

Fundamental Elements of Venezuela's El Sistema

Which Inform and Guide El Sistema-inspired Programs in the USA

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- 1. Mission of social change.** El Sistema is a social change/youth development program that uses intensive ensemble music learning to accomplish its social goals.
- 2. Access and excellence.** El Sistema sites are located near its target communities and include as many children as it can regardless of "talent" or financial means--starting as young as possible and continuing as long as possible.
- 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 relentless positivity and aspiration, where all students are encouraged to explore their potential.
- 4. Intensity.** Students spend a large amount of time at the nucleo, many hours per day, with extra time for special opportunities. Rehearsals are fast paced and rigorous, demanding a durable commitment, personal responsibility, and a strong work ethic.
- 5. The use of ensemble.** The learning in El Sistema is based in ensemble experience, group learning and practice, sectional learning, frequent performance, and consistent (but strategic) individualized attention within and beyond the group setting. Individual lessons are prized and do contribute (especially as students develop into more accomplished orchestras), but the ensemble is the main learning setting. Students' primary musical identification is as an ensemble member more than as "a violinist."
- 6. The CATS teacher model: Citizen/Artist/Teacher/Scholar.** 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 (the CATS model was suggested by the first cohort of Sistema Fellows), these adults encourage their students to develop holistically: as active musicians, helpful educators, inquisitive learners and responsible civic contributors.
- 7. The multi-year continuum.** El Sistema provides a "conveyor belt" of services, supporting its students from early childhood into adulthood.
- 8. Family and community inclusion.** Family participation is an essential aspiration and growing practice in El Sistema, and expands into an active ongoing relationship with the larger community the family inhabits.
- 9. Connections and network.** Although nucleos run independently and customize their programs, they are strongly connected to the national leadership organization, and tied to the many other nucleos that form the El Sistema network.
- 10. Ambition and achievement.** El Sistema work is more than merely good for young people. It aspires to transform young lives. The catalyst that makes it for a life transformative impact is not just the aspiration for excellence, but the degree of hunger driving the aspiration for excellence.