

Fundamental elements of El Sistema Venezuela Which Inform El Sistema-related Programs in the USA

As proposed / compiled by Eric Booth, Senior Advisor to El Sistema USA from a variety of documents and speeches

El Sistema is a set of inspiring ideals that has led to a clearly defined, intensive after-school music program that holds social change as its first goal and the highest values of excellence in music education as its close second. El Sistema is dedicated to at-risk and culturally underserved children.

Four core values:

- Every human being has the right to a life of dignity and contribution.
- Every child can learn to express music and art deeply and receive its many benefits.
- Overcoming poverty and adversity is best done by first strengthening the spirit, creating, as Dr. Abreu puts it: “an affluence of the spirit.”
- Effective education is based on love, approval, and community experience.

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1. El Sistema is a social change/youth development program that uses music to achieve its goal of enabling every child to feel a strong sense of self-worth and of personal value as an asset within a community. Students feel an ownership of the music making process, taking responsibility for both individual and group improvement.

2. The learning and “nucleo” experiences in El Sistema are intensified within the life of the child; “the nucleo” holds a primary place in the daily and weekly activities, interests and pleasures of the child, rather than a peripheral place as one interest among many. The “nucleo” is a haven of safety, fun, joy, and personal success, and the “intensity” is also expressed in number of hours per day of rehearsal.

3. The learning in El Sistema is almost entirely through work in ensembles, which perform frequently. The students *are* the community, and students take on the role of advocate in articulating what they are doing, in performing and teaching others.

4. There is a distinct quality to the teacher-student relationship within El

Sistema, in which the teacher takes on multiple roles in relationship to each child, and the child is perceived and guided holistically.

5. El Sistema places a high value on fun as a key element of the learning process and prioritizes personal connection to the music over concern about technical precision, in the belief that passion leads to precision. The fun is primarily a result of emotional and personal investment in the music and processes, individual artistry.

6. Peer-to-peer teaching and learning is an essential component of El Sistema's practice, based on the conviction that such learning promotes interpersonal and social development and helps build a strong sense of community. People of all ages make music together, including younger and older students, adults and professionals.

7. The El Sistema pedagogy contains many of the same elements we see in good music pedagogy elsewhere, but the priorities, balance and regular practices often follow different paths in order to focus upon the goals of personal and social development. The learning process develops the ear as the fundamental tool before the visual.

8. There are fundamental elements of curriculum that provide consistent kinds of learning within El Sistema, with allowance for local customization.

9. Continuity of learning throughout a child's growth and development is a key element of El Sistema practice; young people can be part of El Sistema from a very early age through their high school years, and starting young is especially valuable.

10. Family participation provides an essential component of El Sistema learning.