

Interviewee: Participant 3

Interviewer: Nathalie Roué

Date of Interview: 03.15.2022

Location of Interview: Telephone Conversation

List of Acronyms: KD= Participant 3 (Interviewee), NR=Interviewer

[Begin Transcript 00:00:00]

NR: Sorry, it cut off. Can you just repeat?

KD: Ja, I visited El Sistema and ja, I know the executive directors and we work very closely with several of the teachers and former teachers. So I know [indistinct] very well.

NR: Really, really.

KD: Ja, they visited here as well. They visited our centres.

NR: Yes, yes, I remember, but that was quite a while ago, right?

KD: Ja, but we have had a few other people come through. Eddy Marcano was just here for our strings competition two weeks ago.

NR: Two weeks ago. Oh, my goodness.

KD: Ja, Eddy was here and the piano teacher [indistinct] [00:00:42] he was also here some time back.

NR: Really, oh my goodness, that is amazing. If I knew that, then I would have tried to also have an interview with them. Actually I think at the end of our discussion maybe perhaps, I do not know. Do you think I would be able to maybe contact one of them? Do you have contact numbers?

KD: Well, they are overseas; so...

NR: Or like an email address or something.

KD: Ja, I can send you an email. Eddy Marcano is no longer there. He has now immigrated. He lives in the US. But he was, ja, he was conductor of the Simón Bolívar. He was Simón Bolívar Conservatory conductor, teacher for many years.

NR: Oh, that is amazing. That will be great. Perhaps if you could then maybe just like WhatsApp me the email address. That would really be wonderful.

KD: Ja, sure, no problem.

NR: Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Prof, so basically, so my research is about implementing an El Sistema-inspired programme in collaboration with the University of Pretoria and I am exploring the possibilities of, you know, how one can implement, how does it work and you know what would you need, what are the facilities that you need and the financial implications and so on. And then with the research that I do, obviously I need to interview people and then Dr Vermeulen said obviously that will be great if I can interview you. So I have got a few questions that I just would like to ask and if you can just like share your opinion and your experiences and so on. So for example, what is your view, first of all, of community music programmes in general?

KD: I mean the idea of community music, for me it is one of the best things that we can do, purely because historically music has always come from the community; whether in the time of Beethoven or whether it is currently new or it is now and people come from the communities and then move for further training at conservatories and universities. So it makes more sense, and given in a country like ours where it is solely lacking. You know music has been... it is lacking in the school system. There is no space in the curriculum. There are all kinds of issues. So if we start at the grassroots level; that is where we are going to build music programmes. So community musically; for me it is the principal vehicle for building a thriving music industry, classical or jazz or any type of industry in the country. So ja, I am 100 percent in support of community music.

NR: Yes, great. And tell me, Prof, how did you become involved?

KD: I started back in 2007 I was living in the US. I had a student. At the time Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the student came to me and she said: hey, you know I want to collect some instruments and send it to New Orleans. So I said: fantastic. She was one of my BMus students and I said: well, how about we do this. I will apply for some funding and if I get

the funding, we send some instruments to New Orleans, but it has always been a dream of mine to start a wind band in my hometown in Pietermaritzburg. So I was living in the US.

So I applied for the funding through the university and we have got some funding and we came out in 2007, started the first wind band at a disadvantaged school in Pietermaritzburg and I kept doing it every year. I kept building wind band programmes in Pietermaritzburg, North West, KZN region and it has been highly successful. So that is how I got involved building programmes, because my area of strength was winds and I was a wind band conductor. That is kind of where I focused on. And those projects have all been successful. Then I established the wind band programme at Potch, at North West University, which is now one of the biggest ones in the country.

And then when the position came up at Unisa, you know they had a community engagement project which I felt I could develop and take to a new level. So that is what appealed to me and you know right now the Unisa project is a pride of joy of Unisa, because we have graduated our first [indistinct] [00:05:25] performance, our first time a technician has come out of a project, [indistinct] engineer is coming out of the project. We have got people with master's degrees, [indistinct] in Stellenbosch, in Potch. So it has been very successful. That is pretty much how I got to do it, ja.

NR: Okay, okay. And tell me, Prof, with regards to the community and the people you know that are, you know, part of the music programmes; for example, what have you seen, like how has it affected them, you know, like in terms of their personalities, personal development? Have you seen successful stories like that?

KD: Ja. So with the students within our project, there has been unprecedented changed. We see students more focused on their studies. The determination, you know the practise, the skill, the attention to detail in music translates into other areas. So whether it is mathematics or schooling or personal life; you know these skills tend to transfer. So we have seen tremendous motivation, delegation with our students in finishing up firstly their high school studies, but then in pursuing music at a later stage. So, and you know there is a whole bunch of studies. I have published a whole bunch of research on the psychological and sociological benefits of studying music, focusing primarily on disadvantaged communities.

Ja, we know [indistinct] [00:07:05] all of that stuff. It has been around for a long time, but in terms of disadvantaged communities where kids do not have access to basic necessities, we

want to see what the impact is; and ja, in our projects we [indistinct]. In fact, our director of music is now employed; I think it is our fourth person to come out of our projects. They are full-time staff members at Unisa managing everything from, you know, concerts, competitions, teaching, obviously our first-time technician trained in the US as a community engagement project person. So the benefit is immense. We have also seen it in the prisons, because we teach in the prisons.

NR: Oh, in the prisons as well; amazing, okay.

KD: Ja, so it has been amazing and then we are also in the orphanages, in the aged orphanages. So we have seen the benefits.

NR: Ja, that is great and especially if it is ploughed back, you know, into the community; and as you say, you know and out of that you actually do get members that become, you know, full-time teachers, like you say.

KD: Yes, exactly.

NR: That is amazing. So with regards to that, what are your views you know regarding the establishment of like; you know, for example an El Sistema-inspired programme at the University of Pretoria, for example?

KD: You know, I think it is a wonderful idea, because those kinds of projects be feed into the university programme, they build the arts, but not just people who want to go study music. You know El Sistema is a social intervention. It is not a professional music training initiative. In fact, it is housed in the ministry of social development. They fund it. So it is not in arts and culture. A spin-off has been all the great musicians who come from it, but there is an intervention to impact the social living conditions of poor people, which has been successful. They have taken it a step further. They are in hospitals, in retirement homes, in mental health facilities, cancer wards. They are everywhere; prisons. I mean it is social change.

So if the University of Pretoria wants to really impact the community, then this is pretty one of the best vehicles they could use. But having said that, it is a very different project compared to what we use. You have to understand. So El Sistema, everything you know about how we teach music here, you have to turn upside down, for example. We have a student who comes to us for a one-on-one lesson. They do not. They would take 250 kids, put them in a room and have one teacher teach music for the first 10 years. The kids, they learn everything in the

ensemble setting, which is technical, repertoire, ensemble playing, skills, I mean everything you will do in a one-on-one lesson. They do it in a group lesson no less than 250 kids. You must meet minimum five days a week for at least two hours.

Now after you have been through that project and you have been through 18 years and you have developed a significant amount of proficiency, only then you apply for private lessons. Now if you apply for private lessons, by that time those kids are proficient. They are like at the level of beyond our BMus level students. Then they apply for lessons; and if they are accepted, and only a handful is accepted, then they do not study with the one teacher, because their philosophy is no one teacher knows everything. You must study with a minimum of four or five teachers, depending on your instrument. One only does technique. One only does repertoire. One only does style and interpretation. One only does ensemble playing. So a student then has five teachers.

So if you think; with us, we have a student/teacher lesson. They become proficient and then we say now you must go with one teacher and then we say: okay, now you must go play in an ensemble; and from an ensemble, now you must go play in an orchestra. So, there it is the other way around and no student studies with a teacher, unless if they played in an ensemble for eight to ten years.

NR: Okay. So like you say, it is exactly the opposite.

KD: Total opposite. You have to think exact opposite of what we do. In a lesson, in an ensemble lesson it will be two hours long. They focus on everything. They focus on intervention, tuning, technique, scales, repertoire and then they play pieces, but that is all of them and it is all drill and practise. So you do that five days a week. You only get two days off. So you know if you really want to be true to the El Sistema model, then that is the model you have to adopt. Now if UP wants to do that, a couple of things to keep in mind. One, it is an expensive initiative, because you have got to have instruments for all of these kids.

NR: Okay, definitely yes, okay.

KD: So purchasing of the instruments become expensive, because you have got to have a significant budget if you want to really start. So you have got to start with an ensemble. You cannot start with one or two kids. I mean you can, but ideally you start with an ensemble. So the kids play in an ensemble. You need instruments. You need a teacher working with them five days a week. It is unlike us where we have an orchestra rehearsal twice a week, maybe

once a week. Five days a week, set time, minimum two hours where they will play in their ensemble.

So there are resources involved. There is time. The challenges that... and with them it must be based in the community. So it is best if they are in that physical environment, because there must be social support from the parents who are there. If you take it out of that environment and put it in the Aula or Musaion, then it is a different feeling. It is a different set-up which can work. We are not saying it does not work, but it is not being true to the El Sistema model. So you know you have to think about resources. You would have to think about location. You would have to think about teachers. Then the big challenge we have here that they do not have is getting access to the kids four, five times a week.

So we run into that problem and we now have got a 120-piece youth orchestra which we have adopted that model where we slowly shifted away from how... we still have teachers, one-on-one teachers and so on, but we are slowly shifting away to that El Sistema model with our huge orchestra, group lessons. The problem is getting the kids five days a week, because they have got to go to school. The transport becomes an issue. So you are going to have to have transport [indistinct] [00:14:47] to get them to one central venue. In Venezuela they all walk to the closest centre.

NR: Okay, all right. Ja, that is the Nucleos. They call it the Nucleos.

KD: Yes, the Nucleos which is basically a music centre. They would have two and a half to 3 000 students there. They would have five orchestras, wind bands, Venezuelan ensembles, harp ensembles. So the kids all walk there and they study there for two hours a day. So the school is going to set up so that they would finish school at about, you know, one o'clock or two o'clock and then they will go to music from two to four or three to five every day. So those are, you know, some of the logistics that you have to think about when you set up the system at UP. Where is it going to be based, the funding for it, instruments, access to music, sheet music. With them as well, they do not focus heavily on reading. Ja, first few years is all training your ears. They feel what is the point of doing music if you cannot play in tune by your ear.

NR: So if you cannot hear.

KD: Ja. And when they work on, for example, a scale; they would work on fingerings, they will work on positions, but they will also work on intervention and balance in practising that scale. So they would talk about intervention in the scale and train the kids that your tuning is out, your

intervention is out; whether it is strings or winds. So they would learn how to tune there. They would learn about balance right there in the scale.

NR: In the scale.

KD: So you have, ja, you have a 250-piece orchestra. The orchestra must be balanced. You know if the cellos are playing too loud and the violins too soft; so that is an issue. So they will talk about playing the scale. This is how it must be balanced for an orchestra. So you play a scale and it is flawlessly in tune. It is flawlessly balanced. You know they would work on all of those concepts in that rehearsal. And the first couple of years they do not read music. It is all by ear until their ears are so in tune. Then they would start reading music, because at that point you are proficient. You know your instrument. You know intervention. You know balance. So then they feel you do not have to work on those things. With us we work on it the opposite way around.

NR: Ja, it is exactly opposite.

KD: You study for Grade 8 and you play your instrument. Now you go to an orchestra and then you start working on intervention and balance, which is... you know and in the meantime you are still grappling with now I have got to learn this repertoire and I have got to learn the fingerings and I have got to learn the bowing and you do not really focus too much on the intervention and the balance and the blend.

Ja, so those are, you know, kind of the things. So I would say, you know, facilities, funding, access to the students, transport. Getting the kids there is always a big one, especially for us in the townships. We have a bus. Unisa has got a 21-seater bus that we use to transport kids around full-time with a driver in order to make it work.

NR: Tell me quickly, Prof. Where you practise the orchestra, is that at the Sunnyside Hall? Do you ...[intervenes]

KD: No. Ja, so we do use the orchestra there or at ZK Mathews. But what we have done is; because we cannot transport, you know, 100 kids every Saturday, what we do is; we have our teachers. The orchestra director work with smaller groups. So until working with a 100 kids at one time, he is working with about 25 to 30 kids in four different centres, but he does exactly the same thing. So he would do the same tuning, the same technical, the same pieces. So all four centres or nucleos [indistinct] [00:18:51] is working on the exact same thing, same repertoire.

And then what they do, they bring them all together once a month and now it is like they have been rehearsing together, because they will be playing the same thing. For somebody having 25, 30 kids; now you have got 100, 120 kids playing the same literature.

NR: Okay. And tell me, with regards to sponsors, for example. If we think about like in Venezuela; say for example, you know, there is like 250 children which obviously they all have to have instruments. Do you know the sponsors? Who would be the sponsors? Is it the Minister of Culture or how does that work?

KD: Ja. So for them it is the Ministry of Social Development. Ja, so it is the same. It is like our Minister of; I think Social and Welfare, the one who do social grants and so on. They have got the equivalent in Venezuela that does the sponsors. In South Africa we have tried. [Indistinct] [00:20:02] we have tried with social development. I had them meet the people from Venezuela, arts and culture. We had them and they just, they did not get anywhere.

So for us, Unisa; Unisa has been sponsoring our project for the longest time. It is all internally funds sponsored through Unisa, which is our teachers, instruments. We run into other issues here, because now we have got, you know, a lot of instruments that need to be maintained. So we have arranged with the music shops that twice in a year we bring the instruments in for maintenance, general maintenance and we take in 100, 200 instruments at a time, get them cleaned, serviced, *et cetera*. But then again, all of those things start to cost. Suddenly your budget starts ballooning.

Ja, the problem with Venezuela that they have is: one, they do not have enough teachers. There are too many kids. So they just cannot get enough teachers. Two, they do not have enough instruments. They go to the manufactures and they try and you know they say. They will go to [indistinct] [00:21:19] or Jupiter and say: 'you know, I need tubas'. And these guys will say: 'okay, you know [indistinct]'. They will say: 'wow, we need about 5 000 tubas', because they now have over a million students. They say they need 5 000 tubas in the next six months and Jupiter will say: 'we cannot give you. We can only give you 2 000, because we have got to supply North America and Europe'.

And they run into a problem, especially with instruments like doubled-reed bassoons which are hard to come by; [indistinct], tubas. Those instruments are very hard. There are reeds. Repairs become a huge problem. You have got to service now a million instruments. So now how many repair shops do you need? So every nucleos there has a repair centre. They have

somebody who is trained and they will have like about one head technician who has about five or six support staff. All they do is they maintain instruments, all do every day. Then they run out of reeds. So they try to manufacture their own reeds. They have got additional problems, because they cannot buy international because of the trade embargo, Venezuela. So they struggle to get stuff, but those are the issues you will probably run into. I mean we face them now with a large number of kids. We are facing the same issue.

NR: Ja, ja, it was the same also with my mom at our school where we also obviously, you know, had to make plans and so on. What I was thinking; you know for example, how do you go about to choose which learners will play which instrument? How does it work at your school?

KD: We have done; we use two methods. One is a demonstration. So new kids we would demo the instruments. So you know we have a violinist playing something on violin, a clarinetist playing some on clarinet, a saxophonist something on saxophone and then we could have the kids; you know, what is your first choice, second choice and third choice? And we let them know you are not always going to get your first choice. Now the trick there is: if you have a saxophone player suddenly playing some really, really cool smooth jazz thing, then everyone wants to play the saxophone, whereas the violinist will only be playing, you know, Tula Tula. Nobody else will play the violin. They get influenced by the music, by the song you are playing. So we told our people who demo everyone plays the same song.

NR: Okay, all right, interesting.

KD: Same song, same intensity, same volume so that the kids could come [indistinct]. So that is the one way we have kind of used. The other way is: we did have kids who come up to us and tutors start to recruit. They will find kids who come to them from the community and say: you know, this kid wants to play violin or this kid wants to play flute and they [indistinct] [00:24:10] and we just tell them: just watch for certain things, you know [indistinct] if there is a big overbite [indistinct] saxophone. Just watch for the minor things, but generally most of times the kids will pick what instruments they want, but sometimes we motivate them. We tell them: it will be good for you to pick up trumpet and then you migrate down to French horn after three years [indistinct] and then from trumpet you migrate down to euphonium and then down to tuba.

NR: Okay, all right. And then tell me, the lessons; you do offer individual lessons?

KD: Yes. So, right now most of our kids still take one-on-one lessons. So we have got about 50 teachers teaching different instruments. So it is all one-on-one lessons from us. But like I

say, we are slowly migrating. We do not want to really change the whole system overnight. That will be detriment. So slow migration to...

NR: To the orchestra.

KD: Ja, to then start in an orchestra.

NR: Okay. And tell me, theory lessons; do you also offer? Is that part of the education?

KD: Yes. So every kid for us must have theory as well. They do the practical and they are required to take theory. Theory is in group lessons. Grade level, you know pre-Grade 1, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3. We can put in maybe 25, 30 kids. But on the more senior level, then the group lessons will come down to about five or six kids. It is Grade 4, Grade 5. When they start getting up to Grade 6, Grade 7, then it is just you know maybe two kids [indistinct] [00:25:55], ja, because it becomes... ja, it is too advanced.

NR: And tell me; in each centre. So you have got the individual lessons. Do they also offer them, you know, smaller group lessons? Are there ensembles as well?

KD: Ja, so we encourage ensembles as much as possible, because not all of the kids can play in, you know, in an orchestra wind band. You know you cannot put 22 suddenly in an orchestra. It does not work. So we have lots of small ensembles; wind ensembles, flute, clarinet, djembe drums, jazz ensembles, choirs, quartets, quintets, trios and we try to give them as much room to perform as we can.

NR: Okay. And tell me; also with the music tutors, the teachers. How do you recruit them? Do they come to you? How do you actually, like, get your music tutors for each centre?

KD: Sometimes we will have people come to us and say: 'I am looking for a teaching position.' And then we let them know. So for us they must have minimum Grade 8 Unisa. It is a requirement now and for the past seven, eight years we have gradually been increasing the requirements. For every teacher of ours must have a Grade 8, Grade 5 theory. A lot of them come to us, but we recruit. For example, you know we have got Lucky [indistinct] who started classical piano and he was doing very well. So the minute he hit Grade 7, we recruited him to say: we want you to teach classical piano. So he is now teaching more classical piano. So we will take tutors that we feel are very good. I mean students that are very good advanced. If they have about Grade 7, Grade 8, we encourage them. 'Do not you want to teach?' Almost everyone of them wants to teach, because it is a source of income.

NR: Yes, yes, of course, of course, which is great. I mean that is again ploughing back into the community. Like with my mom's centre. I mean she had also [indistinct] when they, you know... Onika, but I think you know Onika.

KD: I know Onika.

NR: Yes. Now, Onika, same thing. You know so obviously she matriculated. Then she also said: 'look, I want to start my own music centre'; and also started teaching and also got her, you know, colleagues to go and teach with her. So that is amazing. And tell me, and then do you think for South Africa, you know the concept that we live in. To implement like a programme like that, like El Sistema and so on. Should it be adapted to the country's background for example? Like, for example, do you think we should bring in African music, choirs?

KD: So in Venezuela they have already done that. They started with only classical music, but now they have traditional Venezuelan ensembles, huge ensembles. Ja, I mean they have harp ensembles, the Venezuelan harps cuatro. So they have like traditional music, traditional Venezuelan music ensembles. They have jazz, which is very big. They have jazz orchestras. They have rock ensembles. They have pop ensembles. Their music is now... it is all music. It is not just classical. The orchestras are so very big, but [indistinct] [00:29:22] Latin ensembles. So it is full of every kind of ensemble.

Ja. So in South Africa we would need that. I would say it is a very good model to follow; the African music ensembles, classical ensembles, jazz ensembles. Ja, they have got rock ensembles that only take the music of Queen and, you know, Bon Jovi. Ja, I mean it is all about [indistinct] and they have electronic rock ensembles which is all electronic instruments; so electric violins, electric orchestras. Ja, it has expanded at a tremendous rate. It is not just the traditional classical orchestra that you know.

NR: And tell me, Prof, if you could give like any advice, you know, to the university. Should the establishment of such a programme be considered, what advice?

KD: I would say the planning has to be done very well in advance. The biggest issue you are going to face is going to be the logistics of running the project. One, finances. There has to be a dedicated budget that is set for minimum five years to say: okay, for five years we are going to commit X amount; million rand, R2-million per year that is going to cover tutors. It is going to cover instruments, the repairs of instruments, transport, rental of a facility or a venue. So that is going to be the biggest challenge. The easier things to cope with is to integrate it with some of

the music educating so that those music ed students go and teach or that the practical students can take some of the teaching for credit. So put the teaching into practise.

The other issue that the university is going to face, would reface is securities in the townships; if you are in the townships. We just had a break-in last week and they stole a whole bunch of stuff. So that is the second issue. It is security. It is having someone in the area where the venue is secured. So I would say you have to identify a good venue that is as soon as secure as possible, because that is going to be the biggest challenge. The other big challenge is going to be transport, because the kids cannot walk. If a kid walks with an instrument, even during the day in the townships; they are soft targets. We found that as well.

NR: Oh, wow, okay, interesting.

KD: Ja, you know, [indistinct] in society you see a kid with an instrument case and they realise 'I can, ja, you know, steal the instrument, beat the kid up.' So that is the other issue that you are going to face. So we, again we tell our kids not to... if they are walking, they walk in groups. We try to figure out, you know, how to invest to secure the instruments so that they are safe, but those are going to be the... The logistics probably is going to be the biggest challenge.

NR: The biggest, ja, okay, all right. Okay, Prof, thank you so much. I really appreciate that.

KD: No problem.

NR: That is really amazing. Thank you so much for your time and sharing your advice and your experience with me. I really appreciate it.

KD: No, no problem, Nathalie. So any time, just shout, but I will send you Eddy Marciano's email address so you can email him.

NR: Okay, ja. That will be great. Thank you so much.

[End of Transcript]