

Using Community and University Partnerships to Innovate In Education: The Crescendo Music, Social and Emotional Learning Initiative

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the *Innovation Zones* at Queens University Belfast, which is a partnership between a major UK university and two local disadvantaged communities from West Belfast Northern Ireland. The paper demonstrates how the partnership has driven educational innovation through an example of the *Crescendo* primary school education initiative. *Crescendo* is inspired by similar initiatives like *El Sistema* in Venezuela but is very focused on defined programme activities and continuous evaluation. In practice, *Crescendo* is composed of a series of music, social and emotional learning lessons provided by orchestral musicians and class teachers with pupils in disadvantaged schools. *Crescendo* has been co-designed, implemented and evaluated by the *Innovation Zones* team made up of researchers, community leaders, musicians, school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents. The paper will highlight how important it is to consider the sociocultural contexts in which education programmes are created. Furthermore, it demonstrates that evidence-based and participatory programme design and rigorous evaluation methods (both quantitative and qualitative) as well as an understanding of implementation fidelity, are required to ensure educational programmes are effective in their social and educational impact. In conclusion, the paper shows that combining academic evidence of ‘what works’ with community level understanding of ‘who it works for’ and in ‘what context’ can create innovative educational programmes that improve the outcomes of pupils, families and wider community.

Keywords: Primary School, Innovation, Music, Social and Emotional Learning