

# Sistema Principles

These principles were drawn up following collective discussions between a number of Sistema programmes and Sistema England in 2014.

## Values underpinning the principles

We hold a shared belief in the power of social impact through excellence in immersive orchestral group music-making in a community or place.

## A 'golden thread'

We envisage a 'golden thread' that runs through all programmes, based on the principles at the heart of Sistema work. Whilst we expect there to be variation from programme to programme to meet local need and conditions, programmes will aspire to demonstrate certain core principles and values. These principles should be understood in the context of two overarching ideas:

- That Sistema is a process not a model, that must remain dynamic and flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the children, families and neighbourhoods it serves, and the difference communities in which it is delivered.
- That Sistema work should be underpinned by action research and longitudinal evaluation, leading to improvement, development and innovation, and capturing outcomes and impact.

## The Principles

- 1. Music as a joyful agent of Social Change through child-centred pedagogy.** Though the programme is focused on social improvement and youth development, it uses playing music together as its vehicle. Students are encouraged to feel an ownership of the music making process as an aid to their social development, taking responsibility for both individual and group improvement. The programme encourages music to be used as an agent of joyful expression - passion first, refinement second - and joy to be one of the core energies of the process. The pedagogy is therefore child-centred and based on action.
- 2. Focused on and embedded in selected, most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.** This is a programme focused on social impact and as such it is focused on areas of need. It may also mean that children and young people who not otherwise get the opportunity get access to music education, but that is secondary to the social ambitions.
- 3. The Lifelong Continuum.** A Sistema programme must be developed and have an impact over the longest of terms. It will provide a continuous train of services, supporting its students from early childhood into adulthood. This requires a long-term organisational commitment and outstanding local leadership.
- 4. Access, Excellence and Progression.** A Sistema programme will include 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, with an 'arc of progression' that maintains commitment and engagement. As the programme strives single-mindedly toward musical excellence for all students, it also provides intensive training for the most committed and gifted, supporting progression to other music making opportunities where and when appropriate. In this way and others, the ideals of access and excellence are maintained in a productive balance that aims to maximise both the fullest success and highest accomplishment for all.

- 5. Free and Open to All.** A Sistema programme is free and open to everyone in the selected community regardless of ability to pay.
- 6. Learning through Performing.** Performance is encouraged from an early age and children play in front of audiences as often as possible and from as early as possible. The aim is to make performance a natural part of their musical life and reduce performance anxiety, but it also has significant implications for social impact, around building confidence and developing a virtuous circle of community improvement through praise, collective achievement, civic pride and recognition. Regular performances and events strengthen relationships and build trust with and between families and community networks.
- 7. The Support of the Núcleo Environment.** In Venezuela, the Núcleo is a physical location, within the students' neighbourhood, that embodies the values and goals of El Sistema. It is a haven of safety, fun, joy, and friendship, with an ethos of support, positivity and aspiration, where all students are encouraged to explore their potential, and a place that enables every child to feel like an asset within her or his community, both inside and outside of the Núcleo. A Sistema programme will work towards adapting this principle to the realities of the communities it engages with and buildings that host activities, remembering that the learning environment is an important aspect of the work.
- 8. Immersion and Intensity.** A Sistema programme will work towards achieving the highest possible level or immersion, frequency and intensity, based on the needs and possibilities of the children and the communities it engages with and the local requirements to successfully achieve its stated outcomes. Rehearsals are fast paced and rigorous, demanding a durable commitment, personal responsibility, team work and a strong work ethic.
- 9. Ensemble at the Centre.** The learning is based on the ensemble experience in which group achievement is balanced with individualised attention. The orchestra acts as a model society in which an atmosphere of competition between individuals is replaced by shared struggle and collective celebration of achievement. Smaller ensembles and choruses adopt the same ethos.
- 10. Holistic Child Development.** Those who work in a Sistema programme will take on many jobs and multiple roles in relationship to the students beyond teaching. By using the CATS model and acting as Citizens, Artists, Teachers and Scholars, these adults will encourage their students to develop holistically: as active musicians, helpful educators, inquisitive learners and responsible civic contributors. Ideally, students will take on teaching roles themselves starting at an early age, and mentoring will be a natural activity and a valuable technique for all ages.
- 11. Families and Communities.** Family participation and community involvement are essential aspirations of a Sistema programme. Siblings will attend the programme, parents will attend classes with the youngest students, and families will form the bulk of the audience at orchestra concerts. Eventually, the programme can lead to parent musical ensembles, and it will involve the community at large through concerts and events. Families and communities will be strengthened, and collaborations between them boosted.
- 12. Connections and Networks.** A Sistema programme will engage with other social and music education programmes in England (including other Sistema-inspired projects and Music Education Hubs), as well as El Sistema in Venezuela and Sistema programmes in Europe and other regions. By uniting students and teachers throughout this loose network, the programme embodies the El Sistema ideals of sharing and learning. Programmes will contribute to and learn from wider knowledge exchange in El Sistema networks, music, arts and culture, education, health, regeneration and community development.