



El Sistema Principles

1. Mission of social change.

El Sistema is a social change/youth development program that uses music to enable every child to feel like an asset within her or his community. Students feel an ownership of the music making process, taking responsibility for both individual and group improvement. For example, they often take on teaching roles themselves starting at an early age.

2. Access and excellence.

El Sistema includes as many children as it can, bringing young people into its community whenever possible, as young as possible, for as long as possible, whatever their background or abilities. By never placing a limit on a child's potential, El Sistema strives singlemindedly toward musical excellence for all students. In this way and others, the ideals of access and excellence are maintained in a productive balance that maximizes both the fullest success for all and highest accomplishment for some.

3. The nucleo environment.

The nucleo is a physical location, within the neighborhood where students live, that embodies the values and goals of El Sistema. It is a haven of safety, fun, joy, and friendship, with an ethos of positivity, creativity and aspiration, where all students are encouraged to explore their potential. The nucleo's doors are always open to community members.

4. Intensity.

Students spend a large amount of time at the nucleo, many hours per day, and almost all days of the week, often building up to four to six hours per day, six days per week. Rehearsals are fast paced and rigorous, demanding a durable commitment, personal responsibility, and a strong work ethic. Through frequent performances, students have many opportunities to excel and to share their accomplishments with their peers, family, and community.

5. The use of ensemble.

The learning in El Sistema is based in ensemble experience in which group achievement is balanced with individualized attention. The orchestra acts as a model society in which an atmosphere of competition between individuals is replaced by shared struggle. [Dr Abreu: "The orchestra is the only group that comes together with the sole purpose of agreement."] Choirs, Wind Bands, and Chamber Ensembles adopt the same ethos.

6. The CATS teacher model.

Those who work at the nucleo take on many jobs and multiple roles in relationship to the students. By acting as *citizens, artists, teachers and scholars*, these adults encourage their students to develop holistically: as active musicians, helpful educators, inquisitive learners and responsible civic contributors. The majority of El Sistema teachers and Núcleo leaders are former students of the program. They understand both the social and musical mission of the program — they nurture both the individual person and the musician at the same time.

7. The multi-year continuum.

El Sistema provides a “conveyor belt” of services, supporting its students from early childhood into adulthood. Despite variation in resources and practices, all nucleos work toward a full program. The “Academies” and other national teams have formed lists of sequential repertoire, orchestral levels, and pedagogical practices that create a through line for every child’s learning. Although each nucleo is encouraged to develop programs that suit its community, shared practices and unified vision allow El Sistema to provide its students with a continuous musical experience. The learning process develops the ear as the fundamental tool before the visual.

8. Family and community involvement.

Family participation is an essential aspiration of El Sistema. Many sites have parent ensembles and committees, and all actively work to involve the community at large through outreach concerts. By performing for their community as frequently as possible, the students rarely feel the pressure of formal performance, allowing performing to become a natural part of their musical lives.

9. Connections and network.

Although nucleos run independently and customize their programs, they are strongly connected to the one another through the people working within them. These interdependent relationships are manifested through events such as “seminarios,” which are intensive, project-based musical retreats where orchestras share repertoire, streamline technique, and build personal and institutional relationships. By uniting students and teachers from disparate parts of the country, the nucleo network embodies the El Sistema ideals of sharing and learning.