

## Evaluating the Effects of *El Sistema*-Inspired Music Programs in United States Communities

A Joint Study by Longy School of Music of Bard College & WolfBrown  
Funded by The Buck Family Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

### Why We Need to Study *El Sistema*-inspired Programs

The past decade has witnessed a rapid growth of *El Sistema*-inspired music programs for children throughout the United States. Based on reports of its successes in its home country of Venezuela, and early findings from U.S.-based programs, there is much hope that these programs can:

- Build on the aspirations and assets of children and families,
- Buffer the effects of risks like poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, and unequal opportunities
- Demonstrate how music fuels individual and community development.

To do this, we have to build evidence about the quality of programs, the range of outcomes they foster, and the long-term consequences of different *El Sistema* models. If the claims made for these programs outpace the results, the *El Sistema* movement could lose credibility and support. Communities, children, and families could lose promising programs. Classical music could lose a potential source of vitality.

Recognizing these challenges, the Buck Family Foundation, along with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, funded a national study of *El Sistema*-inspired programs. Two institutions, Longy School of Music of Bard College and the arts research firm WolfBrown, have formed a partnership to carry out a two-year study of the benefits of *El Sistema*-inspired programs for the children they serve.

### The Core Project

We have formed a consortium of nine core *El Sistema*-inspired sites that offer music programs using a variety of approaches. We also have a network of collaborating and companion sites that are following the work and deciding how they might want to participate.

Here are the major milestones for the study:

- **Summer and Fall, 2014:** Sites and researchers developed two sets of measures: 1) a set that examines different ingredients in children's success: from their social and emotional development to their academic progress and 2) a set that looks at their musical growth, both as individual instrumentalists and as members of an ensemble.
- **October 2014:** IRB approval from Bard College, permitting the research to go forward with children, teachers, and families.
- **November 2014—January 2015:** We will train sites on using the common measures and learn how well those measures capture students' performance.
- **Spring 2015:** We will collect an additional round of data to see how well our measures capture student growth, and how well they help us discern which kinds of practices appear to support student development
- **School year 2015—2016:** Based on what we learn, we will collect two additional rounds of data, fall and spring. This will be the first full year of formal data collection. Using a fall and spring assessment, we will develop a picture of what a full year in a *Sistema* program contributes to children's growth as individuals and as musicians.

- **Fall 2016:** A final report on the national findings will be published, which will provide the basis for continued longitudinal work.

### **Beyond the Core Project**

- **Additional Measures:** Sites are also developing additional measures that will enrich the study in 2015 – 16 year. For example, a number of sites are developing approaches to capturing the impact of their programs on entire families.
- **Consequences for Orchestras:** The funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will allow us to look at the consequences of sponsoring *El Sistema*-inspired programs for those orchestras who make the investment. In particular, this inquiry will examine whether these programs are effective sources of community engagement, diversification of audiences, and new vitality for their orchestras.

### **The Partners**

#### *Longy School of Music of Bard College*

Longy School of Music of Bard College is a small, world-class conservatory with a mission defined as empowering students to use music to make a difference in the world. Longy teaches its students to pursue a lifetime of community engagement wherever their musical paths take them. A key component of the curriculum is Longy's Teaching Artist Program. Through this required program, students lead innovative music projects while gaining valuable entrepreneurial and teaching experience in schools, community centers, prisons, hospitals and elderly care centers, as well as in *El Sistema*-inspired programs in the Boston area (See [http://www.longy.edu/conservatory/cons\\_home.htm](http://www.longy.edu/conservatory/cons_home.htm).) These values have led to a deep interest in and engagement with the leaders of FundaMusical, the umbrella organization led by Maestro Jose Antonio Abreu in Caracas, Venezuela.

Longy has actively supported the growth of *El Sistema*-inspired *nucleos* around the country. In 2012, the school formed a three-way partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Bard College called *Take a Stand*. The first outcome of this partnership was the launching, in January, 2013, of a Masters of Arts in Teaching in Music (MAT), the only degree program in the world to offer graduate-level training in the principles of *El Sistema* to musicians with the desire to respond to today's unique educational needs and participate in the growing *El Sistema* movement in the United States.

#### *Judith Hill Bose*

Dr. Bose holds a Ph.D. in Urban Education from the City University of New York Graduate Center and an MM in Vocal Performance from the New England Conservatory of Music. As the former Director of Teacher Education and Educational Initiatives at Longy School of Music of Bard College she directed the innovative Teaching Artist Program in Cambridge and is the central architect of the curriculum for the MAT at the Los Angeles campus. Having recently visited *El Sistema* sites in Venezuela, she is an active collaborator in the Take A Stand partnership and professional development efforts, as well as a lead consultant with WNET and the Annenberg Foundation for an online professional development workshop series, *The Power of Music: P-5 Teaching Inspired by El Sistema*.

## *WolfBrown*

WolfBrown is an international consulting group focused on knowledge building in the fields of arts and culture.<sup>1</sup> In the field of music and music education, the firm has worked with major and community-based organizations including symphony orchestras, community schools of music, national service organizations, school systems and city governments. Researchers Dennie Palmer Wolf and Steven Holochwost specialize in research and evaluation focused on youth and families, with a particular emphasis on the effects of high quality, long-term participation in arts and cultural education. Many of their evaluations apply the principles of participatory evaluation that underscore the role that organizations and their staff can play in designing, collecting, and reflecting on research findings.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, Wolf and Holochwost have worked with a number of music-focused organizations (Carnegie Hall, From the Top, Community Musicworks, and three *nucleos*: Play on Philly, YOSAL, and a third that is incubating at the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra). Throughout this work, they have tailored existing and developed original qualitative and quantitative measures designed to capture the consequences of intensive musical experiences.

### *Dennie Palmer Wolf*

Dr. Wolf holds an ED.D from Harvard University and has taught at Harvard Graduate School of Education and Brown University's Annenberg Institute. She has published widely on the topic of children's imaginative and artistic development and the ways in which institutions and communities can support that development in all children and youth. Dr. Wolf has grants from the Barr, Carnegie, Ford, and Klarman, and Spencer Foundations. She is the 2013 National Service to the Field award winner from the National Guild of Community Arts Education.

### *Steven Holochwost*

Dr. Holochwost holds Ph.D. degrees in Developmental Psychology from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and Music Composition and Theory from Rutgers University, where he studied with Charles Wuorinen. He has received awards and fellowships from the National Science Foundation, the American Psychological Association, the Society for Research in Child Development, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) and the Renee B. Fisher Foundation. Currently, the team is working on evaluations of three distinctive Sistema-inspired *nucleos*: an emerging program at the New Jersey Symphony, a large-scale program at the Steinbeck Center in Salinas, CA, and an intensive program in West Philadelphia, "Play on Philly".

### **For Additional Information:**

- <http://wolfbrown.com/news/a-national-collaborative-evaluation-of-sistema-inspired-music-education>. This provides a more detailed account of the research questions and design.
- Dennie Wolf, [dennie@wolfbrown.com](mailto:dennie@wolfbrown.com)
- Steven Holochwost, [steven@wolfbrown.com](mailto:steven@wolfbrown.com)
- Judy Bose, [Judith.Hill.Bose@longy.edu](mailto:Judith.Hill.Bose@longy.edu)

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.wolfbrown.com](http://www.wolfbrown.com) for current and past projects.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf, Dennie, Bransom, Jennifer, Densen, Katie. (2007). *More than Measuring*. Dallas, TX: Big Thought.