Can music help internally displaced children in Colombia?

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Abstract

Over 40 years of civil conflict in Colombia, Latin America’s second most populous country, has created huge poverty leaving many people without access to health, education and other public services so they have become socio-culturally deprived. Many children from such deprived backgrounds exhibit developmental and educational problems. They have restricted opportunities to interact with others and with their environments. This situation was the motivation to carry out this study, as well as what a number of authors (e.g. Hargreaves, 2002) have shown regarding musical activities as a way to help children in socio-cultural deprived communities because music can be a powerful factor for social cohesion.

Therefore this session will outline a research project undertaken in a school located in a deprived neighbour of Bogota, the capital of Colombia. The problem statement of the project was to investigate the effects of musical experiences on social and musical development of 6 -8 years old children by means of a mixed methods approach (experimental, interviews and psycho musicological studies) involving children, parents, and teachers from displaced communities. The experimental study was carried out with four groups of 30 children between six to eight years old; the experimental group followed a programme of singing musical activities in which children made musical improvisations. Interviews with the children, parent and teacher were conducted during the intervention programme.

The results of this research showed significance differences between control and experimental groups on the test of children’s self-esteem especially in the cognitive component suggesting that musical activities (singing activities) have a positive effect on children self-identities. The results also indicated that musical activities of family and cultural environment play a key role in children’s music identities especially in music improvisation.