallow and misinformed” (Interview A). However, “music education is coming back...and in some ways, we have to thank El Sistema for that” (Interview B). There is also a “positive trend in music education to...try new things and break the norm” (Interview B). Data on CoMT and music education shows that South Africa, as well as many other countries around the world, has no music in schools any more: “[M]usic education is not part of the [public] school curriculum any more, [due to lack of resources],” despite the country’s rich musical culture (Interview C).

Figure 9. Music Education



Private lessons. Data on El Sistema includes an account of one interviewee’s attempts to alter piano lessons so as to include some of the experiences that El Sistema offers (Fig. 10). She had students play together in groups, as “piano students miss a lot in the fact that they don’t grow up playing with other kids. They grow up playing by themselves” (Interview A). Students in El Sistema “come together in a *nucleo* after school in a more organic way” (Interview A). There was no data obtained on private lessons from CoMT practitioners, even though private lessons can be a part of CoMT practice.

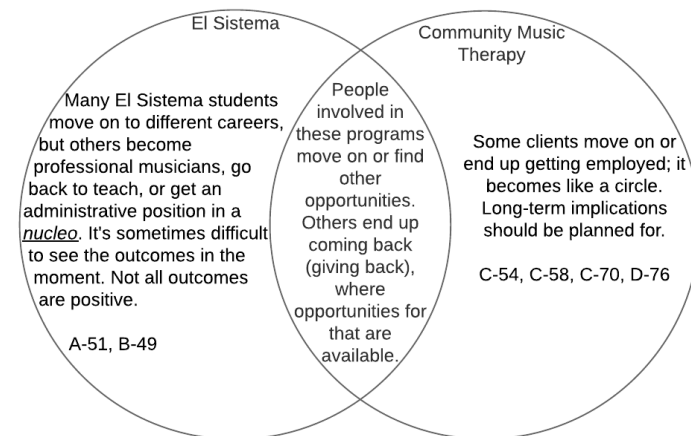
Figure 10. Music Education



Outcomes

Data from both El Sistema and CoMT showed that people who participate in these programs may either move on and find other opportunities or come back and work in the program, when this is possible (Fig. 11). Data on El Sistema reveals that many students move on to different careers while others become professional musicians, go back to teach in a *nucleo*, or even obtain an administrative position in a *nucleo*. Not all outcomes are positive, however, as some students become too dependent on the program and can't move on: "[T]his documentary...show[s] one kid who became so dependent on the program that...it was hard for him to leave, so he went back into the world of drugs" (Interview B). Data from CoMT shows that while some clients move on from therapy, others end up employed to run younger groups as a community musician (if such an opportunity is available for them in the program). Thus "it [can be] like a circle: Start in therapy, then the after-school program, and then come back as an employee/intern" (Interview C).

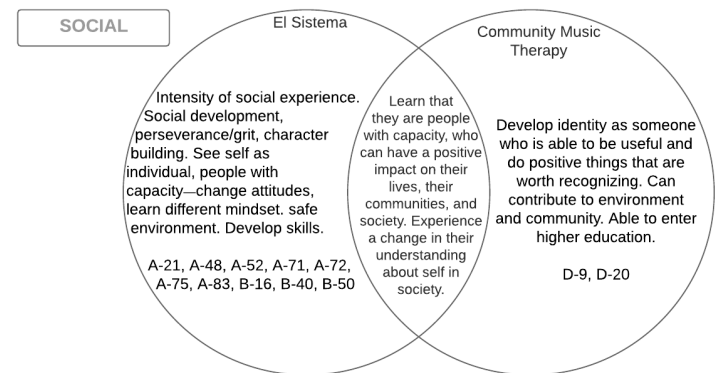
Figure 11. Outcomes



Social. Data on El Sistema and CoMT shows that participants are able to learn that they are people with capacity, people who can have a positive impact on their own lives, on their communities, and on society; they experience a change in their understanding about themselves *in* society (Fig. 12). Data on El Sistema reveals that students experience transformational social development through the intensity of the social interactions they encounter within a safe environment. This aids in learning perseverance and grit, builds character, changes attitudes and capacities for intellectual growth and social cooperation, and helps participants learn to see themselves both as individuals and people with capacity, which is a "different mindset than a lot of kids grow up learning" (Interview A). Data on CoMT shows that participants develop an identity "as someone who is able to do something positive, something useful, something worth recognizing" (Interview D), as well as someone able to contribute to the environment and the community.

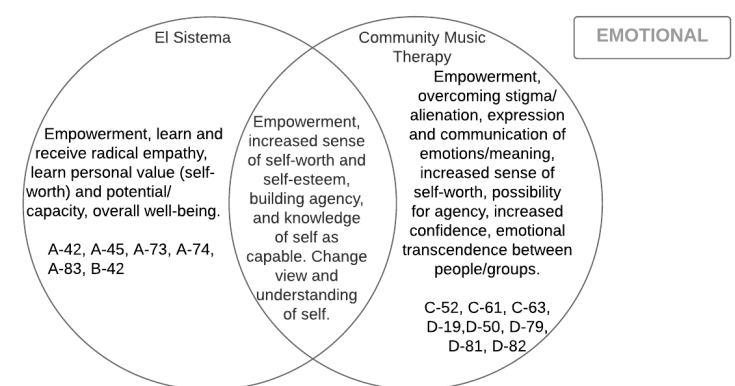
Participation can also "facilitate the possibilities the individual has to have to enter higher education" (Interview D).

Figure 12. Outcomes



Emotional. Data on El Sistema and CoMT substantiates the idea that the emotional outcomes for participants include empowerment, increased sense of self-worth, increased self-esteem, building agency, and knowing and understanding oneself as capable; these programs can fundamentally change the view and understanding of the self (Fig. 13). Emotional outcomes for El Sistema participants include empowerment, learning and receiving radical empathy, increased self-esteem and sense of self-worth, improved overall well-being, and learning "that each one of them is a person with value, who is really important and has good things to offer" (Interview A). Emotional outcomes for CoMT include empowerment, overcoming stigma and alienation, expression and communication of emotions or meaning, increased sense of self-worth, increased possibility for agency, the sense of mastering a skill, increased confidence (self-esteem), and "emotional transcendence between people, and [experiencing a] community of understanding" (Interview D).

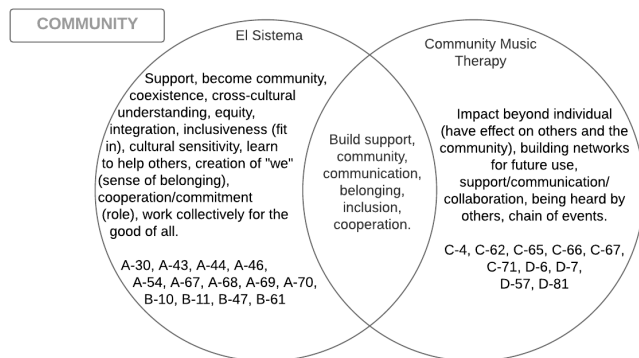
Figure 13. Outcomes



Community. Data on El Sistema and CoMT shows that for both programs, community outcomes include building support, building a community, strengthening communication among people, creating a sense of belonging,

inclusion of all, and encouraging cooperation and collaboration (Fig. 14). Community outcomes for El Sistema can include receiving support, community building, gaining cross-cultural understanding and cultural sensitivity, increasing equity, facilitating “fitting in” (inclusiveness), learning about people’s capacity to help others, the creation of a “we” (sense of belonging), increasing cooperation and commitment, and “coexistence [among participants], integration, and working collectively for the good of all” (Interview A). Community outcomes for CoMT can include building networks (social capital) for future use, building structures of participation, support, communication and learning collaboration, being heard by others, and creating a chain of events or “ripple effect,” which means that the outcomes are “broader than just the one person, that [they stretch] out back into the community” (Interview C).

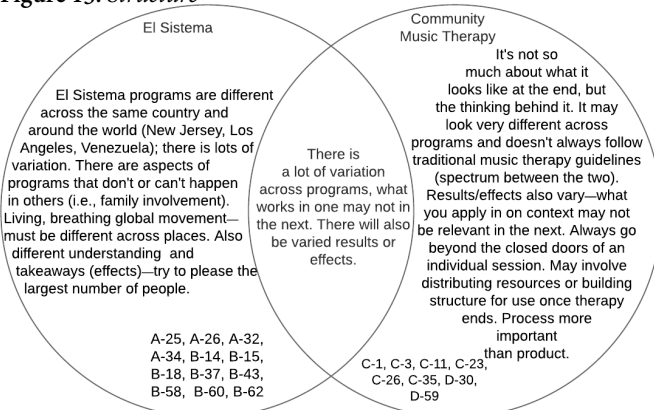
Figure 14. Outcomes



Structure

Data on El Sistema and CoMT shows that there is a lot of variance across both types of approaches; what works in one may not work in the next. As a result, there will also be varied results and effects (Fig. 15). Data from El Sistema showed that there is a lot of variation among El Sistema programs around the world; each program, even within the same country, is different. This is the case for the programs in New Jersey and Los Angeles, as well as in Venezuela. There can be certain aspects of one program that don’t or can’t happen in others (i.e. family involvement). Furthermore, different people are going to have different understandings of the program and different takeaways, but the idea is to attempt to please “the largest number, not just two or three” (Interview B).

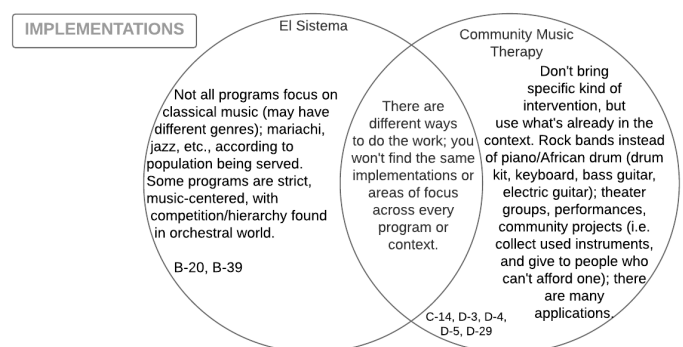
Figure 15. Structure



Data from structure on CoMT shows that it “has more to do [with] how you’re thinking about it and how you’re understanding the work” (Interview C). There is also a spectrum between traditional music therapy and CoMT practice, and the latter does not always follow conventional guidelines. The results and effects also vary, since what “you apply in one context [may] get similar results, but it might not necessarily be relevant to another context” (Interview C). The idea is to allow the work to expand beyond the closed doors of a session by distributing resources or building structures for use once therapy ends.

Implementations. Data about El Sistema and CoMT shows that for both approaches, there are many different ways to do the work; one is unlikely to find the same areas of focus and implementations across every program or context (Fig. 16). Data for El Sistema reveals there are programs that are not based just on classical music. Each program is implemented to best suit “the population [and community] that they serve” (Interview B). There are, however, some El Sistema programs that are strict and music-centered and where one finds the competition and hierarchies that are common in the orchestral world. Data on CoMT shows that therapists don’t bring specific interventions but use what already exists and is already available in the contexts in which carry out the work. There are many different types of CoMT implementations, such as rock bands, theater groups, performances, and community projects. One interviewee gave as an example of a community project collecting “used music instruments to hand them over to people who can’t afford their own” (Interview D). Another type of implementation is the use of instruments usually associated with rock bands (drum kits, keyboards, and electric guitars) instead of the more “traditional” music therapy instruments (piano, African drum).

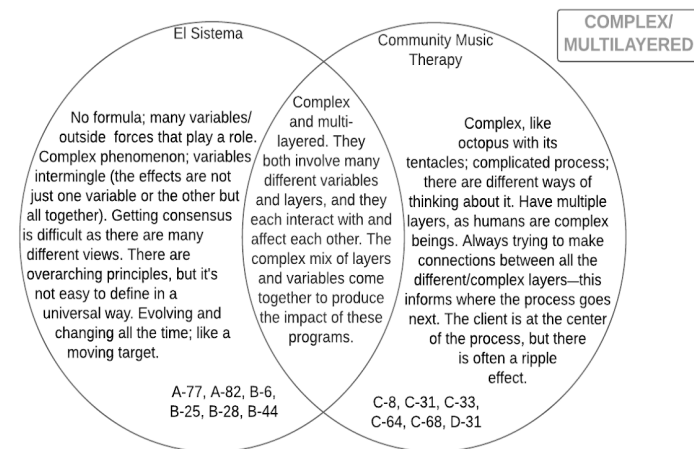
Figure 16. Structure



Complex/multilayered. Data for El Sistema and CoMT demonstrates that both of these approaches are by nature complex and multilayered; they both involve many different variables that interact with and affect each other. The complex mix of layers and variables comes together to produce the

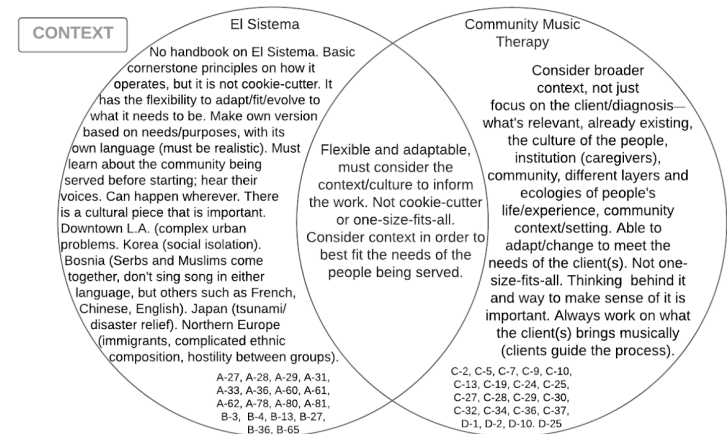
impact of these programs (Fig. 17). Data on El Sistema reveals that there is no one “formula.” There are many variables and outside forces that play a role in creating the structure of El Sistema programs; it is “always changing; it’s like trying to pinpoint a moving target” (Interview A). El Sistema is a complex phenomenon, whose variables intermingle. It is difficult to get a consensus, as there are many different views. There are overarching principles, but it’s not easy to define or “universal in any way” (Interview B). Data on CoMT also shows that it is complex, like an “like an octopus with its tentacles” (Interview C). CoMT is a complicated process, and there are many different ways to think about it. It has many different layers, as it reflects the complex nature of human beings. The client is at the center of the process; the therapist is always trying to make connections between all the different, complex layers; and there is often a ripple effect.

Figure 17. Structure



Context. Data for El Sistema and CoMT shows that both of these approaches are flexible and adaptable; they both use careful consideration of the context and culture of the people and community served to inform the work and best meet the needs of their participants; neither approach is cookie-cutter or one size fits all (Fig. 18). Data on El Sistema reveals that while there are basic, cornerstone principles regarding how it operates, there is no “handbook” to follow. El Sistema is “not cookie-cutter” (Interview A), as it has the flexibility to adapt, fit, and evolve into what it needs to be. It is important to learn about the needs and hear the voices of the community being served before beginning a program, as the cultural piece is important. Examples from downtown Los Angeles, Korea, Bosnia, Japan, and northern Europe—places that have vastly different needs—show the context-specific nature of El Sistema (Interviews A and B).

Figure 18. Structure

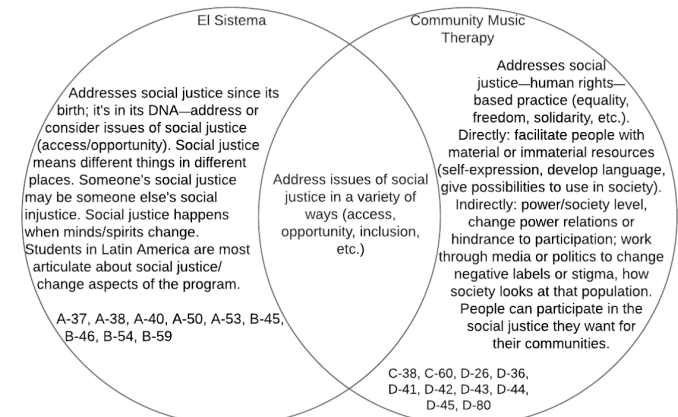


Data about CoMT shows that programs consider the broader context in which the work occurs rather than merely focusing on the client and the individual diagnosis. CoMT programs are able to adapt and change to meet the needs and demands of the clients and the context; it is “not a one-size-fits-all approach” (Interview C). The thinking behind the work and the way to make sense of it is important, as the process is guided by what the clients bring in musically. Examples of the diverse contexts in which CoMT work can occur include schools; child welfare programs (in institutions, in foster care); mental health units; and elder care.

Social Justice

Data for El Sistema and CoMT shows that both of these programs address issues of social justice in a variety of ways (Fig. 19). Data on El Sistema shows that it addresses or at least considers issues of social justice, such as access and opportunity, since its birth. Social justice is “like in its bones, in its DNA” (Interview A). It means different things in different places, and one person’s social justice may be someone else’s social injustice (Interview B), yet it happens when minds and spirits change (Interview A).

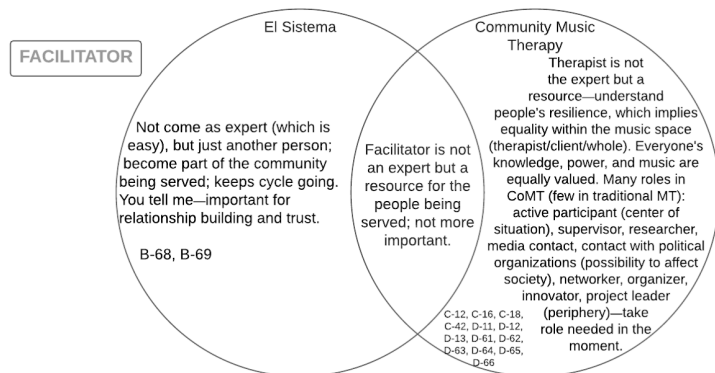
Figure 19. Social Justice



Data on CoMT shows that it also addresses social justice, as “the practice is human rights-based” (Interview D). It focuses on issues such as equality, freedom, and solidarity. Social justice goals may be addressed directly or indirectly in CoMT practices. They are addressed directly by providing people with material or nonmaterial resources, such as self-expression, language development, and giving possibilities to use in society, and addressed indirectly through changing power relations or removing hindrances to participation. In other words, CoMT practice works at the level of power and society, through media and politics, to attack negative labels or stigmas and change how society views a particular population. It also works by showing people that they can be a part of the social justice they want for their communities.

Facilitator. Data about El Sistema and CoMT shows that in both approaches the facilitator is not an “expert” or seen as more important. Instead, the facilitator is a resource for the people being served (Fig. 20). Data on El Sistema shows that the facilitator must “not come in as the expert, which is easy, but just a person just like everybody else” (Interview B). Instead, facilitators should aim to become a part of the community being served by sharing, relating, finding middle ground, and asking about participants’ needs. Data from CoMT shows that the therapist is not the expert but looks at the resources and resilience within the space and the client population, which implies equality within the therapy space (therapist/client/whole). Everyone’s knowledge, power, and music are equally valued. The CoMT therapist is perceived to perform many different roles, “[taking on] the role that they need to in the moment” (Interview D).

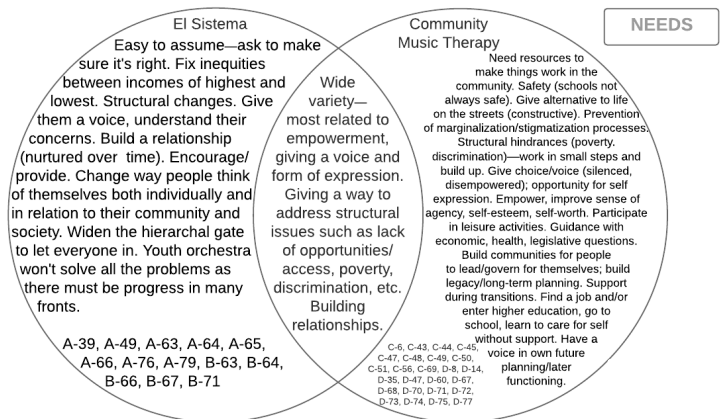
Figure 20. Social Justice



Needs. Data about El Sistema and CoMT shows that both of these approaches address a wide variety of needs. Most of these needs are related to empowerment, giving people a voice and form of expression, building relationships, and giving people a way to address structural issues, such as lack of opportunities and access, poverty, and discrimination (Fig. 21). Data on El Sistema needs underlines that although it is easy to assume what people need, it is important to ask to

make sure one’s understanding is correct. The types of needs addressed include structural changes, such as redressing inequities between the incomes of the highest and lowest in society, and changes within the person, such as giving people a voice, understanding people’s concerns, encouraging and providing support, building a relationship over time, widening the opening opportunities to let everyone in, and changing the way people think about themselves both individually and in relation to their community and society (Interview A and B).

Figure 21. Social Justice



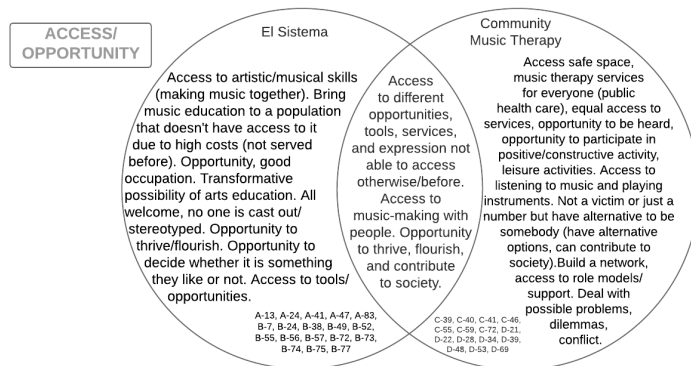
Data on needs in CoMT reveals that we need resources to make things work in the community. The types of needs addressed include safety, prevention of stigmatization and marginalization, and dealing with structural hindrances, such as poverty and discrimination. Emotional needs include giving people a choice and voice; providing opportunities for self-expression; empowerment; and improving people’s sense of agency, self-esteem, and self-worth (Interviews C and D). Participation needs include providing opportunities to participate in leisure activities, building communities for people to lead and govern for themselves, and giving a constructive alternative to life on the streets (Interviews C and D). Guiding needs include providing guidance in economic, health and legislative questions, building a legacy and long-term planning, providing support during transitions, and providing help in finding a job or entering higher education (Interview D).

Access/Opportunity. Data from El Sistema and CoMT reveals that these approaches provide access to opportunities, tools, and services that participants have not been able to access otherwise or before. These programs give participants the opportunity to thrive, flourish, and contribute positively to society (Fig. 22). Data on El Sistema shows that there is a focus on providing access to transformational artistic and musical skills, as well as to other tools and opportunities, by learning an instrument and making music together. El Sistema is perceived by practitioners as providing an opportunity to thrive and flourish, as a good way to occupy one’s time by

providing opportunities for advancement, thus having implications in the long-term (Interviews A and B).

Data shows that CoMT practice can be about being able to access a safe space where there is equal access to services—music therapy services for everyone (Interview C). It is an opportunity to be heard (empowerment) and to participate in positive and constructive leisure activities (Interview D). It is about providing access to listening to music and playing musical instruments, and in that process learning that one is not just a number or a victim of circumstances: there are alternative options (Interviews C and D). It is also about building a network; having access to role models and support; and dealing with possible problems, dilemmas, and conflicts (Interview D).

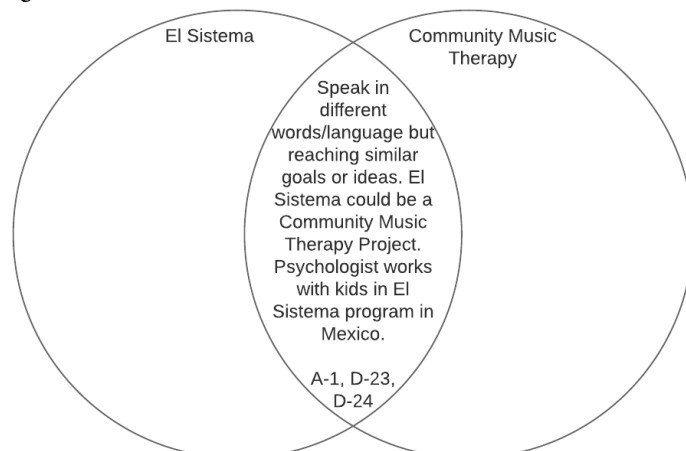
Figure 22. Social Justice



Intersection

According to interview D, El Sistema “sounds like a CoMT project...we share some of the same thinking here a bit...it is spoken [about] in different words [or] language but [it seems to be] reaching [the] same goals [and] ideas” (Fig. 23). In Mexico, there is a psychologist who works with the kids in an El Sistema *nucleo*—bringing education and therapy into one place.

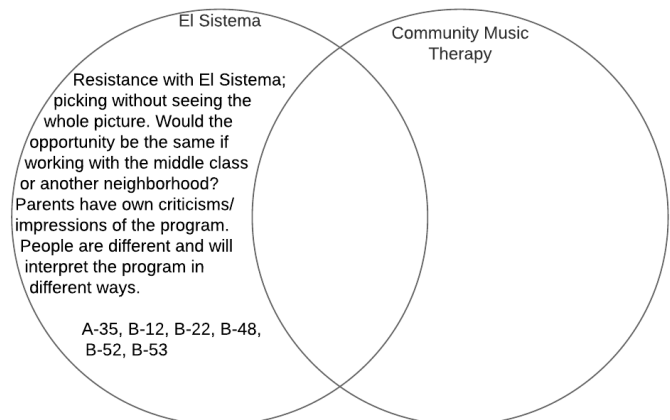
Figure 23. Intersection



Criticisms

Data shows that “some people have resistance with El Sistema” (Interview B) (Fig.24). These critics seem to be picking at something without seeing the whole picture (Interview A). Parents also seem to have some criticisms and negative impressions of the program; this makes sense, as people are different and will interpret the program in different ways (Interview B). Data obtained reveals no specific criticisms of CoMT, though some criticisms exist especially in terms of boundaries.

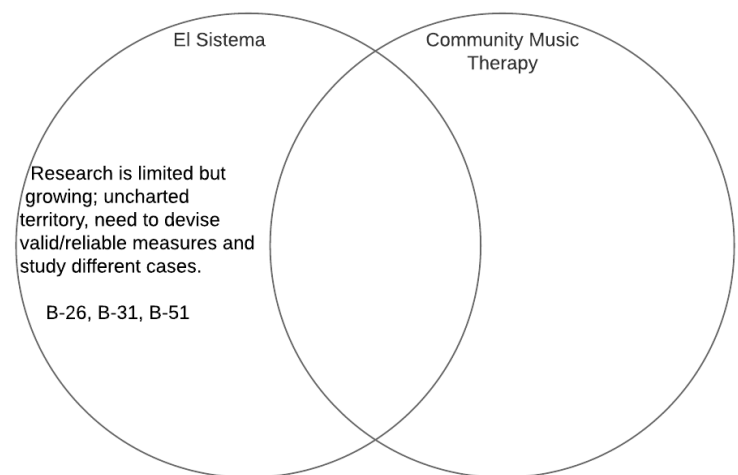
Figure 24. Criticisms



Research

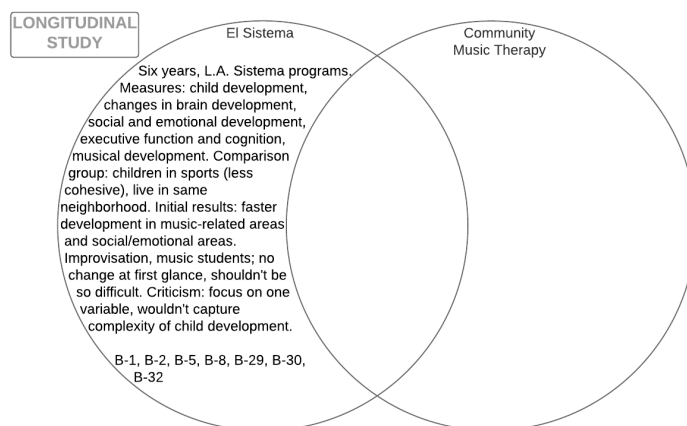
Data data shows that there is a limited body of research on El Sistema (Fig.25). It is growing, however, and diverse cases must be studied (Interview B). Since this is “uncharted territory in some ways,” it is a “problem of us devising [valid and reliable] measures, really capturing what we’re looking for” (Interview B). Neither interviewee made comments with respect to research on CoMT.

Figure 25. Research



Longitudinal study. A longitudinal study about the Los Angeles Sistema programs has recently been published (Fig. 26). The study has been done over the course of the past six years. It looks at a variety of measures, such as child development and changes in brain development, executive function and cognition, social and emotional development, and musical development. The comparison group is made up of children in sports and children who live in the same neighborhood but do not participate in an El Sistema program. Initial results found faster development in music-related areas and social and emotional areas for El Sistema participants. Music students were asked to improvise and showed no changes at first glance. Researchers utilized case studies and found that young musicians can be strong improvisers only under certain conditions. The study was criticized by those who say it should focus on just one variable. That would not capture the complexity of child development, however. Data obtained did not reveal anything specific regarding research in CoMT.

Figure 26. Research



Discussion and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to comparatively examine the ways in which CoMT and El Sistema programs may address the empowerment needs of individuals and communities facing socioeconomic marginalization and suggest how these two approaches may be able to work synergistically to achieve their shared goals. Interview data provided insight into aspects of the purpose and questions of this study that both reflect and expand on the information that already exists in the literature about these approaches. This study found that these programs show parallels as well as divergences in several areas, including the role of the music, their structure, their social justice aims, their outcomes, their implementation of music education, the existing research, and the amount of criticism each has generated.

Music, both as an object and as a resource, is central to both El Sistema and CoMT practice. This study found that for El Sistema and CoMT, music is an accessible resource that

exists within people, communities, and culture and that can provide a way to accomplish nonmusical goals, such as forging relationships between people who participate in music-making. These programs rely on the basic premises that all people are innately musical, and that music is a resource that exists in some form across many different cultures.[5,16,20] They also focus on the fact that participation in music-making can lead to positive change in other areas of individual and community life and thus have an impact that goes beyond the immediate action of making music together.[6,8,19]

In these programs, music is not only about the art, but also about other social objectives; musical and nonmusical goals are intertwined and interrelated.[12,26,28,29] Their social objectives include the formation and performance of relationships, which reflect aspects of daily life and society—by reaching *communitas*, a state where social distinctions disappear, allowing everyone to become equal within the community that is being formed in the moment.[16,19,20,27,42] Being able to access *communitas* within the social space of the *nucleo* or the CoMT session can have a positive impact on other aspects of life outside that space, such as health, emotional well-being, and social development.[1,9]

One main difference El Sistema and CoMT practice has to do with the emphasis on musical quality. While performance can be an important aspect of both programs, CoMT places a greater emphasis on the process that takes place and the thinking behind what's offered, rather than the product that results.[1,6,16] While El Sistema programs vary as to how much emphasis they place on the music versus the social and emotional well-being of their participants, there seems to be a greater emphasis on overall musical quality and excellence in general.[30]

A lack of structural uniformity is also one of the main similarities between El Sistema and CoMT. There is a lot of variation of designs and implementations across different El Sistema and CoMT programs, as each implementation is context-based and addresses a number of complex and multilayered variables to best serve the needs of the particular population being served. Both of these programs are flexible and evolve according to the needs of the participants. In CoMT, practitioners always consider the culture and context in which the work is taking place, and practice is not standardized.[1,6,13] In El Sistema, each *nucleo* has the flexibility to develop its own personality and way of working while evolving constantly to meet the needs of the children and communities being served.[26,28,30]

Even though each approach starts out with a superficially similar structure for its programs, the way of working is fundamentally different, especially as they come from two different fields. Both El Sistema and CoMT place an important emphasis on performance.[1,13,16,26] But El Sistema focuses on orchestra, choir, and band, with an emphasis on musical

excellence,[26,28,29] while CoMT makes use of different types of interventions, such as theater groups, community projects, and musicking in any form it may take; for CoMT, the process is always more important than the product.[1,3,6,13,16] Regardless of the structure in which the service is provided, both of these programs may show a deep commitment to addressing social justice goals.

Both El Sistema and CoMT work to address the needs of people or communities facing social and/or economic marginalization. This study found that El Sistema and CoMT practice may address issues of social justice, especially in terms of access, opportunity and inclusion, by making an effort to understand and listen to the needs of the people and the community being served and by emphasizing that the facilitator is not an expert but just another member of the community. People dealing with socioeconomic marginalization face a host of issues, including lack of access and opportunities, structural issues such as poverty and discrimination, inequality, and injustice; these issues often lead to stress, disconnection from people and society, decreased health, and a persistent and debilitating sense of injustice.[1,15,34]

El Sistema and CoMT work to address issues of social justice in a variety of ways, but primarily by providing access to and opportunities for music-making and social participation.[1,26] They address the most basic human rights, promote empowerment, provide equal access to resources and opportunities participants would not otherwise have, create opportunities for expression through music-making, give people a voice, build relationships, encourage a sense of belonging in a group, and make sure that everyone is included.[1,15,17,24,26,30,35]

El Sistema and CoMT view the role of the facilitator differently and target different populations as participants who will engage in music-making. Even though not coming as an expert is an aspect of El Sistema practice, it does not appear to be emphasized in the literature. CoMT places a relatively greater emphasis on the many different roles that a therapist can play in the process. These include participating actively in music making; being a supervisor, researcher, or contact person for media and political organizations; performing organizational work; and leading projects, i.e., taking on the role that is needed across the different ecologies.[1,4,13,14,16,18]

El Sistema and CoMT emphasize access and inclusion for everyone within their practice. El Sistema, however, only provides access to children and adolescents, while families and other community members are not directly involved in active music-making; they are only involved musically by attending concerts.[26-28,30] They may still receive some benefits, but if so, they are not due to direct involvement in active music-making. On the other hand, CoMT works with people across the life span.[1,4]

This study found that participation in El Sistema and CoMT brings outcomes within the social, emotional, and community realms. Social outcomes include learning that they are people with capacity who can contribute to society, while experiencing trust and trying out different social roles.[1,16,26,27] Emotional outcomes include empowerment, gaining a sense of hope, increased sense of self-esteem and self-worth, ability to express themselves through music, and sense of pride and achievement.[1,16,25,29] Lastly, community outcomes include healthy community and relationship building, increased sense of belonging, experiencing equality and inclusion, increased cooperation, and participation in society and culture.[15,17,26-28]

Participants in both El Sistema and CoMT may have the opportunity to move on or create a career out of working in these programs, wherever the opportunity is available, though the literature on CoMT does not emphasize this.[25,26] In Venezuela, however, El Sistema is well known for producing many great musicians and has a number of professional groups that travel around the world giving concerts and providing outreach to other El Sistema-inspired programs.[25,26]

Though this study finds that El Sistema and CoMT intersect in a variety of ways, it also shows that they diverge from each other in two principal areas: criticism and research. There are a number of criticisms that have been leveled at El Sistema over the years, a fact that is evident in some of its literature.[31,32] Criticism of CoMT exists, especially in terms of defining the boundaries in which music therapy starts or ends, but these were not evident in the literature. Furthermore, this study finds that the literature about El Sistema is limited but growing. The same can be said about CoMT research, even though this study did not produce data directly confirming this.

As explained above, this study finds that both El Sistema and CoMT often incorporate goals that go well beyond their immediate setting (classroom or therapy room) and differ from the goals pursued by conventional music education and music therapy.[3,4,23,31] This study also confirms that music is not a part of the public-school curriculum in many places around the world and that making lessons and music education free and accessible to those who can't afford it can be a part of CoMT. Although this fact does not appear in the CoMT literature surveyed (except perhaps as implied by the emphasis placed on providing resources), it is extremely important as it places what El Sistema does directly into the framework of what CoMT could look like. The literature shows that there are connections between CoMT and Community Music practice.[4] If El Sistema were to be considered a Community Music practice, then the connection with CoMT would become even more apparent and clear.

Implications and Applications

This research study has helped me learn that CoMT and El Sistema cannot be conceptualized as fixed models but should instead be considered terms that encompass a broad range of contextually-based practices. Taking this into consideration, I believe that CoMT and El Sistema practice would each benefit from combining with each other. Given the flexible and adaptable nature of these programs, there is almost an infinite number of possible ways they could come together. I believe that El Sistema would benefit from combining with CoMT by expanding the populations served and by allowing the positive outcomes to reach more people and areas of society. CoMT would also benefit from combining with El Sistema by incorporating its high level of musical excellence into the outreach that performing groups engage in, where that is in accordance with the needs of the participants being served.

From what I have seen across a number of programs in the United States, El Sistema-inspired programs are doing a wonderful job of providing access to music for many different children and adolescents. Yet there does not seem to be an emphasis on including students with disabilities. There could be many reasons for this, but if one has to do with staff members' not feeling prepared to work with children and adolescents with disabilities, then that opens up an opportunity to consult and work with music therapists. Doing so would both address the lack of opportunities for disabled children and adolescents to engage in music-making and increase the type of access and resources the programs are able to provide.

Another way services could be expanded in El Sistema programs is to serve populations other than just children and adolescents. Given that music is an accessible resource within many people and communities, it makes sense to try to provide access to music to people across the life span. The specific implementation would of course vary across contexts and the needs within them. Furthermore, musical performances could become more than just aesthetic experiences: they could serve as advocacy or as political protest and action. If these performances demonstrate a high degree of musical excellence, then the impact on the target audience and the message would be even stronger.

I have recently begun providing music therapy services at Union City Music Prouect, an El Sistema-inspired program in Union City, NJ. At the moment, music therapy occurs separately from the regular activities of the after-school program. As the program continues to grow, however, the goal is to find ways in which both aspects of the program can be integrated. I have begun thinking about different possibilities. Some of my ideas include preparing music therapy clients to perform with the orchestra or choir by providing specific parts or adaptations as needed. I would also like to start an ongoing group in which everyone in the program can participate, including students, clients, staff members, caregivers, and other members of the community.

Future Research

The area of focus in this study would benefit from further research. This study has focused on the theoretical side of how El Sistema and CoMT could come together to work synergistically towards their shared goals. The next step would be to use this theoretical framework in action research.

Conclusion

Combining these two seemingly disparate approaches can have some implications in a larger scope in communities around the world, as well as in the fields of music therapy and music education. It seems like El Sistema and El Sistema-inspired programs are either more widespread or a little more well-known around the world than CoMT or music therapy in general. Bringing CoMT into the picture would not only expand the types of services that people across different communities have access to and increase opportunities for involvement in music-making, but it would also help educate and advocate for the impact that music therapy can have on people and their communities. It could also highlight the impact that involvement in active music-making and performance can play in people's lives.

Socioeconomic marginalization causes a number of barriers to participation in life and society. People facing socioeconomic marginalization deal with barriers such as lack of access to resources and opportunities, lack of connection with people and society, stigmatization, inequality, and injustice. Even though El Sistema and CoMT show parallels in the role of the music, the way in which the programs are structured, addressing social justice, and potential outcomes to participants, there are still some significant differences that likely stem from the fact that these approaches draw from two disparate fields. Despite these differences, it is probable that working synergistically would be beneficial to both CoMT and El Sistema.

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Biographical Statements

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