

# Schooling Habitus:

An auto/ethnographic study of music education's  
entanglements with cultural hegemony

Stephen Thomas Fairbanks

Girton College

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**Declaration:**

*I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.*

## **Abstract**

This thesis emerges out of my autoethnographic experience as a music-educator-turned-researcher in negotiating some of the entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony.

In recent years, youth orchestras have been strongly promoted as a catalyst for social justice. Advocates of such programmes argue that the benefits of youth orchestra participation should be made available to all, regardless of cultural or socioeconomic circumstances. However, critics of these programmes contend that musical expression is culturally-situated and thus inappropriate to impose upon disadvantaged youth by the dominant culture. Such diverging viewpoints have resulted in an ideological impasse regarding the role of youth orchestras in respect to social justice.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus', 'cultural capital', and 'symbolic violence' offer a framework by which social justice questions and cultural expressions can be merged into one. Accordingly, I use a Bourdieusian framework to explore the way in which habitus is influenced in the context of a youth orchestra, specifically focusing upon a highly successful high school orchestra in an ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged community along California's international border with Mexico.

Findings from auto/ethnographic fieldwork suggest that (1) school orchestras may be predisposed to perpetuate cultural hegemony and (2) individual students have sophisticated ways of mediating the effects of cultural hegemony. Building from these findings, I assert that if music educators can awaken to the possibility that they may be entangled in the perpetuation of cultural hegemony, they will be better able to acknowledge, address, and shape the way in which schooling impacts upon student habitus.

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## PRELUDE

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## Prelude

San Diego had disappeared into the rear-view mirror well over an hour before. Vegetation was becoming increasingly sparse, and the heat more pronounced. I was in the driver's seat with my wife Carolee beside me. Momentarily we would be descending 'the grade', the 10-mile portion of the interstate highway where the road careens down 2800 feet of mountainside to the floor of the Imperial Valley. Our destination was El Centro, California.

After descending the grade, my conversation with Carolee abruptly ceased. The sudden change in the landscape perhaps confronted me with a momentary realisation of what I was endeavouring to do, and the consequent urge to contemplate things in silence became deafening. One month previous, I had graduated from university with my bachelor's degree in music education. Now, I was in a far off and lonesome corner of the United States, about to discover whether the preceding four years I had spent at university held potency. As a student, I had proclaimed that I wanted to be a teacher at a 'disadvantaged' school in order to directly address the vast disparities schoolchildren encounter in educational opportunities. Teeming with such ideals, I had spent the previous month pouring through job postings, researching school demographics, applying for positions, and awaiting responses from would-be employers. Now I found myself a scant 25 miles of desert highway away from 'Kumeyaay' High School, on my way to a job interview. My intention was to convince the hiring committee that I should be selected as the school's next orchestra director and, in that capacity, begin to shape the lives of El Centro's young people.

With seemingly blank emotion, the desert replied that I was entering unfamiliar terrain. I gazed across a seemingly endless expanse of parched earth, punctuated only by the ghostly site of brown, scraggly ocotillo. Having been raised in the Pacific Northwest, this terrain was considerably different from the forests, lakes, and mountains which I was more accustomed to. My racing thoughts

remained safely fixated upon the exoticism of the physical landscape, shielding me from the desert's caution about a different unfamiliarity. Shortly, I would be asserting that I should be entrusted with the responsibility of teaching in a school in which 95% of the student body were ethnic minorities, 70% were categorised as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 43% identified as English Language Learners. I would assert my suitability to shape the lives of these young people, irrespective of my different ethnicity, my different socioeconomic status, and my different cultural upbringing. Effectively, I was careening into ethical complexities pertaining to cultural hegemony, for which my prior academic experiences could not have sufficiently prepared me. I urged my car onward through the empty landscape, heeding – but not fully comprehending – the desert's pronouncement that I was propelling myself beyond the point where my habitus would fully hold efficacy.

During the past twelve years, desert landscapes, orchestra classrooms, and university libraries have merged into one as I have increasingly hearkened to the desert's call to consider the unfamiliarity of the terrain. This thesis recounts my efforts to gain familiarity with that terrain. It traverses through autoethnographic reminiscences, educational theory, stories of people encountered, and discussions about education's complex relationship with social justice. As might be expected, El Centro features centrally in my research, not only as a catalyst for originally initiating the research, but also as a fieldwork site. In like manner, school orchestras feature prominently, as does El Sistema, a network of Venezuelan youth orchestras which has purportedly saved thousands of children from poverty. But though my research is clothed in the language and discourse of music and music education, it is perhaps most accurately conceived as a commentary upon the entanglements between society, education, and cultural hegemony, for that is what remains after all the noise finally settles and the quiet of the desert can finally be heard.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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## **Section 1.1: Enchanted by El Sistema**

In 2007, the Venezuelan youth orchestra programme known as El Sistema became an international sensation, ‘capturing the public imagination’ (Creech, et al., 2016, p. 35) and generating widespread interest in using music education for social rescue (Bernstein & Tunstall, 2013). El Sistema purportedly serves hundreds of thousands of children and youth in Venezuela by providing free, ensemble-based musical tuition in community centres throughout the country. It was in 2008 that I first learned about El Sistema, and in looking back across the intervening decade, I can readily acknowledge that El Sistema ‘captur[ed] [my] imagination’ regarding music, music education, and social justice (see Creech, et al., 2016, p. 35). At the time I was in the midst of a graduate degree in orchestral conducting, and I had just completed two years of employment as a high school orchestra teacher in a community with pronounced socioeconomic disadvantage. Accordingly, when I learned that El Sistema was creating youth orchestras in areas of poverty, it felt as though I was being presented with an institution which was engaged in the very same work I had been devoting my career, namely the widening of young people’s participation in orchestra and the reaching out to marginalised populations. Thus, upon discovering El Sistema, I promptly became a Sistema enthusiast. Little did I know that that decision would eventually propel me into doctoral study, which would lead me to examine my own complicity as a music educator – as well as that of the music education profession more broadly – in reinforcing deep levels of cultural hegemony.

### **1.1.1 Spellbound: First encounters with El Sistema**

In 2008, I was aware that something exciting was sweeping across the classical music world. The Los Angeles Philharmonic had just made an announcement that their new music director would be 27-year-old Gustavo Dudamel. Because I was 28-years-old and in the midst of a master’s degree in orchestral conducting, I took particular interest in Dudamel’s appointment. I found it thrillingly inspirational to think that someone my age could be leading such an important and esteemed symphony orchestra.

A few months later, I came across a DVD in my university's music library entitled *The Power of Music* (Sanchez Lansch, 2008). The cover image was of Gustavo Dudamel, the young conductor whose meteoric rise to prominence I had been hearing about. I checked out the DVD and viewed the documentary; from that moment, I was spellbound. The documentary recounted Gustavo's leadership of Venezuela's Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, the flagship orchestra of El Sistema, as they prepared Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony* for the 2007 Beethovenfest in Bonn, Germany. Rich in imagery, the documentary juxtaposed forlorn images of Caracas, Venezuela – the home of the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra – with transcendent images of Europe's classical music edifices. The documentary carried a message of transformation, proclaiming that as the members of the orchestra come together in unity of musical interpretation, they were empowered to transcend their impoverished origins.

In viewing the documentary, I felt that many of my own motivations for becoming a music educator had been affirmed and enacted on the screen. Three years previous, I had begun my teaching career as a high school orchestra director, having selected my career because I believed deeply in the capacity of music education to transform communities. More specifically, I had intentionally sought out a music teaching job in El Centro, California, a community which shares much in common with what I saw depicted in the film – pronounced challenges stemming from economic disadvantage. My intention in seeking out that position was to use music to help my students transcend the economic hardships which pervaded so much of their community. At the time I viewed the documentary, I had been actively engaged in such work for two years. To watch my own ideals as a music educator depicted in film felt almost surreal; it felt as though I was watching an echo of my own career, discovering that not only was there an apparent groundswell of interest in the type of work I had been engaged, it was also being celebrated as transcendently heroic work.

The film had a powerful effect upon me, for I had recently been questioning my career aspirations. At the time, I could not fully articulate why I was questioning them, but I distinctly remembering that after watching the documentary I became recommitted to the ideals of widening young people's participation in orchestra and reaching out to disadvantaged populations. Furthermore, I became convinced that I had found an institution which was proving itself to be the vanguard of orchestral music education. Therefore, I dismissed the uneasiness I had once felt about my work as a high school orchestra teacher and I eagerly counted myself as a Sistema enthusiast.



### 1.1.2 Sympathetic: Youth orchestras, inclusivity, and social justice

Thereafter, I actively engaged in learning as much as I could about El Sistema. To my delight, I discovered that there was a growing movement behind El Sistema's assertion that youth orchestras could be envisioned as a medium for social justice. Such a possibility was seemingly becoming self-evident after El Sistema's four internationally-celebrated achievements of 2007:

- El Sistema's flagship orchestra, the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, received critical acclaim for its BBC Proms debut (see Clements, 2007)
- Gustavo Dudamel, the El Sistema-trained conductor, was appointed the new music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (LAPA, 2007).
- The Inter-American Development Bank announced a \$150 million investment into El Sistema (IADB, 2007)
- The documentary titled *Tocar y Luchar* [To play and to fight] (Arvelo, 2006) enjoyed widespread circulation after winning major awards at the Miami Film Festival and other international film festivals.

These four events championed the message that children participating in El Sistema obtained increased ability to fight (i.e. *luchar*) against the adverse effects of poverty through playing (i.e. *tocar*) together in an orchestra.

El Sistema was founded in 1975, when Venezuelan economist and musician Jose Antonio Abreu desired to established a pre-professional orchestra to provide performance opportunities for young conservatoire-trained Venezuelans who had been unable to obtain positions in the Venezuelan professional orchestras (Tunstall, 2012). Over several decades, that pre-professional orchestra expanded into a nationwide network of youth and children's orchestras, obtaining substantial government funding and support. The former name of the organisation<sup>1</sup> - *Fundacion del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela* (of which 'El Sistema' is a truncated form) - reflects this period of expansion.

In El Sistema, ensembles rehearse daily in community centres (called *nucleos*) for several hours every day. El Sistema leadership asserts that "the collective practice of music through symphony

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, the official name of El Sistema was changed to *Fundacion Musical Simon Bolivar*. However, because of the widespread use of the name *El Sistema*, the organisation continues to be known by its former name.

orchestras and choruses [acts] as a means of social organization and communitarian development” (FMSB, 2014). The symphony orchestra and the repertoire of the western classical canon represent the primary objective as well as the preferred setting for music instruction. Instruments and music instruction are provided free of charge. Proponents of El Sistema assert that this free, intensive, orchestra-based curriculum has been successful at rescuing countless children from disadvantage and deprivation (Tunstall, 2012), and accordingly, they have advocated strongly for replicating El Sistema outside of Venezuela.

There has been a rapid worldwide proliferation of Sistema-inspired programmes. By 2013, there were upwards of 277 distinct Sistema programmes in 58 countries (Creech, et al., 2013) and that number has continued to grow each year (see <http://sistemaglobal.org>). In the early years of these Sistema-inspired programmes – i.e. between 2007 and 2013 – it seemed as though this ‘Venezuelan music miracle’ had only allies, and that Sistema-inspired programmes were only limited in their expansion due to scarcity of financial resources. Treatises on how to replicate El Sistema’s successes soon appeared as books (see Tunstall, 2012; Borzacchini, 2010) and articles in professional journals (see Booth, 2009, 2011; Govias, 2011; Lesniak, 2012, 2013; Tunstall, 2013). Film documentaries, numerous news stories, and countless individuals’ testimonials carried the message that El Sistema was improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of impoverished Venezuelan children (see Arvelo, 2006; 2010; Smaczny & Stodtmeier, 2009). Predominantly, the writings on Sistema echoed the views of El Sistema founder Jose Antonio Abreu (2009):

[Orchestras] are examples and schools of social life, because to sing and to play together mean to intimately coexist toward perfection and excellence, following a strict discipline of organisation and coordination in order to seek the harmonic interdependence of voices and instruments...This is why music is immensely important in the awakening of sensibility, in the forging of values and in the training of youngsters to teach other kids (Abreu, 2009, para 5).

And thus, Sistema-inspired programmes began to proliferate rapidly. Programmes boasted that they were replacing guns with violins and exchanging gangs for ensembles (see Uy, 2012). Professional symphonies and large arts organisations began to sponsor programmes and monumental fundraising, promotion, and recruitment efforts began (see Hollingsworth, 2013). And – perhaps as a direct consequence – a nearly unprecedented amount of media attention began to follow some of these programmes (Yang, 2014). ‘Sistema’ became synonymous with inclusivity, innovation, and community outreach. It became the rallying cry for increasing access to music education, especially for those communities which were not generally participating in youth symphony opportunities. The assertion was – and continues to be – frequently made that participation in Sistema programmes leads to heightened aspirations, increased pro-social behaviours, improved achievement, and greater

likelihood of success in life (Creech, et al., 2013). Essentially, Sistema came to symbolise a certain belief about music education's place in society, one which proclaims that youth orchestras are inherently edifying for individuals and communities.

### **1.1.3 Inspired: On founding a new Sistema programme in my community**

As I continued to hear the inspiring messages of these Sistema activists, I determined that I should do as many of my Sistema peers had done: I would launch a Sistema-inspired programme in my community. At the time, I was living and teaching school in Park City, Utah, a resort community in the Wasatch Mountains, known for its outdoor recreation, the Sundance Film Festival, and world-class skiing. As a school teacher, I knew that Park City schools had been grappling with a pronounced achievement gap, one which was predominantly drawn along racial and socioeconomic lines. The population of Park City was sharply divided between those who lived there because of its recreational desirability (i.e. the upper middle class) and those who lived there because they could find employment in the resorts' service industry (i.e. the working class). For the most part, the service workers were predominantly Spanish-speaking and Hispanic/Latino, whereas the non-service sector was primarily English-speaking and white. The school-aged children of the English-speaking population tended to do well in school, whereas the children of the Spanish-speaking population were often regarded as educationally 'at-risk'. As an intervention, I proposed that a Sistema-inspired programme could address the achievement gap by bringing students from these two populations into a context of shared music making. I argued that the students' musical interactions with each other would foster a sense of interdependence, thereby counteracting many of the adverse educational effects which are caused by social exclusion.

Thus, I launched a Sistema-inspired programme for the express purpose of bring together these two populations together as interdependent musicians. I designed the programme as a partnership between three organizations: the Park City School District, the Utah Symphony, and the Park City Education Foundation. The programme became part of the school district's wrap-around care offerings, running for three days a week, after regular school hours. In each session, pupils received a snack, a group music lesson, guided instruction on a musical instrument, and an ensemble rehearsal. All costs were borne by the school district, the symphony, and the education foundation, ensuring that all pupils could participate, regardless of their socioeconomic status. High school students acted

as tutors and mentors in the programme, teaching alongside me as we delivered the programme to primary-aged pupils.

The programme enjoyed immediate and notable successes: school children and their parents raved about the programme; local media – newspaper, radio, and TV – promoted the programme; the symphony invited participants and their families to attend concerts as special guests; and an impact evaluation determined that the programme was proving successful at addressing and overcoming the achievement gap between white and Hispanic / Latino students. Moreover, I secured funding to not only continue the programme for the following year, but also to expand the programme to three additional sites. It seemed that the Venezuelan music miracle (see Borzacchini, 2010) held potency wherever it was planted, even in the snowy mountain peaks of Park City, Utah.

## **Section 1.2: Provoked to Pursue Doctoral Research**

During the two years in which I directed Park City's fledgling Sistema-inspired programme, I increasingly began to feel unsettled about the work I was doing as a Sistema director. Though I could not fully articulate the malaise I was experiencing, I knew that I could not brush aside these misgivings in the same way I had dismissed similar misgivings before (see section 1.1.1). Though I continued to outwardly advocate for my Sistema programme, I began to be more self-reflective about the work I was engaged in, and I realised that in my eagerness to become a Sistema enthusiast, I had not fully considered whether all aspects of the Sistema message were in full alignment with my own teaching identity and philosophy. As I subsequently began to explore my misgivings, I soon found that there were aspects of Sistema ideology that I found troubling, including an apparent disdain for school music programmes.

Once I was willing to distance myself from the vested position of being a Sistema enthusiast, I began to realise that other criticisms carried resonance. In time, such self-reflection led me to conclude that I was entangled in the midst of a complex knot of music education, cultural values, and social status. Disentangling myself from that knot increasingly became an urgent priority for me, and I largely ascribe my PhD studies to my desire to untangle that knot. In this section, I trace my journey from Sistema enthusiast to Sistema researcher.

### **1.2.1 Unsettled: Misgivings about my own commitment to Sistema**

Notwithstanding the many accolades I received for my work with Park City's Sistema programme, I found that I had a growing sense of discomfort. At that time, I had not yet encountered the intense criticisms which would soon bedevil Sistema discussion, but I did find myself inextricably wondering about the veracity of some of the claims made by Sistema proponents, and which I heard myself

repeating. Concurrent to being the founding director of Park City's Sistema-inspired programme, I was also teaching music classes in the school district. Accordingly, I was presented with a daily juxtaposition between my school-based classroom teaching and my after-school Sistema programme. Because I had so often heard – and also myself repeated – that Sistema programmes were visionary models of what music education could and should look like, I was troubled that I was harbouring a growing suspicion that these two music teaching contexts were actually mirror images of each other. The main distinction between them seemed to be their target populations: Sistema programmes were explicitly reaching out to underserved populations, whereas school programmes did not necessarily have that as an explicit focus. However, I eventually convinced myself to dismiss the perception that these programmes were mirror images, arguing that I probably needed to develop a distinctly more 'Sistema' approach to my teaching and music-making before I would see the unmistakable and particularly unique aspects of a Sistema program.

To such an end, I decided to seek out specific training on being a Sistema programme director. A few weeks later, I attended the 2012 *Take a Stand Symposium*, an event hosted by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and designed to 'drive forward [the] collective thinking on the subject of El Sistema' (YOLA, 2012). Keynote speakers included Gustavo Dudamel and Jose Antonio Abreu, two of the foremost leaders of Sistema thinking and practice. Practical workshops and discussion were led by a team of Sistema fellows, scholars who had spent several weeks in residence with Venezuela's El Sistema, intending to replicate El Sistema in the United States and abroad (see section 1.1.2). As I attended the various workshops and keynote addresses, I soon became keenly aware that I represented an unusual positionality: I straddled the worlds of school orchestras and Sistema programmes, and regarded them as being complementary to each other. However, many of the other attendees were dismissive of school music programs and even outright antagonistic towards them. In illustration of this, one of the convenors of the symposium gave a keynote address in which he emphatically stated, '[The El Sistema movement] represents an end of music education as we know it in this country, which, by the way, *has done more harm than good!*' (Botstein, 2012, emphasis added). His remarks were met with spontaneous applause by the audience of 300 attendees.

Prior to that moment, I had not entertained the idea that there might be any conflict between my work as a school music teacher and my work as a Sistema director. After all, I had been drawn to the Sistema movement precisely because it resonated so closely with the work I had been engaged in as

a school-based music teacher (see section 1.1.1). To enter the seemingly parallel world of Sistema music, and then discover that my intended colleagues were harbouring antagonistic feelings towards American music education was startling. And, it made me wonder whether some of the seeming enthusiasm behind Sistema programmes was a veiled opportunistic grab to exploit music education as a private interest, rather than letting it proceed as a concern of public education. Against such a shocking possibility, I approached the remaining sessions of the symposium with a heightened degree of scepticism.

Moreover, when I returned from the symposium, I began to wonder whether Sistema programmes were truly about empowering marginalised youth, or whether they might be more accurately described as ventures in musical entrepreneurship, with ‘social justice’ being exploited as means for obtaining vast amounts of funding. Such a possibility troubled me deeply, especially given my own long-standing desire to reach out to marginalised populations and to expand young people’s opportunities to participate in orchestras.

As I found my Sistema enthusiasm in question, I also found that the unsettledness I had experienced in El Centro was resurfacing (see section 1.1.1). When I had first begun teaching in El Centro, I had perhaps thought of myself as being there to rescue the students from the perils of their community. But as I taught there, I discovered that such a ‘rescuer’ identity was problematic, and when I left El Centro, I had unresolved questions about how I should position myself in relation to the students I was teaching. However, when I learned about El Sistema, I had brushed aside such thoughts, implicitly believing that El Sistema’s success and popularity had perhaps shown that I need not worry. Yet, as I began to question some of the enthusiasm – including my own – over El Sistema, the discomfort that I had experienced in El Centro returned, and brought with it some even more unsettling possibilities about my positioning as a music educator.

### **1.2.2 Intrigued: A counter-narrative of neo-colonialism**

At this point, it was 2012, and Sistema programmes had been enjoying a ‘honeymoon’ period, with seemingly widespread acceptance of their social justice assertions (see section 1.1.2). However, over

the next 18-month period, that would abruptly change, and Sistema ideology would become the subject of intense scrutiny. The music critic Igor Toronyi-Lalic (2012) cracked open the floodgates on such scrutiny when he unabashedly recast El Sistema's salvific narrative as a neo-colonial endeavour to universalise the cultural views of the western middle class:

The enthusiasm with which people greet [Sistema] troubles me. It troubles me because it comes across as if art is being used to civilise the lower orders ... It exemplifies a type of middle class cultural creep that is often couched in the same obnoxiously worthy language that accompanied Victorian missions to the colonies (p. 21).

I was in the midst of my own unsettledness regarding my Sistema work in Park City when I first came across these views. I began to understand why I was troubled: Sistema ideology represented a distinct philosophical posturing regarding the fundamental purposes of education, music, and music education. Amidst my enthusiasm to take up the mantle of Sistema work, I had not fully explored whether I was in alignment with such views. Even though I had confronted similar issues regarding my teaching in El Centro, I had allowed the Sistema bandwagon to sweep me along without considering the potential entrapments of cultural hegemony when music education is intentionally utilised as a vehicle for advancing social justice. Using Toronyi-Lalic's censuring to re-examine my own Sistema work, I became intensely intrigued in hearing more about such views, especially given my desire to reconcile the unsettled feelings I was experiencing regarding my own career pursuits in both El Centro and Park City. On the one hand, it seemed that I was successfully using orchestra to address a number of social inequities, but on the other hand, I had a growing suspicion that I was becoming complicit to perpetuating other social inequities.

It would be a full two years later before Geoff Baker (2014b) would amplify the argument that El Sistema was engaged in neo-colonialism, but for me, the Pandora's box had suddenly been thrust open. In an instant, I began to reassess my Sistema work with new perspective, and indeed, I began to look at the wider field of music education with a post-colonial lens. Prior to that time, I had been unable to fully articulate my growing unsettledness about Sistema ideology, but upon encountering the Toronyi-Lalic's (2012) critique, I began to have language for exploring my own complicity in cultural hegemony.



### 1.2.3 Entangled: Research-induced ideological circles

Contemporaneous to my encounters with Sistema criticisms, I had been entertaining the idea of pursuing postgraduate study. As I began to realise the complexity of Sistema orientations to music education, I correspondingly began to realise that Sistema research could make a particularly meaningful doctoral study. Although I had only begun to unpack the complexities which would ultimately lead me to constructing an auto/ethnographic study, I determined that I would make Sistema research the focus of my studies. However, it is perhaps interesting to note that when I formally commenced my postgraduate studies and put forward my first research proposal, it was conspicuously sanitised of the ideological discomfort I had been grappling with:

In straddling the worlds of school music and *El Sistema*, I plainly see the growing friction between *El Sistema* inspired programs and school music programs. In considering doctoral study, I had initially shied away from studying and writing about *El Sistema* because I thought that my voice would be lost among the many who are already passionately discussing it. However, I have since realized that amidst the fervor, there is a striking absence of objective, peer-reviewed research. In comparing *El Sistema* and school programs, I intend to identify the points of friction between them. I believe that those friction points will inform each faction of their respective strengths. In identifying those strengths, in engaging in open dialogue, and in incorporating each others' best practices, I hope to improve music education for all children, ultimately strengthening the capacity of music to be a force for social change worldwide (Fairbanks, 2013a, p. 2).

With the characteristic eager enthusiasm of a new postgraduate student, and without acknowledging myself as being entangled in the complexities I was proposing to examine, I began to immerse myself in pursuing a literature review which would serve as the foundation for my proposed study. To my surprise – and as I recount in my first essay – I was ultimately redirected toward ideologically more substantive material:

Different than the findings of many literature reviews which propose to show how their research questions emerges [sic] from valid, reliable literature, this essay has arrived at a research question *because* of the uncertain scholarship of the literature reviewed. This essay reveals the need to conduct an additional literature review, focusing on social justice, the transmission of culture, and critical theory (Fairbanks, 2013b, p. 15).

In my initial research attempt, I had tried to take an approach in which I distanced myself from the ideologically conflicted space I was in. However, I ultimately discovered through my literature review that I would be unable to proceed until I began to address such issues. Accordingly, I grasped ahold of the imperatives of critical theory, social justice, and the transmission of culture, anticipating that the interactions between these three ideas would unlock the more substantive aspects of my proposed research.

Once I was able to reconceptualise my research as pertaining to social justice in music education, rather than merely being a comparison between school orchestras and Sistema programmes, I better understood why I had been locked into ideological circles. The social justice literature introduced me to Gavin Campbell's (2000) study of the music reformers of gilded age America, and his recognition of ideological circles carried deep resonance to my own experiences:

In the end, music reformers forever spiralled in an ideological circle, doubling back on themselves as they struggled to combine their own deep concern for those less fortunate with their equally abiding desire to reinforce their own values, their own moral vision, and their own definition of democracy (p. 262).

In reading Campbell's observation, I suddenly understood how Sistema programmes could simultaneously be epitomising social justice whilst positioning themselves as neo-colonial cultural organisations. But more poignantly, I understood why I had experienced such unsettledness in my previous teaching, especially when I was asserting that orchestra participation would act as a catalyst for social justice.

#### **1.2.4 The Structure of this Thesis**

As I have sought to pursue my research – and thus address my own ideological circles – I have determined that I must build my thesis in a way which continually circles back on itself. It aims to be outward looking, but in a way which must be deeply introspective. Metaphorically, it is as if the study is a pane of glass, through which, if the light is adjusted appropriately, I am able to both see outwardly and also see my own reflection. In its way, it is not unlike the cubist artists who sought to portray multiple perspectives at once, bringing certain contrasts into high relief. This thesis represents my effort to use the tools of research to make sense of the conflicted space in which I inhabit. Or, in other words, this thesis has emerged out of my efforts to use Sistema – and specifically the Sistema ideological circles – as a lens by which to (re)examine the entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony.

In the literature review (see Chapter 2: Review of the Literatures), I unpack and otherwise explore the scholarly literature on the reifications of (1) social justice, (2) inclusivity, and (3) enculturation, three of the dominant themes of Sistema approaches to music education. I introduce some of the theoretical debates pertaining to each of these constructs, using the debates to give rise to my

research questions. Building from my research questions, I then identify a research methodology (see Chapter 3: Methodology & Methods) suitable for studying the complex relationships between sociology, music, and education. I argue for auto/ethnography, a synthesis of ethnography and autoethnography, noting that while ethnography provides the tools for achieving an emic understanding of the nuanced cultural and social elements which will be studied, autoethnography allows me to position myself in the narrative as a reflexive researcher-teacher, thus bringing together introspective and ethnographic observation in a dialectical synthesis. Thereafter, I introduce a Bourdieusian theoretical framework, using Bourdieu's contributions to theory as a bridge between the conceptual framing of the study and the eventual analysis.

Next, I present my fieldwork site (see Chapter 4: Fieldwork), 'Kumeyaay' High School Orchestra, a highly-successful high school string orchestra programme in El Centro, California. With contextual ethnographic depth, I first describe El Centro, introducing the reader to the agricultural, desert community situated ten miles north of the United States' international border with Mexico. Thereafter, I discuss my own relationship to the community, commenting upon how being a former resident of El Centro provides me with a unique perspective for pursuing fieldwork there. I conclude the chapter by describing the orchestra programme itself and disclosing some of the practicalities of collecting data in El Centro.

In chapter five (see Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion) I show how the data suggest that (1) school orchestras may be predisposed to perpetuate cultural hegemony and (2) individual students have sophisticated ways of mediating the effects of cultural hegemony. I then place the findings in relief against the literature reviewed earlier (see Chapter 6: Further Discussion), commenting upon the intersections between my findings and the constructs of enculturation, inclusivity, and social justice.

In the final chapter (see Chapter 7: Conclusions & Implications), I draw the study to a close, offering some cautious conclusions and related implications. I first make the observation that music education and cultural hegemony are deeply entangled with one another, in turn suggesting that schooling can have a decided impact upon individuals' habitus. I invite individual music educators to awaken to the possibility that they may be complicit in perpetuating cultural hegemony and I urge educational policymakers to ensure that schooling encompasses a plurality of viewpoints. I conclude the thesis by reflecting on my own efforts to sensitise myself to issues of cultural hegemony and then

commenting upon how my future research and teaching endeavours will be highly influenced by this study.

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURES**

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## **Section 2.1: Unpacking ‘Sistema’**

Through my work as a Sistema director, I began to realise the degree to which music education can become entangled in cultural hegemony (see section 1.2.3), and I correspondingly found that such Sistema insights awakened the possibility that I could re-examine my work as a school music teacher through such a lens. In this chapter, I use Sistema literature as a pivot to explore the entanglements between cultural hegemony and my work as an American music educator. In doing so, I assert that by juxtaposing Sistema programmes with those of American school-based music education, it might be possible to open up new areas of inquiry which have hitherto been unexplored. Or, in other words, Sistema could act as a lens through which to view American music education. Then, as American school-based music education uses this lens to reassess its own efficacy and purposes, new insights might emerge, which in turn, could represent the profound change spoken about regarding ‘music education in this country’ (Botstein, 2012). Towards this end, I open this section with a contextualisation of American music education in the public schools. Secondly, I draw attention to profound parallels between Sistema approaches and school approaches to the teaching of music. Third, I make an historical contextualisation of other times music education has been utilised for social means. And finally, I identify some possible questions Sistema programmes pose to school-based American music education.

### **2.1.1 Contextualising American music education: Historical-political overview**

Music education represents a highly celebrated tradition in American public education, with a history dating back more than 180 years (Mark & Gary, 2007). Currently in American secondary schools, music instruction is provided almost exclusively through the medium of large performing ensembles such as band, orchestras, and choirs. These performing ensembles stand alongside schools’ other curricular offerings and take place as regularly scheduled classes. From the vantage point of the UK – where I am currently based as I write this dissertation – such an approach to music education might

seem unusual since orchestra participation in UK schools generally takes place as an extra-curricular activity. However, amongst Americans it is generally regarded as an efficient, appropriate, and celebrated medium for delivering music education. To accommodate for the differences in which music education is pursued, practiced, and conceptualised across international educational contexts, I will provide a brief historical and contextual survey of American music education. I do so for three primary purposes. Firstly, there may be those who read my work who will be less familiar with the American education system and the way in which music is positioned in that system. Secondly, the present study will be enriched by understanding how music education is conceptualised by the American students described in the study (see Chapter 4 – Findings & Discussion). And third, by drawing attention to the socio-political factors which have influenced American music education, it allows the present study to be situated amidst broad and trans-disciplinary policy understandings.

I would first like to highlight how education policy decisions influence the way in which music education is conceptualised and operationalized in American schools. Preeminent in such a discussion is the issue of school governance, which in turn is linked to the tenth amendment of the United States Constitution:

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people (US Const, amend. X).

In respect to organising schools, this wording in the US Constitution has been interpreted to mean that the federal government does not have the power to institute a nationwide system of schools. Rather, schools are organised at the state or local level, with powers of governance taking place at that respective level. The result is a highly decentralised – and sometimes disparate – approach to education. Public schools in the United States can differ substantially from region to region in respect to funding, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches. In general, across the United States, each municipality and/or county has a publicly-elected school board which governs the efforts of the respective school district. For the most part, the policy decisions of the school board represent the definitive point of governance, provided that they do not run contrary to existing law.

Notably, there have been a number of instances when the policies of a local school district have been determined to be in violation of an aspect of the United States Constitution. In such instances, the American judicial system becomes involved, making landmark decisions greatly affecting nationwide

education policy. In illustration of this point, the following characteristic features of American public education were each based upon US Supreme Court decisions:

- Receiving an education is compulsory for children, but parents are permitted to select how that education takes place, whether that be public schools, parochial schools, or homeschooling (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1925; *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1972).
- Racially-separated schools are prohibited (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954).
- Public schools must accept for enrolment all children residing in their boundaries, regardless of citizenship status (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

The combination of decentralised educational governance and judicial intervention makes it difficult to discuss American education as a discreet, coalesced historical narrative. Compounding such discussions, recent decades have seen an increase in federal legislation and federal funding for public education (see NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015), resulting in governance and funding becoming a complex web of federal, state, and local interests (McGuinn & Manna, 2013).

Against this backdrop and consistent with the decentralised nature of American public education (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014), music education provision is not necessarily consistent between school districts or even between schools within the same school district (Kelley & Demorest, 2016). And yet, there is a surprisingly high degree of conformity regarding how American schools conceptualise music education (Elpus & Abril, 2011). For the benefit of those who may be less familiar with music education in an American context, what follows is a broad overview of the American public education approach to music education (Mark & Gary, 2007).

During elementary school (i.e. primary school), children take a weekly or biweekly lesson with a music specialist. These 'general music' lessons are taught as a class-wide activity and focus on a wide range of musical experience primarily utilising singing and/or simple percussion instruments (Custodero, 2009). Often these classes follow pedagogical principles of Dalcroze, Orff, or Kodaly approaches (Benedict, 2009). Around 5<sup>th</sup> grade (roughly equivalent to UK Year 6), pupils are invited to select a musical instrument to learn: woodwind, brass, percussion, or strings. Pupils attend a weekly lesson based upon their instrument. Instruction is generally given in an ensemble format, with string players being organised into a string orchestra, and woodwind, brass, and percussion players being organised into a concert band. The curriculum is designed in such a way that the repertoire being taught to the music ensemble is pedagogically sequenced according to the acquisition of technical skills on the instrument (Gillespie, 2001).



In middle school (roughly equivalent to UK Years 7-9), students are invited – and sometimes required – to select a music class in which to participate on a daily basis (Mark & Gary, 2007). Most often, the choice is between concert band or choir, although a number of schools offer an orchestra, allowing the choice to be between band, orchestra, or choir (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gillespie & Hamann, 1998). A growing number of schools are exploring additional music making opportunities, such as guitar class or digital music lab, but as of this writing, such progressive innovations represent a relatively small minority within the context of American music education (Elpus & Abril, 2011). Similar to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade experience, the curriculum is predominantly built around the acquisition technical skills on the respective instruments. Note-reading increasingly becomes a priority, and enrichment-type lessons on music theory, music history, and music appreciation start to be woven into the performance-oriented context (Allen, 2003). In middle school, music classes tend to be open-enrolment, in that any student of the particular year group is able to join the class for that year-group, provided that they have already begun playing one of the requisite instruments. Each subsequent year, students automatically advance with their year group, and in general, between 50 and 75 per cent of the students elect to do so by re-enrolling in music class (Hartley & Porter, 2009).

In high school (roughly equivalent to UK Years 10-13), music ensembles tend to be auditioned and/or mixed-year classes (i.e. the equivalent of vertical tutoring). Additional electives are often available, including marching band, jazz band, pit orchestra, and sometimes folk ensembles. Extra-curricular commitments become more pronounced, such as sectional rehearsals, extra performances, and fundraising, and perhaps consequently, the music classroom often becomes a symbolic place for identity formation as students negotiate and prioritise competing demands upon their time as well as developing a social network of friends with similar interests (Adderly, Kennedy & Berz, 2003). Music festival participation – in which the various school ensembles spend a day performing for other nearby school ensembles – becomes an important focal point to the year (Gouzouasis, 2003). These festivals are organised and coordinated by local music education associations, which are generally comprised and administered solely by school music teachers. High school ensembles tend to present a public concert or performance each term, roughly being about once every 2-3 months (Dillon, 2001).

American music education is largely oriented around large performing ensembles. These ensembles are where students receive their instrumental tuition and their music curriculum. Such an approach

is distinctly different from the UK context where instrumental tuition is generally delivered through one-on-one tutoring and graded examinations – e.g. ABRSM – and where the music curriculum – e.g. GCSE and A-level music – is determined at the national level and is generally conceived as a non-performing endeavour. In American public education, the performing ensemble is central to how music education is conceptualised – indeed, within the American context, the performing ensemble often becomes synonymous with music education.

### **2.1.2 (Re)Contextualising Sistema within the field of music education**

When Sistema programmes first entered the American context, they proclaimed to be an innovative and revolutionary approach to music education (see section 1.2.1), thereby implying that they were substantially different than existing music education offerings. One of the most exhaustive attempts to delineate Sistema's supposedly unique approach to music education was proffered by Jonathan Govias, a Canadian music educator who travelled to Venezuela for several weeks in 2010 as an Abreu Fellow, a fellowship funded through a TED prize for the express purpose of 'recreat[ing] the highly successful El Sistema program around the world' (TED, 2009, para 1). In Venezuela, Govias was a guest of FESNOJIV, the government agency which administers El Sistema. He and the other Abreu Fellows worked extensively with the Venezuelan orchestras and orchestra directors, trying to determine how to adapt and implement El Sistema to a North American context. Govias (2011) postulated that the five distinctive features which establish El Sistema as entirely unique are: (1) Social Change; (2) Ensembles; (3) Frequency; (4) Accessibility; and (5) Connectivity. He goes on to explain what he means by each of these fundamental characteristics:

*Social Change* – El Sistema is viewed as an intervention against social marginalisation

*Ensemble* – Music instruction takes place in the context of the ensemble, coupled with the underlying emphasis that teamwork is required in order to play and perform together

*Frequency* – Rehearsals take for multiple hours each day, effectively claiming the majority of students' discretionary time

*Accessibility* – The programme is free and available to any child

*Connectivity* – Each respective programme is part of the larger El Sistema network

Although Govias (2011) asserts that these characteristics represent 'the core differences between traditional music education systems and el Sistema' (p. 23), I would counterargue that these characteristics outline deep consonances between Sistema programmes and American music

education. In illustration of this, I will briefly consider how school-based music education programmes align with these five characteristics

*Social Change* – Although educational theorists heatedly debate whether schools can produce social change (see Willis, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990; Reay, 2014), such a belief is widely held by educators, politicians, parents, and students (see Ely, 2011). Moreover, such a belief represents one of the fundamental arguments for publicly-funded education in the United States (see Dewey, 1916; Steiner, 1997)

*Ensemble* – As noted earlier (see section 2.1.1), American music education primarily takes place in the praxial context (see Elliott, 1995) of large performing ensembles.

*Frequency* – In the United States, school-based music programmes generally have daily rehearsals taking place during the curricular day. There also tend to be opportunities to participate in extra-curricular music-making, and many of the extra-curricular music opportunities can involve multiple hours of rehearsal each day.

*Accessibility* – Public education in the United States is free and available to all children (ESSA, 2015). Accordingly, participation in school music programmes is presumably free and available to all children.

*Connectivity* – Because of the decentralised nature of American music education, some music education networks tend to be limited to school district boundaries, however, state music education associations often provide some connectivity through events such as large ensemble festivals, all-state ensembles, and solo/ensemble festivals.

These consonances are reiterated and summarised in the following table (see table 2.1.2 on next page):

	Sistema Programmes (as reported by Govias, 2011)	American (school-based) Music Education (as presented in section 2.1.1)
<i>Social Change</i>	El Sistema is conceived as an intervention against social marginalisation.	Publicly-funded education is conceived as a government investment in social change.
<i>Ensemble</i>	Music instruction takes place in the context of the ensemble.	Music instruction takes place in the context of the ensemble.
<i>Frequency</i>	Rehearsals take place daily and can last for multiple hours.	Rehearsals take place daily, usually lasting about one hour. Extracurricular musical commitments often take place.
<i>Accessibility</i>	The programme is free and available to any child.	The programme is free and available to any child.
<i>Connectivity</i>	Each respective programme interacts with other programmes through the larger El Sistema network.	Each respective school ensemble interacts with other school ensembles through state music festivals.

Table 2.1.2: Consonances between Sistema and American Music Education  
Source: *Original illustration, incorporating Govias (2011)*

Since the publication of Govias' (2011) list of characteristics, it is possible that Sistema advocates have recognised the similarities between Sistema programmes and school-based music education. For example, in 2013, Datalogue Smith, the executive director of a notable American Sistema programme advised other Sistema enthusiasts, 'Schools manage the greatest concentration of resources we invest in children, yet the dynamic between North America's El Sistema inspired programs and schools has been only scantily examined' (Smith, 2013, p. 1). Concurrently, Sistema advocate Eric Booth (2013) admonished Sistema practitioners to invest in greater harmony between existing music programmes and new Sistema programmes, acknowledging that the zeal in which Sistema programmes had come into existence people had inadvertently produced self-important

rhetoric which did not take into account existing music programmes. In contrast to the self-assuredness which characterised the early days of Sistema proliferation, there now seems to be an acknowledgement that the differences between Sistema programmes and school music programmes had turned out to be not as pronounced as had previously been alleged. This shift in thinking is perhaps best exemplified by the ‘new’ definition which Jonathan Govias (2015) offers for El Sistema:

El Sistema is the public applied music instruction network of Venezuela. Under a social mandate of accessibility, Sistema uses *conventional* pedagogical techniques to offer program participants the established benefits of music education (para 3, emphasis added).

In summary, although many Sistema proponents have claimed that El Sistema represents a revolutionary and innovative approach to music education, American music education has been utilising a comparable structure since before El Sistema’s founding:

El Sistema has vaulted to the forefront of the public discussion in the field, receiving wide publicity, extensive funding, and marked support. Simultaneously, school music education programs – which generally have been successful in achieving many of the same goals for decades – often struggle for any particular notice (Dabczynski, 2012, para 4).

However, rather than further getting caught up in the details of who has the more legitimate claim on making use of the ensemble-model for delivering music education, I propose that the similarities between school orchestras and Sistema programmes signify an opportunity way for school-based American music educators to ‘look in the mirror’ and (re)consider their practice and ideology from an outside perspective. Additionally, the nuanced differences between the systems – e.g. the nature of the social change and the intentionality of the accessibility – can potentially lead to new understandings as the two systems are juxtaposed side-by-side.

### **2.1.3 Sistema’s Antecedents: Further problematising Sistema’s exceptionality**

Sistema research holds a certain immediacy because of the eagerness of so many varied parties to comprehend and replicate the alleged Venezuelan music miracle. However, El Sistema has had a number of notable antecedents. Across more than three centuries, music education endeavours have been promoted as venues for outreach to the socially disadvantaged. From the Italian *Ospedali* of Vivaldi’s day to the brass bands of Victorian England and to the settlement music houses of Gilded Age America, music education has a long history of doing what El Sistema purports to do. And like El Sistema, each of these programmes have also received sharp criticism for their complicity in perpetuating and reinforcing long-standing social inequities.

The Italian *Ospedali* of Vivaldi's day are often upheld as definite instances in which music saved orphaned girls from 'deprivation and prostitution' (Barbier, 2003, p. 67). Abandoned, orphaned infants were taken in by the *ospedali*, which cared for the orphans' physical needs, provided them a basic education, and guided them towards a life of religious devotion. Within such a context, music featured prominently, and the orphans – girls in particular – were provided substantial music instruction. In time, the choirs and orchestras of the Venetian *Ospedali* attained such musical prominence that they became recognised as the best trained ensembles in Europe. The individual musicians were highly celebrated for their accomplishments and welcomed among the highest social circles. It seemed that music had saved them. However, a counter-narrative portrays the *ospedali* in a different light; the young female musicians became shackled to the patrimony of the *ospedali* because their options were to either work indefinitely at the orphanage, or to get married. If they chose to marry, the *ospedali* insisted that they must abandon any future pursuit of music. It would seem that for these women, they must either remain in perpetual servitude to their *ospedali* or forsake the very instrumentality which had permitted them some increased social agency (Barbier, 2003).

Similarly, the brass band movement of Victorian England – which is often identified as providing sociocultural uplift -- also is fraught with sociocultural tensions. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the industrialisation of England resulted in a large, urban working class. To combat discontent among workers, the various companies enacted several social initiatives, intending to improve the collective quality of life for their workers. Notable among these initiatives were the company brass bands. Brass bands reflected a prevailing belief of the time that certain genres of music were intrinsically edifying (Herbert & Sarkissian, 1997). It was believed that classical music held particular capacity to ennoble individuals, but due to its cost – cost of the instruments, cost of pursuing musical tuition, and cost of attending performances – it had generally been inaccessible to working class populations. The brass band offered a potential solution for such exclusion: brass instruments were much less expensive than their orchestral counterparts; musical tuition could be offered in an ensemble context; and performances could take place outdoors where large numbers of people could attend at minimal cost (Herbert & Sarkissian, 1997). Thus, through the brass bands, the working class had access to classical music and the supposed increased quality of life which it represented. However, in writing about the brass bands, Trevor Herbert (2000) notes that company bands may have had the ulterior motive of redirecting workers' attention from the urgent need to improve workplace conditions. The bands likely engendered feelings of satisfaction between workers and their employers, and thus they potentially obfuscated some of the issues which might

have led to a strike or other industrial action, allowing poor working conditions to persist (Herbert, 2000).

As a third historical example of music being employed for decidedly socio-artistic purposes, the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a large influx of immigrants to the United States. Correspondingly, large segregated neighbourhoods formed in major cities and became synonymous with overcrowding, disease, and illiteracy. Social activists concentrated their efforts to relieve such suffering through the establishment of 'settlement houses'. At these community centres, volunteers provided healthcare, childcare, and educational offerings for immigrant families. In time, educational offerings at the settlement houses expanded to include low-cost music instruction. It was believed that those who participated in these lessons would experience sufficient enculturation through music that they would 'come to love their adopted country' (Campbell, 2000, p. 269). Furthermore, they believed they could 'engineer a better society by strategically applying beauty to those who had the most limited access to it' (p. 275). The music reformers of the progressive era argued that it was unjust that people of high socioeconomic background had access to the riches of classical music, whereas people without such financial advantages were excluded. Thus, they felt great desire to make classical music available to all people, heightened with their belief that this 'good music' embodied the values and aspirations that needed to be transmitted to children in the immigrant neighbourhoods. However, in writing about the music reformers of the settlement music houses, and as noted before (see section 1.2.3), Gavin Campbell (2000) asserts that music reformers ultimately elided their commitment to providing emancipatory education with goals of assimilation and ideological indoctrination. In other words, the philanthropic goal of providing increased social mobility remained in subjection to the paradoxical goals of social control and cultural conformity.

By introducing these three historical examples and by overlaying them on the present exploration of Sistema and Sistema ideology, it has been my intention to show that music education has often been the locus for socially-minded endeavours. And just as each of these historical examples eventually spiralled towards ideological conflicted-ness, so has scholarship on Sistema.

#### **2.1.4 The Sistema Impasse: A heuristic for articulating my research interests**

One of the readily apparent characteristics pervading the field Sistema scholarship is the sense of partisan-like division between those who regard themselves as Sistema enthusiasts and those who

position themselves as Sistema sceptics. Such antagonism is especially pronounced between Tricia Tunstall (2012) and Geoff Baker (2014b), authors who have each contributed a monograph on El Sistema and Sistema ideology. In the years since their works were published, much of the subsequent Sistema scholarship has polarised itself according to their opposing viewpoints.

In the introduction to her work, Tunstall (2012) readily expresses her view that ‘the fast-growing movement to replicate this model [El Sistema] is one of the most significant social and artistic developments of the twenty-first century’ (p. xvi). She then proceeds to affirm, with abundant enthusiasm, the tremendous social and musical successes El Sistema has reportedly fostered amongst Venezuela’s most vulnerable youth. She describes how El Sistema put action to her own seemingly unattainable desire to ‘reach and teach children from all sectors of [her] community, not just the most privileged’ (p. xiv). After foregrounding her interest in El Sistema, she then chronicles her varied interactions with both Gustavo Dudamel and El Sistema, noting that she made several visits to Los Angeles and Caracas during the course of writing the book. She enthusiastically describes the classical music institutions which have been – or are currently – replicating El Sistema’s efforts to rescue disenfranchised youth. And with optimism, she describes the ‘affluence of spirit’ which attends each of the participants in the programme.

Although Tunstall likely intended her work for an audience of classical music enthusiasts, it was promptly reappropriated by the scholarly community which was thirsty for any published writings on El Sistema. In illustration of this, several academic journals reviewed the work (see Hoyer, 2012; Jimenez, 2013; Miller, 2013), and it has become one of the most cited works of subsequent Sistema scholarship. A number of authors have added their voice to Tunstall’s admonition that Sistema programmes should be created throughout the world, especially in areas of deprivation and disadvantage (see Tunstall & Booth, 2016; Witkowski, 2015; Hernandez-Estrada, 2012).

In stark contrast to Tunstall’s enthusiasm, Geoff Baker (2014b) warns in his activist ethnography of El Sistema that the everyday realities of El Sistema do not match with the public image put forward by what he describes as El Sistema’s disingenuous and politically corrupt marketing team. Accordingly, Baker contends that El Sistema has fostered a culture of discipline and fear; dependence upon programme leadership; continued marginalisation of indigenous cultures and their musical expressions; and a hegemonic system in which socio-artistic conventions go unquestioned. He bases



his arguments upon a year of ethnographic research in Venezuela, in which '[he] went to Venezuela looking for an uplifting story, for what Simon Rattle had called "the future of music," and [he] was disappointed to find something quite different' (Baker, 2014b, p. 12). He recasts El Sistema, not as a revolutionary and emancipatory new model of music education, but rather, as a programme which reinforces deeply entrenched social inequities. In particular, he asserts that local Venezuelan musicians disbelieve rhetoric describing El Sistema as an ideal model of society. In illustration, he quotes one such musician as saying, 'It's a model...of absolute tyranny: a society where someone will always be telling you what to do.... It'll be organised, of course, because you have someone with lots of power who tells you exactly what to do, and you keep your mouth shut, end of story' (Baker, 2014a, para. 8). Further, Baker declares that El Sistema has crafted its predominantly positive public image through deliberate use of the media and that such images are egregiously inconsistent with the lived experiences of the participants (Baker, 2014b). In Baker's view, El Sistema represents a neo-colonial approach to music education, in which its participants are presented with an oppressive pedagogy (see Freire, 1974) masked in ironically emancipatory language.

Baker's work has had a profound effect upon the Sistema research community, effectively acting as the impetus for a growing counter-narrative of Sistema ideology and practice. These wide-ranging narratives approach Sistema from a plurality of disciplines, including musicology, sociology, political theory, history, critical theory, and music education. For example, American musicologist Robert Fink (2016) argues that Sistema programmes have effectively adopted a rhetoric of social justice for the express purpose of reigniting an otherwise fading interest in classical music. British sociologist Anna Bull (2016) asserts that Sistema programmes' fixation on classical music has the effect of teaching middle class Bourgeois values, thereby reinforcing a neoliberal perception that poverty is the resultant consequence of holding non-Bourgeois values. This dynamic between neoliberalism and structural reform is pursued further by Scottish political theorist Owen Logan (2016) who contends that Sistema uses meritocracy to divert attention from the failure of its own government to address widespread issues of poverty and inequality. Other writers have raised questions about Sistema and postcoloniality (Rosabal-Coto, 2016); Sistema and Foucauldian authoritarianism (Dobson, 2016); Sistema and the veracity of its reported history and ideology (Pedroza, 2015a, 2015b).

Over the past several years, Sistema thinking has largely become polarised between these two overarching perspectives – those who advocate for El Sistema as the democratisation of high art and

those who view it as a neo-colonial cultural imperialism. In the face of this seeming impasse, it is perhaps poignant to note that each respective faction cites social justice as being central to their argument. Sistema proponents argue that they are delivering social justice when they bring youth orchestra and other music education opportunities to communities which had not previously had access to them. The Sistema critics argue that social justice is subverted when such neo-colonisation prevails. Whereas some scholars have lamented the partisan-like impasse of Sistema scholarship (Boia, 2017), I regard such an impasse as being an opportune heuristic for identifying and articulating an essential new research pursuit, namely the further theorisation of social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation.

## **Section 2.2: Theorising ‘Social Justice’**

Music education advocacy has long had an association with ‘social justice’. At least since the Italian *Ospedali* of Vivaldi’s day (see section 2.1.3), social endeavours feature prominently amongst the rationales given for instituting music education programmes. The recent enthusiasm with which Sistema programmes have been received in the United States is perhaps illustrative of the way in which ‘social justice’ continues to act as a powerful rationale for music education, uniting diverse people and interests into a shared common cause. However, social justice rationales can be problematic for music education. After all, the current Sistema impasse suggests that widely divergent views can arise from a common commitment to social justice (see section 2.1.4).

In this section, I use the lack-of-consensus regarding social justice as a starting point for pursuing the literature. I first consider the ambiguities of social justice by reviewing literature on how the term is discussed by the political philosopher and social theorist Friedrich Hayek (2013). Next, I introduce political theorist David Miller’s (1999) pluralistic conceptualisation of social justice, accompanied by music education philosopher Estelle Jorgensen’s (2015) argument that because social justice has a plurality of dimensions, there is a diversity of ways in which music educators approach their practice. Finally, I assert that the present Sistema impasse has arisen because of a divergence in the way social justice has been theorised.

### **2.2.1 Acknowledging the ambiguities of social justice: Epistemic impasses**

Social justice presents itself as a self-evident representation of collective moral goodness. However, in trying to settle upon a generally-agreed-upon definition of what that social justice means, it becomes apparent that the term masks a high degree of unsettledness. The political scientist Joe

Oppenheimer (2002) captures this unsettledness when he announces, 'Everyone is for social justice', adding the seeming afterthought, 'Of course unanimity rarely survives scrutiny. And unanimity regarding justice papers over deep controversies' (p. 295).

The political philosopher and social theorist Friedrich Hayek (2013) describes the seeming unanimity of social justice as rendering it akin to a mirage. He notes that 'justice' is itself a reification which is intended to ensure fairness and equity between different social players. Correspondingly, he argues that the addition of the modifier 'social' is redundant, because the very purpose of justice is to create *social* fairness. Accordingly, Hayek argues that the term social justice either acts as a distractor to justice by implying that justice is unconcerned with the social relationships between people, or it acts as a confounder to justice by privileging social equality and fairness at the expense of justice. Either way, Hayek argues that 'social justice' disguises its own abstractions by utilising the emotionally-laden language of justice to build consensus over a social issue. To illustrate this argument, Hayek (2013) notes, 'There are today probably no political movements or politicians who do not readily appeal to "social justice" in support of the particular measures which they advocate' (p. 229). Accordingly, social justice becomes reappropriated for any number of political arguments because it hides the actual rationale upon which such arguments are built by making an abstract appeal to moral goodness.

By extension, social justice acts as a problematic reification and rationale for education. In essence, it represents a tautological reflection of epistemic beliefs, and as such, it becomes the operationalised way for individuals to act upon their deeply held values and beliefs, while masking such complex negotiations from further scrutiny. Thereby, it obscures the arguments upon which it is built, and in doing so, it also attempts to co-opt others into its cause, without necessarily ensuring that others share the same epistemic value system (see Oppenheimer, 2012; Ham, 2008; Schmidt, 2015; Horsley, 2015).

Tensions regarding social justice in music education have been noted by music education researchers:

Music education has historically had a tense relationship with social justice. On the one hand, educators concerned with music practices have long preoccupied themselves with ideas of open participation and the potentially transformative capacity that musical interaction fosters. On the other hand, they have often done so while promoting and privileging a particular set of musical practices, traditions, and forms of musical knowledge, which has in

turn alienated and even excluded many children from music education opportunities (Benedict, Schmidt, Spruce & Woodford, 2015, dustjacket overleaf).

In illustration of this – and returning momentarily to the discussion from the previous chapter – Sistema programmes have branded themselves as symbolising social justice (Shieh, 2015), and although this manoeuvre initially gave them strong political and emotional appeal, it has ultimately become a source of controversy. As various observers – with widely differing epistemic beliefs – have become increasingly interested in this purported social-justice-through-music-education project, the limitations of using a social justice rationale to advocate for any music education endeavour have become increasingly apparent, ultimately revealing that individuals can conceptualise ‘social justice’ in widely divergent ways.

### **2.2.2 A pluralistic conceptualisation of ‘social justice’: Miller and Jorgensen**

In an effort to provide theoretical grounding to ‘social justice’, the political theorist David Miller (1999) challenges Hayek’s scepticism. He acknowledges that there exists ‘suspicion that the term [social justice] may have emotive force, but no real meaning beyond that’ (p. ix). However, he asserts that ‘a clear meaning can be given to the idea’ (p. ix) by recognising that all people have their own personal, well-developed sense of justice. As evidence, Miller argues that because people are very capable at negotiating and interacting with their social worlds, they must have highly sophisticated, nuanced and individualised ways of practicing ‘social justice’. Accordingly, Miller argues that a more inclusive and general theory of ‘social justice’ could be devised by assembling a plurality of such individualised understandings. Once these individualised understandings are synthesised into a broad theory, Miller suggests that ‘social justice’ would be persuasive enough that individuals would regulate their own personal sense of justice according to the principles which the general theory advances. Such a pluralistic theory of social justice – in which different dimensions of justice are acknowledged as reprioritising themselves depending upon the particular situation – can account for the variation in conceptions of justice which Hayek identifies as being problematic. The assertion that ‘social justice’ is comprised of overlapping and competing priorities has since been reaffirmed by a number of scholars writing in wide-ranging contexts. The economist James Konow (2003) argues that there are three main types of social justice theories: those which presume an impartiality; those which focus on fair processes; and those which maximise the number of people receiving a benefit. To these ideas, the political scientist Joe Oppenheimer (2012) intersects the theories of justice put forward by Rawls (1971) and Sen (2009) to argue that fairness and impartiality are central to justice but that social justice is achieved by personalising justice to the individual,

thereby mirroring Miller's argument that social justice is built upon pluralistic individualised understandings.

Building upon this pluralistic conception of social justice, music education philosopher Estelle Jorgensen (2015) explores some of the multiple ways of theorising social justice in music education. Like Hayek, she notes that what is considered 'just' and 'right' behaviour is not universal across different peoples, cultures, and societal institutions, but like Miller, she asserts that the lack of universality does not prevent social justice from being an important theoretical exploration for music educators. Rather, she contends that because music education emanates from cultural and public policy (see section 2.1.1), it is therefore inseparable from 'social justice', for public policy itself derives from a commitment social justice (Schmidt & Colwell, 2017; Woodford, 2004). Thus, instead of rejecting social justice because of its ambiguous nature, it is essential to theorise it in such a way that its divergent nature becomes revealed. Jorgensen therefore identifies 12 different lenses by which to conceptualise social justice in music education settings: distributive justice, commutative justice, common good, natural law, divine justice, poetic justice, legal justice, instrumental justice, procedural justice, contributive justice, retributive justice, and restorative justice. Though Jorgensen acknowledges that her list is not necessarily exhaustive, she argues that each of the different dimensions of justice would place discretely different demands upon how music educators would proceed to pursue their work. Correspondingly, these differing social justice lenses could result in widely different aims, goals, and purposes for music education (see figure 2.2.2), notwithstanding a common commitment to upholding social justice.

Such divergence in how social justice is theorised and operationalised is perhaps able to account for some of the many controversies related to assertions of social justice in music education (Spruce, 2017). In illustration of this, I return to the music education controversy which I used to open this thesis (see section 1.2.3), asserting that the Sistema Impasse could be understood as a divergence in the way social justice is being theorised and operationalised by passionate music educators who are equally committed to pursuing social justice.

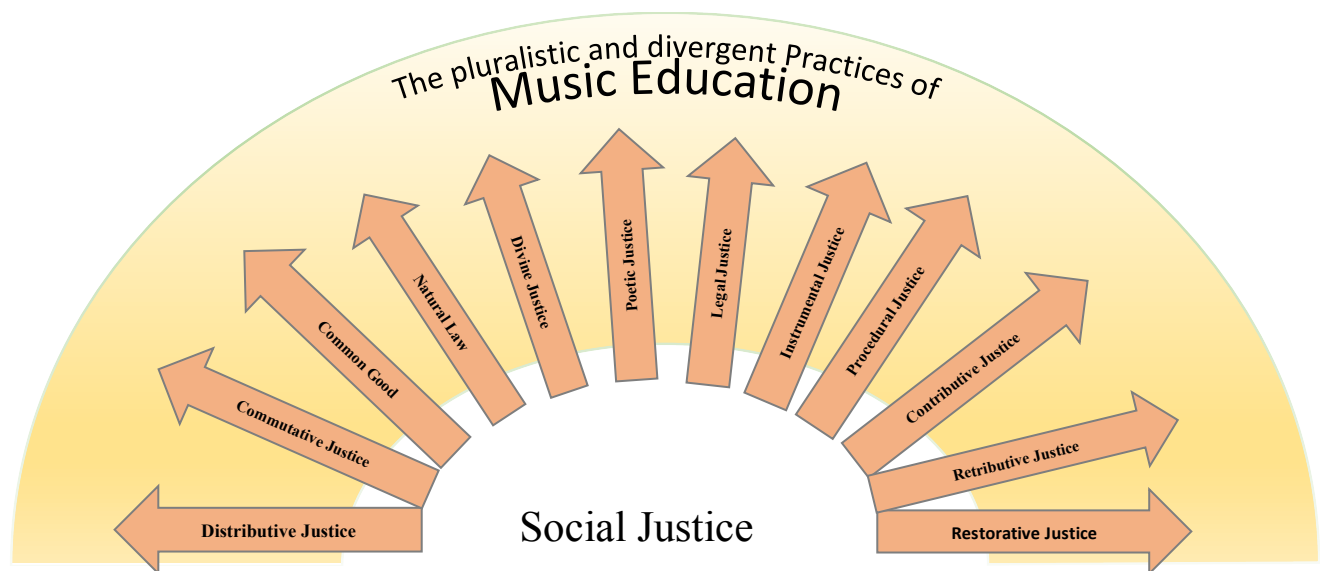


Figure 2.2.2: A Pluralistic Theorisation of Social Justice  
Source: Original illustration, incorporating Jorgensen (2015)

### 2.2.3 Distributive Justice / Restorative Justice: Untangling the Sistema impasse

In aggregate, Hayek's (2013), Miller's (1999), and Jorgensen's (2015) contributions towards social justice theory suggest why Sistema programmes' rhetoric of social justice has increasingly come under scrutiny. Proponents of these programmes have perhaps built their social justice arguments without identifying the dimension of social justice with which they are conceptualising their work nor have they acknowledged the limitations of a particular social justice theorisation. Sistema critics – who likely view social justice through a different lens – become drawn to the programme because of the apparent commitment to social justice, however they find their conceptualisation of social justice to be missing from the programme and decry the social justice argument as being erroneous. In illustration of this point, I would like to draw particular attention to two dimensions of social justice – distributive justice and restorative justice – which seem to capture the essence of the impasse between the two prevailing Sistema perspectives (see figure 2.2.3).

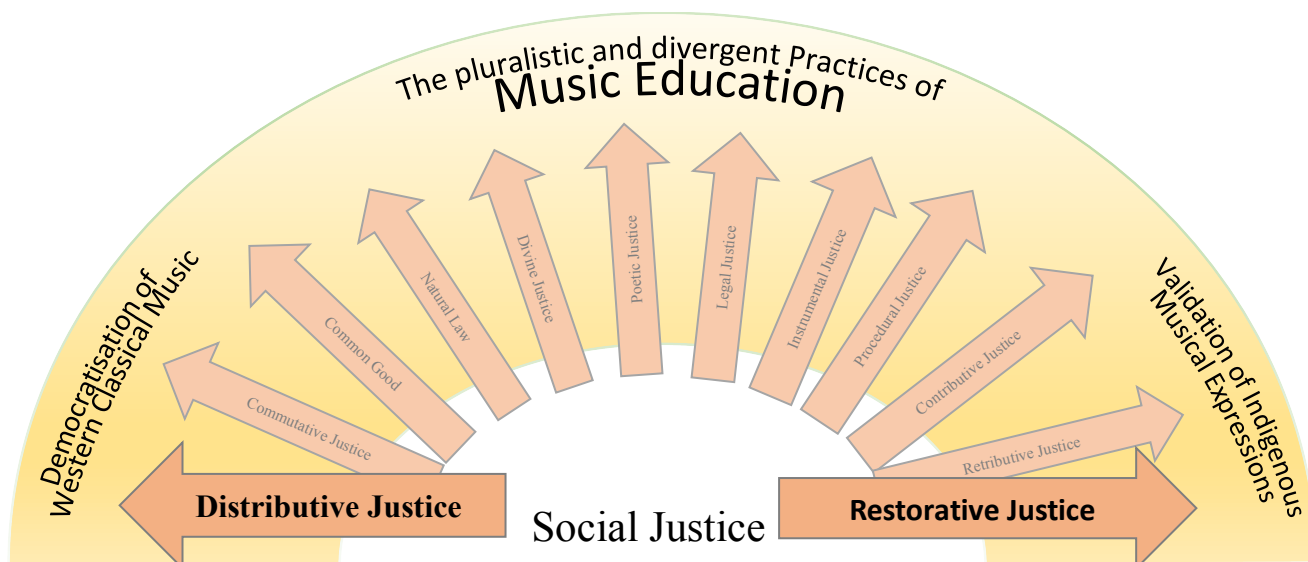


Figure 2.2.3: Divergence of Distributive Justice and Restorative Justice  
 Source: Original illustration, incorporating Jorgensen (2015)

*Distributive justice* would suggest that economic and cultural resources should be redistributed in such a way that marginalised populations have equal access to opportunities which had previously been unavailable to them (Ben-Shahar, 2015). Sistema proponents are perhaps in line with this formulation of social justice: their argument is based upon the observation that children in impoverished communities are precluded from many opportunities which are available to those who live in more affluent communities. In particular, opportunities to participate in a youth orchestra would either not be available or be impractical because of the costs required to participate (Gillespie & Hamann, 2010). Thus, the educational or cultural benefit which might be derived from orchestra participation and classical musical study (see section 1.1.2) is pre-emptively lost to these individuals. Distributive justice would decry such inequity and demand that comparable opportunities be made available to all children. Under this framework, it becomes a straightforward and self-evident argument to declare that Sistema-inspired programmes symbolise social justice. After all, by making youth orchestra opportunities available to those who previously had been unable to participate, social justice is upheld because the injustice of economic disadvantage is being addressed.

In contrast, however, the dimension of *restorative justice* would argue that social justice is only achieved by rescinding the social structures that initially caused certain populations to become marginalised (Cremin, Sellman & McCluskey, 2012). Restorative justice would assert that the way to help economically disadvantaged areas and marginalised populations is to address the factors which have caused such hardship (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). For many communities – and especially those



in Latin America, including Venezuela – the roots of such marginalisation are inextricably linked with Western civilisation’s successive eras of colonisation, imperialism, and capitalism (Larrain, 1998). Because classical music is so often tied to the veneration of Western civilisation and culture (Ross, 2017), the introduction of youth orchestras to these communities is potentially complicit in denigrating the indigenous musical traditions of these respective areas and continuing to perpetuate the inequities of the past (Mantie & Tucker, 2012). Western classical music is often asserted to be – either implicitly or explicitly – the most refined, prestigious, and/or transcendent of musical expressions (Bazemore, 2019). The corresponding implication is that other musical genres and cultural symbols are of less worth, potentially exacerbating a perceived sociocultural hierarchy between western civilisations and non-western cultures (see Brewer, 2010; Schippers, 2009). Such repressive hierarchies and structures represent the antithesis of restorative justice (see Gil, 2006; Van Ness & Strong, 2015).

These differing lenses for conceptualising social justice – distributive justice and restorative justice – provide a way to account for the diverging opinions regarding whether Sistema programmes symbolise, or whether they subvert, social justice. They also provide a structure by which to reassess school-based music education. Notwithstanding the emergent and growing body of scholarship on social justice in music education (see Benedict, Schmidt, Spruce & Woodford, 2015), the field of music education remains relatively unaware of the plurality of ways in which ‘social justice’ might influence music education practice, policy, and/or philosophy (see Allsup, 2012; Schmidt, 2015; Jorgensen, 2015; Gould, Countryman, Morton & Stewart Rose, 2009). Moreover, even those who assert themselves as being highly committed to social justice may ultimately underconceptualise alternative pluralistic ways of upholding ‘social justice’ (Fairbanks, 2014). Thus, the Sistema lens of ‘social justice’ reveals a dynamic tension between different theoretical conceptualisations of ‘social justice’, thereby suggesting the need to interrogate similar music education programmes, such as American school-based music education, regarding whether such ‘social justice’ pluralities are acknowledged and attended to.

## **Section 2.3: Problematising ‘Inclusivity’**

Given the close relationship between distributive justice and ‘inclusivity’, I use this section to review the scholarly literature pertaining to inclusivity in music education. First, I identify the populations which are currently underrepresented in school-based music education in the United States. I then explore the various explanations given for such underrepresentation, noting that the explanations generally coincide with the various pluralistic ways of conceptualising ‘social justice’ (see section 2.2.2). Thereafter, I conclude by suggesting that the language often used for describing the unequal demographic participation in school music programmes is problematic, in that it potentially reinforces an ideology which places blame upon individuals for non-participation rather than holding institutions accountable for enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies (see Bull, 2016).

### **2.3.1 Inclusivity Matters: Underrepresented populations in American music education**

As noted earlier (see section 2.1.1), American music education at the secondary level generally takes place in the context of large-ensemble classes, such as concert band, choir, and orchestra. These classes are offered as part of the curriculum, and usually ‘count’ for elective credit, meaning they can be used to fulfil graduation requirements. Accordingly, because music classes are electives and thus non-compulsory, enrolment statistics in music classes can be useful for exploring the relationships between music education offerings and inclusivity, especially when the statistics are disaggregated according to demographic indicators. Based on such statistical analysis, researchers have identified certain populations as being underrepresented, and by implication, underserved by American school-based music education. In relation to American school-based music education, these underrepresented populations include Black and Latino students (DeLorenzo & Silverman, 2016); students from rural areas (Bates, 2016); and students with a ‘low’ socioeconomic status (SES) (Smith, 1997). The documentation and discussion of such underrepresentation is acting as a catalyst for burgeoning new areas of music education scholarship (see Conway, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Elpus,

2015), advocacy efforts (see Campbell, 2013; NSPC, 2009), and recruitment pursuits (see Benham, 2011).

To establish a demographic profile of secondary school music programmes in the United States, a number of studies have explored whether school music programmes are demographically representative of the schools and communities in which they exist. In large measure, such research into underrepresented populations has mostly been limited to localised areas and specific contexts (see Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007; Nabb & Balcetis, 2010; Salvador & Allegood, 2014; Brewer, 2010). However, a study by Kenneth Elpus and Carlos Abril (2011) manages to elevate such inquiries to a national scale. In their study, Elpus and Abril engage with a national data-set, the U.S. Department of Education's *Education Longitudinal Study* of 2002, to determine what specific demographic characteristics are statistically significant in relation to a student's participation in a music class during his/her final year of high school. First, they determine that 21% of high school seniors enrol in music classes. In comparing this 21% against the entire sample, the researchers note that certain populations are significantly underrepresented in high school music ensembles. These include male students, English language learners, Hispanics, children of parents holding a high school diploma or less, and students in the lowest SES quartile. Populations which were significantly overrepresented were female students, native English speakers, white students, children of parents holding advanced postsecondary degrees, and students in the highest SES quartile.

It may perhaps be unsurprising that Elpus and Abril's (2011) study found that American music education exhibits a pronounced participation gap based around race, socioeconomic status, and gender. After all, demographic inequity has been one of the persistent themes of American *public* education more generally (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010), with numerous scholars presenting narratives of the complex, slow, and sometimes arduous process of making public education more inclusive and representative of race (Spring, 2001; Williamson, Rhodes & Dunson, 2007), class (Boyles, Carusi & Attick, 2009), and gender (Keddie & Mills, 2009). Facilitating greater inclusivity reflects one of the fundamental premises of American public education, namely that 'schools were [intended] to unite *all* students by providing them with a common education which would eventually eliminate social inequity among disparate ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes' (Boyles, Carusi & Attick, 2009, p. 34). American public education still strives to realise such an ideal, even elevating it to the status of law: 'The purpose of this title [Every Student Succeeds Act] is to provide *all* children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational

achievement gaps' (ESSA, 2015, Sec 1001, emphasis added). As a field, music education tries to align with such ideals (McCarthy, 2015), but given the findings presented by Elpus and Abril (2011), it appears that the field of music education is yet a long way off from reaching *all* children.

Accordingly, one of the more poignant questions which the Sistema movement makes of school-based music education pertains to issues of racial and socioeconomic inequity. As Elpus and Abril (2011) note, Hispanic students, black students and students from low SES backgrounds are particularly underrepresented in American music education. Notably, these are some of the exact populations which American Sistema programmes aim to serve (Witkowski, 2015). By making the underrepresented populations of American music classrooms the focus of their efforts, Sistema programmes are tacitly questioning the field of music education on why such underrepresentation has been permitted to persist. By highlighting the persistent presence of racial and socioeconomic inequity in school-based music education, the Sistema movement effectively holds American music education accountable for reconciling the discrepancy between its supposed adherence to inclusivity and the lived reality of underrepresented students.

### **2.3.2 Interrogating Inclusivity: Access, recruitment, retention and relevance**

The reason why ethnic minority students and students from low SES backgrounds are underrepresented in school music programmes is widely contested. Explanations range from issues of access, recruitment, and retention to allegations of cultural irrelevance. In the following paragraphs, I will review some of the arguments and literature regarding why certain populations persist in being underrepresented in school-based music offerings. Where possible, I will feature literature pertaining to school orchestras.

In a study focused on access to string instruction in American public schools, Camille Smith (1997) surveyed which schools were most likely to offer orchestra programmes. She assembled a large sample of schools (n=14,183) throughout the United States which varied according to urbanicity, size of the school district, and socioeconomic factors. Using statistical regressions, Smith determined which factors had the highest correlations to whether or not orchestra programmes were offered as part of the curriculum. Smith noted that 'the pattern of string offerings varied considerably' (p. 653) in relation to geographic measures, but across all contexts, 'inequality of access exists among the

socioeconomic levels' (p. 661). Across the entire sample, 15.9% of high schools offered string programmes. Amongst high schools identified as having a low socioeconomic level – where more than 25% of the students were considered to be below the federal poverty line – Smith noted that only 4.4% offered string instruction. Thereafter, Smith concludes that 'clearly, the issue of access to string instruction in the public schools needs to be addressed by the music education profession and possible solutions proposed that will make such instruction available to more children throughout the United States' (p. 662). Smith's research hints that the cause of demographic underrepresentation in American music education is related to access; the populations who are persistently underrepresented in music education are the ones who do not have access to music education through their schools. According to this logic, underrepresentation could be rectified by instituting more music programmes in the schools which serve the underrepresented populations. This particular viewpoint, which aligns closely with the tenets of distributive justice (see section 2.2.3), is often promoted by music education advocacy organisations and tends to be a recurrent theme of arts policy research (see NAFME, 2016; Hamann, 2002; Salvador & Allegood, 2014; Bergonzi & Smith, 1996).

Other researchers have suggested that in addition to lack of access, issues of underrepresentation may also be closely tied to recruitment, retention, and/or removing barriers to participation. In a study exploring the recruitment and retention of music students in low socioeconomic school districts, Daniel Albert (2006) noted that because students of lower socioeconomic status have less access to music education opportunities, recruitment and retention become heightened concerns. Based upon his phenomenological study, he asserts that visibility of the music programme and the use of culturally relevant music is influential on recruiting and retaining students. He also notes that if the school is able to purchase and loan the instruments, rather than requiring students to provide their own, one of the larger barriers to participation for students with limited economic means can be overcome. Stephen Benham (2003), a string orchestra specialist, affirms that culturally-relevant repertoire is necessary for increasing access to string instruction and that a wide-range of styles can mediate against students having a bias against a specific style. In their study about recruitment of minority students into music programs, Lisa DeLorenzo and Marissa Silverman (2016) assert that although recruitment activities are important, a more pressing concern is regarding the quality of instruction and whether the music teacher is perceived by the students to be a role model. They argue that because the teaching profession has an overwhelming underrepresentation of minorities, this impacts minority students' perceptions regarding the cultural relevance of school music programmes. Accordingly, they cite an urgent need to recruit minority teachers to the profession,

believing that to be the most effective means for overcoming what they identify as the cyclic nature of underrepresentation. Collectively, these views on recruitment seem to suggest that structures are currently in place for underrepresented populations to participate more fully in music education, but that there are persistent sociocultural obstacles which must first be acknowledged and addressed in order to facilitate greater participation.

Another explanation for the underrepresentation of certain populations in music education is to be found in postcolonialist music education scholar Deborah Bradley's (2012) assertion that the field of music education tends to uphold philosophies which are epistemologically colonial. She notes that because music education largely celebrates the musical achievements of western civilization, little room remains for pursuing, experiencing, and/or studying the music of peoples that have historically been dominated, marginalised, and/or colonised by western civilizations. This results in a music education practice which is insular and self-perpetuating; generally, the types of musical pursuits which are celebrated and pursued in schools are those which conform to the dominant western middle class culture. For Bradley, the underrepresentation of certain populations in school music programmes would be evidence of these epistemological disjunctures; underrepresented populations are collectively making a statement that the structures and curriculum of school music programmes are lacking in relevance. This view that demographic inequality persists in American music education because the music offerings are lacking in relevance for the students for whom they are intended is generally in alignment with the tenets of restorative justice (see section 2.2.3).

### **2.3.3 Rethinking underrepresented-ness: Intersecting inclusivity with social justice**

In light of Deborah Bradley's (2012) views, it could be said that American music education is in the midst of waking up to its potential complicity in promoting a cultural (re)production which is self-perpetuatingly insular (see Brewer, 2010; Bourdieu, 1990). Given music education's perpetual preoccupation with advocating for its own existence (Mark, 2002), the lively and controversial way in which Sistema programmes have been received by the American music education establishment is perhaps indicative that some American music educators are somewhat unsettled by the spotlight which Sistema places upon school music education's inclusivity practices – and shortcomings.

The proposition that a celebrated cultural institution of Western civilisation – i.e. the symphony orchestra – can symbolise social justice becomes a metaphorical lemon test for how music education will respond to entanglements with cultural hegemony. Thus, Sistema programmes tacitly invite further exploration into the relationship between cultural hegemony and inclusivity in all music education endeavours, an area which has received relatively scant attention, especially in respect to the way that narratives of inclusion represent an axiomatic foundation for a centuries-long tradition of instituting many music education programmes (see section 2.1.3).

Because inclusivity – like social justice – can be theorised in divergent ways, it can also become embroiled in epistemic impasse. As reviewed in the previous subsection, a variety of explanations exist regarding the widely-acknowledged discrepancies between the demographics of those who participate in school music programmes and the demographics of society more broadly. Similar to the divergence of ways in which ‘social justice’ can be theorised (see sections 2.2.2, 2.2.3), ‘inclusivity’ shows similar predilections and perhaps radiates from a shared epistemic centre. Issues of access and recruitment are generally aligned with the tenets of distributive justice, whereas efforts towards culturally relevant pedagogies are more akin to restorative justice (see figure 2.3.3).

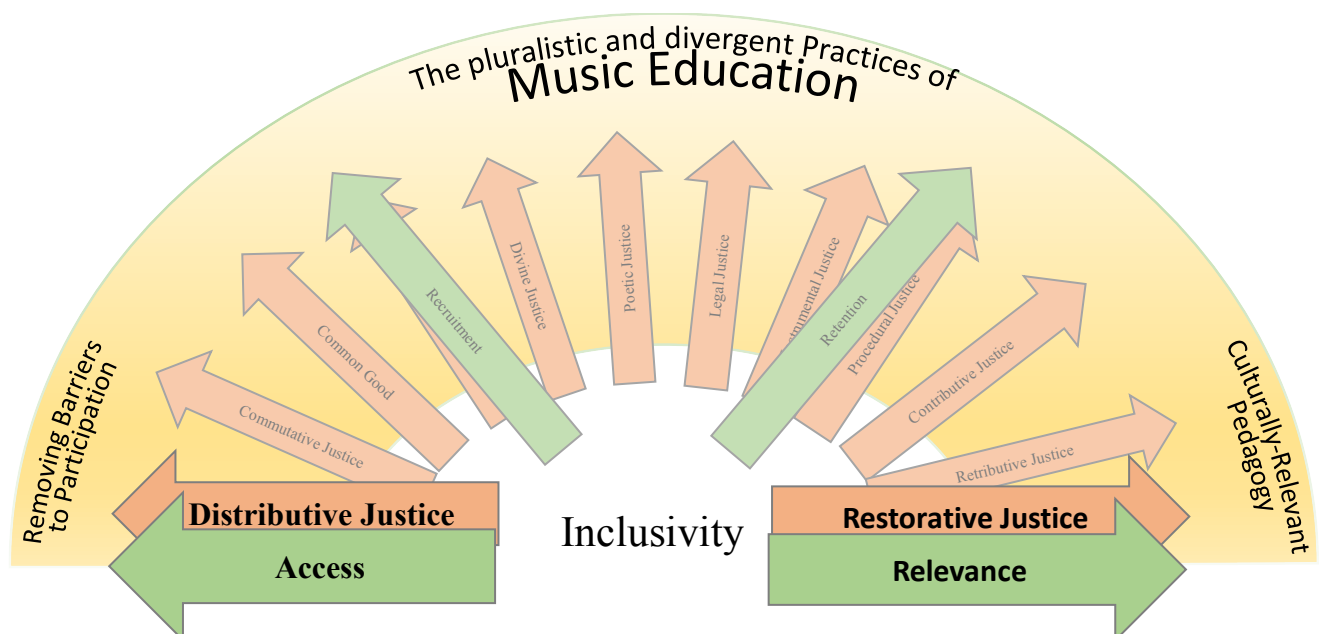


Figure 2.3.3: Alignment of ‘Inclusivity’ and ‘Social Justice’  
Source: Original illustration

Taken together, these pluralistic undercurrents of 'inclusivity' reveal the possibility that 'inclusivity' can be a tautological reflection of cultural hegemony. After all, 'inclusivity' fundamentally implies that there is a desirable normative positionality to which marginalised populations have been precluded. Moreover, this normative centre is predominantly defined by the dominant culture. In essence, to become 'included' means being able to navigate the normative centre in accordance to the tacit rules of the dominant culture. All of this points to the valuable way in which the Sistema lens can raise philosophical debates and can be broadly applicable to the field of music education, and by extension, the broader field of education.



## Section 2.4: Exploring ‘Enculturation’

In returning to the discussion of Sistema ideology, one of the primary reasons that inclusivity in youth orchestras has been promoted as an avenue to social justice is the perception that orchestras – and classical music generally – constitute a culturally-rich context for young people to participate in. This is openly asserted by Sistema proponents who frequently quote El Sistema founder Jose Antonio Abreu:

[T]he orchestra and the choir are much more than artistic structures. They are examples and schools of social life, because to sing and to play together means to intimately coexist toward perfection and excellence, following a strict discipline of organization and coordination in order to seek the harmonic interdependence of voices and instruments. That's how they build a spirit of solidarity and fraternity among them, develop their self-esteem and foster the ethical and aesthetical values related to the music in all its senses. This is why music is immensely important in the awakening of sensibility, in the forging of values and in the training of youngsters to teach other kids (Abreu, 2009, para 5).

In such thinking, the music ensemble is conceptualised as a sociocultural intervention, intended to provide desirable ‘enculturation’ alongside musical tuition. Therefore, inclusivity and social justice arguments arise from the belief that placing children into large music ensembles and immersing them into the culture of orchestras and orchestral music will improve their lives, not only by providing them with enjoyable musical experiences, but also by benefitting them with the derivative effects of orchestra enculturation.

Given the strong way in which enculturation has been questioned in a Sistema context, it is useful to reconsider the way in which enculturation takes place in the wider context of music education, especially in respect to the way in which school music programmes act as institutions of enculturation. Thus, in the following subsections, I will review scholarly literature related to enculturation, particularly focusing on research pertaining to the relationship between music study and enculturation. I begin by making a brief foray into ethnomusicology, the field which explores the relationships between music, culture, and meaning-making. Thereafter, I consider several studies at

the intersection of ethnomusicology and music education, exploring how various researchers have conceptualised the effects of music education upon enculturation. In the final subsection, I cite some of the dilemmas raised by scholars of enculturation in music education, noting that deep ethical dilemmas can accompany discussions regarding 'enculturation' interventions.

#### **2.4.1 Musicking in school: Harmonising ethnomusicology and music education**

To begin a discussion on the enculturation processes pertaining to music making activities, it may be helpful to first consider how 'music' interacts with culture and society. Musicologist Christopher Small (1977) – whose scholarly work explores the relationships between music, society, and education – asserts that music is better understood socially if it is conceived as a verb. To this end, he has promoted use of the term 'musicking' (Small, 1998). In his view, musicking signifies more than humanly organised sound (see Blacking, 1973). Musicking encompasses all the interactions between all people involved in the musical process. Not only does musicking include performers, listeners, and composers, it also includes teachers, students, arts organisations, arts policy makers, and myriads of others. As such, musicking becomes a medium for individuals to construct, examine, shape, and/or reaffirm their social identities. As explained by Small (1998),

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world (p. 13).

Such a conceptualisation of music aligns quite profoundly with the underlying tenets of ethnomusicology:

Ethnomusicology is the study of music in its cultural context. Ethnomusicologists approach music as a social process in order to understand not only what music is but why it is: what music means to its practitioners and audiences, and how those meanings are conveyed (SEM, 2018, para 1).

As a field, ethnomusicology has experienced tremendous growth in recent decades, providing a consistent and rigorous research framework for exploring music in respect to its various meanings across many diverse cultures. Historically, the field of ethnomusicology has primarily focused upon

the musics of non-Western cultures, but more recently, there have been increased and important efforts to study Western music and music in Western culture from the perspective of ethnomusicology (Nettl, 2015). Such a repositioning of ethnomusicology opens up tools for inquiry – especially pertaining to enculturation -- which previously had been unavailable.

However, establishing a harmony between ethnomusicology and music education is not necessarily straightforward, as each of these disciplines has developed separate and distinct methods of inquiry and logical argument. Ethnomusicology generally aligns with the tenets of anthropology and anthropological research (Nettl, 2015; also see section 3.2.2), whereas music education tends to favour the educational research paradigms of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and history (Biesta, 2011). However, as Pat Campbell (2003), a highly respected researcher of both ethnomusicology and music education, has observed, ‘the intersection of ethnomusicology and music education is a point at which the means for understanding music, education, and culture may be found’ (p. 28). A number of prominent music education researchers have pursued the intersection between ethnomusicology and music education, including Pat Campbell’s (2010) assertion that children inhabit, form, and negotiate their own musical cultures; Kathryn Marsh’s (2009) account of how children’s musical cultures are transmitted and reinforced through musical play; and Huib Schippers’ (2009) observation that children develop an orientation towards their own culturality through an exposure to music of diverse cultures. Collectively, these studies suggest that music has a much more formative place in children’s lives than had previously been acknowledged.

In spite of the close association and important insights arising from the intersection of ethnomusicology and music education, there remains a pronounced gap in the literature in respect to American high school music education in particular. The published ethnographies of music education are predominantly focused on musicking at the primary school level and/or community education contexts (Krueger, 2014). A disproportionately smaller number of ethnographies explore music education activities at the high school level. Given the preponderance of high school music ensembles in the United States (Elpus & Abril, 2011) and the way in which American music education is largely oriented around the ensemble model (Elpus & Abril, 2011), and also given the important insights which ethnomusicological research has brought to the field of music education, it is notable – and perhaps surprising – that high school music ensembles remain an under-researched area in regard to ethnomusicology.

#### **2.4.2 Ethnographies of secondary music education: Insights into enculturation**

Though the existing ethnographies of secondary music education are relatively few in number, they provide important insights into the way in which music education exerts a sociocultural influence upon its participants. They hint at the complex enculturation processes which take place in the context of musicking. In this subsection, I will review three seminal ethnographies of secondary music education, namely, Lucy's Green (2002) ethnography of adolescent and adult musicians engaging in informal music-making, Peter Cope's (1999) ethnography of traditional Scottish fiddling in a formal music education context, and Henry Kingsbury's (1988) ethnography of a music conservatoire. Although this third ethnography does not technically take place in a secondary music education context, I have decided to include it in this section because of its potential transferability to a secondary context.

Music education researcher Lucy Green (2002) presents an ethnography of how 'popular' (i.e. not classically-trained) musicians learn music. She premises her study upon a recognition that popular music is almost entirely pursued, learnt, and practiced outside of schools or other formal music education programs. Through the study, Green outlines what she terms a pedagogy of informal music learning. Green finds that popular musicians acquire their sophisticated musical expertise through peer-directed and self-initiated activities, noting that aural replication and personal enjoyment encapsulate popular musicians' central priorities. Though Green's work is centrally focused upon non-school music education settings, it also has the effect of commenting upon formal music education. By focusing upon how musicians acquire their musical skills outside of a formal context, she is arguably utilising an implicit means for drawing attention to what pedagogies might be insufficiently enacted within a school music education context, namely peer-directed learning, aural replication, and the prioritisation of personal enjoyment. It is useful to note that in subsequent research, Green (2008) warns that formal music education settings can prioritise 'discipline' so thoroughly as to replace individuality with conformity and to elide personal satisfaction with the ensemble's collective success.

In a similar vein, Peter Cope (1999) made ethnographic observations juxtaposing Scottish fiddling and school-based music education. He asserts that formal music education is often at odds with more 'natural' approaches, resulting in high attrition rates in school-based instrumental music education

programmes. Cope's own action research project – in which he designed a community music education programme founded upon the 'democratic' principles he gleaned from Scottish fiddling – indicated that a much higher percentage of students remained committed to instrumental music when formal music education was more closely aligned to community music practices.

In 1988, anthropologist Henry Kingsbury (1988) conducted an ethnography of a prestigious and highly competitive American music conservatoire. His results indicated that music students and their teachers negotiate a rarefied cultural system around the processes of studying classical music. In the study, Kingsbury positions himself as a piano student, who attends classes, lectures, and performances with the matriculated students. Preceding his year of ethnographic immersion, he was particularly interested in the way in which evaluation took place in the conservatoire. As a consequence of his study, he found such inquiries were eclipsed by his discovery of the importance placed upon the reification of musical 'talent' and how such attributions fuelled an unfriendly and competitive 'conservatory cultural system'. He found that social prestige ultimately subverted students' efforts to acquire musical proficiency. This occurred because proclamations of 'talent' were intimately tied to pre-established social rankings, and thus had the effect of reaffirming social rankings among the conservatoire students. Correspondingly, he concluded that in pursuing conservatoire training, the acquisition of musical skills, techniques, and expertises were somewhat ancillary to negotiating the cultural constraints of formalised classical music instruction. In effect, Kingsbury argues that the conservatoire system perpetuates a competitive and mercenary social hierarchy built around conformity to the culture of classical music, with 'talent' acting as the symbolic measure for such conformity. Kingsbury's assertion that 'talent' is a euphemistic affirmation of the existing social order aptly foreshadows the forthcoming discussion of Pierre Bourdieu and his views on education and social reproduction (see section 3.4.2). Kingsbury's assessment of classical music training is clearly at odds with the way in which music education purportedly values social inclusivity, particularly in respect to the assertion that symphony orchestras symbolise an idealised society. Accordingly, Kingsbury's work invites investigation into the degree to which high school music ensembles perpetuate and reinforce existing social rankings and/or the degree to which they enable students to transcend such structures.

### 2.4.3 Research Questions

In these two opening chapters, I have reviewed and interwoven several disparate literatures. My purpose in doing so has been to explore and elaborate on some of the questions arising from the juxtaposition of El Sistema with American music education, the field(s) in which I have pursued my career thus far. As I indicated in the preceding chapter (see sections 1.2.1, 2.1.1), El Sistema burst onto the international scene with bold statements about the far-reaching impacts of music education, namely that youth orchestras were the solution for at-risk youth because they protected children against the vices of idleness, social disenfranchisement, and poverty. A wave of Sistema enthusiasm promptly followed, and new Sistema programmes began to proliferate around the world under a mantra of social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation (Tunstall, 2012; see also section 1.1.2).

In time, El Sistema came under intense scrutiny (see section 1.1.3). Some researchers criticised the neo-colonial undertones of ascribing salvific capabilities to western art music (see Toronyi-Lalic, 2012; Bull, 2016) and others argued that El Sistema's claim at being a social programme was no more than a marketing ploy to secure continued funding (Baker, 2014b). Sistema scholarship soon propelled itself to a point of impasse as Sistema proponents and Sistema detractors pitted themselves against each other in an antagonistic relationship.

Fortunately, that same Sistema impasse has opened up new avenues to scholarship as it became evident that each faction claimed that their respective arguments were justified by the tenets of social justice. In this chapter, I have pursued a review of the social justice literature, as well as the closely-related literature of inclusivity and enculturation. In doing so, I have built the argument that music education is deeply entangled in the multi-faceted and complex reification of cultural hegemony.

Set against this theoretical exploration of how the Sistema lens is highlighting important avenues of inquiry for music education (see section 2.1.4), I have also juxtaposed my own experiences as a school-based music educator and founding director of a Sistema programme (see Chapter 1). In doing so, I have sought to illustrate that as I proceed with this study, it becomes impossible not to acknowledge myself as a research subject and participant. Therefore, I am deeply entangled in my research. That entanglement ultimately makes it possible to pursue this research, for it is because of

the unique perspective I hold, having worked in both Sistema and school contexts, that I am uniquely situated to direct the Sistema lens at myself and American music education.

The following research questions guide this study:

*RQ1: To what degree are school orchestras entangled in issues of cultural hegemony?*

*RQ2: How do high school orchestra students negotiate encounters with cultural hegemony?*

*RQ3: To what extent have I been complicit in perpetuating cultural hegemony through my work as a high school orchestra teacher?*

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE**

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### **Section 3.1: An Auto/Ethnographic Positionality**

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to present my methodological rationale for addressing the study's research questions (see section 2.4.3). My original research intention had been to position myself as an 'un-entangled' researcher who undertook research from a 'dispassionate and objective' perspective. However, my research efforts eventually propelled me to the realisation that I would be unable to remain un-entangled whilst pursuing this research – the very nature of which demanded an entangled approach. Consequently, I had to choose to either amend my research purposes or abandon my methodological un-entanglement. Because I felt that the former option would be unsatisfactory and perhaps disingenuous, I have methodologically chosen to follow the latter option. Consequently, I have been thrust into the subjective and entangled 'messy-ness' of embracing autoethnography, and in the process, I have discovered its respective strengths and limitations.

Therefore, this chapter proceeds as a mosaic of methodological mini-chapters and as a narrative of continual methodological refinement, with an overarching intention of building the rationale for pursuing an auto/ethnography. First, I provide a autoethnographically narrative account regarding researcher positionality (see Pitard, 2017), asserting that my unique perspective as a music-teacher-turned-researcher is central to the research I am pursuing. Second, I present and theorise auto/ethnography, the methodological orientation I have selected for this study. In doing so, I follow methodologist Michael Crotty's (1998) admonition to be transparent about the epistemological foundations of the selected methodology. Third, I introduce and discuss the data collection methods I employ in this auto/ethnographic study (Chang, 2016). And finally, I introduce a theoretical and analytical framework, aligning myself with methodologist John Creswell's (2014) belief that theory-use is often a methodological decision. Interspersed throughout all of the sections, I identify a number of methodological exemplars which have aided me in defining and articulating my methodology (Thomson & Kamler, 2016).

In this first mini-chapter, I discuss researcher positionality, accounting for the way in which my research evolved towards autoethnography, and thus facilitated greater alignment between my research pursuits and my research purpose than what I had undertaken previously. I discuss how such a realignment provides additional advantages, namely the capacity to apply critical theory more ethically and rigorously as well as the possibility of increased readability for practicing music educators. I conclude the section by acknowledging some of limitations I face by positioning myself as a researcher who is entangled within the research process.

### **3.1.1 Design Genesis: Evolution toward autoethnography**

When I initially embarked on my postgraduate studies, I had attempted to distance myself sufficiently from a particular educational setting (e.g. American music education) in order to take note of what was particularly noteworthy of that setting. As I have indicated earlier (see section 1.2.3), such an approach resulted in a research trajectory which was ultimately unable to attend to my fundamental research interests. Accordingly, in looking back across the past several years of methodological refinement, my research pursuits showcase a consistent evolution as I have confronted the topic of researcher objectivity and ultimately moved towards autoethnography. In doing so, I have gained appreciation for a research approach which harmonises intention, fieldwork, and eventual dissemination of the research.

Because this study has been built upon a continually evolving methodology and because ‘autoethnography’ recognises such evolution as being essential to document and reflect upon (Rodriguez, et al., 2017), I now give a brief accounting of how my methodology has evolved since I began this project. When I prepared my first research proposal, I had wanted to place my experience as a practicing school teacher, coupled with my complex feelings about using music education as a medium for social justice, at the axiomatic centre of my research (see section 1.2.3), but I sought to project this research focus upon an external music education institution. Thus, I proposed to conduct a comparative study of school orchestras and Sistema programmes. I argued that there needed to be greater clarity regarding the similarities and differences – if indeed there were notable differences – between the programmes. It appeared to me as though Sistema programmes were re-creating music education offerings which were already available within the context of the American public school system, and I questioned why this might be the case. When I subsequently arrived in the UK to begin my studies, I discovered that my own immersion in the field of American music education had precluded me from recognising that my proposed methodology – as well as the

project itself – would not be feasible to pursue in a UK context because of the pronounced differences between American and British approaches to school-based music education, especially in regard to large performing ensembles. I subsequently recrafted my research agenda, and through the guidance of my supervisor, I determined that I could conduct an ethnographically-informed case-study of a Sistema programme in England and see how other Sistema teachers were conceptualising social justice (see Fairbanks, 2014).

Although that particular research project produced a number of important contributions to the field of Sistema research, I realised that amidst my goal of projecting my research interests onto an external music education institution, I had not fully aligned my research project with my research intention; I had not explored the conflicted-ness I had felt in using music education for the purpose of social justice. Interestingly though, one result of my study was the discovery that other Sistema music educators were experiencing similar ideological circles as I had experienced, particularly when they were asked to identify the nexus between their programme and social justice.

In constructing the next iteration of my methodology – my PhD registration upgrade report – I made an abrupt shift in my fieldwork focus, allowing me to focus my research directly upon the teaching field that I primarily identified with, namely school-based music education. While such an action did align more closely with my career identity, it still sought to project my research interests outward upon an external music education institution, thereby taking a rather indirect stance towards addressing my research purposes. Fortunately, during my Registration Viva, I was presented with the possibility of conceiving of my research as an autoethnography. At the time, the suggestion seemed antithetical to my notions of rigorous educational research, yet, I was intrigued by the possibility.

As I subsequently weighed the affordances of aligning intention, fieldwork, and eventual dissemination of the research, I began to realise that autoethnography would need to feature prominently in my study. In turn, I have discovered that rigorously constructed research can take many forms, and that for my research to address the questions I have set forth, I would need to embrace the subjective, entangled, and vulnerable position of placing myself autoethnographically in the study.

### 3.1.2 Methodological Integrity: Alignment of design and theoretical perspective

In alignment with the realisation that I had been previously been methodologically projecting my own unsettledness upon those I was researching, I also realised that I had paired such research with an incongruent theoretical perspective. Although I had claimed to be conducting an ethnographically-informed study, I had animated it with Critical Theory, a theory which concerns itself with identifying and removing latent structures of oppression (Harvey, 1990). In doing so, I had not fully realised that I was introducing an internal tension between emic trust and commitment to theory.

Early in my studies, I recognised the value of applying Critical Theory to my chosen research field. Indeed, one of the principle conclusions from my MPhil literature review (Fairbanks, 2013a) was the need to build my subsequent scholarship upon a theoretical framework of Critical Theory:

I suggest that this essay which sought to contextualise the *El Sistema* movement within English music education has ultimately shown a need to apply critical social theory to the *El Sistema* movement to specifically explore the construct of social justice (p. 14).

I argued that because Sistema programmes had embraced the problematic construct of ‘social justice’, it would be necessary to apply Critical Theory, a theory which concerns itself with identifying and removing latent structures of oppression (Harvey, 1990).

As I began to see my research through the lens of Critical Theory, I was able to identify the concepts – such as ‘social justice’ – that I needed to explore through a review of scholarly literature. As I continued to pursue my research through a lens of Critical Theory, I sensed that I had a powerful and robust means for tackling research questions pertaining to the relationships between music education and social justice. This was consistently affirmed by feedback I received from researchers and assessors who reviewed my work, and ultimately, it was my Critical Theory perspective that allowed me to gain the important insight that other Sistema music educators were encountering a certain underconceptualisation and unsettledness regarding their commitments to social justice. Accordingly, Critical Theory impressed itself upon me as being inseparably linked with the research agenda I was pursuing.

However, I was soon presented with a dilemma. Although I had embraced Critical Theory because it sought to ‘expose and minimize rationalizations, legitimations, and taken for granted assumptions’ (Regelski, 2005, p. 9), I had not fully considered whether such a theoretical perspective could actually

work in tandem with my chosen methodology of an ethnographically-informed case study. Ethnographic research tends to favour an inductive approach to research (see 3.2.1), but when I had pursued my research I had clung tenaciously to my deductive Critical Theory approach. Thus, I had co-opted my research participants into using ‘the taken-for-granted assumptions of traditional theory and practice as lightning rods for bolts of critical rationality’ (Regelski, 2005, p. 13). This problematic use of theory was presented to me by one of the assessors of my EdRes Essay 2: ‘Your research risks unsettling well-meaning advocates of social justice from their comfortable assumptions’ (Cremin, 2014, para 3).

I was deeply troubled by this observation. Critical Theory had indeed redirected my research toward my deeper research interests, but in doing so, it had raised new dilemmas pertaining to theory-use and methodological commitments. As I internally struggled to address such dilemmas, I devoted large sections of my MPhil thesis to trying to reconcile the ethical tension I perceived:

This study may “unsettle well-meaning advocates of social justice from their comfortable assumptions”, but it also intends to provide those advocates with deeper conceptualisation of their practice, resulting in greater capacity to deliver their programmes successfully (Fairbanks, 2014, p. 21).

However, even with my best efforts to mediate the ethical tension by (1) asserting that my research would ultimately be helpful rather than harmful and (2) affirming that I was fulfilling an expressed need of the ‘El Sistema movement’ to produce rigorous research in order ‘to provide a solid research foundation for the international field to stand and build upon’ (Booth, 2013, p. 8), I had to ultimately admit that I was personally troubled by my own positioning:

I hope to mediate the potentially ‘unsettling’ nature of this study, but I also recognise that some ethical dilemmas do not have complete resolutions (Fairbanks, 2014, p. 18).

In the end, I rationalised that my MPhil study should go forward as I had planned, with the dissonant pairing of Critical Theory and ethnography.

A year later, when I was revisiting the fieldwork site to share my findings with the research participants who had hosted my MPhil research and generously set aside time to participate in the interviews, I found that I was uneasy sharing such findings with these individuals, given the trust they had demonstrated to me in welcoming me to their Sistema programme. Throughout my study, I had tenaciously aligned my research with critical perspectives, which led me to conclude that the practitioners at that particular Sistema site had underconceptualised ‘social justice’ with respect to the cultural messages of their music programme. I anticipated that this was not necessarily a

welcome finding for them, especially given their vested interest in presenting themselves favourably to the community in which they were a part. Further, I realised that because they had known of my prior work as the director of a Sistema programme, they probably had anticipated that I would portray them with the characteristic enthusiasm of a Sistema advocate. So, as I shared my research findings back with the programme's leadership, I distinctly remember feeling a lingering ethical discomfort at recasting these individuals differently than they had been presenting themselves.

As I subsequently advanced to the PhD, I faced a methodological conundrum. I wanted to hold to the powerful imperatives of Critical Theory because of its theoretical sharpness, but I also wanted to carry out an ethnographic study because of its particular strengths for understanding a culturally-situated setting. And I was beginning to wonder whether the two were mutually exclusive of each other. To engage in ethnographic fieldwork, it was essential that I convey to my research participants that I could be trusted, and yet a commitment to critical theory presupposed that I would actively be seeking to expose structures of oppression. And to be so intent on uncovering structures of oppression felt as though it would be compromising – if not betraying – the trust upon which ethnographic research is premised.

Similar to the earlier dilemma I had faced regarding whether my research interest could be projected upon an external music education institution (see section 3.1.1), I realised that I could not, in good conscience, project my Critical Theory framework upon music teaching colleagues, especially when one of my principle aims in embracing Critical Theory was to address my own internal ideological struggle. So, when autoethnography was presented to me as a methodological possibility, I recognized it as an ethically sound solution, a way to 'understand the lived experiences of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination' by studying my own teaching practice through a critical lens (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 20). Through autoethnography, I could refocus Critical Theory inwardly, directly addressing the issues I wanted to address without unnecessarily implicating myself into the ethically compromised position of unilaterally projecting Critical Theory upon my research participants.

### **3.1.3 Remaining Relatable: Minding the gap between researchers and teachers**

One of the overarching and enduring aims of educational research is to facilitate an improvement in educational practice of some kind (Whitty, 2006; Menter, 2017). Whilst it might be expected that the field of educational practice would tend to embrace and implement research findings – similar to the ways in which other fields have complementary relationships between research and industry (Blumenthal, et al., 1996; Foray & Lissoni, 2010) – a large body of research literature, as well as my own perceptions as a former school teacher, suggest that there exists a pronounced dichotomy between educational research and educational practice (Dewey, 1904; Zeichner, 1995; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Korthagen, 2007; Roth, Mavin & Dekker, 2014; Ion, Stingu & Marin, 2018). A discussion on the causes and effects of this dichotomy is outside the scope of this methodology chapter, however, because one of my overarching aims as a researcher is to produce work which is useful, accessible and relatable to the field I am studying, I wish to devote momentary attention to the way in which autoethnography potentially offers methodological advantages for research dissemination and impact.

It has been noted and argued that practicing teachers are reluctant to engage in research literature for a wide variety of reasons. These range from issues of trustworthiness, usefulness, and accessibility (Carnine, 1995) to epistemological differences between how practicing teachers and educational researchers regard educational knowledge (Joram, 2007). In addition to the plethora of suggestions for how to bridge this gap, which range from jargon-free writing (Thomson & Kamler, 2016; Bhachu, 2015) to distilling research into bulleted lists (Drill, Miller & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2012) and from restructuring the field of academic research (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003) to giving pre-service teachers increased training on reading research and making educational research publicly available to all professional teachers (Carnine, 1995; Drill, Miller & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2012), I proffer another suggestion for how to bridge the chasm between research and practice.

David Hargreaves' (1996) makes the observation that the field of education reaffirms the divide between research and practice because 'it is the researchers, not the practitioners, who determine the agenda of educational research' (p. 3). Elana Joram (2007) adds her assertion that the dichotomy is exacerbated by epistemological differences between 'teaching knowledge' and 'research knowledge'. In synthesising these two observations, I assert that a distinct advantage of my autoethnographic approach is that I am able to straddle the worlds of academic research and practice-based knowledge. Indeed, autoethnography offers the possibility that my lived experience as a music educator can become the substance of 'research' in this paper, thereby erasing some of

the marked distinctions between research and practice. Thus, by merging these two worlds – i.e. research and practice – and remaining anchored solidly and reflexively in both, my autoethnographic research seeks to be accessible to researchers and practicing music educators alike. Further, as I continue to offer my candid and vulnerable reflections on my own journey(s) between music education practice and academic research, I anticipate that those who read my work may similarly be able to bridge the seeming divide between practice and research. Thus, my autoethnographic positionality has the potential to build synergies and co-constructions between the fields of educational research and educational practice.

### **3.1.4 Acknowledging Limitations: Situating myself as an entangled researcher**

By adopting an autoethnographic positionality, I acknowledge that although such a manoeuvre aligns with the methodological call for critical reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and postmodernism's insistence that research pursuits remain inseparable from the epistemological positioning of the researcher (Lyotard, 1984), the decision to position myself autoethnographically in the study carries notable repercussions regarding the way in which my research will be received and/or perceived by those who read it (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Related to such considerations, let me acknowledge some methodological boldness in aligning my study with autoethnography. First, autoethnography is a research design which is arguably in its infancy (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011); therefore, I am unable to utilise the take-it-off-the-shelf convenience of more established research paradigms (Creswell, 2014). Second, autoethnography's legitimacy as a research design is highly predicated upon the postmodern insistence that researcher objectivity is a false ideal (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), a postmodern positionality which itself remains highly contentious among a wide-range of academic thought (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998). Third, noted educational ethnographers have questioned whether autoethnography is able to access the same level of rigour which ethnography derives from anthropological research (Delamont, 2009). Fourth, this thesis represents my first formalised attempt to construct an autoethnographic study, meaning that I am unable to draw upon some of the methodological insights which might have been refined by undertaking an autoethnographic pilot study.



While I acknowledge that autoethnography places a number of limitations upon my research, I am committed to selecting a methodological stance which aligns profoundly with my research intentions. During the several years in which I have been developing this thesis, I have discovered that in order for me to even undertake this research – including the refocusing of critical theory on self and the dialectical reconciling of emic and etic perspectives – I must acknowledge my entangledness in the study. And in acknowledging my autoethnographic positionality, I accept both the limitations and the risks of pursuing an autoethnographic study. In the section which follows, I further elaborate on autoethnography and attend to how I address the varied limitations and risks of making such a methodological decision, but ultimately, I argue, these limitations and risks are imperative if I am to follow through on my 'ethical, respectful and dialogic quest to understand the world' (Cremin, 2018, p. 1).

## **Section 3.2: Theorising Auto/Ethnography**

The choreography between research questions and research design is the substance of methodology. In the preceding sections, I presented and commented upon how my methodology has steadily evolved towards being more autoethnographic. In doing so, ‘autoethnography’ impetuously swept onto the metaphorical dancefloor before the nexus between research questions and research design had fully been established. In this section, I seek to establish that nexus by attending to the epistemological foundations of social research, ethnography, and autoethnography.

To proceed with this discussion, I have constructed this section in four parts. First, I discuss the relationship(s) between inductive observations, deductive observations, theory-building, and theory validation. Second, I discuss one of the epistemological contributions of cultural anthropology – the reconciliation of etic and emic perspectives – which synthesises the processes of theory-building and theory-validation into a research methodology. Third, I discuss how autoethnography arises out of a postmodern re-centering of the ethnographic research process. And fourth, I argue that a dialectical synergy can arise when autoethnography and ethnography are layered on top of each other. In the end, I intend to show that auto/ethnography is not only well-suited for my particular research intentions, it is also endowed with a substantial and rigorous theoretical foundation.

### **3.2.1 Epistemological Foundations of Socio-Educational Research**

Broadly construed, ‘research’ is premised upon a belief that empirical observation forms the foundation of legitimate and verifiable knowledge (Longino, 2016). Whilst philosophers have long-debated the precise way in which observation and truth are interrelated (see Hume, 2000; Kant, 1950; Habermas, 1978; Lyotard, 1984), there is generally agreement that observation can lead to reliable knowledge claims through a process of rationality and reason (Bogen, 2017). It is generally

accepted that there are two main ways in which observation and reasoning interact (Taber, 2007). The deductive reasoning tradition suggests that theory should act as the catalyst for conducting observations; the inductive tradition suggests that observations precede theory (see figure 3.2.1a).

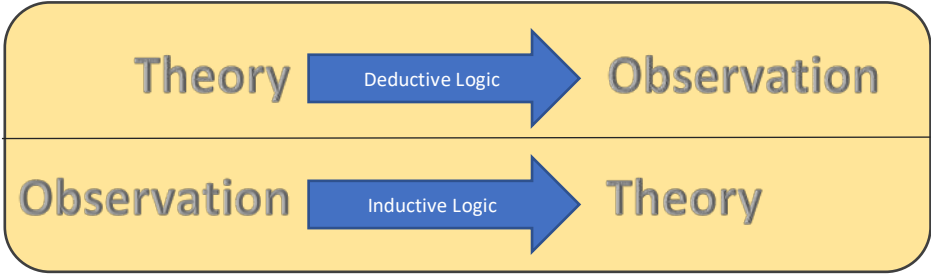


Figure 3.2.1a: Reasoning, Theory, Observation  
Source: Original Illustration

At times, *science* is presented as being exclusively concerned with the deductive relationships between theory and observation (see Medewar, 1996; Popper, 1959). While it may be accurate to say that the *scientific method* tends to focus upon deductive relationships (e.g. hypothesis testing), it would be erroneous and inaccurate to make an elision between the deductive-ness of the *scientific method* and *science* itself (Blachowitz, 2009). After all, the scientific method is deeply reliant upon the inductive logic which gives rise to theories and hypotheses. So, rather than thinking of deductive and inductive logic as being in opposition, they can be conceptualised as being complementary. In inductive approaches, the aim of the research is to construct theory and/or understandings which can encompass the observations made. In deductive approaches, the aim is to test, validate, and/or apply theory. As such, inductive and deductive research traditions occupy differing positions along the progression of knowledge creation, and are linked by the centrality of theory (see figure 3.2.1b).

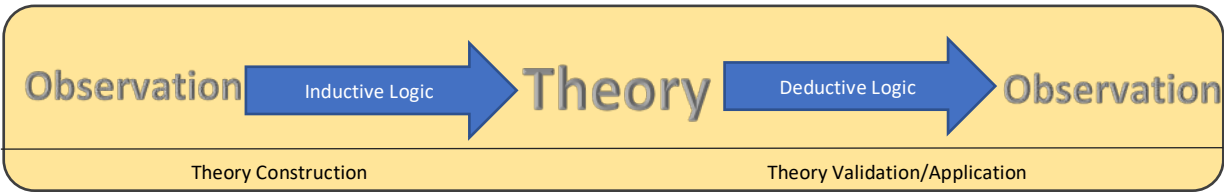


Figure 3.2.1b: Progression of Knowledge Creation  
Source: Original Illustration

Although this progression is useful for highlighting the centrality of theory, it does not necessarily show the way in which observation is also a shared feature between inductive and deductive

approaches. Thus, this model can be adjusted to emphasise both points of commonality – observation and theory – bringing inductive and deductive research traditions into a complementary, iterative, symbiotic, and mutually dependent relationship (see figure 3.2.1c).

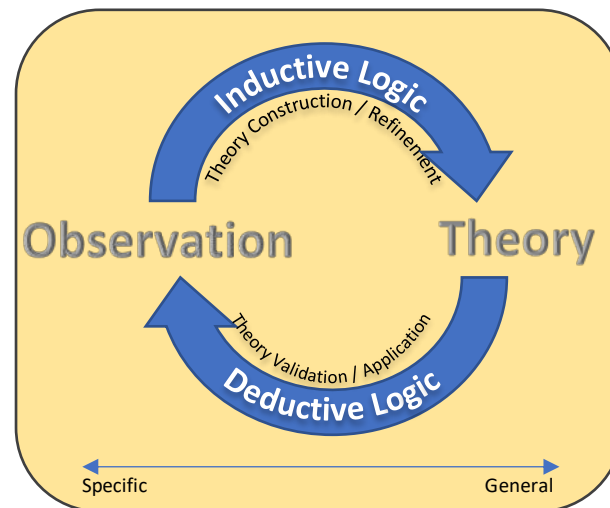


Figure 3.2.1c: Iterative Relationship between Theory and Observation  
*Source: Original Illustration*

In respect to such a conceptualisation of the knowledge creation process, it becomes evident that research traditions do not operate exclusively in either the inductive or the deductive domain. Rather, they necessarily incorporate a complex weave of inductive and deductive reasoning to draw meaningful relationships between empirical observation and theory.

### 3.3.2 Etic and Emic Reconciliation: Insights from ethnography

One research tradition which embraces such an iterative weave of deductive and inductive approaches is ethnography. Ethnography derives from anthropology, a research discipline which asserts that cultural contexts are so central to the way in which individuals navigate their respective social world, that researchers should immerse themselves within the culture being studied (Malinowski, 1960; Geertz, 1973) in order to engage in a reconciliation of *emic* and *etic* perspectives (Harris, 1976). *Emic* refers to the ‘insider’ view, or the shared understandings of those who belong to a particular cultural or social group, whereas *etic* refers to the ‘outsider’ view, or the collective understandings of those who do not identify themselves as being part of the particular cultural or social group (Pike, 1967; Feleppa, 1986). When ethnographers enter a fieldsite and/or select a group

to study, they bring with them etic perspectives. As they subsequently engage in research, they seek to gain an emic perspective on a group which had previously been 'other'. Once the emic perspective has been obtained, ethnographers then engage in a dialectical reconciliation of the tensions arising between etic and emic perspectives, thereby drawing upon an epistemologically rigorous way in which to comprehend socio-cultural worlds which might be substantially outside of the researcher's (and the reader's) realm of experience (Hammersley, 2006). As noted by ethnographer John Van Maanen (2011),

[Ethnographies] sit between two worlds or systems of meaning – the world of the ethnographer (and readers) and the world of cultural members ... They necessarily decode one culture while recoding it for another (p. 4).

Because ethnography is premised upon the dialectic between etic and emic perspectives, it is simultaneously inductive and deductive. As such, it contributes to both the construction of theory and the application of it.

Anthropology's contribution of etic/emic reconciliation has had a far-reaching impact upon the social sciences. Not only has it been adopted as a tool for empirical research in nearly all sub-disciplines of the social sciences (Hammersley, 2018), some authors have even quipped that, 'The method has gone "viral" beyond the university ... to the extent that one could feasibly claim that "we're all ethnographers now"' (Mills & Morton, 2013, p. 3). Within educational research, there is generally widespread agreement that ethnography constitutes an appropriate and legitimate approach to many types of research questions (Creswell, 2014).

However, educational ethnographer and theorist Martyn Hammersley (2018) warns that the widespread and uncritical acceptance of ethnography as a methodology is both problematic and potentially dangerous: problematic because education (re)defines 'ethnography' in such divergent ways that there is little consensus upon what epistemological commitments are implicated by a decision to utilise ethnography, and dangerous because without a clear epistemological foundation, it is possible that educational researchers will either use ethnography to draw conclusions and generalisations which extend beyond the epistemological bounds of their research, or they will use ethnography to hegemonically reaffirm a pre-existing ideological belief (Hammersley, 1990). Notwithstanding this strong critique of educational ethnography, Hammersley (2018) ultimately contends, 'There are kinds of ethnographic work whose contribution to our knowledge of the social world is essential' (p. 12).

As a research design, ethnography relies heavily upon the intuition of the researcher. This feature permits great flexibility to tailor the research towards the inductive pursuit of emergent areas of interest, but it also potentially represents an important limitation (Denzin, 1997); the researcher is often the sole collector, analyser, and interpreter of the data, as well as the exclusive disseminator of the findings. Accordingly, direct replicability of an ethnography is extremely limited. For this reason, great emphasis is often placed upon providing descriptions with only minimal commentary, thus making it symbolically possible for other readers to analyse the data themselves and determine whether they would draw similar conclusions.

As a medium, ethnographies are often celebrated for the way in which they can situate complex social issues within a compelling narrative. Indeed, the anthropologist and educational researcher Harry Wolcott (2005) asserts that ethnography represents the marriage of social science and artistry. He explains that the way in which ethnographies represent the fieldwork site and present the data is central to the ethnographic endeavour. Because ethnographies seek to invite readers into the cultural world of the group being studied, and because they use text as the principle means of cultural representation, the aesthetic and artistic decisions pertaining to writing an ethnography correspondingly become entangled in the ethnographic depictions of identity, power, and cultural understandings (see Snyder-Young, 2010; Hjorth & Sharp, 2014)

### **3.2.3 Autoethnography: A postmodern take on ethnography**

Over the past several decades, as ethnography has increasingly interacted with postmodernism, it has given rise to a new methodological approach known as autoethnography (Wall, 2006). As the name implies, autoethnography is created by layering *autobiography* with *ethnography*. It seeks to tell an ethnographic story – the story of etic and emic reconciliation – by centring the researcher's personal experience. As with ethnography, the focus remains on the aspects of experience that are intricately tied to culture and/or cultural identity. However, it differs substantially from ethnography in that the ethnographic focus is often introspective:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, then, they look inward, exposing a

vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

Autoethnography is a relatively recent addition to the field of educational research (Denzin, 1997). In contrast to ethnography, which has been codified and accepted as a research method since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, autoethnography traces its origins to the 1970s. Pioneers of autoethnography, such as David Hayano (1979), initially conceptualised autoethnography as a means by which to apply the tools of ethnography to a researcher's 'home' culture. In addition to the practical benefit that 'years of effort may be saved by native ethnographers who have already acquired internal group membership' (Hayano, 1979, p. 103), Hayano also asserts that autoethnography offers the possibility to highlight voices which are sometimes neglected precisely because they are not immediately recognised as being culturally diverse. Thus, by reimagining one's own 'home' culture as one in which others might need to pass across a threshold of emic understanding, autoethnography seeks to 'enlarge anthropology's conceptual and epistemological foundations' (Hayano, 1979, p. 103). Correspondingly, autoethnographers contribute to the postmodern tendency towards an ever-expanding pluralistic view of cultural diversity by making the subtle but bold assertion that the locus of ethnographic gaze can be shifted to focus upon one's 'own' people (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

As the field of autoethnography continues to mature, its innate potentialities for critical reflection become more evident (Prendergast, 2013; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010). Because autoethnography acknowledges the postmodern imperative that the authority of academic research's ontological and epistemological assumptions should be questioned (Wall, 2006), it fully embraces the postmodern call to explore one's own reflexive positioning as a researcher (Reed-Danahay, 1997), and this shift to the personal has been celebrated as one of its particular strengths:

Autoethnography is one of the [research] approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, para 3).

Indeed, because of my own research journey, I have recognised the importance of acknowledging subjectivity, emotionality, and my own influence upon the research (see section 3.1.1).

As I have recounted earlier (see section 1.2.3 and 3.1.1), when I first undertook my research pursuits, I had not considered the postmodern possibility of placing my own subjectivity and emotionality at

the centre of the research process. And yet, problematically, I attempted to project my own internal subjectivities and emotions upon external music education institutions, exerting an unmistakable influence upon the research process, while also trying to engage in objective, dispassionate research. Whether it should be said that I found autoethnography, or that autoethnography found me, I am not quite sure. But regardless, autoethnography and my research are well-paired for one another.

### **3.2.4 Capitalising upon the dialectic between ethnography and autoethnography**

Autoethnography introduces an essential methodological consideration into my study, and yet, autoethnography alone is not sufficient for addressing my research questions. For, in the end, my research is concerned with the complexity of addressing cultural hegemony *in the context* of school-based music education. In other words, to fully address my research questions, there must be an ethnographic component; it needs to be autoethnographic in an ethnographic context. So, my study must be autoethnographic, but it also must be ethnographic. In short, it must be both. And thus I have designed it as an auto/ethnography.

To highlight the way that my study functions both autoethnographically and ethnographically, I have chosen to make use of a slash ('/') in the midst of the word 'auto/ethnography'. I intend such a nomenclature to signify the dialectical nature of my research. When autoethnography was first named and codified as a methodological approach, it sometimes did carry a slash (Cullen, 2011), and correspondingly seemed to carry focus upon the shifting identifies between the researcher acting as an ethnographer and the researcher acting as autoethnographer (see Reed-Danahay, 1997). The current convention has been to move towards autoethnography-without-a-slash, and some commentators have suggested that in doing so, there has been a corresponding trend for autoethnography to distance itself from the parent discipline of ethnography (Walford, 2004) and become more self-focused (Delamont, 2009). My research is arguably more akin to these earlier notions of autoethnography, and my use of the slash is primarily intended to highlight my intention to retain the ethnographic component and capitalise on the dialectic overlay of two closely-related research approaches.



The dialectic between autoethnography and ethnography becomes an advantage to my research because it allows my methodology to be enriched by both approaches, a feature which is essential for studying the highly contextualised setting of school-based music education (e.g. ethnographic) in order to understand the entanglements music educators experience with cultural hegemony (e.g. autoethnographic). Moreover, because ethnography and autoethnography are premised upon similar epistemological foundations, and can thus proceed from similar fieldwork experiences, my study can be conceived as an internal synthesis of the two approaches. It becomes the methodological way to turn my fieldwork is a pane of glass, through which, if the light is adjusted appropriately, I become able to simultaneously see outwardly and see my own reflection (see section 1.2.4).

To draw several parts of my thesis together at this point, I return to how this methodology intersects with my overarching research intentions and career goals. My motivation for becoming a music teacher was built in part upon a desire to bring educational and musical opportunities to socioeconomically disadvantaged students. When I graduated from university with my teaching credential, I intentionally sought out a teaching position in a ‘disadvantaged’ community, thus initiating a teaching career in which I differed from the predominant ethnic, socioeconomic status, and cultural background of the students with whom I was working. That teaching career has eventually elided into my current research agenda as I have endeavoured to gain greater understanding of the complexities associated with using education – and specifically music education – as an intervention against socioeconomic disadvantage. By utilising auto/ethnography, I am able to engage in frequent reflexive practices in the midst of the research process and thereby make use of critical theory without the pronounced ethical dilemmas outlined in the previous section (see section 3.1.2). Such methodological alignment carries deep resonance for my project, especially because of the way in which I have positioned myself in relation to my research. So accordingly, not only is auto/ethnography a particularly appropriate method for addressing this study’s research questions, it also resonates deeply with my underlying research purposes.

### **3.2.5 Methodological Rigour: Thick descriptions, transferability, and verisimilitude**

Given auto/ethnography’s dualistic role in both constructing theory (i.e. emic reconciliation) and application of it (i.e. etic reconciliation), it becomes useful to discuss the ways in which research

rigour is established. In contrast to other research paradigms in which rigour is epistemologically established by adherence to well-established methodological protocols and/or notions of objectivity, ethnography has a differing epistemological commitment to the subjective world of etic and emic reconciliation. The result is that ethnography does not necessarily conform to some of the traditional measures of research rigour. Additionally, ethnography is endowed with an internal tension regarding its applicability. On the one hand, almost by definition, the findings of an ethnography pertain specifically to the cultural group being studied. And yet, ethnographers construct their ethnographies, not for the group being studied, but rather, for those who are 'outsiders' to that group. Thus, the intended recipients of ethnography are those for whom the research findings do not directly pertain. This naturally raises questions about the usefulness of ethnography, particularly in applied fields, such as educational research. In this subsection, I discuss these twin concerns of rigour and applicability, ultimately arguing that 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) represent the way in which ethnography produces rigorous and transferable findings which carry a high degree of verisimilitude. Additionally, I argue that by overlaying ethnography with autoethnography – i.e. auto/ethnography – ethnographic research can be infused with a high degree of applicability.

The educational research methodologist Egon Guba (1981) identifies that differing research traditions are built upon differing epistemological commitments, and he posits that the wording used to establish research rigour should align with the epistemological commitments of the research. Such an assertion became strongly amplified by a number of methodologists who have advocated that postmodernism's challenges to scientific inquiry (Kuntz, 2012; Ramaekers, 2002; Stronach & MacLure, 1997) and the corresponding rise of qualitative research paradigms (Alasuutari, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 2018) warrants the need for entirely new criteria for determining research rigour (Lub, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Against such developments, Guba's (1981) decision to change 'applicability' to 'transferability' now seems rather mild, but it did establish a precedence for considering methodological rigour in relationship to epistemological commitments.

The way in which ethnographic research attends to these various criteria of rigour continues to be discussed and debated by ethnographers (see Hammersley, 2018; Walford, 2009), but there is generally consensus that 'thick description' becomes one of the principle ways to attend to the verisimilitude, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Geertz, 1973). As explained by Creswell and Miller (2000),

The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation (p. 128).

Norman Denzin (1997) expands, 'A text with high verisimilitude provides the opportunity for vicarious experience' (p. 10). By providing readers with a descriptive enough text that they are able to vicariously engage in the research as if they were physically present, the researcher allows them to ascertain for themselves whether the research findings are rigorously constructed, dependable, and potentially confirmable. In this way, ethnographic verisimilitude becomes both a goal in and of itself and also a medium for establishing the rigour and trustworthiness of the research (Jackson, 2009).

Thick description can also bear upon transferability, which is the ability for findings from one research context to be applicable in another setting. In ethnographic research, 'transferability' is often held up as being preferable to 'generalisability'. Because ethnographic research findings are intentionally restricted to the group for which they apply, generalisability is usually not possible. However, the concept of 'transferability' suggests that the findings may still hold resonance in different contexts. In ethnographic research, such transferability is most often achieved through thick description: 'Thick description means that the researcher provides the reader with a full and purposeful account of the context, participants, and research design so that the reader can make their own determinations about transferability' (Jensen, 2008, p. 886).

In my research, I have consistently sought to make my positionality accessible, transparent, and vulnerable. Specific to this study, I have done so by placing my autoethnographic positionality (see 3.2) in a dialectical relationship with ethnography (see section 3.2.4). Not only is such an auto/ethnography situated within the well-established epistemological traditions of anthropology and social science, it is also well-positioned to synthesise critical theory with thick description, creating research findings which are rigorous and applicable to 'insiders' and 'outsiders' alike.

### **Section 3.3: Auto/Ethnographic Data collection**

The purpose of this section is to introduce and discuss the auto/ethnographic strategies I employ for my data collection. I first describe and provide a rationale for the main data collection strategies I undertake in my research, namely participant observation, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. With each of these data collection strategies, I outline the theoretical basis of the strategies and then identify methodological exemplars. In doing so, I first examine how other educational researchers have employed these strategies in the context of their fieldwork and then I discuss how these strategies are applicable to my study.

#### **3.3.1 Participant Observation: Actively ‘hanging out’**

As elaborated upon earlier (see sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3), auto/ethnography is highly dependent upon the researcher’s ability to achieve the ethnographic aim of traversing etic and emic perspectives. Accordingly, the researcher generally constructs the research questions upon an etic foundation, allowing the subsequent fieldwork to be propelled forward by theory and the eventual analysis to maintain an epistemological congruence within the larger fields of sociology and/or anthropology. It is generally through fieldwork that emic perspectives are introduced. Participant observation is one of the primary means for pursuing this emic perspective. Rather than remaining a distanced observer, the ethnographer – and by derivation the auto/ethnographer – strives to become a fully-accepted member of the group, participating with the group in an authentic way, thereby becoming a dynamic part of the sociocultural group being studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This positionality facilitates the acquisition of emic insights because the participation in the culture-sharing activities lends itself to a tacit understanding of the culture (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), which in turn, leads to an understanding of those activities from the perspective of the participants (Denzin, 1997; Creswell, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In its abstract sense, participant observation can be defined as ‘a lot of hanging around, soaking up every tiny detail’ (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p. 538), but in terms of the practical application, participant observation is more nuanced and context specific. Before introducing my own application of participant observation in the context of fieldwork (see section 4.3.1), I first explore some of the methodological exemplars of participant observation in American music education, noting that ‘[e]thnography is a relatively recent form of inquiry in music education research in the United States’ (Krueger, 2014, p. 133).

In the literature reviewed earlier, I reviewed Henry Kingsbury’s (1988) ethnography of a music conservatoire. In that landmark study, Kingsbury was able to enter the conservatoire in the guise of a matriculated student. To do so, he had obtained permission from the conservatoire administration to position himself as a peer to the conservatoire students, and since he had the musical abilities to present himself as such, the students readily accepted him as a fellow student. Kingsbury attended lectures, masterclasses, and performances as though he were a degree-seeking student. From such a participant observation vantage point, he was able to carry out his research, ultimately asserting that conservatoires breed an insular cultural system which has the effect of reaffirming pre-existing social distinctions through the language and structures of musical study.

Although Kingsbury’s approach to participant observation – in which he largely conceals his research purposes – carries a number of advantages, including the authenticity in which he would have been able to collect his data, it ultimately is problematic in an educational research context. For one, the issue of informed consent is not fully attended to. Although the conservatoire leadership evidently knew of Kingsbury’s research intentions, the individuals with which he was interacting as a peer were apparently not privy to his research purposes, which in turn, raises some lingering questions about ethics from an educational research perspective (see BERA, 2018). Secondly, Kingsbury’s study was in an adult learning context, a setting in which he could authentically position himself as one of the students. Because of these two considerations – informed consent and authentic membership in the group being studied – Kingsbury’s ethnography carries limited use for my study. Thus, it becomes necessary to review additional music education studies in which the use of participant observation is more in line with my fieldwork setting.

In a study about mutual learning and democratic action in instrumental music education, music education philosopher and researcher Randall Allsup (2003) invited nine students from an American high school band class to participate in an eleven-week course in which he sought to reimagine the high school music classroom. Allsup acted as the facilitator of the weekly course and ensured that he had obtained informed consent before anyone participated. He describes his use of participant observation as follows:

As a researcher, I was placed within a particular social order experiencing events as a temporary member – all the while chronicling observations, taking field notes, and recording personal reflections (Allsup, 2003, p. 29).

In Allsup's participant observer approach, he occupied a different positionality from that of the students – he was the facilitator, and they were the participants. However, he was momentarily able to become a temporary member because of their shared goal of music making.

In a similar vein, choral music education researcher Sarah Bartolome (2013) conducted an ethnography of the Seattle Girls' Choir. She explains that her participant observation involvement was as the conductor of one of the choirs:

I also spent more than 200 hr as a participant observer, interacting with younger choristers as the conductor of the Allegra choir (a group of 24, primarily ages 10 to 13) and as a teacher of beginning-level theory and sight-singing classes. Although many of my observations were conducted during weekly rehearsals, I also was present at other SGC events, including performances, board meetings, summer camps, and faculty meetings (p. 400).

Like Allsup, Bartolome found that the shared music-making setting of a choir allowed her to position herself in the study as a participant observer. Through her role as conductor of the Allegra choir, she developed important relationships with the girls which subsequently allowed her to invite them to participate in additional data collection exercises. Thus, she mediated the problem of being an 'insider' in a children's context by positioning herself authentically as a teacher figure. Likewise, another music education researcher, Sheila Feay-Shaw (2001), found that her participant observer role in directing four rehearsals of a 5<sup>th</sup>-grade musical supplied her with the necessary ethnographic context to document the enjoyment and achievement of students as they participate in an elementary school musical.

In a notably different approach to participant observation, professional violinist and music education researcher Kathryn Jourdan (2015) describes how she pursued fieldwork in a music classroom which was not her own. Rather than drawing upon a relationship with the students which was derived

from a positionality of a music teacher, she conceived of herself as a guest in the classroom. She intentionally did not take on a role of authority in the classroom, trying to avoid any inadvertent manipulation of the research findings. Even so, she notes,

As the year went on, and as I got to know the pupil and staff participants better, I was able to probe more deeply in interviews and was conscious of the tension, discussed above, between drawing participants in to my developing theoretical outlook and not biasing their responses.

Jourdan's acknowledgement of the impact that researchers have upon the fieldwork participants is notable, especially given her carefully-designed strategies to be a participant observer without drastically altering the experience of the students.

In designing my own participant observation strategies for my own music education context – which will be elaborated on later in some detail (see section 4.3.1) – I have sought to build upon the work of Allsup (2003), Bartolome (2013), Feay-Shaw (2001), and Jourdan (2015). In regard to my study's specific context of a high school orchestra, I have followed Allsup's example in foregrounding my role as a researcher and obtaining informed consent: on my first day visiting the orchestra classroom, I introduced my research and distributed informed consent letters (see Appendix B). Like Jourdan, I primarily regarded myself as a guest in the school and in the music classroom, intentionally trying to remain clear of the inadvertent biasing of responses: I spent a lot of time building friendships with the students before/after class (see section 4.3.1) and I intentionally stayed clear of positioning myself as another teacher (see section 4.3.2). But like Bartolome and Feay-Shaw, I regarded my identity as a musician to be advantageous for interacting with the students in an authentic music-making context: by playing alongside them in the orchestra and occasionally conducting the ensemble (see section 4.3.1), I became a full participant in the shared goal of music making.

### **3.3.2 Focus Group Discussions: Students sharing their perspectives**

In ethnographic educational research, one of the persistent dilemmas faced by researchers is the ability to obtain the student perspective. In a school context, the researcher remains unable to fully become a member of the student population, and thus is unable to fully embody the experience of being a student. Consequently, the researcher must intentionally seek ways to discern the students' perspective, and often, one of the most effective ways to learn of a student's perspective on a topic

is to ask (Taber, 2007). In educational research, the asking of questions is frequently referred to as interview<sup>2</sup>:

The term interviews is used to encompass many forms of talk.... What all of these forms of talk have in common is that parties are engaged in asking and answering questions. Whatever the structure or format of an interview, or medium used for an interview..., the basic unit of interaction is the question-answer sequence (Roulston, 2010, p. 10).

Interviews represent an essential data collection strategy for ethnographic research because it 'allows people access to the participants' ideas, thoughts, and memories using their own words, terminology, and language structure' (Eder & Fingerson, 2001, p. 197).

However, a number of considerations arise when interviews take place in the context of educational research. Foremost among them are the following:

- If the respondents are adolescents, there is often a power differential between the respondents and the researcher, which can preclude the interview from proceeding in an authentic manner (Eder & Fingerson, 2001).
- Formal interviews may be developmentally inappropriate for children and adolescents and/or make them uncomfortable (Gibson, 2012).

Focus group discussions offer a way to mediate both of these considerations, as well as being an ethnographically rich approach to interviewing. In educational research, focus group discussions encompass a range of data collection practices, but they generally exhibit the following set of commonalities: 'a small group of 4–12 people [which] meet with a trained researcher/ facilitator/ moderator for 1-2 hours [in order to] discuss selected topic(s) in a non-threatening environment, [thereby allowing the researcher to] explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, ideas and encourage and *utilise group interactions*' (Wilson, 1977).

Additionally, holding a discussion in a group setting alters the power dynamic and potentially increases the comfort level for students:

The group setting is also important for minimizing the power differential between the researcher and those being studied. Power dynamics occur in all interview studies, in that

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<sup>2</sup> As a clarification on terminology, I do make extensive use of multiple approaches to interviewing, namely informal conversations, focus group discussions, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In reporting these various interviewing strategies, I have chosen to identify and delineate each of these interview techniques by the more specific terminology of 'conversations', 'focus group discussion' and 'semi-structured interviews' rather than the overarching term of 'interviews'. This delineation of terminology is in alignment with conventions of educational ethnography (see Kawulich, 2005).



the researcher has control over the research process as well as over much of the interview by virtue of being the one posing the questions. As noted previously, in studies of youth the researcher also has the added power associated with age. Both of these aspects can be minimized to some degree when interviewing takes place in group settings, as children are more relaxed in the company of their peers and are more comfortable knowing that they outnumber the adults in the setting. Also, there is less chance for a researcher to impose adult interpretations and language on the young people if they are interviewed collectively and have the opportunity to develop and convey aspects of peer culture in their talk (Eder & Fingerson, 2001, p. 183).

In consideration of the importance of obtaining students' perspectives, particularly in relation to my 2<sup>nd</sup> research question pertaining to understanding how students navigate cultural hegemony in the context of a high school orchestra, focus group discussions represent an invaluable data collection strategy for my research.

Focus group discussions are used with increasing frequency in music education research (Eros, 2014). They have been employed in the context of undergraduate music education majors (Conway, et al., 2010), middle school band students (Gouzouasis, Henrey & Belliveau, 2008), and elementary students engaging in musical improvisations (Beegle, 2010). Perhaps because focus group discussions are relatively new to music education research, relatively little is presented in these studies regarding the practical aspects of holding and moderating a focus group discussion. Consequently, these particular instances of focus group discussions make somewhat problematic exemplars, for methodologists consistently assert that the particular context of a focus group discussion is as noteworthy to recount as the perspectives shared in it (Eros, 2014; Agar & MacDonald, 1995; Morgan, 1993). However, what these particular studies do well is to describe the demographics of the respective discussion groups in some detail. In my study, I follow such exemplars of describing the individuals in the group, but I also dedicate additional attention to the practical aspects of conducting the focus group interview, including how the invitations were extended, when and where the focus group met, and how the focus group discussion was moderated (see sections 4.3.3, 4.3.4), believing that these details offer important insight into how the responses can be understood (see also Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

### **3.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews: Seeking in-depth understanding**

The third data collection strategy I employed in my study was semi-structured interviews, whereby I reconnected with some of the alumni of the orchestra programme. In contrast to the focus group

discussions, in which the aim was to gather the perspectives of the students currently participating in the orchestra, these interviews sought to add some longitudinal perspective to the study by interviewing alumni of the orchestra who are now engaged in music-related career pursuits.

Such an approach to interviewing impressed itself upon me as I contemplated how to develop the pilot study of my MPhil research into a full doctoral project. In my pilot study, I had made extensive use of semi-structured interviews, and those semi-structured interviews had generated particularly rich data. Accordingly, I wanted to capitalise on the methodological strength of employing semi-structured interviews, but I was faced with a few dilemmas related to my interest in having music students – rather than music teachers – become the research participants. As I outlined above (see section 3.3.2), this would potentially introduce a potential power differential between myself and the interview participants and it might be developmentally inappropriate to ask the students to engage in one-on-one interviews. Moreover, by inviting the students to critically engage in questions which might ultimately disrupt the way they participated in the orchestra (e.g. delving into specific questions about their encounters with cultural hegemony or symbolic violence), there was potential for an ethically problematic situation. In consideration of these dilemmas, and in tandem with my autoethnographic realisation that fieldwork would be particularly rich and meaningful if I were to pursue it in El Centro, I determined that I would reconnect with my former students and invite them to be interview participants. By taking such an approach, I could draw upon individuals who likely had very comparable experiences as those currently participating in the programme and who could also discuss their experiences with invaluable longitudinal perspective. Moreover, because they had fully matriculated out of the orchestra, the ethical tension of asking them to critically reflect upon their experiences participating in the orchestra was largely mediated.

Additionally, I realised that by re-engaging with my own former students over the sociocultural experience that they had had in my orchestra class, I would be able to draw upon the auto/ethnographic advantages of having been personally involved and present with these students during their high school orchestra experience. Specifically, I would already have a contextual understanding of how each of these students engaged in the orchestra and interacted with their orchestra peers. Also, as I pursued the requisite interviews, there would already be a relationship of mutual respect to draw upon, facilitating more genuine and introspective responses. And as an added benefit, there would be the possibility that the co-constructed narratives might even offer the

possibility of retroactive mediation of any previously unsettled sociocultural tensions, should any arise during the process of pursuing co-constructed narratives. In turn, by (re)directing some of my research questions to my former students, an ethically problematic area becomes one with ethically advantageous possibilities.

In turning to the music education literature for methodological exemplars, there are a number of researchers who utilise semi-structured interviews to explore individuals' values, perspectives, and aspirations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A number of researchers regard their interviews as co-constructed experiences, in which the researcher and the research participants become co-writers of how a person experienced a particular event or situation (Bignold & Su, 2013; Kearns, 2012; Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013). Such an interview approach holds resonance for me, given my auto/ethnographic orientation; the researcher's etic perspective becomes reconciled with the research participant's emic perspective, through the medium of writing:

[M]eaningful change will happen as we listen to the voices of our students, engage their lives in all of their complexity and daily approximations, and become open to what may be learned in the process (Nichols, 2013, p. 276).

The manner in which semi-structured interviews are presented in the music education literature vary greatly. Some proceed in a biographical manner, such as Jeananne Nichols' (2013) account of marginalised and socially-excluded high school student. Others proceed as anecdotes (Barrett, 2010), a series of conversations (see Griffin, 2009), or even as an autoethnodrama (see Saldana, 2008). Most often though, the semi-structured interviews are transcribed, coded, excerpted, and then discussed at some length (see Burwell, 2017; Bresler, 1995, Creswell, 2014). In my study, I have followed this particular convention.

## **Section 3.4: Auto/Ethnographic Data Analysis**

In recognition of the potentially expansive nature of auto/ethnographic research – and to bring some unity to the diverse ideas of social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation – I now introduce a theoretical and analytical framework which holds the potential to circumscribe and weave together the wide range of divergent ideas previously presented. I begin the discussion by articulating the methodological imperative to design a dialectical analytical approach which acts in a complementary manner to the dialectical nature of auto/ethnographic fieldwork. In doing so, I foreshadow that my analysis weaves together inductive and deductive components. Thereafter, I identify the deductive theoretical lens I use in this study, namely, the Bourdieusian constructs of cultural capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990). To introduce this Bourdieusian theoretical lens, I provide a primer on Pierre Bourdieu, discussing how the constructs of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’, and ‘field’ create a powerful triumvirate for discussing culture, society, and education. Next, I reframe some of the discussion from the earlier literature review, using Bourdieusian language. In doing so, I momentarily revisit some of the Sistema debates, illustrating the way in which Bourdieusian ideas can highlight the specific points of sociocultural tension. I then discuss how Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of field represents an ideal segue into pursuing auto/ethnographic fieldwork into the lived experience of orchestra students. Finally, I discuss how I synthesise Bourdieu’s ideas with an inductive analysis, thereby uniting my fieldwork, methodology, and literature review under a broad theoretical framework.

### **3.4.1 Fractal Symmetry: The methodological imperative for a dialectical analysis**

In earlier sections, I have asserted that my research is simultaneously introspective and outward looking (see section 1.2.4). Similarly, I have stated that it is built upon a dialectic between ethnography and autoethnography (see section 3.2.4). I argue that such methodological decisions give my research a powerful internal dynamic, but I also recognise that they also introduce the

danger that one aspect of my research will ultimately become subordinate to the other. In attending to similar challenges, the continental philosopher Jacques Derrida (1993) advanced the concept of aporias as a way to conduct meaningful research whilst allowing ambiguities, uncertainties, and pluralities to be preserved. As described by Derrida, an aporia denotes an undecidability between competing imperatives, allowing competing imperatives and contradictory narratives to be privileged alike. Given the dialectical nature of my research, I would suggest that aporia is a useful way to conceptualise the analytical imperative required by my methodological commitments.

Accordingly, my approach to the analysis has been to favour a fractal symmetry between fieldwork and analysis. I have thus conceptualised my analysis as being a weave of inductive and deductive analyses. A portion of my fieldwork proceeds in an inductive (i.e. ethnographic) manner, so it is imperative to utilise inductive analysis techniques. However, another aspect of my fieldwork is decidedly deductive (i.e. autoethnographic), which in turn, suggests that a portion of my analysis should be enriched with deductive analytical techniques. In formulating how these two imperatives should interact in my study, I have ultimately determined that they weave together, creating an analytical tapestry which is neither exclusively inductive or deductive, but rather infused with the characteristics of both approaches.

To foreshadow how this analysis is woven together, I primarily use this section to present my deductive coding scheme, using the next two subsections to indicate how a Bourdieusian analysis provides powerful tools for analysing the way in which culture, education, and social class interact. In the final section, I highlight the way in which I synthesise that Bourdieusian analysis with an inductive analysis borne of the more ethnographic components of the study.

### **3.4.2 Theorising Music Education through Sociology: A primer on Bourdieu**

Notwithstanding sociology's roles as a parent discipline for the field of education, music education is relatively new to theorising itself through the lens of sociology. As recently as 1999, noted music education researcher Lucy Green (1999) observed, 'Sociological methods and concepts within the field of music education represent a goldmine for research ... a growing amount of such research is already being done, [however] there is still much that is left open' (p. 168). The subsequent decade

witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of scholars pursuing music education from a sociological perspective, evidenced in part by the publication of Ruth Wright's (2010) edited book *Music Education and Sociology*. In Wright's introductory chapter, she presents a number of sociological theories and theorists, advocating for the dynamic ways in which they could inform music education research. Amongst the theorists, she particularly identifies Pierre Bourdieu as providing unique insight into 'the complex relationships between culture, education, society, and music' (Wright, 2010, p. 13). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence are powerful ways to conceptualise educational endeavours, especially when such endeavours are intertwined with culturally situated practices such as music making. Accordingly, Bourdieusian thinking is very pertinent to my study.

Bourdieuian thinking can be broadly understood as consisting of interactions between habitus, capital, and field (Grenfell, 2014). Habitus refers to the cumulative dispositions, tastes, sensibilities, and collective experiences which have become embodied within individuals over time and ultimately determine how individuals interact with the social world (Bourdieu, 2002). Accordingly, habitus represents a dynamic way of conceptualising the socialisation process; not only do individuals draw upon their habitus to know how to interact with the social world, they also further shape and refine their habitus as they do so. In this way, habitus acts as a structuring structure, and greatly influences an individual's social interactions (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). The term 'capital' signifies objectified power, and can be manifest in the form of economic capital, cultural capital, or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In contrast with economic capital – perhaps the most intuitive form of capital – which is most often visible in the form of money, cultural capital denotes an individual's familiarity with cultural norms and expectations as well as his/her ability to work within such cultural frameworks to reposition him/herself within the existing structure of society (Bourdieu, 1984). 'Field' signifies the place where a person's habitus and capital interact as that person negotiates and renegotiates his/her social position (Bourdieu, 1984). Like fields of a sportsground, they represent the boundaries in which certain social rules and practices apply. In general, fields are autonomous from one another in respect to their practices and priorities, and are predominantly constructed by the participants of that particular field (Thompson, 2008). They are bounded by 'doxa', the shared beliefs, practices, and priorities which are particular to that field. The degree to which doxa is perceived to have a self-existing and unchanging nature undergirds the relative power of doxa to have an influence upon habitus:

Doxa is the cornerstone of any field to the extent that it determines the stability of the objective social structures through the way these are reproduced and reproduce themselves

in a social agent's perceptions and practices; in other words in the *habitus* (Deer, 2008, p. 121)

Because social fields represent the places in which the various forms of capital can be interchanged for social power and thus social mobility, it is necessary to think of any given field as being simultaneously interrelated and subordinate to the overarching fields of power and class (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). Similarly, all fields have some interdependence, given the way that they relate to the interchange of capital, though the valuation of the various forms of capital may be constructed differently in the different fields (Bourdieu, 1986).

Some caution must be used in drawing upon Bourdieu for a theoretical framework. After all, Bourdieu preferred to regard himself as an empiricist, rather than a theorist (Grenfell, 2014), and accordingly, he does not put forward his ideas as social theory. Instead, he describes them as 'thinking tools' which he developed to make sense of his own research pursuits, and he cautions against separating them from the empirical research which produced them (Wacquant, 1989). Notwithstanding this Bourdieusian disclaimer and his reluctance to codify his thinking tools into precise theory, numerous researchers have found these 'thinking tools' to act as a powerful theoretical lens for exploring the multifaceted and complex relationships between culture, society, and education (Nash, 1990). In particular, music education researchers Garth Stahl, Pam Burnard, and Rosie Perkins (2017) note the generative potential of various operationalisations of Bourdieu's theories. When they place three of their Bourdieusian studies of music education 'in concert', they discover that the openness of Bourdieu's thinking tools provides an ontological basis for exploring widely divergent practices of music learning:

What we found particularly insightful was how Bourdieu helped us focus on the way individuals developed certain dispositions through practices that embodied what was so often accepted as the norms/structures/hegemonies of the wider discourses in which they were situated. Bourdieu's 'tools for thinking' supply an ontological framing that establishes social existence as never singular but rather that every individual belongs simultaneously to multiple categories that shift over time. This makes drawing conclusions based on 'practice' potentially problematic, as we are dealing with dynamics which are constantly changing. A crucial point across the case studies was the need for an openness to engage not just with tools which acknowledge 'structures' but those that recognise and identify important intersections and offer analyses which are relational, relevant, and analytically sound (Stahl, Burnard & Perkins, 2017, p. 71).

Similarly, Bourdieu scholar Diane Reay (2004) observes, 'Paradoxically the conceptual looseness of *habitus* also constitutes a potential strength. It makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption of the concept within empirical work' (p. 441). Researchers continue to apply Bourdieu's ideas in a multiplicity of ways to wide-ranging research contexts.

Although the lack of conformity regarding the application of Bourdieu's theories in educational research is notably conspicuous, there is consensus among some Bourdieusian theorists that such openness is a great advantage.

### **3.4.3 Analysing with Bourdieu: Cultural capital and symbolic violence**

As an exploration – and preview – of the ways in which a Bourdieusian analysis enriches this study, I will momentarily return to the Sistema debates which appeared earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 1). One of the main assertions of Sistema advocates is that youth orchestra participation can act as a catalyst for social change. A considerably large number of Sistema enthusiasts have identified the sociocultural benefits of participation in Sistema programmes (see section 1.1.2). This has resulted in a rapid proliferation of Sistema related literature, including research, advocacy, evaluation, marketing, and opinion pieces. Amongst this growing body of literature, there is strong support to suggest that Sistema programmes are effective at cultivating a number of skills, attitudes, and experiences, which could collectively be viewed as cultural capital. These include increased 'attention, autonomy, commitment, concentration, confidence/self-efficacy, coping, determination, discipline, effort, emotional well-being, engagement with learning, expression, focus, happiness, health, life satisfaction, listening skills, motivation, obedience, optimism, perseverance, personhood, positive attitudes towards school, pride, raised aspirations, resilience, responsibility, self-concept, self-esteem, self-regulation, time-management, and well-being' (see Creech, et al., 2016, p. 73). Such a lengthy list could perhaps be regarded as an operationalisation for the way in which Sistema advocates believe that youth orchestras are able to help individuals transcend poverty. Such a belief can be traced to statements by El Sistema founder Jose Antonio Abreu who declares, 'Material poverty can be completely overcome by spiritual richness' (quoted by Booth, 2009, p. 84; see also Fink, 2016). This ideology is further developed in Abreu's 2009 TED talk:

The huge spiritual world that music produces in itself, which also lies within itself, ends up overcoming material poverty. From the minute a child's taught how to play an instrument, he's no longer poor. He becomes a child in progress heading for a professional level, who'll later become a full citizen. Needless to say that music is the number one prevention against prostitution, violence, bad habits, and everything degrading in the life of a child (Abreu, 2009, para 13).

In line with this, much of the existing Sistema literature approaches Sistema scholarship from the axiomatic position that music participation is symbolic of the transcendence of artistic and cultural practices over all other human endeavours.



Much of this discussion of Sistema advocacy could be subsumed within Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital (see Fairbanks 2014). The argument proceeds that Sistema programmes are premised upon helping disadvantaged children have greater social agency. This is achieved by creating the institutional infrastructure to allow them to participate collectively and successfully in a youth symphony. As proposed by Abreu (2009) and endorsed by Sistema advocates (see Booth, 2009; Tunstall, 2012; IADB 2007), this type of investment carries a greater promise of impacting social development – both individually and collectively – than a monetary one. Such reasoning aligns closely with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, which purports that the acquisition of cultural symbols and cultural understandings can permit individuals to have greater agency in repositioning themselves in respect to their social standing. Accordingly, Sistema programmes can be conceived as distributors of cultural capital.

As indicated earlier (see section 1.2.1), another faction of Sistema scholars assert that participation in Sistema programmes results in a reaffirmation of systemic cultural hegemony (see Baker, 2014b; Mauskopf, 2012; Bull, 2016; Logan, 2016). Such a conceptualisation aligns closely with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence. 'Symbolic violence' refers to the harshness and the effective hurt arising when an individual's influence over another is derived from differences in sociocultural symbols, effectually rendering an individual's valued cultural background – i.e. habitus – as being of very little worth (Bourdieu, 1990). The way in which symbolic violence takes place in Sistema programmes is poignantly brought into relief by Anna Bull (2016), who states,

In prescribing classical music as a cultural intervention for disadvantaged communities, Sistema-inspired programs reinforce the idea that being poor is about the behavior and the culture of poor people...They work on the assumption that by changing their behavior, family relationships, and aspirations, poor people will no longer be poor. This vision blames individuals for their situation, rather than looking for structural solutions (p. 143).

According to Bourdieu (1990), symbolic violence is one of the primary mechanisms by which society's reproduces its structures of power over successive generations. Bourdieu asserts that those who find themselves in power will construct the social rules of any given field in such a way that they are advantaged based upon their habitus. Further, symbolic violence hides behind a self-perpetuating structure in which marginalised social players are only able to gain social power by complicitly legitimising what Bourdieu describes as a cultural arbitrary.

Bourdieu's sociological contributions would suggest that in regard to 'social justice', Sistema programmes are inherently imbued with a certain dualism (see Allan, et al., 2010). Sociologically, Sistema programmes and their advocates may be providing participants with greater cultural capital, and thereby fulfil a mandate of distributive justice (see section 2.2.3), but in doing so, they reaffirm a status quo in which classical music and other expressions of Western civilisation are preferenced above the cultural expressions of those participating in the programmes. And this subtle legitimisation of Western civilisation's dominant culture is what tends to be called into question by Sistema critics, who call instead for a removal of such structures through restorative justice. In short, building upon a pluralistic conception of social justice (see sections 2.2.2, 2.2.3), there is a possibility that Sistema programmes could simultaneously be liberating and oppressive. To conceptualise this, I have devised the following illustration which brings together the ideas of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence into a single framework (see Figure 3.4.3) (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1990):

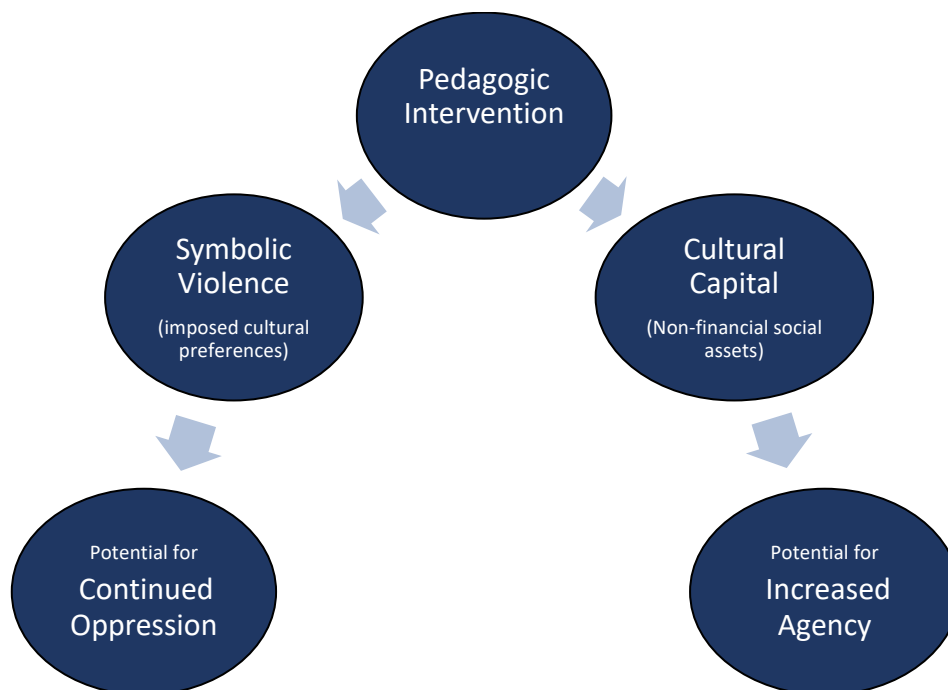


Figure 3.4.3: Pedagogic Intervention and its Effects upon Agency/Oppression  
 Source: Adapted from Fairbanks, 2014, p. 52

This illustration asserts that pedagogic intervention carries the potential of simultaneously delivering cultural capital and symbolic violence. On one hand, pedagogic intervention equips individuals with greater ability to understand and navigate the wider sociocultural world. Such an increase in cultural capital would correspondingly suggest that these individuals would have greater agency over their

social status, being able to reposition themselves in the way that they choose. On the other hand, this increase in agency is premised upon being able to navigate the social world of dominant culture. So, if it is members of the dominant culture which establish these music education programmes, the dominant cultural has imposed its cultural preferences upon these marginalised populations. And because it is the cultural symbols of the dominant class that are upheld as being worthy of reproduction, any other cultural expressions experience a symbolic violence. Thus, educational interventions – such as Sistema programmes or American music education – which are built upon the cultural practices of the dominant culture are potentially complicit in reinforcing a form of ideological oppression (see also Freire, 1974; Gartman, 2012).

As mentioned earlier (see section 1.2.1), when I was administering and teaching in my own Sistema programme, I had felt a sense of malaise regarding the way in which my own cultural expressions were being privileged, but at the time, I was unable to fully articulate my feelings succinctly into words. When I subsequently encountered Bourdieu's contributions regarding education, culture, and society, I was presented with language and theory for conceptualising some of the inherent complexities of using cultural expressions pedagogically as a social intervention. Thereafter, as I applied a Bourdieusian analysis to my research pursuits, I found that I had a strong theoretical framing for disentangling some of the complexities pertaining to the simultaneity of cultural capital and symbolic violence. In critically applying this framework to the auto-ethnographic context of this study, I have a means for uniting my fieldwork, methodology, literature review, and my own autoethnographic positionality under a single theoretical framework.

#### **3.4.4 Synthesising Analyses: The auto/ethnographic weave**

As acknowledged earlier in this section (see section 3.4.1), keeping aporias open represents a way of preserving justice – or to use Bourdieusian language, it resists committing symbolic violence – because it does not necessitate the privileging of a particular perspective at the expense of the other. This feature of aporias has been described as 'a way to incorporate "responsibility" and "validity" into the research process, particularly when researchers face impossible decisions' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). On multiple levels, my research attends to aporias. For example, Sistema scholarship is implicated into the pluralistic aporia(s) of 'social justice' (see section 2.2.1). Similarly, my methodology is built upon the dialectical simultaneity of ethnography and autoethnography (see

section 3.2.4). Accordingly, I have sought to construct an analysis which seeks to weave together these analytical aporias in a meaningful way, thereby allowing inductive and deductive aspects of the knowledge creation process to be equally privileged in my study (see section 3.2.1).

To do so, I have conceived of my analysis as being a weaving together of inductive and deductive approaches. Ethnography tends to have an epistemological kinship with grounded theory (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001), in that inductive analyses and interpretations are often preferred to those which proceed deductively from social theory (O'Reilly, 2009; 2012). In contrast, autoethnography often favours deductive approaches (Cook, 2012), which is one of the principal ways in which autoethnographic writing becomes infused with theory (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These analytical divergent leanings of ethnography and autoethnography have correspondingly necessitated that my study weaves together two seemingly divergent approaches to analysis, namely a Bourdieusian interpretation and an emic interpretation of the data.

To achieve such an analysis, I followed a process I first began to develop during the pilot study I conducted (Fairbanks, 2014), which is as follows:

- Following the collection and preparation of data, the data undergoes a dual analysis, in which the data is coded and analysed separately, based upon grounded-theory and Bourdieusian theory.
- The resultant findings are presented side-by-side.
- The juxtaposition of these divergent findings becomes the basis of the subsequent discussion.
- Conclusions are made which aim to circumscribe the dialectical nature of the findings.

This process is further presented in the following illustration (see figure 3.5.4):

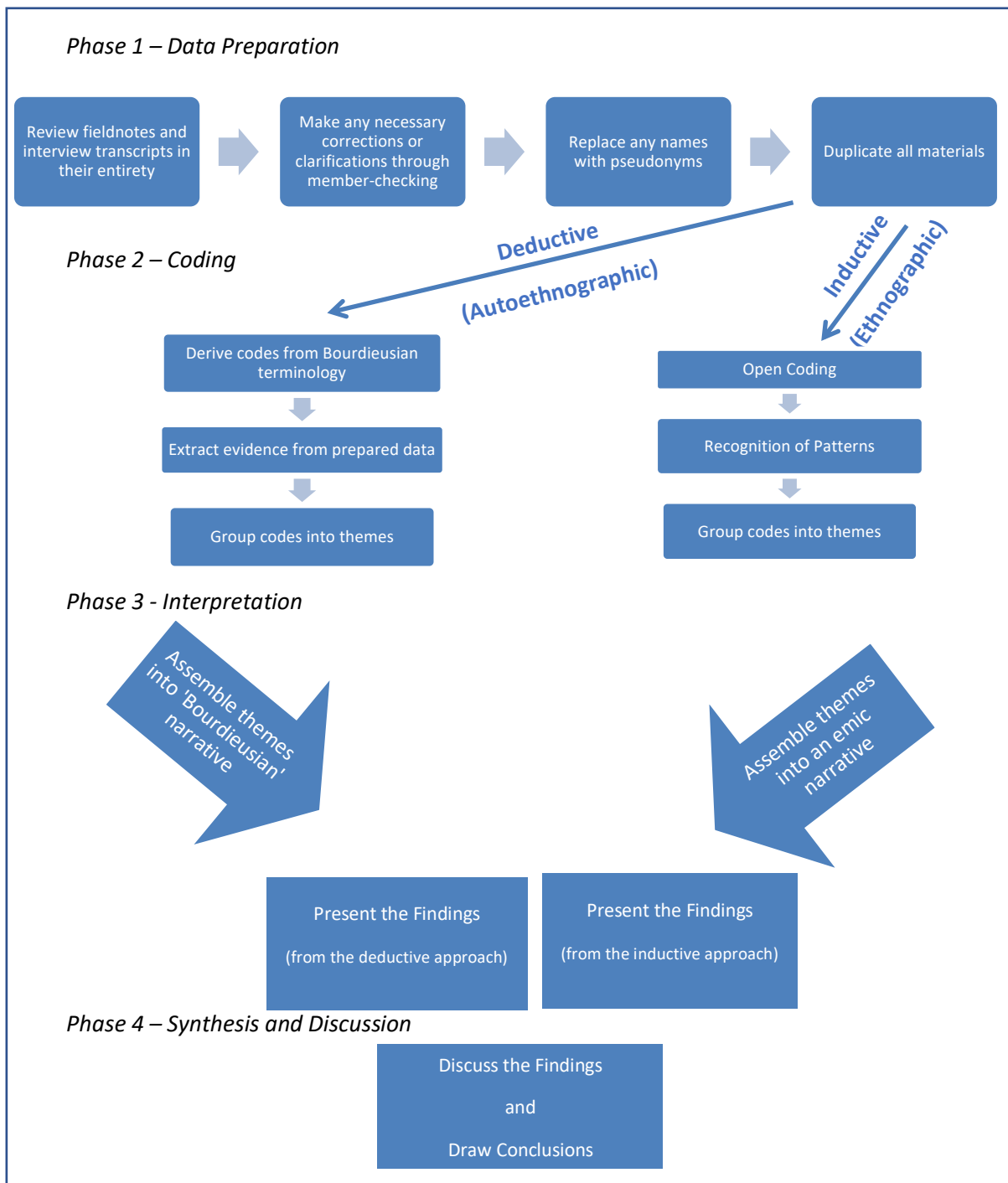


Figure 3.5.4: Dialectical Process of Analysis  
 Source: Adapted from Fairbanks, 2014, p. 30

In constructing this type of analysis, it had originally been my intention to produce two entirely separate interpretations of the data, which were exclusively derived from their respective inductive and deductive roots. However, as I carried out the analysis, I discovered that producing such a fully

'bracketed-out' interpretation presented its own challenges and limitations (see Gearing, 2008; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Moreover, having two fully separate interpretations ultimately fought against my more fundamental goal of utilising a two-pronged analytical lens in order to capitalise upon the internal dialectical dynamic of the research. Hence, in my analysis, I have ultimately moved toward a more nuanced approach to constructing inductive and deductive interpretations, in that I have selected and curated the instances in the data where the respective inductive and deductive analytical lenses provide a particularly noteworthy dynamic for interpreting the data. In order to provide some transparency to the reader regarding such analytical decisions, I discuss in subsequent chapters the rationale behind particular citations of the data (see section 4.3.4) and then, when I present the data, I utilise a side-by-side format which preserves the dialectic between ethnographic data and autoethnographic commentary (see Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion).

In the end, my analytical intention has been to acknowledge the dialectical strength which arises when a divergence of interpretation at the centre of the interpretive process. Likewise, by becoming entangled in the complexities of interpretation, I assert that I am better able to produce findings which hold verisimilitude to the complexities which persist when music, education, and social justice interact.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FIELDWORK**

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## Section 4.1: Locating El Centro

In an auto/ethnographic study such as this one, the fieldwork site represents a central consideration. In recognition of such centrality, I have placed this fieldwork chapter as the centre point of my thesis. The preceding chapters build in an arc towards this chapter, and the subsequent chapters complete that arc, situating this chapter as a point of symmetry: each of the first three chapters are complemented by a corresponding chapter in the second half of the thesis (see Appendix C: Thesis Matrix). The purpose of this chapter is to describe in rich detail the site where I undertook the fieldwork. The chapter proceeds in the following manner: First, I introduce El Centro, the city in which my fieldwork was situated, and 'Kumeyaay' High School, the school where most of the fieldwork took place. Secondly, I provide a rationale for deciding to base my study in El Centro, a place which features so prominently in my own career as a music educator (see Prelude). In addition to discussing my return to El Centro, I also provide a broad overview of my fieldwork activities, as well as an introduction to the particular orchestra class which became the focal point of my fieldwork. In the final section, I describe the particulars and the practicalities of pursuing in data collection in El Centro.

In this first section, I utilise the imagery of road travel to introduce the reader to El Centro, California. I intend the imagery as a metaphor for discussing the complex weave of El Centro's contradicting – albeit complementary – existential identities. By establishing this wider context of my fieldwork site, it then becomes possible to discuss the deep fractal symmetry which exists between the particular experiences of the students and those of the community more generally. The material in this section is primarily drawn from my personal knowledge of the area, having lived there between 2005 and 2007.

In the Southern California desert sits the city of El Centro, California. Though it is the county seat of Imperial County and the most populous city in the southeast corner of California, it remains surprisingly unknown and hidden away. Its name literally means 'the centre', but the rationale



behind how it received its name is seemingly lost to history. However, local residents quip that they know the *real* story behind the name: it was actually supposed to be ‘the centre of nowhere’, but somebody mistakenly left off the last bit. In almost mocking affirmation of this, the nearby unincorporated community of Felicity proclaims itself as ‘the centre of the world’ and has managed to procure a certificate confirming it as such from the *Institut Geographique National* of France. To access El Centro, there are four main roads, each one following a different point of the compass rose. In the four subsections which follow, I describe each of the four respective driving routes to El Centro. In the final subsection, I synthesise these four juxtaposed identities to suggest that El Centro represents a multiplicity of shifting meanings, and that these meanings directly impact upon the experience of what a high school string orchestra might represent to the community and the students in that community.

#### **4.1.1 El Centro via San Diego: Remote desert oasis**

In San Diego, the signs for traffic merging onto Interstate Highway 8 announce the available choices: ‘beaches’ to the west and ‘El Centro’ to the east. Both options appear on the road sign nonchalantly, as though they are amicable friends, sharing equal popularity. There appears to be no hint that San Diego and its beaches are chosen over El Centro and its desert by factor of 100 to 1 (see SDIR, 2018 and IVJC, 2018). Both options are put forward without commentary, as if to say that either destination is equally valid. Visitors following the signs to the beach are rewarded with the increasingly familiar images of how they have oft seen California depicted in film, television, and tourism materials: palm trees, boardwalks, and crowds of people playing in the surf and on the sand. Visitors following the signs to El Centro find themselves relegating such images of the California coast to the rear-view mirror; their destination lies 110 miles away, over mountains and across desert.

As if anticipating the arduousness of the journey, the freeway lingers in the San Diego suburbs with road signs silently but emphatically encouraging drivers to fill up on petrol before embarking on a journey which will largely be devoid of services. The Laguna Mountains loom on the horizon – mute sentinels, guarding the eastern boundary of the San Diego metropolitan area. The road aims directly and defiantly at them, but their intimidating presence has already had an effect: the sprawling suburbs have thinned to just a few intermittent homes; the road has narrowed from twelve lanes down to four; and most of the eastward travelling vehicles have left the motorway. At this point, the freeway climbs wearily into the Laguna Mountains. After about 45 minutes of driving, the Laguna summit is reached at 4055 feet (1236 m). The vegetation progressively thins until the wild yucca,

sagebrush, and exposed rock become the lone features of the landscape, accompanied by a sign quixotically announcing that the area is designated as National Forest. The sagebrush and yucca hurriedly flee, and the few remaining plants look somehow guilty, as though they have been caught in an act of trespassing.

Quite suddenly, the road begins to careen steeply downward – the eastern edge of the Laguna Mountains has been breached. The landscape becomes otherworldly – an ogre’s ruined and forgotten kingdom. The slopes have the appearance of being piles upon piles of rocks, as if formidable castle walls had been besieged and reduced entirely to debris and rubble. The road dodges precariously in and out of these forlorn monuments, juxtaposing its own apathetic greyness against the sepia of stone and earth. The sun bears down, mocking the dry riverbed the road has just traversed. Road signs point to the ‘Runaway Truck Ramp’, and tyre tracks in its gravel reveal that it has been used recently. At the end of the runaway truck ramp, the gravel is piled up into a barrier, a grim and ironic protection against the dangers which lay beyond.

At last the vehicle arrives at the base of the mountains, where it is greeted by a desert so vast that its eastern extremity is beyond the horizon. Though El Centro is yet another 30 minutes further, it is at this point – the edge of the Imperial Valley – where El Centro’s event horizon has irreversibly been crossed. The final slope of the mountains gives way to a vast ocean of parched, unending desert soil. The view is monotonous. Endless. The sun is still in its ascent, but the temperature is already approaching 50° C (122° F). Ocotillo rise from the ground, their wildly splaying greyish-brown arms reaching heavenwards, begging for rain. The ocotillos are seemingly devoid of life, evidence that it has been months since they last tasted water. Rainfall is scarce – the yearly precipitation remains well-below 3 inches (78 mm). Most of that rain comes in a single downpour during the monsoon season. The rest of the year is rainless, cloudless, and hot.

Just ahead, a clump of palm trees interrupts the conformity of the desert landscape. A highway sign announces an explanation for this intrusion of palm trees: The town of Ocotillo, population 266. The road veers away, pretending it has not seen, but an outlier of the town insists upon being noticed. Creeping menacingly close to the roadway, Miller’s Garage cannot be ignored. A service garage with three bays. An awning and pavilion for fuel pumps. A café. But something is amiss. It is entirely surrounded by a chain link fence. There are weeds in the car park. There are missing windows, broken roof tiles, piles of rubble, faded lettering, and other signs of neglect. Uninhabited. Empty. Dishevelled. Abandoned. The road carries on, trying to ignore what it just saw, but somehow it

cannot – the bleached white skeleton of an abandoned fuel station does not bode well for highway travel.

More flatness. More dullness. It has been a long drive from San Diego, nearly two hours. Then suddenly, El Centro appears, a mirage of vitality and cultivated greenery in the midst of monotony. It comes up abruptly – a few housing subdivisions, then playing fields, a high school, and finally, the long-awaited road sign: El Centro, next 4 exits. After the miles and miles of lonely desert driving, El Centro's services represent a needed oasis, a welcome outpost of civilisation, and an escape from the desert wilds.

#### **4.1.2 El Centro via Mexicali: Citadel of American protectionism**

About ten miles to the South of El Centro is the California-Mexico international border. The border is flanked by two cities: Calexico on the California side and Mexicali – or 'Mex', as it is known by the locals – on the Mexico side. Though Mexicali is only ten miles from El Centro, travel times can be as much as two hours. This is due to long waits at the Calexico border crossing. The Calexico border crossing is a highly trafficked route, ranking among the ten busiest border crossings in the United States. Every year, more than 4 million vehicles and 4.8 million pedestrians enter the United States via the Calexico border crossing. During peak times, the vehicle queues can stretch for several miles along the streets of Mexicali. Amidst these queues, an army of haggard-looking individuals walk among the waiting vehicles, selling flowers, washing car windscreens, or simply begging for money. Many are children. Watching over this scene of waiting vehicles and weary peddlers is a 9-metre (30 feet) high steel fence, marking the precise demarcation between the United States and Mexico. On one side of the fence is Mexicali. On the other is Calexico. The fence stretches in a straight line for miles beyond the edge of the city, as if to warn the residents that there is no place where the two communities could merge into one. The juxtaposition between the two sides of the fence is pronounced: long traffic queues on the one side, free flowing traffic on the other; potholes on the one side, unblemished road surfaces on the other; boarded up windows on the one side, clean and well-kept buildings on the other; endless concrete and asphalt on the one side, gardens, parks, and grass lawns on the other.

The border fence has been in place for decades. It has accumulated stories innumerable of desperate individuals trying to scale it, tunnel under it, or break through it. Somewhere, it likely keeps a register of people who have breached it: the pregnant woman who scaled the fence whilst in labour in hopes of giving birth to her child on American soil (see McDonald, et al., 2015); the drug

traffickers who built a 400-metre long tunnel which they were able to use for two months until their activities were discovered and their remaining \$23 million hoard of marijuana and cocaine was seized (Stimson, 2018); the hundreds of would-be immigrants who scale it under cover of darkness each night (Morrall, Willis & Brownell, 2011); and the hundreds more who plunge themselves in the polluted waters of the New River in order to bypass the fence (Eschbach, et al., 1999). Through it all, the fence stands there firm – watching and vigilant.

The fence has garnered allies, a team of border patrol agents. They patrol the fence; they patrol the river; and they patrol the desert. They set up checkpoints on major roads. Dressed all in dark green, they are instantly recognisable. Undocumented immigrants avoid them. Drug traffickers fear them. They have sophisticated equipment for tracking people and locating smuggled goods. They drive fast vehicles. And, they carry guns.

From somewhere up above comes the rumble of military aircraft. A major military installation – NAF El Centro – resides just a short distance from the border. Flybys are a daily occurrence. Most often it is the military helicopters doing their daily drills, but from time to time, it will be a deafening roar as low-flying fighter jets carry out training manoeuvres. For the most part, the military base remains independent from matters related to the international border crossing, but even so, its show-of-force presence evokes the symbolic message that if someone were to elude the border patrol, they would have to answer to the American military.

The Imperial Valley is also home to two major correctional facilities – Centinela State Prison and Calipatria State Prison. Like the nearby military base, these penal institutions are not directly related to the border crossing, yet they broadcast an unequivocal warning about the consequences of illegal activities. Like the stockades and pillories of medieval times, these prisons seem to be placed in plain view of all, as if to say, 'Be Warned!'

At last, the vehicle reaches the port of entry. A border patrol agent, attired in green and carrying a gun, addresses the driver. In a voice conveying the importance of a no-nonsense response, the agent reaches a hand forward and demands, 'Your passport...' Eyes, hidden behind sunglasses, study it solemnly. 'What is your citizenship? What was your business in Mexico? What is your business in the United States?' Every statement is scrutinised, while hidden eyes make notes of every movement. Further questions are asked. The whole story assessed. Finally, a verdict pronounced.

Effectively, El Centro is a reinstatement of the medieval walled city, and a monument to American protectionism. Just like the ancient citadels, she has her gatehouse, her garrison of troops, her military battlements, and her dungeons. The whole border-crossing ordeal – from the waiting queue of vehicles to the interrogation ritual at the port-of-entry with the border patrol agent – becomes a pilgrimage of compulsion, in which travellers must acquiesce to the unspoken America First doctrine: America must be protected from the heretics who seek to destroy her.

#### **4.1.3 El Centro via Palm Springs: Ghosted wasteland**

The northern route into El Centro comes via Palm Springs. Palm Springs is the resort community which was created for Hollywood film stars of a bygone era to enjoy winter warmth and sunshine. It continues to be a highly desirable resort destination, and features a seemingly endless array of restaurants, shows, and golf courses.

Travelling south from this burgeoning hub of desert tourism and culture, Highway 86 plaintively makes its way towards the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea is California's largest lake. With an estimated surface area of 350 square miles, it is over 150 square miles larger than Lake Tahoe, California's next largest lake – and its antithesis (SSA, 1997). The Salton Sea is an accidental lake, or rather, it currently exists because of a human-caused accident. Up until 1905, it had been the Salton Sink, a dry lakebed 252 feet below sea level. Then in 1905, heavy rains in the Rocky Mountains caused the Colorado River to surge, and the surging river proved to be too powerful for the dikes and head gates that Imperial Valley agricultural developers had installed on their newly built irrigation canals. The Colorado River diverted itself entirely into the Imperial Valley. With brute strength, the Colorado River swept away the insufficient irrigation infrastructure and greedily eroded its way to the lowest point it could find, the Salton Sink. For two years, it churned across the desert soil, rejecting all efforts to redirect it to its former riverbed (Goldbaum, 2016). Only through the dam-building efforts of the Southern Pacific Railway – accompanied by millions of dollars of emergency funds allocated by the United States Congress – could the truant river be persuaded to break off its assault on the Imperial Valley and resume its predictable, contained, and genteel path to the sea.

With the birth of the Salton Sea came numerous development prospects. A new inland sea represented tremendous potential for recreation, tourism, and wildlife. Although it had been feared that the accidental lake would dry up almost as quickly as it had been created, the Salton Sea proved to have staying power. When it became evident that the lake's continued existence was no longer in question, lakeside resorts and communities began to dot the shores of the Salton Sea. For a time,

the area promoted itself as Palm Springs by-the-Sea, a Californian French Riviera. Celebrities, recording artists, movie stars, and people of wealth all flocked to its shores. Waterfowl also came in abundance. By 1930, the Salton Sea had become such an important habitat for birds – especially on their migratory routes – that the US Government designated it as a wildlife sanctuary. By 1950, it had achieved the status of being the most productive fishery in California. It was also drawing 1.5 million visitors annually, more than even Yosemite National Park. The Salton Sea and everything it touched was alive and thriving -- at least, so it appeared.

But, like the ancient Sirens, who use their beauty to lure unsuspecting mariners to a menace which lurks beneath the surface of the water, the Salton Sea carefully calculated its attack. First, salinity levels began to increase. Like her cousins the Great Salt Lake and the Dead Sea, the Salton Sea concentrates her salt content over time through evaporation. In the heat of the Imperial Valley desert, this has happened rapidly. In 1905, salinity levels of the Salton Sea would have been roughly similar to that of the Colorado River. In 2018, the salt content of the Salton Sea is at 4.4% salinity – 25% higher than that of the world's oceans (SSA, 1997). But it is not only the rising salinity levels which the Salton Sea Sirens have been premeditating. As a terminal lake, the Salton Sea is apt to concentrate anything which becomes dissolved or suspended in her waters. The three rivers which feed the Salton Sea traverse agricultural land. Accordingly, they have been delivering agricultural run-off to the Salton Sea for well over a century, dispassionately burdening her with fertilisers, pesticides, and other pollutants. Additionally, one of the rivers – the New River – has its origins in Mexico and is widely acknowledged to be infused with Mexicali's industrial waste and raw sewage (SSA, 1997). With this triumvirate of salinity, agricultural pollutants, and industrial wastewater, the Salton Sea Sirens have ravaged the ecological health of the Salton Sea. The fish and other wildlife have died off. The people have left. The resorts have ghosted.

Highway 86 follows along the western shore of the lake. The signs read like a registry for the Salton Sea's graveyard of failed and ghosted beach resorts: Desert Shores, Salton Sea Beach, Salton City. A few gloomy reminders exist which show the Salton Sea's merciless triumph: vacant marinas, ruins of piers, lonely pilings, decapitated palm trees, emptiness. The Salton Sea Authority (SSA), a government organisation tasked with monitoring the Salton Sea, warns that the Salton Sea is preparing to throw up new snares. According to the SSA, the Salton Sea is in danger of shrinking. If substantial shrinking occurs, the waters will deposit their pollutants on the dust and sand. Then, as winds blow, these pollutants could become airborne, travel great distances, and affect large population centres such as Los Angeles and Phoenix. The proposed solution for pacifying the Salton

Sea's imminent threat to public health carries a large price – upwards of \$9 billion – the ransom which the Salton Sea demands for the Imperial Valley's ecological neglect of her (Cohen, 2014).

El Centro resides 30 minutes beyond the southern extremity of the Salton Sea – far enough away to feel safe from its poisoned water, but not far enough away to escape her briny, acrid, and dangerous Siren stench. Like a spectre, she watches over the whole valley, whispering messages of abandonment and neglect. El Centro's downtown is succumbing to her persuasive voice. It is filled with abandoned buildings, vacant storefronts, boarded up windows, empty streets, low-budget motels, homelessness. Like the Salton Sea, it verges on the brink of becoming a ghosted wasteland.

#### **4.2.4 El Centro via Yuma: Enchanted valley of prosperity**

From Yuma, Arizona in the East, the Imperial Valley is entered via the Algodones Dunes, a majestic gateway of virgin sand. Evoking an unrestrained sense of awe, the dunes stretch for dozens of miles to the north and the south, conclusively secluding the Imperial Valley from the vastness of the Sonoran Desert. The folklore of the local Native Americans – the Kumeyaay – tells of times when the Valley held water and when their people fished and lived in villages along a lush lake (Baksh, 2004). They had known that even though the Valley appeared desolate, it was patiently waiting to burst into bloom. Similar to the flora of the Imperial Valley – the ocotillo, yucca, agave, jumping cholla, and barrel cacti – which spectacularly burst into bloom each spring after long periods of dormancy, the Valley herself would someday burst again into vitality. She was simply preserving her energy until the moment when water would once again come.

The geologic record tells that the waters did come. They came in the form of cataclysmic flooding. Every few centuries, the Colorado River would breach her banks and choose the Imperial Valley as a flood plain. The Valley would fill, until the water levels reached high enough to find a new exit to the sea, emptying into the Sea of Cortez to the south. This capricious courtship between the Colorado River, the Imperial Valley, and the Sea of Cortez meant that the Imperial Valley was continuously fickle in her identity: sometimes a dry desert, sometimes an inland sea, and sometimes a river delta. In 1901, the Imperial Land Company became partially aware of this strange love triangle and proposed an ambitious land reclamation endeavour. The Imperial Land Company would build an 80-mile long canal from the Colorado River, through the Algodones Dunes, to the Imperial Valley. The Imperial Valley could now have her water without the agony of subjecting herself to the unpredictable romances of her capricious youth; she could settle down to a stable marriage with the Colorado River.

For the most part, the Imperial Land Company was successful in its irrigation efforts. Imperial Valley farmers could access a nearly limitless source of water at minimal cost. No pumping was necessary; the water flowed freely to this valley which was below sea level. As soon as the canals were in place, an agricultural boom town sprang up – almost overnight – as tens of thousands of acres of farmland suddenly became arable and available to prospective farmers. The land itself proved to be especially fertile. Having once been an ancient lake bed and a river delta, rich nutrients had been deposited in her soil. Once she received her water, she became an agricultural paradise: fertile soil, low-cost water, cloudless skies, frost-free winters.

The Imperial Valley has since become one of the most important agricultural centres of the United States, and indeed, the world. With annual sales of agricultural products surpassing \$2.1 billion, accounting for 13% of the nation's total cash receipts from agriculture, the Imperial County is ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup> most productive county in the United States for agriculture. Three sectors of agriculture are particularly noteworthy: vegetable crops, non-vegetable crops, and livestock production. Major vegetable crops are lettuce, sugar beets, and carrots. Other notable crops include cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, asparagus, onions, sweet corn, peppers, spinach, and melons. The Imperial Valley's estimated production of vegetable crops exceeds \$700 million annually, placing it amongst the top three of all counties in the United States in terms of vegetable production (USDA, 2012). Major non-vegetable crops are alfalfa, Sudan grass, and durum wheat. The alfalfa and Sudan grass are primarily used for cattle feed, and the durum wheat is used for making pasta. The annual production of these non-vegetable crops is valued at more than \$480 million, making the Imperial County the top producing county for non-vegetable crops in the United States (USDA, 2012). In this area, she is also able to claim international honours – her 113,000 acres of dedicated alfalfa land give her the title of being the largest alfalfa growing area in the world. Livestock production also ranks high; the raising of cattle and calves is valued at upwards of \$530 million annually, allowing the Imperial Valley to claim California's top spot for cattle production.

Thus, from her dormant past, the Imperial Valley has become an enchanted kingdom of agriculture. Her previously slumbering beauty has been awoken by the water which now flows unceasingly into her realms. Like a treasured gem, she remains hidden away by the Algodones Dunes, but for those who venture into her lands, they find a valley of prosperity, brimming with vitality and possibility.



#### **4.1.5 'Kumeyaay' High School: A fusion of plural identities**

Since its founding, more than 100 years ago, El Centro has been carving out a plural identity of simultaneously being an oasis, a citadel, a wasteland, and an enchanted valley. Somehow these contradictory identities have formed a symbiotic relationship, resulting in El Centro becoming an embodiment of existential contradiction. And yet, to those who regard El Centro as home, the contradictions are normalised and part of everyday life.

Within such a context, it is perhaps to be expected that the high school would carry a certain fractal symmetry with the larger community. 'Kumeyaay' High School sits on the edge of town. The grey, utilitarian, one-storey buildings have stood on the site since 1996, when a population growth necessitated the opening of a second high school in El Centro. The campus of Kumeyaay is built in the shape of a right triangle; the office forming the apex of the triangle and the blocks of classrooms extending outward. One side of the school runs along the main road and points back towards the centre of town, as if reaffirming the school's deep commitment to the community. The other side of the school reaches toward the nearby freeway, as though surreptitiously trying to thumb a ride with anyone willing to give it a lift westward, out of the Valley. Correspondingly, the school seems to be arguing with itself over whether its successes will be best measured in the number of its graduates who become contributing members of El Centro's economy or in the number of graduates who manage to leave the valley, a question pertaining to whether the high school regards the larger community as a place of prosperity or whether it regards El Centro as an outpost of civilisation, with the school acting as oasis on the way to a more prosperous future.

Watching over the entire campus of Kumeyaay is a three-metre high perimeter fence made of concrete and steel. Just inside the fence, four security officers ensure that school takes place in an orderly manner. Equipped with a fleet of golf carts, these officers are constantly criss-crossing the campus, busily attending to class disruptions, inquiries into student substance abuse, reports of graffiti, and rumours of gang activity.

The centre of campus is an open courtyard, punctuated by the earth-bare remains of what was once a plot of grass. During lunch and between classes, the student body converges on the courtyard en masse: 2000 thousand students, ages 14-18. Upwards of 92.5% are Hispanic/Latino; 74.8% are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged; 42.9% are designated as English Language Learners;

and 9.7% qualify for migrant education<sup>3</sup> (ICOE, 2017). When the school bell rings, the courtyard is left empty. Little trace is left of the students. Unfortunately, the same could be said of the large number of students who leave before completion of high school – little trace seems to remain. At Kumeyaay High School, upwards of 600 students enter as freshmen (9<sup>th</sup> grade, roughly equivalent to year 10 in the UK) each year. And each year, 400 students graduate (SARC, 2016), implying a graduation rate of 66%. However, the school's official graduation rate is reported as approaching 92% (SARC, 2017). The discrepancy<sup>4</sup> between these 'unofficial' and official graduation rates accounts for 170 students. These are 170 students for which little trace seems to remain. They are absent from the central courtyard and apparently absent from the records of the educational system. In a way, ghosts.

Just like El Centro, Kumeyaay High School sits at the crossroads of contradiction. It is an oasis of opportunity, providing educational nourishment to any students who wish to someday leave the desert. It is a citadel of control, where students' activities are monitored with close vigilance. It is a ghosted wasteland, where students who are unsuccessful in their educational pursuits are seemingly erased from the purview of the school system. And it is an enchanted valley of prosperity, where an orchestra programme has thrived to the point where it performs to the same standard as the top performing high school ensembles in the United States. It could be said that is for this latter reason that I first travelled to El Centro (see Prelude), and that it is also for the same reason that I returned again, more than a decade later, as a researcher. But I would also contend that it is precisely because of these three other intersecting identities that I find this particular high school orchestra programme to be so deeply intriguing.

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that these statistics rank amongst the highest of all California schools for each of the respective categories (ICOE, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, the reported graduation rate for the state of California is purportedly 83.2%. However, this particular statistic is currently mired down in federal auditors' allegations that the statistic had been improperly inflated by removing students from the calculation who should have been included (Frazier, 2018).

## **Section 4.2: Revisiting El Centro**

In the previous section, I asserted that El Centro's location at the crossroads of contradictions makes it an especially fertile ethnographic fieldwork site for exploring music education's entanglements with cultural hegemony, the topic for which this thesis is intent on exploring. It also acts as an especially appropriate fieldwork site autoethnographically. Between 2005 and 2007, I worked as the orchestra director at Kumeyaay High School. The experience presented me with firsthand experience with many of the complexities related to overlaying music education with a social justice agenda, and thus could be justifiably described as the origin of my research interests. When I left El Centro in 2007, I found myself caught up in ideological circles regarding how I should view my work (see section 1.2.3). The intervening twelve years have presented me with increased ability to articulate and theorise how my work as an orchestra director in El Centro might have been inextricably entangled with notions of cultural hegemony. Correspondingly, El Centro continues to act as a catalyst for exploring my own complicity in cultural hegemony. As such, El Centro is able to simultaneously act as a lens for collecting both ethnographic and autoethnographic data. Thus, by making El Centro the locus of my fieldwork, I became enabled to activate both autoethnographic fieldwork and ethnographic fieldwork through a single site.

In this section, I give a large-scale narrative of my experience revisiting El Centro as a researcher. I first describe my changed perspective on the community, making reference to the road journey imagery of the previous section. Second, I give an overview of my various fieldwork activities. Third, I describe the Kumeyaay orchestra programme and the students in that programme. And fourth, I discuss the process and practicalities of engaging in the data collection strategies I introduced in the previous chapter (see section 3.3).

#### **4.2.1 El Centro via the air: Four disparate identities merge into one**

It was through the window of a 10-passenger single-propeller aeroplane that I found myself once again seeing the Imperial Valley. It had been ten years since I lived and taught in El Centro, which perhaps prompted me to ask myself how I felt about returning to the Imperial Valley, a community which had featured so prominently in the development of my teaching identity. Travelling to the Imperial Valley by aeroplane was certainly a new experience for me. As I gazed out the window, I had an uninterrupted view of the 121,000 acres of verdant agricultural land carpeting the valley floor. I was struck with the poetic appropriateness of re-entering the Valley in this manner. In contrast to my initial visit to El Centro in which I had been fixated upon the barrenness of the desert landscape (see Prelude), I was now seeing El Centro as rich and fertile land.

And yet, as I looked out from the aeroplane, I could see the other identities of El Centro merging into one. Out the right side of the plane, military jets were practicing their manoeuvres. To the left, the New River was delivering its toxic waters to the Salton Sea. Off in the distance, it was possible to see the stark boundary between the greenness of the irrigated fields and the brownness of the barren desert. As the plane descended into this elision of conflicted identities, I remembered poignantly how conflicted my own feelings were about El Centro.

When I had first accepted the position of orchestra director at Kumeyaay High School, I had envisioned myself leading a high-performing ensemble to national accolades. In doing so, I believed that I would be nurturing an orchestra community, which in turn, would provide students with the type of peer support they would need to rise above the challenges facing the wider El Centro community. In large measure, it could be said that I accomplished these aims. But somehow, along the way, I found myself questioning the way I was positioning myself, particularly having been a cultural outsider to El Centro. And thus, when I left El Centro, I left with unresolved feelings, especially pertaining to whether I could genuinely regard myself as a member of the community. So, in returning to El Centro, I found myself conflicted regarding whether I was returning to a community of which I was a member, or whether I was returning as an outsider.

About an hour later, I re-entered the high school I had formerly taught at, only to discover that my entrance went unnoticed. Though I stood in plain view of the receptionist, my presence prompted no response. I walked forward and asked for assistance. The receptionist took my name and then

directed me to some chairs where I could wait. I stole a moment to glance round. Even though it had been ten years since I had been in this office, everything looked exactly the same – the same chairs lining wall of the foyer, the same plaque commemorating the founding of the school, the same purple racing painted along the wall to give the room a supposedly welcoming feel. I found myself in a place that I knew profoundly, and yet, I was seemingly invisible. In the midst of such reflections, the door opened and in walked a young man in his mid-to-late twenties. It was ‘Santiago’, a gifted violinist I had taught 10 years previously, when he had been a student at the high school. He was now taller and leaner, but unmistakably the same person. He glanced in my direction. Then his brow furrowed and he cocked his head sharply in my direction, whilst his body jerked to a halt. ‘Mr Fairbanks?’

Similar experiences occurred numerous times throughout my time in the Valley – at restaurants, at shops, at community events, at rehearsals. With each re-acquaintance, there was a hurried effort to summarise ten years of life experience into just a few sentences. And with each successive iteration of ‘What brings you back to town?’ and ‘So glad to see you!’, I came to realise that I need not question whether I could legitimately claim El Centro as one of my former homes. It was becoming clear that El Centro was unmistakeably welcoming me back. In spite of my concerns that my own cultural background would preclude me from fully being a part of El Centro, it was apparent that El Centro was insisting that there was a legitimate place for me amidst her complicated identities.

#### **4.2.2 Overview of Fieldwork Activities: Blending into the community**

To authentically engage both ethnographically and autoethnographically with El Centro, it became necessary for me to interact with the community in a variety of ways. In this section, I give a general accounting of my various fieldwork activities, making specific note of which activities elided directly into data collection activities. I have broadly catalogued my fieldwork activities into three categories: school-based activities, community-based activities, and activities beyond El Centro (see table 4.2.2).

# Catalogue of Fieldwork Activities

(with approximate number of hours spent in each activity)

<b>School-based Activities</b>		<b>126</b>
Finalizing access/permissions (4 hours)	4	
Visiting Orchestra Classroom	80	
<i>Observing music classes (34 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Playing alongside students (30 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Teaching music classes (6 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Interacting with students outside of class (10 hours)</i>	-	
Conversing one-on-one with music teachers	22	
Focus group discussions	8	
Writing-up fieldnotes	12	
<b>Community-based Activities</b>		<b>108</b>
Attending community events	17	
<i>NoCCA's Beauty and the Beast (5 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Imperial Valley Symphony Rehearsals (9 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Drumline Competition (3 hours)</i>	-	
Engaging in 'regular' life	75	
<i>Grocery shopping (6 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Visiting shops/restaurants (13 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Visiting library and reading local newspaper (4 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Attending Sunday church meetings (9 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Going running in the park (4 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Taking public transit (7 hours)</i>	-	
<i>Visiting with homestay family (30 hours)</i>	-	
Interviews/Conversations with local teachers	11	
<b>Activities Beyond El Centro</b>		<b>71</b>
Follow-up interviews with former students	12	
Fieldwork trip to Santa Ana, CA	20	
Fieldwork trip to New York, NY	5	
Fieldwork trip to Davis, CA	30	
Reconnecting with Orchestra Alumni via Social Media	4	
<b>Travel to/from Fieldwork Site</b>		<b>140</b>
<b>Total hours</b>		<b>445</b>
		<b>(43 total days)</b>

Table 4.2.2: Catalogue of Fieldwork Activities

A majority of my fieldwork was based at Kumeyaay High School. Going into my fieldwork, it was my intention to collect a large portion of my data from the orchestra classroom and from the orchestra students. This necessitated an involved authorisation process (see Appendix A), and even some delays once I was in El Centro. However, once all the authorisations were in place, I was able to

attend the orchestra classes on a daily basis. In total, I spent 18 days at the school, permitting me upwards of 70 hours of classroom interaction with students in the following classes: Chamber Orchestra (advanced), Intermediate Orchestra, and Beginning Orchestra. I also lingered in the orchestra room after school and during lunches, which brought a further 10 hours of interaction with the students. These activities are described in more detail in the discussion of participant observation in the following section (see section 4.3.1). Collectively, they represent one of the major sources of data collection.

Other school-based activities included having one-on-one conversations with the Kumeyaay music teachers, including the orchestra director, the band director, and the choir director. These interactions, coupled with the time I spent with the orchestra students, permitted me to effectively organise a series of focus group discussions, which took place on consecutive days after school during the final week of my fieldwork. Because these focus group discussions represent an invaluable exploration of the students' perspectives, they have become a major source of data collection. In a subsequent section, I discuss in more detail the practicalities of setting up and holding the focus group discussions (see section 4.3.2). The school schedule had a gap in the middle of the day, in which there was not a meaningful class for me to interact with. I found this break in the day to be particularly advantageous, for it gave me an opportunity to review and expand some of my ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011).

In regard to community-based activities, these were much more broad in character and generally served to reactivate my emic understanding of the community. Additionally though, they gave me an opportunity to revisit and view familiar places and experiences, utilising a research lens. Some of the activities were intentionally planned in advance, such as spending time at the library reading current and past editions of the local newspaper or taking public transit. Other activities were more emergent, such as attending highly celebrated community events like the Valley-wide Drumline Competition or the Valley's production of *Beauty and the Beast*, which incidentally, was directed by one of my former students. To position myself as a member of the community, albeit a temporary one, these events seemed particularly important to attend, especially because the invitations to these particular events were extended to me by the students and music teachers whom I was interacting with in a research capacity. I also attended several rehearsals of the Imperial Valley Symphony Orchestra, a community orchestra I had played with when I had been resident in El Centro. The invitation to attend was similarly issued by the students and music teachers I was

working with closely. In addition to these events and rehearsals, I made a particular point to be engaging in the community in a 'regular life' sort of way. Accordingly, I regularly went to the grocery stores, restaurants, and shops; I attended church on Sunday; and I went running in the park. Amidst all these activities, it was uncanny how often these community-based activities provided me with unplan-able encounters with former colleagues and/or students. These unplanned encounters were perhaps the most advantageous aspect of my fieldwork activities, second only to the broad contextualisation they provided me regarding my fieldwork site. And in one notable instance, I found that I was able to reconnect and visit at some length with one of my former students, David, who was in the midst of pursuing a career in music education. We met up several times to chat informally, which eventually led to a more formalised semi-structured in-depth interview (see section 4.3.3).

For the third category of fieldwork activities, I have classified these activities as parallel activities. These are activities that are certainly fieldwork activities, but ones that did not take place in El Centro. Several of these were nested fieldwork trips. In one instance, I made a two-day trip to Santa Ana, California, which gave me the opportunity to make an extended visit to two individuals I had worked closely with when I had been a teacher in El Centro. One individual was 'John', an orchestra teacher colleague who had since moved from his junior high school orchestra teaching position to a high school position in Santa Ana. The other individual was 'Marcos', a student whom I had formerly taught at Kumeyaay High School in 2007. In the intervening decade, he had obtained a music degree, a teaching credential, and a job in Santa Ana as a middle school orchestra teacher. By visiting Santa Ana, I was able to reconnect with Marcos and subsequently invite him to become an interview participant (see section 4.3.3).

Another nested fieldwork trip was to New York, where I was able to meet with Randall Allsup, who had been designated as my overseas supervisor. Together, we were able to discuss my emergent fieldwork and ensure that my data collection strategies were on target for gathering the data I would need for my study.

The third nested fieldwork trip was to Davis, California. On the Davis trip, I accompanied the Kumeyaay Chamber Orchestra as they participated in the California Music Educators Association state band and orchestra festival. During the many hours of driving to get to and from that event, the students eagerly participated in further focus group discussions (see section 4.3.2), and



interestingly, those particular in-transit focus group discussions were amongst the most substantive of the several focus group discussions that I held.

Upon completion of my in-person fieldwork in El Centro, I held follow-up interviews with former students of mine who are alumni of the Kumeyaay orchestra programme (see section 4.3.3). These took place via Google Hangouts several months after I left El Centro. This format permitted me the ability to record the interviews and transcribe them for eventual inclusion in my thesis. One final thing to note about my fieldwork activities is the extensive amount of travel required. In order for me to spend upwards of six weeks at the fieldwork site and for me to be able to extend that fieldwork across a four-month time span, I needed to make three separate visits to El Centro, necessitating a substantial number of hours travelling.

In aggregate, my fieldwork activities amounted to 445 hours, and included substantial time spent at Kumeyaay High School and throughout the wider El Centro community. These fieldwork activities ultimately opened up opportunities to visit with students via focus group discussions and former students via semi-structured in-depth interviews. In the end, this holistic approach to fieldwork resulted in a broad contextualisation of El Centro as well as mechanism for interacting with the research participants in a meaningful and genuine way.

#### **4.2.3 The Kumeyaay High School Orchestra Programme**

I use this section to introduce the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra, the principal locus of my fieldwork. To do so, I first situate it within the competing identities – welcome oasis, citadel of protectionism, ghosted wasteland, and enchanted valley of prosperity – which I identified in the previous section. Thereafter, I provide a description of the orchestra programme and the orchestra students.

I vividly remember my first encounter with the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra. The year was 2005, and I had applied for a teaching position in El Centro, California. Evidently, my job application had been regarded favourably, for my wife and I had been flown out by the school district for an in-person interview. Our itinerary took us to San Diego, after which, my wife Carolee and I commenced

the two-hour drive to El Centro (see Prelude). Thirsting for the oasis of something familiar after crossing the lonely desert, Carolee and I went directly to the orchestra room after arriving at the school. The muted sound of a string orchestra escaped through the door, beckoning me to enter. The rehearsal ceased abruptly as a brusque woman brandishing a baton directed me towards a chair behind the first violin section. Moments later, the sound of a baton striking a music stand signalled that the students' attention was needed at the front of the room. The students immediately gave the authoritative woman their rapt attention, breaking off from their furtive glances towards the unknown newcomer who sat behind them. I prepared myself for the characteristically imprecise sound of a high school orchestra.

To my astonishment, the orchestra was absolutely precise in its rhythmic integrity and pure in its intonation. In fact, the sounds I encountered were amongst the best I had ever heard from a school ensemble. I remember thinking to myself, 'What is an orchestra like this doing out here?' Because my mind still held the images of the drive from San Diego, I had expected to find a scrappy little orchestra which matched what I perceived the Imperial Valley to be – a remote outpost of civilisation. I was not expecting to find an orchestra whose standard of playing rivalled that of the best high school orchestras in the country. So, at the end of fifteen minutes, when I walked out of the room, I found that I was still trying to discern what kind of an enchantment I had just encountered.

The 'Kumeyaay' High School Orchestra consistently receives accolades as being one of the best high school orchestras in the United States. The orchestra room acts as a witness to the orchestra's many accomplishments. Watching as sentinels over the room is retinue of trophies. Placed side-by-side and stretching across the back wall, these trophies chronicle years of orchestral triumphs at competitive music festivals. They stand proudly, as though their sheer number are enough to dissuade anyone from asking about the incongruity between the winning of trophies and the giving of a music performance. Adorning the front wall of the classroom are framed photos of the orchestra – in chronological order – stretching back to the school's founding.

The programme is comprised of three string orchestras, each with a full instrumentation of violins, violas, cellos, and basses. The classes meet daily and are offered for elective credit within the fine arts department. The current teacher is a string specialist, who was hired and brought to El Centro as the result of a nationwide search in 2007 for a suitable teacher. Kumeyaay's orchestra programme is

the only high school orchestra programme in the region. The nearest high school programme would likely be found an hour's drive away in Riverside, San Diego, or Yuma counties. Quixotically, the Kumeyaay orchestra thrives in the type of community which music education researchers have asserted are unlikely to support school orchestra programmes: socioeconomically disadvantaged; predominantly Hispanic/Latino; rural/nonurban; low educational attainment amongst adults (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Smith, 1997; see also Section 2.3.1).

The ethnic demographics of the orchestra are notable. Asian students comprise less than two per cent of the school's population, but they represent a disproportionately high percentage of the orchestra. Approximately 10% of the orchestra is comprised of Asian students. Conversely, Hispanic/Latino students represent 92% of the school population, but at 85% in the school orchestra, they are somewhat underrepresented in relation to schoolwide demographics. About 5% of the orchestra is comprised of white / non-Hispanic students.

Within the school's culture, the orchestra programme has seemingly imbued itself with an aura of social mobility. Not only are the members of the orchestra programme's top ensemble – the chamber orchestra – regarded as the most musically capable students within the school, they are also perceived as being some of the most capable academic students. In a school where about one in four students pursue higher education, it is particularly noteworthy that amongst graduates of the chamber orchestra, the college attendance rate hovers around 100% and rarely dips below 90%. Moreover, orchestra students consistently receive admission and scholarship offers to prestigious American universities.

### **Section 4.3: Collecting Data in El Centro**

My return to El Centro immediately plunged me into the extensive, rich, and expansive world of data collection. The purpose of this section is to describe in some detail the main data collection strategies I undertook, namely participant observation, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.3.1 Participant Observation: Reengaging in the orchestra class**

I purposefully selected a fieldwork site in which I could enjoy immediate success as a participant observer. Between 2005 and 2007, I held the post of orchestra director at Kumeyaay High School. By returning to a fieldwork site where I had been a teacher, I was able to activate my familiarity with the school's protocols, my collegial relationships with other teachers, and my comfort level in working with the school's student population. Additionally, as a former resident in the community, I already possessed an emic understanding of what school might mean to an agricultural, desert community near the California-Mexico border. Thus, by returning to El Centro for fieldwork, I was able to immediately activate the extensive contextual and emic insights I had gained from my prior employment and residency in El Centro. In pursuing participant observation, one of my overarching goals was to reengage authentically with the school orchestra, and thus weave in the auto/ethnographic insights I had gained from several years of full-time doctoral study. To do so, I needed to give focused attention to the way in which I positioned myself within the orchestra classroom. Through my studies, I had increasingly become aware of the power differential which often exists between teacher and student, and I realised that unless I could situate myself in a role other than that of a 'teacher', I would be unsure whether the responses I received from students were genuine or whether they were in deference to the power differential. Thus, as I interacted with the students, I conscientiously sought out opportunities to convey to them that I need not be regarded as an authority figure, which I realised was different than how most adults positioned themselves in a school setting. By focusing so specifically upon this aspect of engaging with the

students, I believe I was able to develop more genuine relationships of trust, which, in turn, resulted in students sharing what I felt were authentic reflections, rather than carefully rehearsed, prepared, and/or pre-constructed responses (Denzin, 1997).

Three ways in which I pursued this collegiality were (1) my initial introduction to the students, (2) the activities I pursued during class time, and (3) the types of conversations I would pursue with the students when we were not actively 'doing orchestra'. In anticipation of my initial introduction to the students, I had thoroughly thought through the different options for how I might present myself, each of which would dramatically shape how the students regarded me: the predecessor of the current teacher; a researcher from Cambridge; an orchestra conductor; a colleague and friend. In the end, I chose to emphasise this latter identity. I did acknowledge my other identities, but ultimately, I felt that the research would be enhanced by minimising the distance between me and the students. Hence, my introduction consisted of explaining to the students that I had formerly lived in El Centro and that I had come back for a research project because I felt like the field of music education could learn substantially from the Kumeyaay orchestra. I explained to the students that I would be visiting their classes for a total of six weeks, and I asked them to regard me as a colleague and friend, further explaining that I would be playing alongside them in the orchestra. The students responded favourably to my introduction, aided of course, by the unambiguous messages of support they were receiving from their own teacher regarding my research.

In short time, my presence in the classroom was fully normalised. Most often, I played alongside the students in rehearsal. By playing violin – or another instrument – side-by-side with the students, I was able to participate in the same music-making they were engaged in. As we focused our attention towards our shared goal of playing the music on the page and responded to the conducting gestures and verbal instructions of the teacher, we symbolically became part of the same team, relying upon each other musically.

#### **4.3.2 Focus Group Discussions: Establishing a space to hear students' views**

In my role as a participant observer, I had the opportunity to interact daily with the orchestra students, resulting in an abundance of informal interview data. To encourage that data to coalesce

quickly, I organised a series of focus group discussions (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). My purpose in doing so was to create an appropriate setting in which I could directly ask students to comment upon their experience participating in the orchestra programme. By providing them an opportunity to give voice to their lived experience of embodying, experiencing, and negotiating their own sociocultural identity within the context of the orchestra (Richardson, 1999; Tight, 2016; Marton, 1986), I anticipated that I would be able to more directly address the research questions, particularly the question pertaining to learning how high school orchestra students negotiate any encounters with cultural hegemony.

I intentionally waited until the latter part of my fieldwork to hold the focus group discussions. I did so for two primary reasons: (1) I wanted to ensure that a sufficient relationship of trust had developed between the students and myself, and (2) I wanted to allow myself sufficient time to refine the discussion prompts in respect to the emerging analysis based upon my participant observations. In the end, I organised five separate focus group discussions. The first three discussions took place in the orchestra room after school during my final week in El Centro. On each of those days, I made an announcement in class that I would be holding a focus group discussion after school for anyone who would like to participate, and I wrote the discussion prompt on the board. Partially because it was an open invitation, and partially because students had different commitments on each day of the week, there were different people present at each of these three focus group discussions. On one day, it was primarily orchestra students. On another day, the orchestra students were joined by the band and orchestra teacher. On another day, a number of students from the concert band ended up joining the discussion.

During the focus group discussions, students sat in a loose semi-circle and commented freely upon the discussion prompts I had prepared in advance. At first there was some timidity in responding to the prompts, but as the focus group discussion proceeded, the discussion became more conversational and more lively. Though students were welcome to come and go, most students choose to stay for the entire 40-minute duration of each respective focus group discussion. Attendance varied according to the day, but there tended to be about 5-6 students involved in each focus group discussion.

The remaining two focus group interviews took place rather spontaneously in a 10-passenger van en route to El Centro after students had participated in the CMEA state band and orchestra festival. Building upon the success of the after-school focus group discussions, several of the orchestra students had suggested that the trip would represent an ideal time to continue the focus group discussions. Six students self-selected to ride in the van in which the orchestra director and myself were driving, specifically asking if we could carry on the focus group discussions whilst in transit. These focus group discussions ended up taking place in two 40-minute sessions during the ten-hour drive. They carried a sense of spontaneity, for it was ultimately the students who signalled that they wanted to engage in a focus group discussion. They would ask me to pull out my voice-recorder – which they had seen me do in the prior focus group interviews – and then ask me to give them a prompt for discussion. From there the discussion would naturally develop in a conversational way.

In each focus group session, the orchestra teacher was present, and the students agreed in advance to an audio recording. In total, the focus group interviews amounted to several hours of recorded audio, capturing the students' collective thoughts and dilemmas in their own words, as they responded to my semi-structured prompts regarding how their participation in orchestra related to their developing sociocultural identities.

#### **4.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews: Reconnecting with former students**

My third data collection activity took place outside of the context of the orchestra classroom, and required some logistical risk-taking. To hold semi-structured interviews with my own former students, I first needed to reconnect with these alumni of the orchestra whom I had not been in contact with for ten years. In preparing for my such fieldwork, I had anticipated that I would encounter pronounced practical difficulties in finding and working with these individuals. In contrast to working with the current orchestra students – who would be attending orchestra class at a specified time, date, and location – the orchestra alumni were spread out across the United States and further. I did not have a straightforward means for re-establishing contact. However, based upon my prior work as the students' orchestra teacher and my knowledge of their strong friendships, I anticipated that in spite of the potentially large geographical distances between them, they had probably remained in contact with each other. I reasoned to myself that if I were to travel to El Centro, I might be able to gather some information which would represent an entrypoint for getting

back in contact with one or two of the students. Little did I know that one of the first people to greet me in El Centro would be one of these former students!

By travelling back to El Centro, I ended up re-establishing contact with more than a dozen of my former students. Ultimately, I decided to invite four of these individuals to engage in semi-structured interviews. The four I selected had graduated high school during the same year, and they had each pursued music and music teaching careers. In reconnecting with them, I discovered that they encountered – or were encountering – pronounced entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony. Anticipating that these four individuals would provide particularly rich interview responses, I asked them if they would be willing to become research participants in my study. They each agreed very enthusiastically. Over the subsequent weeks and months following my departure from El Centro, we corresponded by email and Facebook messenger, as we determined the best way to pursue the semi-structured interviews

In the end, I was able to coordinate holding interviews with two of the selected students. We did this by video chat, using Google Hangouts. During the video chats, I first asked the students to begin with a career narrative, which in turn, prompted further discussion on a number of follow-up matters as I asked for certain clarifications. At moments when the students found their narratives coming to a pause, I would prompt discussion on one of the many topics we had talked about at length when I had visited with them in El Centro, and on which I had previously made some ethnographic notes. Following each video chat, I typed up a written transcription and shared it back with each of the interviewees for member checking. Combined, the semi-structured interviews amounted to 165 minutes of video chat, which in turn, became 24 pages of type-written transcription.

By re-engaging with my own former students over their sociocultural experience in my orchestra class, I found that I was able to draw upon the auto/ethnographic advantages of working closely with these individuals during their high school orchestra experience. Specifically, I already had a contextual understanding of how each of them engaged in the orchestra and interacted with their orchestra peers, having personally taught them and interacted with them regularly over a period of two years. As I pursued the semi-structured interviews, there was already a relationship of mutual respect to draw upon, which seemed to generate more genuine and introspective responses. And as an added benefit, this process of reconnecting with former students seemed to facilitate the



retroactive mediation of previously unsettled sociocultural tensions. Though such an outcome might seem ancillary to my specific research questions (see section 2.4.3) and thus outside the scope of this particular study, I do wish to note that this outcome aligns particularly closely with my larger research purposes (see section 1.2.3). Moreover, it opens up exciting possibilities for future research. For example, if I were to weave together these individuals' lived experiences together with some of the theory I discuss in this thesis, we could produce co-constructed narratives which are illustrative of how individuals might negotiate the complex terrain of cultural hegemony in music education.

#### **4.3.4 Curating the data: Commentary on which data is presented**

By engaging in these varied data collection activities over the duration of my fieldwork, I gathered an overabundance of data which could all be used to address my research questions. Because there has been a large amount of sampling, abridging, and distilling of that data prior to its inclusion in this thesis (see Chapter 5 – Findings & Discussion), I would like to discuss the rationale behind how I made many of those decisions.

First of all, it is worth reiterating that my auto/ethnographic positionality placed a certain charge upon me to have a dualistic approach to my fieldwork. On the one hand, I needed to approach my fieldwork ethnographically, being thorough in my inductive observations and flexible in respect to allowing my data collection strategies to develop as I gained further emic insight into my fieldwork site. On the other hand, through my autoethnographic positioning, I brought a strong theoretical perspective which sought to explore whether there existed any disjunctures between the orchestra students' habitus and the expectations of the orchestra programme. These seemingly methodological binaries ultimately created a dialectic through which I found I could efficiently curate the data.

For example, during my fieldwork, I made intentional effort to utilise public transportation and visit local shops, anticipating that by doing so, I would have access to some ethnographic insights about El Centro which I would be unable to acquire any other way. Accordingly, in my fieldwork journal, I have some extensive notes about such experiences. However, these particular ethnographic

observations did not necessarily give any specific insight into possible disjunctures between students' habitus and the expectations of the orchestra programme. Therefore, I have ultimately omitted these fieldwork experiences from specific inclusion in my thesis, though in aggregate, I have tried to capture the general character of these observations through my introductory description of El Centro (see section 4.1). Similarly, there were instances when I sensed that I was encountering powerful glimpses into students' expressions of habitus, identity, and culture, and yet I ultimately omitted quite a few of them because I did not feel it would be appropriate for me to implicate students' hints at citizenship status and other particularly sensitive matters. So, in the end, I found that my auto/ethnographic positionality guided me towards selecting the data which was illustrative of the multi-dimensional aspects of my research, namely ethnographically-rich data which was particularly imbued with issues of cultural hegemony.

Additionally, in identifying which materials to include in the findings chapter, I felt a desire to include representative work from each of my three different fieldwork trips. Also, I wanted to include excerpts from each of my data collection strategies. By including data from multiple sources as well as from different fieldwork visits, I sought to create an internal triangulation of data, thus adding to the rigour of the study.

As indicated earlier (see section 4.2.2), my fieldwork encompassed 445 hours of ethnographic-related activities, all of which have contributed to my analysis. In formulating that analysis into discreet findings (see Chapter 5 – Findings & Discussion), I have elected to illustrate the findings with representative data from the participant observations, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. In the end, one of the focus group discussions ended up being particularly illustrative of the findings and so, I have decided to cite from it rather extensively in the presentation of my findings. This particular focus group discussion materialised rather spontaneously while travelling home from the CMEA band and orchestra festival (see section 4.3.2). Perhaps because the students involved were all close friends with each other and because I had had the experience of facilitating several previous focus group discussions, this particular focus group discussion had a certain synergistic spontaneity coupled with a summative comprehensiveness. As such, it lends itself particularly well for citing in my research, especially because with each successive time I circle back to these students' comments, there are layers of meaning and context added to their statements.

In the subsequent discussion of the findings (see Chapter 6 – Further Discussion), I reflect on the pertinent consideration of whose voices are included in this study and whose voices might not be represented. I also reflect a little further upon the analysis and the complexity which my auto/ethnographic positionality introduced.

#### 4.3.5 Format for Presenting the Data: Preserving the dialectic

In alignment with my dialectic and auto/ethnographic approach, I have chosen to present the study's findings in a format, where ethnographic evidence and autoethnographic commentary appears side-by-side (see figure 4.3.5a).

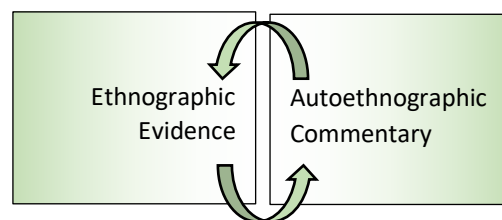


Figure 4.3.5a: Side-by-side Presentation of Ethnographic and Autoethnographic Data  
*Source: Original Illustration*

Building outward from this side-by-side format for presenting the data, I have decided to present the findings and discussion in a blended format (see figure 4.3.5b), where each of the subsections of the chapter proceeds in the following format:

- 1.) I present the respective finding.
- 2.) I provide evidence for the finding from the data: ethnographic observations, focus group interviews, and/or co-constructed narratives.
- 3.) Concurrently, I provide autoethnographic commentary.
- 4.) I discuss the particular finding in relation to other findings, as well as the literature reviewed (see sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4) and Bourdieusian theory (see section 3.4.3)

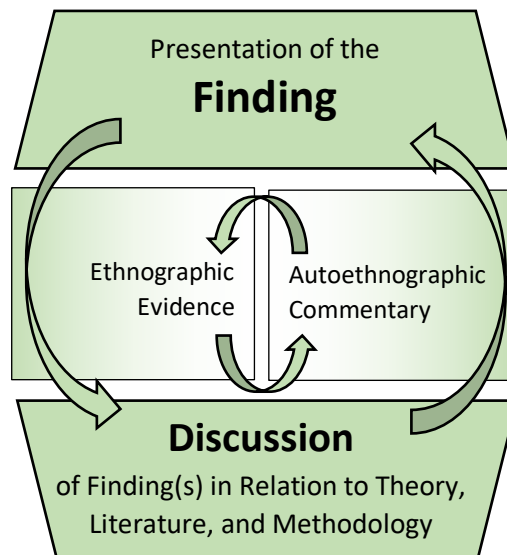


Figure 4.3.5b: Blended Format of Findings and Discussion  
*Source: Original Illustration*

I have constructed each of these blocks of 'Findings and Discussion' in such a way that they can link together with the other 'Findings and Discussion' blocks found in each respective section. When these blocks are linked together (see figure 4.3.5c), they become the basis for the conclusions and implications I eventually draw from my research (see Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications).

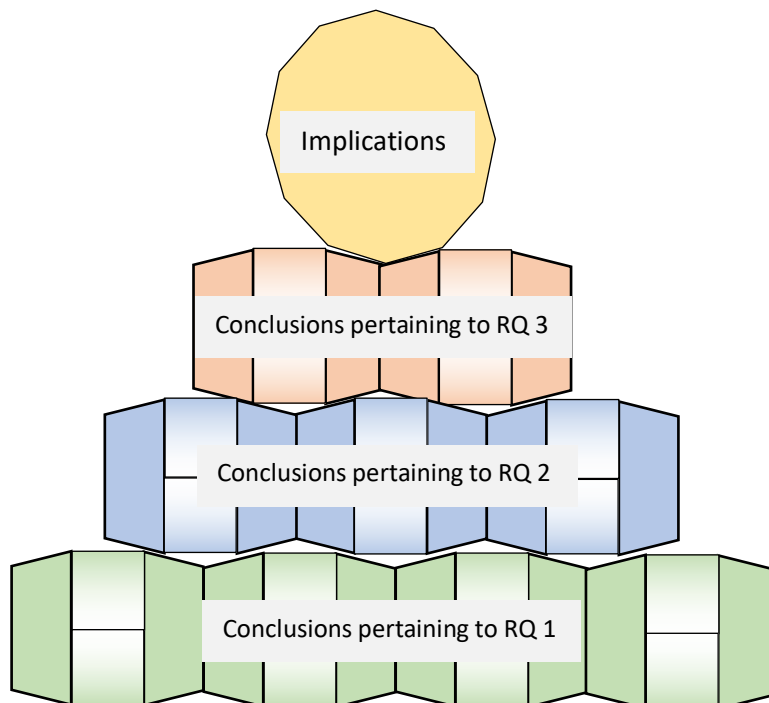


Figure 4.3.5c: Relationships between Chapters 5, 6, & 7  
*Source: Original Illustration*

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

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## Section 5.1: Sociocultural Dissonances

For an orchestra to achieve the transcendence which comes when rich sonorities, vibrant harmonies, and intense rhythms come together in a brilliant tapestry of sound, the conductor often directs rehearsal time and attention towards the musical moments which are decidedly nontranscendent. By drawing attention to an unobserved dynamic marking or an incorrectly placed note, the conductor is able to assist the orchestra in removing glaring distractions and thus propel the ensemble toward the collective goal of a satisfying musical performance. In like manner, educational research often has a tendency towards highlighting weakness. Even in the midst of educational transcendence, researchers frequently direct their time and attention towards those instances when educational provision has become imbued with dissonance. In this section, as I proceed to present findings related to my first research question (*RQ1: To what degree are school orchestras entangled in issues of cultural hegemony?*), I wish to state that in no way are these findings intended to dismiss or rebut the enthusiastic and passionate way in which the Kumeyaay orchestra students describe their experience in the orchestra class. The undeniable impression is that the orchestra students – both past and present – are deeply appreciative of their orchestra experience. Notwithstanding their appreciation, several instances surfaced when it became evident that students were encountering hegemonic sociocultural structures. The purpose of this section is to highlight and discuss such instances.

In this opening section, I present and discuss four findings related to instances when students encountered hegemonic sociocultural structures. First, I discuss the primacy of adjudications, noting how music festival participation can have the effect of perpetuating the cultural arbitraries associated with western classical music, thereby immersing orchestra students into the simultaneity of cultural capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990). Second, I discuss the way in which adjudication has an association with non-musical, behavioural expectations. I draw parallels between orchestra students' acknowledgements that they act 'sophisticated' because of judges and Bourdieu's (1984) notion that sophistication is often deliberately performed in order to project one's

social class. Third, I comment upon orchestra students’ confessions that in spite of their enthusiastic participation in the orchestra, many of them remain ambivalent to classical music. In doing so, I link Bourdieu’s (1984, 1990) notions of symbolic violence, cultural capital, and performed social class. Fourth, I assert that orchestra students have a desire to be validated by their peers, but that their entanglements with the hegemonic structures of music education sometimes preclude them from obtaining such validation, ultimately suggesting that the doxa of music education can be symbolically violent against the students who are the intended beneficiaries.

**5.1.1 ‘I want you to be successful [at festival]’: The primacy of adjudications**

*Finding: The orchestra’s collective sense of ‘success’ is highly predicated upon ratings received at adjudicated music festivals.*

Almost immediately upon engaging in fieldwork, I came to understand that for the orchestra students at Kumeyaay High School, their collective sense of ‘success’ is deeply entangled in the ratings they received – and would receive – at adjudicated music festivals. Of the festivals, the one which carried the most weight in the Valley was the festival sponsored by the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association (SCSBOA). During that annual festival, high school bands and orchestras are allocated a 20-minute time slot on stage to perform for three visiting adjudicators. The adjudicators listen to the performance, assess its merits and weaknesses, and then provide a rating to the ensemble (I – Superior, II – Excellent, III – Good, IV – Fair, V – Poor). These judges exert a powerful hegemonic influence upon the way orchestra is pursued, taught, practiced, and conceptualised at Kumeyaay High School.

<i>Ethnographic Evidence</i>	<i>Autoethnographic Commentary</i>
<p><b>[From ethnographic fieldnotes (21 Feb 2017)]</b></p> <p>In my hands, I held the printed programme from the Kumeyaay High School Chamber Orchestra’s recent performance at the 2016 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic. In it I read, ‘The Kumeyaay High School Chamber Orchestra, from El Centro, CA, is widely recognized by many as one of the most successful programs in California’</p>	<p>‘What does it mean for a school orchestra</p>

I was standing in the orchestra room of the Kumeyaay High School Chamber Orchestra, on my first day of fieldwork. I was surrounded by trophies, certificates, and plaques, all proclaiming that the Kumeyaay Orchestra was a 'successful' orchestra.

**[From ethnographic fieldnotes (1 Mar 2017)]**

I was sitting side-by-side with Marisol, a second violinist, in the intermediate orchestra. We had just completed a run-through of a passage of music the students had been rehearsing for several weeks. Over half the players trailed off midway through the passage, as the notes became faster and higher. The collective sound of the orchestra sounded more aleatoric than Classical, and the tone distinctly tenuous. Dr Morrison, the orchestra director, signalled for everyone to stop playing. An agitated silence commenced. The conductor spoke brusquely, emphatically, and somewhat dismissively 'You need to learn this music! Go home and practice it tonight. Otherwise, you won't be successful. We have festival in two weeks. And I don't want to bring you to festival and have you *not* be successful'.

programme to be successful?' The question formed in my mind as I reacted to the statement I had just read about the Kumeyaay High School Chamber Orchestra.

Moreover, I found it particularly noteworthy that my first impression on returning to this particular orchestra classroom would be to ask 'what is success?'

'Success is clearly important to this orchestra. What precisely does that mean?'

I remembered the pressure I had felt when I was first teaching at Kumeyaay to ensure that the orchestra was 'successful', a euphemism for getting a superior rating at festival. It had been emphatically impressed upon me by colleagues that my continued employment at the school might be predicated upon whether I could lead the orchestra to a superior rating at festival.

In returning to El Centro as a researcher – and being independent from the imminent threat of festival adjudication – I found it curious that nearly everybody associated with music education was caught up in the unrelenting



The silence became more pronounced; it was clear that the students felt reprimanded by Dr Morrison's comments.

Dr Morrison added, 'Look, if it feels like I'm being hard on you, it's only because I want you to be successful'.

**[from ethnographic fieldnotes (30 Mar 2017)]**

Later that day, I again sat beside Marisol in the Intermediate Orchestra. She leant over, her face beaming 'Did you hear? We got a superior!'

riptide of festival adjudication.

For example, it appeared that Dr Morrison, the orchestra director, constructed much of his class around preparing for festival adjudication.

The SCSBOA Festival took place during one of the weeks when I was not in El Centro. Specifically, it occurred in the time between my first and second fieldwork trips to El Centro. Correspondingly, I had thought that I would miss out on knowing which of the ensembles had been 'successful' at festival. However, I needn't have worried.

A few weeks later, when I had returned to El Centro, music teachers and students alike were clamouring to tell me the results of the festival. Only three of the fifteen ensembles had received superior ratings, and they were all from Kumeyaay High School:

- the Kumeyaay Chamber Orchestra
- the Kumeyaay Concert Band
- the Kumeyaay Intermediate Orchestra

I had heard each of these ensembles in rehearsal, and as I received news that they had each received a superior rating, I found myself thinking,

Chamber orchestra – Expected

Concert band – Surprising, but believable

Intermediate orchestra – Astonishing!

I had been spent a substantial amount of time with the intermediate orchestra. When I had last heard them play, their playing was decidedly not 'superior', at least not the way it would be measured by festival adjudicators. I

Evidently, Dr Morrison had had misgivings about whether the orchestra could be 'successful' at the festival, so he made some changes. He asked the Intermediate Orchestra and the Beginning Orchestra to perform as a combined orchestra, performing the repertoire of the beginning orchestra class. No longer did the Intermediate Orchestra need to be adjudicated on the passage of music he had warned them would result in them being 'not successful'. Instead they played less difficult repertoire and correspondingly came away from festival feeling 'successful'.

wondered to myself, 'What changed while I was away?'

Based upon such observations, adjudication was running through my mind as I considered what it meant for an orchestra to be successful. What was the nature of this success? Was it actually bound up in adjudication? In order to probe whether I was correct in surmising that adjudication was how students measured their success, I decided to raise the matter in a focus group discussion.

**[from Focus Group Session #5 (16 May 2017)]**

*This focus group discussion took place in-transit from the CMEA band/orchestra festival. There were six students involved, all close friends with one another:*

**Sarah** (12<sup>th</sup> grade, viola). Sarah is the only student in the orchestra programme who identifies as ethnically white and non-Hispanic. After high school, she plans to attend Seattle University.

**Michael** (12<sup>th</sup> grade, violin). Michael is Chinese-American. He is the assistant concertmaster of the orchestra. After high school, he plans to attend Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Ji** (11<sup>th</sup> grade, violin). Ji is the brother of Michael. For much of the focus group discussion, he is asleep.

**Anita** (12<sup>th</sup> grade, cello). Anita is Mexican-American. She is an avid athlete and admired by her peers as a very capable student. After high school, she plans to attend UCLA.

**Rosa** (11<sup>th</sup> grade, violin). Rosa is Mexican-American. One of her distinguishing features is

*an apparent preference towards high fashion in clothing and appearance.*

**George** (12<sup>th</sup> grade, violin). *George is Mexican-American. He identifies very decidedly as a gamer and coder. After high school, he plans to attend the University of San Diego.*

Me: *What does it mean to be successful? What is 'success'?*

Sarah (12<sup>th</sup> grade violist): I guess being well-regarded in your field. Morrison [the orchestra teacher] is really renowned in his field for being a conductor and being the leader of a good orchestra, so I think that makes him successful

Me: *OK. As an orchestra, are you guys successful?*

Michael (12<sup>th</sup> grade violinist): I think so.

Sarah: Based off our [adjudication] scores, we are, but I think based off how we feel about our playing, we don't feel like we are.

Me: *You don't feel like you are?*

Sarah: No. I think our [adjudication] scores tell us we are, but we are very harsh on ourselves. So we're like, 'No, it could have been better', so we're not successful. We are not as successful as we could be.

I intentionally ask the students about 'success' in an open-ended manner, careful to avoid inadvertently biasing the discussion towards adjudication.

Sarah's answer is intriguingly circular *and* insightful – to be successful you need to be regarded as successful.

I note to myself that Sarah makes an unprompted reference to adjudication ratings.

I find it of particular interest that Sarah is willingly to call into question the adjudication system. I wonder to myself what she would have to say about the apparent 'gaming of the system' which I had observed with the recent SCSBOA festival. Would she condone adjusting

Unfortunately, the focus group discussion

elides into a different topic and that point and I am left without an answer to whether she, or any of her peers, would find it problematic that her peers in the intermediate orchestra would find their 'superior' rating so legitimising when it was acquired by replacing their repertoire with substantially easier music.

Regardless, I realise that Sarah is willing to question such notions of success, stating quite boldly that her personal convictions regarding success do not necessarily align with adjudication ratings. And it is perhaps noteworthy that Sarah is the only student who seems willing to question such notions idea of 'success'. I

Though Sarah's discussion of 'success' is brief, I begin to understand my original discomfort with the assertion that 'The Kumeyaay High School Orchestra ... is widely recognized by many as the most successful program in California.' It wasn't just that the word 'success' had not been fully theorised in its pluralistic possibilities, it was also that judgements of 'success' had been placed in the jurisdiction of external arbiters. As a result, the festival adjudicators were bestowed with the capacity to exert powerful hegemonic influence upon the way orchestra was pursued, taught, practiced, and conceptualised at Kumeyaay High School.

#### *Discussion: Explicit deference to adjudication paves the way for implicit symbolic violence*

It is perhaps a curious thing to question the appropriateness of whether a music ensemble should perform for an adjudicator; after all, adjudicated music festivals have been one of the hallmarks of school-based American music education for nearly a century (Mark & Gary, 2007; Rawlings, 2018). However, as musician and music education researcher Gary McPherson (1998) has observed in his study of music assessment,

'An evaluation of a performer does not mean anything until we know how reliable the judge was who evaluated that performance' (Fiske, 1994, p. 76). As researchers we need to obtain further evidence on the variety of elements that directly influence the decision making

process of music assessors, and how these are mediated by social, cultural, personal and professional factors (McPherson, 1998, p. 21).

In synthesising this observation of McPherson with the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990) and Freire (1974), it is possible that deference to an external judge exposes the ensemble to a conforming influence which is akin to what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic violence (see section 3.4.3 and figure 3.4.3). According to Freire, educational institutions often dictate which cultural backgrounds and types of knowledge will be privileged. This cultural domination occurs through the institutional structures of assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy. As individuals participate in these structures and negotiate the competing aspects of cultural capital and symbolic violence (see section 3.4.3 and figure 3.4.3), some students who had previously found themselves in a culturally dominated position, such as those in the intermediate orchestra, become complicit in education's cultural domination as they attribute their social success to the educational institution, for example by legitimising the ratings they receive from adjudicators.

The judge essentially becomes the arbiter of music and of culture. Whilst judges' ratings can endow the orchestra with the transferable benefit of cultural capital – e.g. being widely regarded as a 'successful' programme – it creates a structure in which there is continual deference to a higher musical authority (see also Kingsbury, 1988), a potential symbolic violence of musical expression:

- The adjudicator imposes adjudication criteria upon the music teachers
- The music teachers impose adjudication criteria upon their servants
- To be 'successful', the students must conform to the criteria placed upon them, even to the degree that they are willing to play a little disingenuously.

Music education philosopher Randall Allsup (2016a), recognising the danger of this imposition of cultural expression notes, 'The danger of teaching a traditional art form can be the danger of mistaking induction for education' (p. 20). Festival adjudication privileges performative approaches to music-making; it privileges written traditions of music; and it privileges certain ensemble configurations of instruments. In short, adjudication privileges western classical music, whilst subtly disguising its own complicity in promoting cultural reproduction.

### 5.1.2 ‘We were expected to be more proper’: The performance of sophistication

*Finding: Orchestra students tenuously regarded themselves as more sophisticated than their non-orchestra peers.*

Not only did festival adjudication create a structure of deference to the cultural arbitrary of an outside musical authority, it also had the effect of shaping how students positioned themselves in respect to their peers. Although it is often argued that festival adjudication limits itself to well-established and universally agreed upon standards of music performance such as tone quality, rhythmic integrity, and accuracy of intonation (see McPherson, 1998), my fieldwork indicated that students perceived an elision between adjudication and the need to behave in a certain way – e.g. more polite, more ‘proper’, more sophisticated. Without feeling a need to question themselves on their assertions, they stated emphatically that because it was an orchestra’s responsibility to act professional on stage, they felt a need to comport themselves in a decidedly ‘classy’ manner. In turn, this led some students to draw associations between participation in orchestra and the acquisition of higher social class.

Such themes arose during the focus group interview in which I was querying the students about success (see section 5.1.1). In fact, the discussion of success elided seamlessly into a discussion of what it meant to be a member of a successful orchestra and whether or not there was a certain ‘type’ of kid for whom orchestra was a particularly good match.

#### *Ethnographic Observations*

**[from Focus Group Interview #5 (16 May 2017)]:**  
*See note in section 5.1.1 about the composition of this particular focus group.*

Me: *Is orchestra different from band?*

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

Throughout my fieldwork visits, I had noted that orchestra students had consistently drawn marked distinctions between the orchestra programme and the band programme at Kumeyaay High School. I began to perceive that students were inclined to draw some sociocultural distinctions between the band students and the orchestra students. During a focus group discussion, I provided them an opportunity to comment.

Sarah: I think so. It's the same basis of playing music, but I think it's different.

Ji (10<sup>th</sup> grade violinist): Yeah

Anita (12<sup>th</sup> grade cellist): And it's just different people too. The people in band are way more—

[Several students interject]: Outgoing!

Anita: —and really loud and also [a hesitation] misbehaved

[laughter and affirmations]

Anita: And we are classy. Well, not classy, but-

Anita trails off as she suddenly finds herself at a loss for words. I wonder to myself whether she found it uncomfortable to put words to her previously unspoken thoughts. Perhaps she was doubting whether clear social distinctions could – or should – be drawn between herself and her peers.

George: You have to know, there was a line drawn between orchestra kids and band kids.

However, Anita's classmates carry on undaunted.

Sarah: Yeah, that's true! There is a pretty interesting correlation between the top twenty and orchestra chamber kids'

The discussion is suddenly thrust in a new direction as Sarah makes an explicit link between orchestra participation and the top twenty percent of the student body, when ranked according to grade point average.

George: Yeah, there are a lot of us are in there.

Anita appears uncomfortable, as if unsure whether she should re-join the conversation.

Sarah: I don't know if it's the discipline of practicing, or- You guys are like the top two! [Sarah motions to Anita and Michael] And you two are in the same orchestra. I'm not saying that band kids don't make it into the top twenty. I'm just saying that a large majority *are* orchestra kids, or they hang out with orchestra kids. I've just noticed the association.

Me: *So, you'd agree that there is a difference between orchestra kids and band kids?*

Michael: For our schools.

Sarah: I don't know. At Wilson [the junior high], I don't think I saw a big, big difference, but in 7th grade, I think it was more noticeable because Lewis [the middle school orchestra teacher] was like, 'You are part of an orchestra. So you need to keep up. You need to be polite, you need to have this image of orchestra—

Sarah: Band kids – they're like, 'Yeah, you're musicians', but they are not told you are supposed to have a certain amount of sophistication, kind of—I guess that's why—

I sense that the students are on the brink of making what could be a really useful observation. I determine that I would like to encourage their discussion, but I'm worried about inadvertently influencing it. I noted to myself that Sarah's comment has the effect of extending the primacy of adjudication to the whole school context. She essentially conjectured that the 'orchestra kid' identity corresponds to being adjudicated favourably – i.e. graded – by the other teachers throughout the school.

I realise to myself that Sarah is beginning to place the distinctions she had identified earlier within a sociocultural context. In my mind, I begin to hear echoes of Bourdieu's (1990) assertion that pedagogic action has the implicit effect of shaping habitus because here was an assertion by Sarah that a teacher had used pedagogic action to target her habitus.

The echoes of Bourdieu continued as I remember what Bourdieu (1984) asserts about taste and how taste and sophistication is arbitrarily determined by the dominant class (see section 3.4.3).



Rosa (11<sup>th</sup> grade violinist): We have more expectations. We are respected more.

Rosa had been silent up until this point (20 minutes of focus group discussion), but then she joins in with a matter-of-fact encouragement of Sarah's foray into sociocultural distinctions between band and orchestra.

Sarah: People who listen or play classical music are associated, typically – even in movies – with higher levels of social class, so I think that is why we were expected to be more proper.

Up until this point, the students had been tip-toeing around social class. Once Sarah broached the subject, the floodgates opened up.

George: It's like their [the band students'] job description is to play at football games and be party animals, and our job description is to be professional on stage.

Me: *That's interesting to think about. Why do you suppose there is that perception or culture of sophistication?*

George: I think it is where you have to present yourself, because when we have to go to festivals and we see concert bands, and those kids are still fairly well behaved, because they are concert bands. But our band is primarily a marching band.

Rosa: That's true, I never thought about that.

George: In their environment, they don't have to be professional, they don't really have to carry themselves stalk still like we do. Their job is to beat the drums and rile the crowd up.

Rosa: Our audience is judges and adults, and their audience is people yelling in stands who aren't even paying attention. Not judging you.

Curiously – and perhaps appropriately – the discussion circles back upon the topic of adjudication. As an explanation for why orchestra students would willingly project a certain image of social class, Rosa explains that it is because the orchestra regards itself as continually preparing for adjudication, and such continual preparation will eventually affect habitus. Thus, the primacy of adjudication is ultimately entangled in matters of habitus.

*Discussion: Because of their participation in the orchestra programme, orchestra students felt a need to project a higher social class*

For the students to make assertions – as tenuous as they were – that they possessed greater social class than that of their non-orchestra peers was characteristic of what Bourdieu (1984) writes about social distinctions. He argues that the socially dominant class is able to impose its judgements of taste upon the socially marginalised by rendering certain expressions of culture as sophisticated and others as uncouth and crude. In turn, several of the orchestra students were willing to ascribe higher social class to their activities – using words such as classy, proper, sophisticated – whilst regarding some of the activities of their peers as being decidedly lower class – loud, misbehaved, unprofessional. As the students made efforts to draw distinctions between their social group – i.e. the orchestra – and the social group of some of their peers – i.e. the band – there were remarkable parallels with the Bourdieusian notion of social reproduction in society, culture and education (Bourdieu, 1990). Certain cultural symbols, such as adjudication ratings and grades, were reaffirmed, in a potentially symbolically violent way, as bestowing greater social value. For some of students to state that higher expectations were placed upon them because of their participation in the orchestra was akin to saying that their own educational institution presupposes that certain cultural expressions – such as orchestra participation – are symbols of higher social class and avenues to ‘success’. Whilst the students focused upon the cultural capital which was available to them because of their willingness to abide by these ‘higher [social] expectations’, Bourdieu (1990) would likely assert that the students had been subjected to implicit symbolic violence (see section 3.4.3 and figure 3.4.3).

For the students to attribute their need to modify their behaviour because of adjudication expectations reaffirms the primacy of adjudication talked about in the previous subsection. As a self-evident rationale for why it might be justified for orchestra to be directing pedagogic action towards

students' habitus, the students appealed to the effects of adjudication, observing that their audience is 'adults and judges'. In so doing, the students effectively stated that they were willing to subject themselves to a cultural arbitrary enforced by an external adjudicator, based on a position on the adjudicator's supposed position of being a cultural authority. Bourdieu (1990) would likely assert that this too was evidence of symbolic violence, institutionalised within the educational structure.

Moreover, for the students to assert that they had acquired a higher social position than that of their peers, they were engaging in a process which critical pedagogue Paolo Freire (1974) describes as the way educational institutions exert social and cultural oppression and which Bourdieu (1990) describes as normalising a cultural arbitrary. For at least one of the students – Anita – it seemed that she became uncomfortable asserting that orchestra students were more classy than their non-orchestra peers. Perhaps she was troubled that education could have the effect of drawing and reaffirming social distinctions (see Bourdieu, 1990), and potentially leading her to enact symbolic violence toward her peers (see Freire, 1984).

### **5.1.3 'I usually don't listen to classical music': Confessions of repertoire incongruity**

*Finding: For some orchestra students, the pursuit of classical music was primarily an experience of social distinction, rather than an authentic expression of musical identity.*

We were aboard a 12-passenger van, bound for Davis, California, where the students would soon be participating in the California State Band and Orchestra Festival. I was seated alone on a bench seat. The six students on the bench seats behind me were actively musicking with the help of their phones, itunes, and youtube. I began to take notice of what I was hearing – a blending of adolescent voices and phone speakers. First was a Taylor Swift selection. Then a new hip hop release. Then karaoke. That was followed by Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen. Next was Bloch, Concerto Grosso #1. At that point, the students determined that they wanted to sing in 4-part harmony, a task which was short-lived as it spontaneously gave way to a vocal rendition of their orchestra parts. There had been a constant flow of music, and each of the musical selections had struck me as belonging to decidedly different musical traditions. I began to wonder how students' musical identities (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003) influenced their participation in the orchestra. From my weeks of participant observation, I had determined that students were avid classical music enthusiasts. I wondered to myself how students had added this genre of music to their pluralistic musical identities, because I

had learnt that very few of the students had grown up in homes where classical music was listened to and/or pursued.

From ethnographic observations, I understood that students enjoyed championing classical music. As will be shown momentarily, they regarded 'the music' as what brought them unity and cohesion in the orchestra. However, when I inferred that classical music was part of their musical identity, I learnt – to my surprise – that a number of the students expressed an ambivalence – or even contempt – of classical music. Though they acknowledged that they enjoyed playing classical music in the context of the orchestra, they felt that their pursuit of classical music was somewhat incongruous to their musical identities when I inferred that it was part of their musical identity.

#### *Ethnographic Observations*

##### **[From ethnographic fieldnotes (1 Mar 2017)]**

In speaking with Dr Morrison about his repertoire preferences, he stated emphatically that he prioritised programming music from the western classical canon – 'the traditional stuff' he called it. He further explained that he was especially passionate about programming music by 20<sup>th</sup> century composers, with Shostakovich being a particular favourite.

Evidently, many of the students responded favourably to Dr Morrison's programming choices. Perhaps in illustration of this, a pair of cellists had tacked an image of Dmitri Shostakovich high up on the front wall of the orchestra classroom and excitedly explained to me when I asked them about the image that they regarded Shostakovich as their mascot.

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

'Mascot? Is that the correct term?' I remember thinking to myself. 'They seem to have elevated him to a place of veneration, almost like a patron saint...'

Several weeks later, the image of Shostakovich watching over – and protecting – the classroom was still firmly fixed in my mind. And so, given

the students' apparent enthusiasm and embrace of classical music, I decided to ask the students to comment upon how they had come to identify with classical music. In particular, I was interested in how such a music identity intersected with the eclectic cosmopolitan-ness I had observed in the van regarding the students' music listening preferences,

From an earlier focus group interviews (8 May 2016), I had learnt that very few of the students had grown up in homes where classical music was part of their everyday experience. For most of the students, classical music was something they had become introduced to through their participation in the school orchestra. Thus, it interested me to know how students would reflectively discuss how they came to add this classical music to their cosmopolitan music identities:

**[from Focus Group Session #5 (13 May 2017)]**

*See note in section 5.1.1 about the composition of this particular focus group.*

Me: *You guys talked about yourselves becoming familiar with – and I suppose falling in love with classical music or this more 'serious' genre of music – by being in the orchestra. Talk about that.*

Michael: Nah. Not really. It didn't happen. Maybe in eighth grade, but now if I listen to classical music, I usually skip it.

Me: OK.

Michael: I like playing more than I like listening.

Rosa: For me, I usually don't listen to classical music. I don't know. [pause] I like listening to what I play. I've liked it more, now that I'm older. I've played it, so I can hear what I've played.

The responses surprised me. They came across as a confession that some students did not subscribe to what was regarded as a shared love of classical music. Just a few minutes earlier in the focus group discussion, George had been discussing the 'orchestra kid' identity (see section 5.1.2) and been speculating that the reason some supposed 'orchestra kids' had left the orchestra programme was because they did not have a passion for the music.

**[Focus Group Discussion #5 (16 May 2017),  
five minutes earlier than the preceding excerpt]**

George: Then she just left the programme, but in the end, she still ended up being a high achiever. So-

Sarah: Maybe they just weren't orchestra kids.

George: Yeah, maybe in the end, they weren't orchestra kids 'cause there wasn't the love for *the music*. That's what it boils down to. Because you can join any club and make friends with people. But in orchestra, the common thread is it boils down to is the passion for the music.

In the moment, George's statement went unquestioned, or at least the other students in the focus group discussion seemed to give their assent by remaining silent. Yet, I wondered to myself whether the seeming collective enthusiasm for classical music might be a 'performance of sophistication' (see section 5.1.2).

About fifteen minutes prior, they had made assertions about what repertoire they wanted to perform:

**[Focus Group Discussion #5 (13 May 2017),  
fifteen minutes before the preceding excerpts]**

George: If we did a show of really flashy, gaudy show tunes [like the band], we probably could draw an audience, but at our core, we feel that would be kind of selling out.

Sarah: Yeah, that's not what we are here for! We are an orchestra, a classical orchestra. We are not here to play show tunes for people who probably wouldn't even know the difference anyways.

It suddenly occurred to me that the students might be performing a certain 'official' view of repertoire hierarchies in the orchestra. My mind raced back to an observation I had made about a month previously:

**[from ethnographic fieldnotes (4 Apr 2017)]**

It was lunchtime and a number of orchestra students had gathered to the large practice room. In a few minutes, the high school chamber orchestra would be going out on stage to have a side-by-side experience with the visiting middle school orchestra students. When it became time to go on stage, the orchestra director asked me if I would inform the students in the practice room.

I opened the door, and the eight students huddled closely round the piano all looked in my direction. Hector, the boy seated at the piano carried on a moment longer, but when he realised that the room had been entered, he broke off from playing. I had only heard about two bars of what he was playing, but even from that small amount, I had been able to recognise it as 'Viva la Vida' by Coldplay.

To all the students, I said, 'Sorry to interrupt, but Dr Morrison asked me to let you know that we are ready to start'.

The students promptly gathered up their instruments and their rucksacks and proceeded to walk to the stage.

To the student who had been at the piano, I said, 'You know, there's a pretty good orchestra arrangement of that'. I was specifically thinking about an arrangement of 'Viva la Vida' I had rehearsed and performed with my high school orchestra students a few years previously, and I meant the comment to be helpful, an affirmation that the music he enjoyed in his leisure time could be pursued in the context of orchestra.

Hector gave me a quizzical look, half-shrugged, and grunted an expression of disbelief. Thinking that he must be confused as to whether I was

teasing him or speaking to him in earnest, I persisted, 'In fact, there was an orchestra which just performed it with Coldplay at the Super Bowl. A youth orchestra from Los Angeles, with colourful violins. Go ahead and look it up on youtube'.

As we exited the room together, Hector's face broke into a half smile, as though he was enjoying an internal conversation he was having with himself.

*Discussion: The orchestra's valorisation of western classical music was the point at which some students diverged in whether they allowed the doxa of orchestra to become part of their habitus.*

Some orchestra students asserted that the unifying commonality amongst them was a love for the music they performed in class, and the other students in the focus group did not challenge this statement, possibly suggesting that this was the 'official' view of the group. In turn, this became the framework by which students explained differences in ambition and ability amongst their peers. According to some students, if an individual was committed enough to *the music*, he/she would do sufficient personal practise to be able to be successful in orchestra, or in other words, the cultural capital would outweigh the symbolic violence of making the doxa part of one's habitus (Deer, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, students' ability to perform orchestral music became a latent measure for their valorisation of western classical music, as well as an indication of their willingness to conform to the sociocultural expectations associated with participation in the orchestra (see section 5.1.2). Similarly, some students used the same framework to explain why some of their peers had discontinued their participation in orchestra. The logic proceeded that if students did not fully embrace the music – i.e. if they resisted the symbolic violence of valorising the music – then they could not fully be regarded as 'orchestra kids'.

In Bourdieu's (1984) classic work *Distinction*, he proposes that the dominant social class establishes a(n) (arbitrary) hierarchy of which cultural expressions are endowed with greater levels of cultural capital. In turn, social actors actively and intentionally project their social class via the cultural expressions in which they participate. Bourdieu argues that against such a cultural arbitrary, social actors – in this case, the students – are faced with the dilemma of either disingenuously affirming their allegiance to certain 'higher-value' cultural expressions or accepting that their cultural



expressions have been rendered as possessing relatively little worth. In either scenario, the effect is symbolic violence. It is noteworthy that some students expressed a reticence to claim classical music as being part of their composite and pluralistic musical identities in spite of their membership and participation in classical orchestra. It is also noteworthy that in spite of the apparent incongruity of the repertoire for some of the students, they still affirmed and valorised the status of western classical music, possibly as a precaution against being snubbed as not being a genuine ‘orchestra kid’ (see Bourdieu, 1984). This careful delineation of repertoire preferences foreshadows some of the mediations which students make of symbolic violence (see section 5.3.2).

#### 5.1.4 ‘Just listen to me [please?]’: Seeking validation from peers

*Finding: Notwithstanding the seeming validation which came through the primacy of adjudication and the performance of sophistication, students expressed some dismay that they were unable to obtain validation from their peers regarding their participation in the orchestra.*

The leitmotif – and the apparent internal struggle – of repertoire incongruity surfaced once more as students discussed a performance that had happened the year previously. It was an anecdote intended to be symbolic of the larger community’s acceptance of the orchestra. As related by a student, the orchestra had received and accepted an invitation to play at the high school graduation ceremony. This was to be a featured musical performance, intended to contribute to the celebratory nature of the evening. The four hundred graduating seniors with their friends and family would ensure that the orchestra’s audience would be close to two thousand, a sizeable number for an ensemble accustomed to giving performances for ‘judges and adults’. The juxtaposition of how this performance was received in light of the foregoing discussions – e.g. the primacy of adjudication, the performance of sophistication, and the incongruity of repertoire – suggest that students ultimately remain troubled that they are unable to obtain validation from their peers regarding their participation in the orchestra.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

As noted earlier (see sections 5.1.2, 5.1.3), during the focus group discussions, the students made social and musical distinctions between the school’s band and the school’s orchestra. They asserted that whereas band performed ‘flashy, gaudy show tunes’, the orchestra was devoted to the pleasures of classical music. As I pursued the

**[from focus group discussion #5 (13 May 2017)]**

*See note in section 5.1.1 about the composition of this particular focus group.*

Me: *Maybe we can talk about that. We'll say popular music – which is an awkward term – but popular music and classical music, comment on it.*

Sarah: I think that's why people like band more – because they play songs which people know more. Take last year's graduation as a perfect example. The seniors [in orchestra] played the Shostakovich at graduation, and midway through they [the audience] just started throwing beach balls to kind of uppen the mood. And I get why, because it's Shostakovich.

Sarah: And I remember the year before, the band played. And they played show tunes -- not *show* tunes – but they played songs that people know, like 80s songs, 90s songs, arranged for musical instruments. And people know those, they like hearing those. But they don't like hearing, they don't like hearing Shostakovich. Things they don't know.

Sarah: Last year, we were saying we were going to lose the audience, so they should just play 'Imagine' by John Lennon, 'cause that's something people want to hear.

matter further, it became clear that students were not entirely as ease with the way they were regarded by their peers:

Here was a moment when Sarah was confiding that the orchestra students' entangled world of adjudication, sophistication, and valorisation of western classical music placed them in the vulnerable position of being judged – not by judges and adults – but by people in football stands. Ironically, it was the very audience which had earlier been dismissed by Rosa as being one which was 'not judging you'.

Sarah also seems to circle back to the repertoire incongruity which was expressed by some of her peers.

It's perhaps worth noting that Sarah had been the one to insist that the orchestra's purpose was to play classical music (see section 5.1.3): 'Yeah,

Sarah: And last year I just got really frustrated, 'cause they just threw in the balls, and I was like, really?? Just listen to the song. Just listen to me. It's not that hard.

that's not what we are here for. We are an orchestra, a classical orchestra. We are not here to play show tunes for people who probably wouldn't even know the difference anyways'. However, when presented with the opportunity to perform 'orchestra repertoire' for her peers, she was apparently willing to consider different repertoire.

In an inverted echo of one of Rosa's earlier comments, the orchestra performed not for an audience of judges and adults, but rather, for an audience of peers, people in football stands who weren't even paying attention. But in contrast to Rosa's conclusion that people in football stands wouldn't be judging, it turned out that they were. The orchestra received the beach ball rating.

*Discussion: Students can experience an inverted symbolic violence if their contributions – and sociocultural positioning – in the orchestra is rejected by those they regard as their peers.*

Evidently, in preparation for the graduation ceremony, there had been a class-wide discussion regarding the choice of repertoire, and as if in affirmation of Sara's exclamation of 'We are not here to play show tunes for people who probably wouldn't even know the difference anyways,' the decision was made to present a work by Shostakovich. The beach ball reaction from the audience perhaps suggests that the audience did not find the orchestra's performance engaging or compelling enough. In effect, they were expressing their own judgement about the orchestra's self-affirming culture of success. Although the orchestra had been deemed successful by adjudicators (see section 5.1.1), the audience was unwilling to affirm that the valorisation of classical music (see section 5.1.3) – as demonstrated by the Shostakovich selection – merited that they discipline their musical tastes. The response to the orchestra's supposed sophistication (see section 5.1.2) was distinctly – and perhaps subversively – delegitimised by the introduction of beach balls at the graduation ceremony. As a result, the students found themselves not fully validated by their peers and in a context where they could not be validated by the conventions of western classical music.

In effect, the doxa of the orchestra was incongruous to the field in which the orchestra found itself performing. By holding to the former doxa, instead of adjusting to the doxa of 'people in football stands not paying attention' (see section 5.1.2), the orchestra exposed itself to a symbolic violence. However, rather than being a symbolic violence which was enacted by a dominant social class trying to legitimise its own cultural expressions (see Bourdieu, 1984), this was a reverse symbolic violence, enacted by the students' peers as they tried to hold themselves to the sociocultural expectations associated with western classical music. So, although the primacy of adjudication was pushing and pulling the orchestra students in one direction, their peers were pushing and pulling them in a different direction. And in their quest for validation, the orchestra students were caught up in the midst of this entanglement of symbolic violence and sociocultural expectations.

## Section 5.2: Amplifications of Dissonance

Certain populations of students are underrepresented in American music education (see section 2.3). One of the things which makes the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra distinctive is that it exists – even thrives – in the type of community which music education researchers have consistently suggested is the least likely to have an orchestra programme (see sections 2.3.1, 4.2.3): low socioeconomic status, predominantly ethnic minorities, and rural. Correspondingly, the Kumeyaay Orchestra is largely comprised of students who are regarded as ‘underrepresented’ in American music education, especially in relation to school orchestras. In this section, I present and discuss findings related to my second research question (*RQ2: How do high school orchestra students negotiate encounters with cultural hegemony?*). Because this question requires a more personal and probing nature, I primarily attend to it through the semi-structured interviews with my former students who are now mid-career adults, preferring this data collection strategy as a way to avoid entangling current orchestra students into potentially disruptive ideas.

In this section, I draw attention to three instances in which I became aware of how pronounced the issues of cultural hegemony can be for underrepresented students. First, I make note of the racialized way which one student perceived the Kumeyaay music classes, using her observations as a springboard to talk about the (inadvertent) marginalisation of underrepresented students when positions of power – such as teaching positions – are occupied by individuals whose culture, language, and ethnicity differs from that of the underrepresented students. Second, I draw attention to how school-based music education (inadvertently) denies entire cultures and their musical expressions by its privileging of western classical music. Third, I assert that the field of classical music is (inadvertently) guarded by unrelenting financial barriers, which can be insurmountable for aspiring underrepresented musicians of limited financial means, notwithstanding a total commitment to pursue classical music as a career and the ability to win auditions.

### 5.2.1 ‘Those classes taught by white teachers’: Ever-present racial awareness

*Finding: In El Centro, there is a pronounced discrepancy between the racial demographic of those taking music classes and those teaching music classes.*

In a community in which the overwhelming majority of the population is Hispanic / Latino, it is worth noting that the racial demographic of the music teachers is not representative of the populations being taught. Thus, underrepresentedness is modelled by the teachers who are supposedly working to counteract such a pattern.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

**[from ethnographic fieldnotes (15 May 2017)]**

Lady seated near me in the airport: Excuse me, do you work at Kumeyaay High School?

Me: Yes. *Or rather, I was working there today.*

Lady: Were you there in 2006?

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

I sat in the Imperial Valley Airport, awaiting my flight home. Minutes before, I had thanked the orchestra students for the many hours we had spent together over the preceding weeks and months. Then, as I walked out of the orchestra classroom, I made a mental note to myself that my fieldwork had just come to an end. I walked across campus, past the empty courtyard, and out through the front gates. With each successive step, my fieldwork seemed to retreat further into the past, and it felt as though the imminent task of conducting my analysis was drawing ever nearer.

I appreciated this fellow passenger’s effort to engage in friendly conversation as we waited to board the plane, and I desired to respond in an equally friendly way. However, I was a little thrown by the question. I didn’t want to go into a long explanation about how I had temporarily been working there as a researcher, but I did want to affirm and legitimise the question.

I wondered to myself what it was that gave away that I had been working there.

Me: *Yes. How did you-*

Lady: You taught music.

Me: *Right! And you were one of my students!*

Me: *I enjoyed that class.*

Amaris: Me too! I ended up taking more music classes. And you know what, I ended up enjoying all those classes taught by white teachers.

Fortunately, I broke off the question just before asking it, saving me from some later awkwardness.

This individual was Amaris. She had been a student in one of my guitar classes back in 2006, during her 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. I should have recognised her, but apparently my thoughts had been elsewhere. Some happy, nostalgic memories came flooding back.

If I were to have had that airport conversation with Amaris prior to engaging in my fieldwork, I probably would have found it jarring. My internal dialogue would have started up, 'What do you mean by *those classes taught by white teachers*? Yes, I acknowledge that *I* am white, but that's not why I was hired to teach the class. I would be much more appropriate to simply refer to them as music classes. Besides, there's no need to superimpose unnecessary racial tension on something as universal as music'.

However, I did not find Amaris' words jarring at this point in my research. Rather, it placed words on something I had observed and realised just a few weeks earlier.

I reviewed the observation/realisation in my mind. It actually occurred in two parts – first in the orchestra room and then secondly at the Imperial Valley drumline competition:

**[ethnographic fieldnotes (30 March 2017)]**

I was standing at the back of classroom. Because of the tiered risers, the entire intermediate orchestra class was in my view. As I looked across the orchestra classroom and saw the teacher walking to his podium, I noticed that –

aside from me – he was the only person in the room who was white.

I asked myself, ‘Was I really seeing what I thought I was seeing?’ To my discomfort, my mind remembered back to when I was occupying the conductor’s podium. Yes, it was the same back then as well: Me – a white teacher – with a class full of ethnic minority students. Now, to be entirely candid, I did have three white students (out of 60) in my first year of teaching and one white student (out of 65) in my second year of teaching.

The image startled me, and I recoiled as I tried to reconcile this troubling image of the-only-white-person-in-the-room-is-occupying-the-place-of-power with the post-colonialism I had espoused ever since I had encountered Paolo Freire (1974) and his writings on critical pedagogy.

Yes, here was a classroom where there was a decided power imbalance which corresponded to racial demographics.

It was astounding. And the fact that I had not noticed it before made me uncomfortable.

I tried to let the moment go. I told myself that I had no indication from the students that there were racial tensions. It was probably unnecessary for me to racialize the moment. However, I couldn’t get the image out of my mind.

#### **[ethnographic fieldnotes (10 May 2017)]**

It was the annual drumline competition and nearly all the middle school and high school band programmes in the Imperial Valley had gathered to Kumeyaay High School.

At the encouragement of the Kumeyaay High School band director, I decided to attend the event, though I worried to myself whether I could justify spending the time at this ‘non-orchestra’ event rather than reviewing and compiling my fieldwork notes from earlier that day.

As I sat there, enjoying the show, I began to notice something that made me a little uncomfortable. As each drumline took the stage, I realised that I was replaying the scene



that I had observed in the orchestra classroom. The gathered audience in the bleachers was fairly representative of Imperial Valley's demographics: 92% Hispanic/ Latino, 5% White, 3% Other. However, the band directors were definitely not. Every single band director – more than a dozen of them – were white. As I thought about the other school music teachers throughout the Valley, I realised that I could not identify a single music teacher who was not white.

I was shocked. I asked myself, 'How could it be possible that there was such a pronounced discrepancy between the demographics of the community and the demographics of the music educators?'

So, when Amaris and I greeted each other, I did not find her comment needlessly racialized. To Amaris, it was just part of everyday life: Music classes in Kumeyaay High School, as well as the Valley generally, were – and are – taught by white teachers.

*Discussion: Music teachers may be entangled in structures of social reproduction without realising it*

Among Bourdieu's (1990) many contributions to educational theory, he asserts that the processes of symbolic violence are often so subtle and imperceptible that they escape the notice of those who are trying to counter them. Accordingly, education can perpetuate the inequalities of society in a way which appears perversely to be self-affirming. Underrepresentation of certain populations in music education is perhaps tautologically related to the underrepresentation of those populations amongst the music educators (see Bradley, 2012). If the music teachers are all members of the dominant social class, and if the music students take note of that positionality – as was indicated by Amaris – then there is potential that music education will take on what Freire describes as an 'oppressor' / 'oppressed' duality:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors (Freire, 1971, p. 54).

Thus, music teachers – many of whom are likely thinking of themselves being engaged in the work of social justice – may be inadvertently reaffirming societal structures of reproduction.

### 5.2.2 ‘Denying music of an entire culture’: On the suppression of mariachi

*Finding: There is a deafening absence of mariachi music in the public schools of El Centro*

Kristina, one of my orchestra students from 2005-07, has achieved notable success as a performing artist. As one of her high school music teachers, I am particularly proud of her musical accomplishments. However, I need to candidly acknowledge that Kristina’s career largely happened irrespective of the orchestra. Although Kristina participated in the high school orchestra, her subsequent career trajectory has been non-orchestral. In fact, it has predominantly been non-classical. Kristina, whose ethnic background is Mexican-American, is achieving success as a mariachi performer. When Kristina was in high school, her mariachi passion and talents were known to me, and though I wanted to be encouraging, I found that I did not have the musical expertise or the practical know-how to guide her in this regard. Fortunately, Kristina could pursue some out-of-school mariachi opportunities, and this is where she primarily received the training for her eventual career, as a performer with the Grammy-winning ensemble Mariachi Divas. Although Kristina’s participation in the school orchestra was somewhat ancillary to her out-of-school music education, she does tell me that ‘There’s one technique in particular that you showed me that I still, till this day, 10 years later, share with the girls [in Mariachi Divas] and I think about you particularly!’

Kristina’s career has been a source of much pride amongst the orchestra alumni, as well as for me. Her peers are all eager to celebrate and discuss her success as a performing artist. Inevitably though, a discussion about Kristina and her mariachi career elides into a discussion about the deafening absence of mariachi music in the public schools.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

##### **Excerpt from David’s semi-structured interview:**

Kristina went mariachi. She went a very different route and she’s doing so well. I get so excited about that. Because actually in high school, I had been really interested in mariachi.

Mariachi is as good to me as anything else I

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

learn. When I listen to it, I can hear where it came from because it definitely has European influence – I mean mixed with Eastern. From when the Moors ended up in Spain and then the Spanish Moors ended up in Mexico. You can hear all the cultures clashing together and becoming what it is now. That's how I listen to it.

I've learned that a lot of people- They don't hear it for what it is. They just hear it for a bunch of out-of-tune music. I'm not kidding when I tell you that most people I talk to about mariachi music perceive it negatively here [in El Centro]. It's *here* though. Outside of *here* – like when I was at university – people would love when I would put it on. They were into diversity, but here, it's not as much accepted.

Last year, my brother Santiago and I were invited to a dinner event with one of the local arts organisations.

Someone brought up mariachi. I stayed quiet, but the rest of the table had a conversation where they claimed they had never heard a mariachi which could play in tune, or it's so obnoxious. After that, I realised that that's how a lot of people in the Valley feel about that style

I find myself both intrigued and troubled by how David draws a connection between mariachi and European influences: intrigued because I wonder whether I can hear those influences when I listen to mariachi; troubling because it seems as though he is using 'European influence' as a way to legitimise it as a musical expression. And regardless of whether mariachi music is infused with European influences, it is decidedly a symbol of Mexican culture and identity.

David intentionally avoids identifying the arts organisation by name [and I'll follow suit], but since there are only a handful of arts organisations in the Valley, it was readily apparent to me which one he was referring to. This dinner event would have been a gathering of the major arts funders in the Valley, and their influence on local arts would be quite profound. And though David also intentionally does not comment on the ethnicity of the gathering, my knowledge of the particular arts organisation would suggest that David and Santiago may have been the only Mexican-Americans in attendance.

of music. There are very diverse opinions in the Valley. One thing that can be a symbol of culture – like mariachi music – to others it seems like trashy, dirty music. But that’s just because that is how they are choosing to view it with their own bias, without being open to understanding it for what it is. I was hearing them denying music of an entire culture. That’s when I got the culture shock. So, there is even a divide within music just based on race? To me, that’s a problem.

When I heard David give this explication on mariachi music, it gave me pause. As I copy it down from the transcript into this thesis, it still gives me pause. I hesitate to comment on it, for fear of diluting its message. I hesitate to move on without comment, for fear of inadvertently dismissing it. David’s words – coupled with the preponderance of white music teachers in the Imperial Valley (see section 5.2.1) – highlights the possibility that music education in the Imperial Valley is complicit in suppressing ‘the music of an entire culture’, a culture to which the overwhelming majority of the students identify. To me, that’s a problem.

*Discussion: Cultural hegemony can be especially pronounced in music education because music is often an expression of culture.*

Music education is necessarily taught through the medium of music. Because music is an expression of culture, that means that music education is often entangled in the privileging of some cultures and the silencing of others. At times the silencing is done unintentionally. For example, as a young music teacher in El Centro, I had been intrigued at the possibilities of mariachi music, however, I lacked the background knowledge to be able to incorporate it meaningfully into my instruction. Effectively, my own cultural background made me complicit in the silencing of mariachi whilst I lived and taught in El Centro. At other times, the silencing of culture is done intentionally. As indicated by David’s anecdote, a contingent of the local musicians – ones who held some influence in the Valley – apparently were so averse to music from a culture other than their own that they vocally disparaged it. As experienced by David, it was overt symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984) because *his* cultural expressions had momentarily been rendered worthless.

### 5.2.3 'I couldn't afford it': Money matters

*Finding: Participation in classical music often has unrelenting, hidden, and insurmountable financial barriers which complicitly keeps it inaccessible to those from limited financial means, notwithstanding their skill.*

In the course of his discussion of Kristina's career, David reflected upon why his career path had followed classical music, rather than mariachi. His narrative underscores the unrelenting financial barriers which musicians can encounter.

In high school, my brother and I were in that mariachi that Kristina was in. We were trying to be part of it, but we couldn't afford to buy the outfits, which are very expensive. Those outfits are like \$500 each because you have to get them sent to Mexico City, because that's the only place where they officially make them. So, I couldn't afford it, and also I didn't have my own violin. As much as I wanted to play and learn mariachi, I wasn't able to just do it. Otherwise, I would have totally stuck with it.

Though David had mariachi musical interests, his financial situation precluded him from pursuing these. Instead, he was constrained to the school system, which offered to provide him with free music instruction, an orchestra uniform, and a doublebass for use whilst a high school orchestra student, thereby temporarily removing many of the financial barriers which made classical music inaccessible. The music programme was a sufficiently good enough programme that David was able to obtain the guidance he needed to be regarded as a promising classical doublebassist. However, as he matriculated beyond high school, he once again encountered financial barriers in the very music culture which had lured him with offers of free music tuition. And this time, the financial barriers threaten to be insurmountable.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

##### **Excerpt from David's co-constructed narrative:**

I got accepted to San Francisco State University to study music. The School of Music needed me to come take a placement test. I didn't have the money to go, but I had to go, and since I had recently gotten a credit card that year, I was like, "Well, I guess this is a good thing to use it on." I eventually got a letter from San Francisco, where they gave me my financial package and I was still short. My financial package was able to cover the fees, but not room and board. So, I ended up being short like \$13,000, something significant that I didn't have. Nor my parents.

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

I took it on advice from my uncle not to do anything with taking out loans for education. That's how I ended up staying in El Centro going to IVC [i.e. the local community college].

And then that next year, I was like, "Nope, I gotta go!" which is how I ended up at Azuza Pacific University (APU).

To do that, I did end up taking out a loan, and it was even more [of a loan than I had considered the previous year] because APU was a private school. But I ended up going that route because I was more desperate to get out of the Valley.

After two years, I transferred to Indiana University's (IU) Jacobs School of Music.

I did one year of the Bachelor of Music degree. Towards the end of that year, I got a notification from financial aid department telling me that I had almost no money left to be able to finish the degree. And I was like, "Oh man, how is this going to work?"

What we ended up doing was to switch me to the Performers Diploma [PD]. I was officially an undergraduate performer diploma student,

Though David had acquired the skills in high school orchestra to being a career path in classical music, financial barriers initially precluded David from pursuing a bachelor's degree at a university or conservatoire.

At that point, nearly all of David's peers from the orchestra had left the Valley and were pursuing four-year degrees, and perhaps it was for this reason that David felt 'desperate to get out of the Valley' like his peers had done.

David's narrative continues to proceed almost like an accounting of his finances.

David explained to me that he intentionally chose IU because the bass professor had a reputation for placing graduates in symphony jobs. David could have also made mention of its prestige as one of the most competitive music schools in the United States, but he didn't need to, because that was mutually understood.

Again, financial barriers impacting and interrupt his studies.

which was something they keep for rare cases, but since I was a rare case in that I couldn't finish the degree, we just went the other route of doing a PD.

But that's on permanent hold right now. The only thing I have left is my recital, but since I ran out of money, I had to come back here. If I went back and paid a fee, I could still do my recital, but I don't know if that will happen.

Anyway, during my PD, I took some symphony auditions. With Houston Symphony, I made it all the way to the finals, but they ended up choosing someone else. The year after the Houston audition, I did Cincinnati, and again I was a finalist, but it didn't work out. After that, I said to myself, "I'm kind of done. I'm tired of doing these things and not having them not really working out. I don't really make enough money to do this all the time and it's not working out, so I'll just go to California and try something else for the time being."

Not only was David accepted into a highly competitive conservatoire-level music degree, he was able to be placed in a graduate-level programme whilst an undergraduate student.

When I met up with him, David had been back in El Centro for about three months. He had found temporary work as an hourly instructor for an after-school strings class at one of the local elementary schools, though he conceded that without a bachelor's degree, he was constantly worried about whether the school would keep him on staff due to rules about being 'highly qualified'<sup>5</sup>. So, with apparent optimism, he explained that he was taking classes at IVC and making progress towards a bachelor's degree via the IVC/SDSU partnership. In the end, his music pursuits – as well as their unrelenting financial consequences – had brought him full circle. For David to have music opportunities, money mattered.

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<sup>5</sup> According to current legislation, only teachers who are 'highly qualified' can be offered continuing teaching contracts (NCLB, 2001), and it is not without irony that the legal definition of 'highly qualified' is so rigid that David, who has pursued postgraduate training at one of the foremost music institutions in the world, is unable to be considered 'highly qualified' to teach an after-school strings class in an elementary school setting.

*Discussion: In spite of being given a wealth of cultural capital, students may still encounter societal structures which ultimately subvert the supposed social justice of orchestra participation.*

When this thesis opened, I gave a fair amount of attention to the concept of distributive justice (see section 2.2.3), arguing that some conceptualisations of social justice argued that an equal distribution of opportunities – i.e. cultural capital – would allow individuals to transcend the disadvantage to which they had been subjected. In good faith, David seems to be pursuing such an approach to his own career. In high school, he took advantage of the free music tuition and access to an instrument. He acquired sufficient musical skill to audition for – and be accepted into – conservatoire-level music programmes. In the midst of his undergraduate studies, he determined that he would like to pursue a performance career, and found that he could audition for – and be accepted into – one of the most competitive and highly-respected university music programmes in the United States. As he subsequently began to audition for professional symphonies, he was able to advance. His abilities as a doublebass player were highly valued; he possessed a high degree of cultural capital. However, he ultimately found that he was unable to exchange that cultural capital for either of the things he was pursuing – a university degree or employment with a symphony.

As asserted by Bourdieu (1977), fields are able to determine the way in which the exchange of capital can take place. Apparently, the field of classical music is unwilling to allow David to exchange his substantial cultural capital – i.e. his bass playing – unless he pairs it with economic capital – i.e. the money it would cost to pay for his recital and/or travel to an orchestra audition. Thus, in this instance, Abreu's (2009) assertion that cultural riches are able to compensate for material lack seems to be a hollow promise. So, in the end, after following the pied piper of distributive justice, David has encountered an insurmountable symbolic violence, a discovery that continued participation in western classical music requires a greater financial investment than he is able to make. And it is also worth noting that the grand total of what he has invested financially into his classical music pursuits is exponentially higher than the \$500 which had been required to join the mariachi group.



### Section 5.3: Suspension of Dissonance

Musically speaking, a suspension is ‘a dissonance configuration in which the dissonant note is tied over from the previous beat (where it is consonant) and resolved by step’ (Rushton, 2001). I have entitled this section ‘suspension of dissonance’, intending it as an allusion to the earlier sections on dissonance (see sections 5.1 and 5.2) in which the orchestra students encountered several instances of sociocultural dissonance. Specifically, I wish to highlight that although the orchestra students had found their sociocultural positioning to be consonant by the many adjudicators which had heard the orchestra perform, when the students ‘tied over the note from the previous beat’ and performed the Shostakovich selection for their peers at the graduation ceremony (see section 5.1.4), the orchestra students found dissonance in a place which had previously been consonant.

To continue with the suspension metaphor, this section is focused upon the ways in which students resolved the dissonances – i.e. mediated the effects of symbolic violence. I present and discuss findings related to my third research question (*RQ3: How do orchestra students negotiate encounters with cultural hegemony?*). Based upon participant observations, focus group discussions, and co-constructed narratives with former orchestra students, I found that students had developed several sophisticated systems for limiting the degree to which orchestra would govern their musical identities. In this section I discuss three of these: first, I assert that students reappropriate orchestra to their own varied purpose; second, I suggest they maintain a marked delineation between ‘our music’ and ‘school music’; and third, I conjecture that some embrace a sociocultural positionality of in between-ness.

### 5.3.1 Preserving Autonomy: Reappropriating orchestra to their varied purposes

*Finding: Students reappropriate orchestra to their own varied purposes.*

In focus group discussions, students candidly and readily acknowledged that their participation in the orchestra came about because of arguably ‘non-orchestral’ purposes. This became most evident when I asked students about their motivations for joining the orchestra. I received a number of wide-ranging responses, few of which were directly related to the collectively learning and performing of orchestral music. Students spoke about receiving instruction on a desired musical instrument, about wanting to sign up for classes with their friends, and about the opportunities for travel. Most – if not all – the students had initially joined the orchestra for reasons only indirectly related to the purpose of an orchestra, suggesting that students may reappropriate their participation in orchestra to their own varied purposes. In turn, this suggests that students have a mechanism to maintain their own sociocultural autonomy even whilst embracing the sociocultural habitus associated with orchestra participation.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

##### **[From focus group session #3 {10 May 2017}]**

*This focus group discussion took place after school in the orchestra room. There was an open invitation for anyone to join in. About five students participated in the focus group discussion. Of those, two students were able to respond to the initial prompt about how they joined the orchestra, before the focus group discussion spontaneously moved in a different direction:*

**Alberto** (11<sup>th</sup> grade, viola). *Alberto is Mexican-American. He generally keeps to himself. He is one of the stand-out students in IB Music class.*

**Richard** (9<sup>th</sup> grade, cello). *Richard is Mexican-*

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

As an initial discussion activity – a so-called ice-breaker – I opened each of the focus group discussions by asking the students to tell me about how they came to join orchestra in the first place. Once I stacked the various stories up, I noticed a distinct theme: Students initially joined orchestra for arguably non-orchestra purposes.

*American and the only member of the chamber orchestra who is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. His enthusiasm for Star Wars is such that he brought May the Fourth (Force) treats for the whole class.*

‘Alberto’ (violin) – First of all, I was raised in a very musical family. Most of my cousins and uncles know how to play an instrument, like guitars or flute or whatever. So, I think what pushed me the most to play an instrument was like every afternoon – and sometimes family reunions – everybody would pull out their instrument and they would start playing. I felt kind of envious because I couldn’t play an instrument. So, I asked my dad, what instrument do you think would most fit with the others? Yeah, that’s how it started.

‘Richard’ (cello) – I was influenced by two people. My older brother -- I saw how he played – and a friend named Juan. He plays viola. I remember he always took his instrument to lunch. I was like, ‘Hey dude, can I play?’ And he’s like, ‘Yeah, sure.’ I tried it and I started kind of liking it, so I went to Miss Palmer [the orchestra teacher]. I was like, ‘Can I play the viola?’ And she’s like, ‘Yeah, sure.’ I tried it but then I asked a private teacher and he’s like, ‘It’s going to be \$40’. Great. No thanks. So, I chose the cello.

Please note that Alberto’s music-making with his family was predominantly in the genres of Mexican folk music and Mexican popular music. He was able to take advantage of the instruction he received on violin at school – in spite of it being in another musical tradition – and apply it to his home context.

To fully understand the preceding anecdote, a little context might be helpful. At Kumeyaay High School, the larger instruments – cello and doublebass – are owned by the school and lent out for free (or nearly free) to the students. For the smaller instruments – violin and viola – the students are generally asked to supply their own.

Richard had evidently become interested in playing a musical instrument. However, the cost of doing so was apparently an issue, so he found an avenue – i.e. school orchestra – which

provided him the musical instrument tuition without as much financial cost.

**[From focus group discussion #5 (13 May 2017)]**

*See note in section 5.1.1 about the composition of this particular focus group.*

‘George’ (violin) – Back in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I wanted to play the violin because I thought that’s what nerds do. [laughter and an interjection from another student: ‘You wanted to be a hipster!’]. Einstein played the violin so I thought I needed to learn the violin. It’s just something I needed to do. So, in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I started with this organisation, this free fiddle lessons – they were called the California Old Time Fiddlers Association. So, I played with them, and they gave me free lessons. And then in fifth grade I figured I’d join [orchestra] as a violin.

Similar to Alberto, George’s initial engagement with the violin came through folk music, rather than classical music. However, because the only violin instruction available at the school was through the orchestra, he states matter-of-factly, ‘I figured I’d join as a violin’. More interestingly though, George openly acknowledges that his specific interest in violin was related to the social distinction (i.e. being perceived as intelligent) which it would give him (see Bourdieu, 1984).

Michael (violin): Well, I knew I was going to join the orchestra or band. I was thinking about the flute at first when I was in 4th grade, because Mr Donnelly and Mr Lewis would teach at Sunflower Elementary, so they would perform for the lower grades, and I was like, ‘Oh, that’s so cool!’ I thought I was going to play the flute, but then [my brother] Paul got recruited by Mr Lewis for the cello, and then I was like, ‘I love string instruments’. But I didn’t want to play such a big instrument, so I said, ‘I’ll play the violin’. I guess I continued to play, because I do like playing the violin. It’s fun. It helps release stress sometimes. I don’t know. I can’t imagine high school without orchestra.

Michael's story matches somewhat with Richard's. He wanted to learn an instrument and the school offered him an opportunity to receive tuition on a musical instrument. He joined the orchestra because he wanted to learn to play an instrument (i.e. not because it meant that he could play in an orchestra) and the orchestra was part of the package deal.

Anita: I wanted to play any musical instrument.

There was either band or orchestra, so I thought about joining band because, I thought the trumpet - [interjection from another student: 'You wanted to be a trumpet player!']. I wanted to play trumpet. But then - I think Mr Lewis' kids came over to perform at our school. So I heard them play. Then my older brother was playing the violin. He's a grade older than me. He started first, so then I didn't want to play the violin. I wanted to be an instrument different than his. I didn't know anything about the viola, really. So I like the cello. I liked the deep sound of it. I tried that and I stuck with it.

Again, we have another matter-of-fact explanation that a student wanted to learn a musical instrument – any musical instrument, in fact. She recognised that the school provided her with some options, and from those options, she selected a specific instrument.

Rosa: Same thing, I joined because my sister started playing the cello. The reason I continued was- I remember in elementary school when we would go to Jefferson [Middle School] with Mr Lewis, we all played together. I always like practicing by myself, but when we played together, it always made me smile, the way it sounded all together. By ourselves it sounded good, but when we put it all together, it sounded better.

It is perhaps notable that off all the stories given about joining the orchestra, Rosa's story is the first one which makes specific mention of playing together in an ensemble.

Sarah: When I was younger, I guess I listened to a lot of band music, like actual trumpet-flutes band music, so my parents were like, 'you should join band'. So, in sixth grade, I went to Clark Baker [the local music shop] and got a saxophone. I went to band and everything,

but – this is going to sound really weird – but it was so loud! I didn't like when the instruments would squeak. I understand that they can't help it, but it bothered me. And, I don't know, I wanted something more smooth, quieter, and more elegant. And my mom, she listened to a lot of classical music when I was growing up, and so I was like, 'hey, maybe I should try that'. So I got a violin. I started off on violin. Then my orchestra teacher Mr Lewis said, 'Hey, we need more violas. So, do you maybe want to switch, 'cause you learn quickly?' So I switched. And actually I liked it a lot more because it was deeper, and it was a lot bigger. - My neck felt weird because it was so small - I liked the tone quality of it more, too. And I liked that it was kind of like an unconventional instrument. A lot of people play cello and violin, but nobody really knows about bass and viola. I continued with it, I honestly really liked it. Band, I liked it at first, but then I slowly stopped liking it. Orchestra – even now – I still like it so much. I like being able to recreate music with people that I love and everything, and grew up with.

Amongst the many origin stories, Sarah's is the first which indicates that she joined because she was specifically seeking out a particular type of ensemble and a certain genre of music.

*Discussion: Rather than feeling constrained by their music education options, students generally felt pleased that they had been presented with an opportunity to obtain instrumental music tuition.*

Collectively, throughout each of these students' stories, it is curious to note that students did not explain that they had joined the orchestra because they had wanted to play in a musical ensemble or because they had a desire to play orchestral music or even an orchestral instrument, specifically. The orchestra itself was largely ancillary to the motivations students expressed for joining the orchestra in the first place. Accordingly, I would assert that students reappropriate the orchestra to their own purposes. For many of the students, the opportunity to learn a musical instrument – for free – provided sufficient motivation to join the orchestra and carry on through years of study. In effect the cultural capital of being able to play an instrument outweighed the symbolic violence discussed in the previous section (see sections 5.1.1, 3.4.3 and figure 3.4.3). Other students indicated that they

had been placed in the orchestra because they understood that that was what people who play the violin should do. For Alberto and his Mexican music, and for George and his old-time fiddle music, the orchestra was the closest curricular offering which the school could offer, so they took it.

I acknowledge that with each of these narratives, a Critical Theory lens could be applied to expose the disjunctures between the school's curricular offerings and the interests of the students, however, I find it even more remarkable that the students are navigating these disjunctures with relative ease. Each of the students is able to present him/herself as an autonomous agent who was able to determine which opportunities to participate in, in order to achieve certain goals and interests. Therefore, rather than feeling constrained by the orchestra, its doxa (Bourdieu, 1986), and its symbolic violence (see section 5.1.1), the students have been able to reappropriate the orchestra into a field in which they are able to acquire the cultural capital which they themselves are seeking. In effect, the Kumeyaay orchestra students are sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and pragmatic consumers of their own music education provision. They have negotiated ways to capitalise on the orchestra programme's cultural capital while mediating certain effects of any symbolic violence.

### **5.3.2 'Our music' and 'school music': Keeping genres distinct**

*Finding: Students retained autonomy by keeping genres of music distinct and separate, choosing to keep school orchestra independent from their wider, pluralistic music identities*

As alluded to earlier (see section 5.1.3), focus group interviews with students revealed that they regarded their sociomusical identities as encompassing a much wider range of musical styles, genres, traditions, and practices than their formal school-based music education had provided for them. In general, students regarded their orchestra participation as being one of the primary ways in which they identified as a musician, but ultimately, they asserted that they did not expect – nor did they want – their school orchestra to connect to all aspects of their musical identity. When I asked the students specifically about whether their participation in the orchestra was related to the music making they engaged in, students almost universally acknowledged that their continued participation in the orchestra was premised upon developing a love for the music they played in that context. However, it seemed that even in this, students retained their autonomy by keeping genres of music distinct and separate. Students' specifically identified the following ways they engaged in music:

music they performed, music they listened to, music they engaged in with their families, music they would participate in at church, music associated with their cultural backgrounds, music they encountered on social media, and music they would pursue with friends.

Of these, students were only willing to let the first enter into the school context, music they performed – the others were decidedly out of the purview of the school orchestra. As mentioned earlier, students surprised me with their assertion that although they enjoyed playing classical music, they preferred not to listen to it (see section 5.1.3). To ascertain whether students would be interested in pursuing greater congruence between their disparate musical identities, by – for example – finding authentic ways to merge orchestra with the music they enjoyed listening to, I brought the question up in a focus group discussion.

#### *Ethnographic Evidence*

#### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

When I sensed that students felt some incongruity between their musical identities and the way in which they were constrained to certain music-making pursuits in the context of the school orchestra (see section 5.1.3), I found my mind reeling with how to capitalise on the moment. Through my studies, I had been enamoured with Lucy Green's (2002) assertion that informal pedagogies of music could be used in the formal music classroom as a way to counteract the dissatisfaction many students experience with school-based music education. And just two and a half weeks earlier, I had sat in a music education classroom at Teachers College, Columbia, watching as Randall Allsup (2016a) essentially showcased his philosophies through a music performance with his students in which formal and informal pedagogies mixed, resulting in exciting expressions of students' genuine music identities. Accordingly, I felt that I had some cutting-edge ideas to offer the students. If they expressed interest – as I was sure they would – we could dedicate the remainder of the focus group discussion to reimagining the orchestra. I felt particularly good about such a possibility, because I reasoned to myself, I could leave them with this valuable idea as a gesture of appreciation for the time and attention they had given me during my fieldwork.



However, as will be shown in the following excerpts, this was not received quite as I had anticipated.

**[Focus group discussion #5 (13 May 2017)]**

*See note in section 5.1.1 about the composition of this particular focus group.*

*Me: I'm intrigued by Michael's comment of 'I like playing this, but I like listening to this'. What if those somehow merged? What if the orchestra was playing the tunes you were listening to – not in an arrangement way – but in some kind of authentic way? I don't quite know what that would look like.*

Sarah: That's a good question. I think I would still like it, but it would be weird to see my two worlds merge.

As I hear Sarah's reaction, I realise that I have potentially just introduced an idea which is too disruptive – or farfetched – to how orchestra students understand and negotiate their sociocultural world(s).

Sarah: Like, classical and K-pop are the two most different things that I listen to. It would be weird if they mixed. Of course, there are some K-pop pieces with orchestra in the middle, but it would be weird to play pop songs, like upbeat pop songs on my viola. It would be weird.

I briefly try to clarify that to be authentic, it would be a complete reimagining of the structures and conventions of school-based music education (see section 2.1.1).

*Me: And you'd need a singer and you'd need drums, and all that.*

Sarah: I like it because of the voices, so it would be weird for us to become the voices. It would be weird.

Even with my attempts towards clarification, I realise that the students are unconvinced by my suggestion. Additionally, I remember that the orchestra director is passionate about the 'traditional stuff', so I decide to retreat from my brief foray into informal pedagogy (Green, 2002) and its corollary open philosophy of music

education (Allsup, 2016a). I wonder to myself if I can gain further insight into how committed students are to preserving orchestra as it is.

Me: *And if it's not [a classical] orchestra anymore, then does it lose the magic of orchestra [class] being orchestra [the sociocultural construct]?*

Sarah: I think so, because then it becomes show tunes or pop tunes.

Rosa: Like what we were saying before about catering to everyone else, instead of being traditional, not what we listen to, but new stuff.

I decide to clarify, especially in consideration of the repertoire incongruity I had perceived.

Me: *So, you love the repertoire?*

Michael: It's kind of like orchestra is serious and the stuff we listen to is casual.

Rosa: Yeah

Sarah: It's like two alternative identities. That I'd rather not mix!

At this point, I begin to understand my confusion. The students are able to negotiate school orchestra – including its sociocultural dissonances – because they treat it as an alternative identity. They have their 'school' music and they have their 'own' music.

*Discussion: By keeping music genres distinct, the doxa of the respective genres remain predictable, allowing students the autonomy to participate to the degree they find useful.*

By maintaining a distinction between 'our music' and 'school music', students essentially had a way to control their level of sociocultural engagement. By keeping them separate and distinct, they can

continue to operate within their respective doxa. However, if they were to somehow combine, the students would be left with unsure sociocultural footing as they tried to negotiate a blending of divergent doxa, cultures, and music genres. Like the floodgates which control the amount of water which flows through El Centro's irrigation canals, students wanted to be able to control the amount of sociocultural-ness which was presented to them through the orchestra. When I presented an idea which seemed to suggest a complete opening of the floodgates, students reacted decisively against it.

Alternatively, it could be that because students had found a way to negotiate their diverging sociocultural worlds, they preferred to not upend a system that was working, in spite of some indications of symbolic violence (see section 5.1). It was as if the students would rather have the doxa of school music to remain unchanged and predictable (Bourdieu, 1986), rather than risk having to negotiate a new set of doxa and sociocultural expectations (Bourdieu, 1990). Because students knew how to mediate the symbolic violence they had encountered in school orchestra, they no longer felt oppressed by it.

### **5.3.3 'Cada Cabeza es el Mundo': Celebrating each person's individuality**

*Finding: Cultural hegemony can be substantially mediated by regarding each person as an individual*

In this final section of the findings, I present a lengthy excerpt from a co-constructed narrative by Marcos, a middle school orchestra teacher in Santa Ana, California. Marcos had been one of my students at Kumeyaay High School between 2005 and 2007. His experience as a high school music student was sufficiently empowering that he determined that he would enter the music education profession. As a school teacher, he has taught music in urban, rural, and suburban contexts. As an ethnic minority who found purpose, identity, and meaning through high school band and orchestra offerings, he views postcolonial critiques of music education with a certain ambivalence, feeling that as long as educational opportunities are made available, individual students have the agency to participate or not to participate.

In an echo of Miller's (1999) pluralistic conceptualisation of social justice (see section 2.2.3), Marcos draws attention to the importance of regarding each student as an individual and avoiding the labels which can cause people to become 'pigeon-holed'. In seeming contrast to Bourdieusian (1990)

assertions that schools act as a re-inscriber of social inequities, Marcos states that school – and school-teaching in particular – has taught him to celebrate each person’s individuality.

### *Ethnographic Evidence*

#### **[From semi-structured interview with Marcos]**

*Me: You mentioned that when you got to University of the Pacific, you realised that you were one of two Mexican-American students. What struck me about how you said it is that it sounded like suddenly your ethnicity and cultural background mattered a whole lot. Did you suddenly look at yourself differently than you had before?*

Marcos: I don’t know. I think that looking at myself differently came from not being experienced or as experienced in other areas like sight-singing or choir than the other students. The whole race ‘issue’, that didn’t come into play until my first year teaching. The particular school I was at was primarily African American.

Once I called out one of my Hispanic students in Spanish. ‘Whoa, you know Spanish? What the heck?’ That’s when it started to matter. That’s when I found that it’s an advantage to have some cultural connection with Mexico – being Hispanic here in the US. Because that means that they can have someone to look up to, that they can see somebody and be like, they made it and so can I.

I don’t think any students have told me straightforward, but I can definitely tell a slight change in their attitude towards me when they find out, ‘Oh, he’s Mexican’.

### *Reflexive and Autoethnographic Commentary*

In the midst of giving his career narrative, Marcos had mentioned that he was one of two Mexican-American students in his degree programme at his university.

Marcos discovered that in his particular context of being a school teacher, he had cultural capital that he had previously been unaware.

For me, my ethnicity never really mattered until I started teaching. It certainly helped with my worldview and my empathy towards students, especially starting in Sacramento because that was inner-city, like *inner-city*! So, there were a lot of social issues and all this stuff, but that particular setting helped me become more empathetic towards students. Yeah, for a lot of these students, school is not that important for them because they literally have more important things to worry about.

Teaching has definitely widened my worldview and it's provided me a frontline view of what's really going on in the world. You know, 'cause it's true, 'cause we're right there. We directly impact society, sometimes hundreds of people at a time. And yeah, and it'll affect society in a few years, in a few short years. Some of my high schoolers from Sacramento already graduated. They are in college. Some have kids already. And it's nice to know that for some of them I had a positive impact.

There's a saying in Spanish, 'Every person's head is a whole different world'. Having the privilege of connecting with all these people expanded my whole worldview and it's just been really eye-opening. And it's tough. It's been really, really tough. And all the things we have to manage and all the successes we try to have.

*Me: What is that Spanish saying in Spanish?*

Marcos: Cada cabeza es el mundo. Every head is a world.

*Me: Good. So, I should be more comfortable with identity terms. For some reason, I stumble over whether I should refer to somebody as Mexican or Mexican-American or Hispanic. Talk me through how you think of yourself.*

Similarly, Bourdieu (1990) and Freire (1974) both discuss the almost immediate influence which schools can have upon society.

In contrast to narratives of schools being institutions of conformity (Althusser, 2014), Marcos seems to argue that schools have presented him with the diversity of students' pluralistic lives.

Marcos: To me, none of it matters. We are all here. We're all American.

You know, there's an old movie from Mexico – it's called, 'ni de aqui, ni de alla', which means 'not from here, nor am I from over there.' I've had it where I've had sort of an identity crisis. Not crisis, but some questions, you know. I'm not really "Mexican enough" to go and live over there. But over here, I'm still Mexican. For me personally, I've never really cared. I do what I need to do, but yeah, all those labels, I feel like they can pigeon hole students.

Just call them by their name. That's it. That's the only identifier I need for any student. Because again, every head is a different world, you know.

Being a teacher has really shown me that we're all different. Every house has its own culture. Every classroom has its own culture. Every family. Like I said, every student is different and every family is different.

I had a thought once where if we all went by our personal experiences with people, the world would really be a different place. And we would see ourselves differently. We would see other people differently. Teaching helped solidify that. Every single person you will ever meet is completely different from the last.

So, what is the right way to refer to someone? It's just their name. That's all the information you need until you get to know them better.

In the context of El Centro, especially the inescapable presence of the border and citizenship status, Marcos' assertion of a shared American-ness is notable. On one hand, he is saying that the American ideal of equality can and should be lived. On the other hand, it comes at the cost of shedding a past identity.

*Discussion: Schools – and school music programmes – bring diverse groups of people together in a shared purpose, potentially resulting in intercultural exchange.*

Much of the scholarly literature is focused upon the ways in which educational institutions provide sociocultural privileging of certain populations (see Bourdieu, 1990; Freire, 1974). In Marcos' foregoing narrative, he inverts the model, identifying schools as the place where diverse cultures are experienced and where cultural empathy can be developed. Accordingly, schools – and school music programmes – represent a powerful bringing together of people and their pluralistic and individualised identities. Such a coming together can either result in certain cultural expressions being privileged, or it can signify an opportunity to make changes to society through intercultural exchange (see Postlude).

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FURTHER DISCUSSION**

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## **Section 6.1: Methodology Revisited**

In this chapter, I offer further discussion of the findings, particularly in light of methodological and conceptual considerations. In reflecting upon the methodological commitments I embraced at the outset of the study (see Chapter 3 – Methodology), I acknowledge that at least a couple of considerations require revisiting. Therefore, in this section, I first discuss which voices are not necessarily represented in the fieldwork. Thereafter, I discuss the complexities of pursuing an analysis which weaves together inductive coding with a strong theoretical framework.

### **6.1.1 Hearing the Silences: Voices absent from the fieldwork**

In my fieldwork, I made distinct and intentional efforts to seek out the perspectives of students who were participating in the orchestra. I had selected that particular subset of students, anticipating that even amongst the students who were the culture bearers for the school orchestra, there would still be substantial sociocultural negotiation of values as these orchestra students reconciled their own views with the collective views of the orchestra programme and the doxa of the larger classical music world. While such has shown itself to be the case, it is equally important to note that a number of important voices and perspectives have not been represented in this study's data. These include students in other music ensembles, students who have been precluded from joining the orchestra, and students who were previously members of the orchestra but who have chosen not to continue participating. In the following paragraphs, I discuss each of these subgroups, interweaving some of the imagery from earlier in this thesis.

If it could be said that the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra programme is akin to an enchanted valley of prosperity (see section 4.2.3), it could equally be said that it also simultaneously represents an oasis, a citadel, and a ghosted wasteland (see section 4.1). The students who are actively participating in the orchestra perhaps regard it as an enchanted place where they can pursue musical and social success (see section 5.1.1), however, to their non-orchestra peers, it potentially represents these other identities. For example, students in the band programme did not seem to regard the

orchestra as an enchanted valley. Rather, for them, the orchestra represented a dearth of the types of music-making activities and repertoire which were important to members of the band: parades, football games, popular music.

And yet, there were decided intersections between the band students and the orchestra students. In the winter and spring months, the marching band shifted identities somewhat and performed as a concert band. As hinted at before (see sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2), the band and the orchestra both entered the SCSBOA festival. In that setting, superior ratings were highly-touted as the definitive measure of success (see section 5.1.1) and an honour which was recognised and legitimised by band and orchestra students alike. Although the Kumeyaay chamber orchestra consistently received superior ratings, for the Kumeyaay concert band, superior ratings were a somewhat rare and highly celebrated occurrence. Accordingly, for the band students, though the musical expressions of the orchestra might seem akin to a foreign land, the orchestra's festival successes would likely come across with the desirability of a sought-after oasis in those desert lands (see section 4.1.1).

During my fieldwork, I interacted with band students on a number of occasions, including times when they spontaneously joined in on the focus group discussions. Had I known in advance of their eagerness to participate in my research, I would have considered preparing informed consent documents for them and then transcribing their contributions to the focus group discussions and including their views in the findings chapter. However, because I had not anticipated their participation and thus did not obtain their informed consent to participate in the research, I am limited in my ability to present and discuss their specific comments. Yet, I can anecdotally state that the band students seem to exude mixed feelings towards their orchestra playing peers: envy, pride, confusion, and disinterest. They are envious of the orchestra students' successes, both at festival and academically; they are proud to know and be associated with such successful students; but they are confused at how different this other instrumental ensemble is from them; and ultimately, they are largely disinterested in the music-making that the orchestra students invest so much time into.

With regard to other students at the school, I had very little interaction with them. Kumeyaay High School boasts an enrolment surpassing 2000, but the orchestra programme is comprised of only about 75 of those students. For a vast majority of the student body, they would be unable to participate in the orchestra, even if they wanted to. To join the orchestra programme, there is an expectation of prior experience on a string instrument, which correspondingly means that students from certain middle schools and elementary schools are favoured because they can learn a string instrument within the school structure. Students from other schools are effectively and pre-

emptively denied entrance. Additionally, to play in the chamber orchestra, there is a high-stakes audition process which takes place once each year. These barriers effectively keep a large number of students locked out of the orchestra programme, similar to the way the border wall establishes a distinct separation between communities on either side of the wall (see section 4.1.2). Because of such a separation, my study does not include the voices of those students who have never had – or sought out – the opportunity to join the orchestra. Likely, their views would be substantially different from those who are active participants in it.

Likewise, my study does not include the voices or views of those students who have discontinued their participation in the orchestra programme. In El Centro, this accounts for a sizable number of students. The orchestra programme essentially begins in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when students at several of the local elementary schools are offered the opportunity to begin learning a musical instrument. Collectively, across the several schools, upwards of 60 students elect to play a string instrument at that point. Over the successive years, orchestra enrolment steadily diminishes. By the final year of high school, there are typically ten or fewer graduating seniors in the orchestra. This suggests that amongst the seniors at Kumeyaay High School, there are upwards of 50 ‘ghosts’ – which incidentally amounts to five times the number of ‘successful’ high school orchestra musicians – who ultimately discontinued their participation in the orchestra programme. An interesting follow-up study could be built around seeking the views and perspectives of these ghosts, especially regarding the negotiating of sociocultural complexities and the competing constraints of cultural and symbolic violence.

### **6.1.2 Analytical Modulations: Auto/ethnographic complexity**

When I commenced my fieldwork, I had anticipated that my data collection would immediately elide into the analysis, but I had not anticipated how much that analysis would ultimately be shaped by my theoretical framing. In my pilot study, I had carried out an ethnographically-informed research, and in the process, I had discovered that I needed to regard the data collection and the analysis as proceeding in an iterative relationship (Fairbanks 2014). Accordingly, I began thinking towards analysis before I even entered the field (see figure 6.1.2).

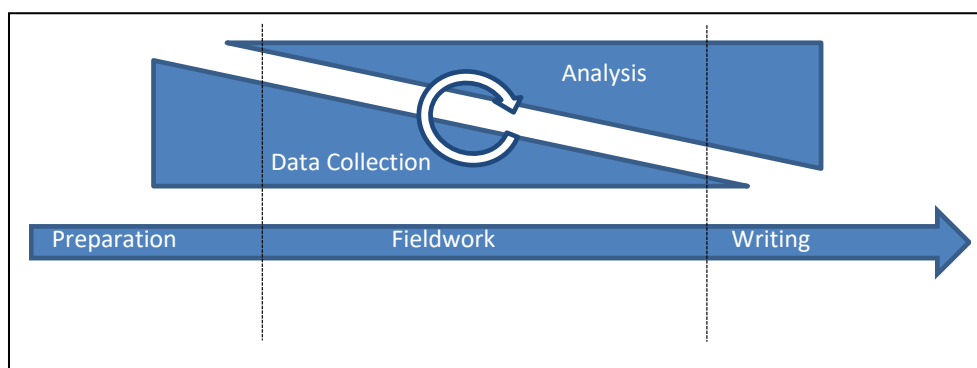


Figure 6.1.2: Iterative Process of Data Collection and Analysis  
Source: Fairbanks, 2014, p. 29

In that study, I had also explored the possibility of weaving together deductive and inductive approaches to the analysis, a methodological commitment which I have carried forward into the current study (see section 3.2.4). However, a notable difference between the pilot study and the current study is the methodological layering of ethnographic and autoethnographic components in the present study. In my pilot study, I had not taken such a positionality. Accordingly, I was able to enter that research site as a somewhat dispassionate researcher who could entirely focus upon gathering data from an emic perspective. And once I left the field, I could weave together the inductive and deductive approaches into the analysis.

In my present study, I had not anticipated the complexity which an auto/ethnographic positionality would add to the data collection process. For example, whilst in the field, I found myself needing to modulate between emic and etic perspectives, depending upon who I was interacting with. With the orchestra students, I wanted to approach the data collection inductively, avoiding unnecessary imposition of theory. However, when I was interacting with music teacher colleagues and orchestra alumni, it was important and necessary to implicate and discuss the theoretical concepts I was exploring through my research. Thus, I found myself constantly modulating between a more ethnographic positionality and one which was more autoethnographic. As I subsequently gained increased ability to position myself both ethnographically and autoethnographically in the fieldwork site, I found that I could make those modulations more effortlessly. In doing so, I correspondingly found increased ability to pursue the dialectic of etic and emic reconciliation (see section 3.2.2).

In reflecting upon the nuanced, emergent, and particular way in which I pursued the data collection and analysis whilst at my fieldwork site, I realise that my stated analytical weave (see section 3.4.4) represents a heuristic for describing the analytical process, rather than being a discreet set of

analytical procedures. In juxtaposing my ethnographic evidence side-by-side with my autoethnographic commentary (see section 4.3.5), I have sought to showcase how the dialectic of analysis emerged in the context of the fieldwork.

## **Section 6.2: Literature Review Revisited**

At the outset of this thesis, I reviewed several bodies of literatures, proposing to look at the intersections between school orchestras and the respective fields of social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation. Through my auto/ethnographic fieldwork, I have been able to study an American high school orchestra in some depth. In this section I return to those reifications of social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation, using them as a lens for further discussing my findings.

### **6.2.1 Enculturation and the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra**

Findings from my study seem to suggest that the Kumeyaay orchestra programme functions as a place of enculturation. As was demonstrated by the primacy of adjudications (see section 5.1.1), the performance of sophistication (see section 5.1.2), the reconciliation of repertoire incongruity (see section 5.1.3), and interactions with peers (see section 5.1.4), orchestra students seem to regularly adjust their cultural priorities in accordance with the cultural expressions which are valued, promoted, and inculcated by the structures governing their participation in the orchestra programme. After all, such is the process for obtaining success in orchestra – by conforming to the expressions which are regarded as successful in an orchestra setting, orchestra students can claim success (see section 5.1.1). In Bourdieusian language, as students learn the unique doxa pertaining the field of school orchestras, they acquire the cultural capital to be successful in that context (see section 3.4.2). And if the acquisition of the cultural capital is so profound that it fundamentally alters the students' habitus, it could be said that students are undergoing a process of enculturation.

The degree to which enculturation is taking place in the Kumeyaay orchestra programme is certainly open to speculation. My research efforts were not intended to measure the enculturation effects of the programme, but my findings do seem to imply that students have renegotiated some aspects of their own cultural identity as a result of their participation in the programme (see section 5.1.2).

However, it remains somewhat ambiguous whether the orchestra itself produced those enculturation effects, or whether such leanings are indicative of a broader school-wide enculturation. Regardless, it seems that the school orchestra may be implicated in actively reshaping some of the students' cultural values and identity.

Theorists have long debated about the role of education in respect to enculturation and habitus-formation. As noted earlier (see section 2.1.1), public education emerged from a belief that schooling would be innately beneficial to all people (Spring, 2001). State sponsored education has since been acknowledged as exerting a normative effect upon each successive generation, producing a populace with predominantly shared values (Singh, 1995). Critical theorists have contended that this normative process acts as an implicit reaffirmation of existing class inequities (see Althusser, 2014), arguing instead that the purpose of education should be to awaken critical consciousness towards processes of enculturation. Amongst these critical theorists was Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1971), who observed that the process of teaching and learning in formal settings often resulted in an ideological oppression. In rejecting what he identified to be an 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' duality of education, he advocated for an educational approach which did not regard the learners as needing to assimilate the culture of those in educational authority.

In light of Freire's views, music education has potentially assumed a problematic position of sociocultural authority, viewing its own purpose as inducting students into a particular cultural and artistic tradition (see Allsup, 2016a). According to such thinking, the institutional habitus of western classical music becomes the measurement by which pronouncements of social justice are made. Such thinking is warned against by literary critic and culture theorist Terry Eagleton (2000) who asserts that the arts are ultimately unable to hold a place of such deep ontological importance. He argues that the arts have erroneously been elevated to a position of such importance that it blinds society as to where its cultural foundation can be found:

The story of what this [social justice] will do to the arts themselves, as they find themselves accorded a momentous social significance which they are really too fragile and delicate to sustain, crumbling from the inside as they are forced to stand in for God or happiness or political justice, belongs to the narrative of modernism (Eagleton, 2000, p. 16).

In considering these views on enculturation, it is perhaps worth noting that although schooling itself is compulsory, participation in the orchestra is not. Therefore, for the students who persist in

participating in the orchestra, they are presumably amenable – or at least tolerant – toward the types of enculturation which their orchestra participation facilitates. However, for the students who discontinue their participation, and who are therefore not represented in this study (see section 6.1.1), it could be particularly insightful to discern whether enculturation factored into their decision to withdraw.

### **6.2.2 Inclusivity and the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra**

In presenting the literature on inclusivity, I asserted that the respective dimensions of access, recruitment, retention, and relevance could be superimposed upon the spectrum of restorative and distributive theorisations of social justice (see figure 2.3.3). Moreover, I proposed that music education's proclivity toward describing certain populations as being 'underrepresented' in effect implicates these groups for their own 'underrepresented-ness', and subtly directs attention towards issues of access and recruitment rather than inviting inquiry into retention and relevance.

Through my fieldwork, I was able to gain some insight on each of these dimensions of inclusivity: access, recruitment, retention, and relevance. In regard to access, El Centro represents a unique place for an orchestra to be thriving. As stated earlier, the orchestra defies what researchers have described as being the expected community demographics for a school orchestra programmes (see section 4.2.3). Thus, by its sheer existence, the Kumeyaay orchestra is offering access to the types of students who typically would not have access. A pertinent follow-up study could document how the Kumeyaay orchestra came into existence in such an unexpected locale, and how it continues to enjoy rather strong community and administrative support. In regard to recruitment, I was limited in pursuing direct observation of recruitment efforts, for much of these efforts take place at the elementary school level, and my fieldwork was primarily based at the high school. However, through the students' focus group discussions, I was able to learn about how the orchestra students recounted their respective introductions to the orchestra. As documented earlier (see section 5.3.1), most of the students acknowledged that they had joined the orchestra because of the promise of a cost-free way of being able to learn a musical instrument. They wanted to acquire the ability to play a musical instrument, and the school orchestra programme offered them an opportunity to receive such musical instrument tuition. And for these students, the increased immersion in western classical music occurred over time as the students progressed in their studies. Thus, recruitment into the orchestra elided with recruitment to learn how to play a string instrument.



Retention became a recurrent theme of my fieldwork, as orchestra students speculated why many of their orchestra playing peers had ceased to play in the orchestra. In most instances, the speculations were subsumed in the comment, 'Maybe they just weren't orchestra kids' (see section 5.1.3), raising the possibility that students regard retention and enculturation as being intimately related. Such an intersection is particularly intriguing and perhaps warrants further research, especially given the number of 'underrepresented' students who elect to discontinue their participation in the orchestra (see also section 6.1.1).

Of the varied dimensions of inclusivity, relevance offers the most room for discussion. Several students readily acknowledged that the repertoire of the orchestra was not relevant to them (see section 5.1.3) nor was it relevant to their orchestra peers (see section 5.1.4). However, when presented with the possibility of reimagining orchestra as a space where the students could pursue authentic music-making experiences which were closely aligned with their musical tastes, the students strongly stated that they would prefer to keep the genres distinct (see section 5.3.2). In combination, this suggests that the orchestra students knowingly and willingly engage in activities they do not necessarily find to be deeply relevant. This unanticipated finding certainly opens up a number of possibilities for subsequent research, including the possibility that relevance in music education might be tempered by a number of other constraints. Also, it invites speculation into the possibility that even the most ardent supporters of orchestra might not be finding as much relevance in the orchestra as might be assumed.

### **6.2.3 Social Justice and the Kumeyaay High School Orchestra**

Orchestra students make sophisticated and complex mediations of symbolic violence in order to capitalise upon the cultural capital which was available to them (see section 5.3). In pursuing my fieldwork, it became readily apparent that each student has a personalised and nuanced way of doing so. This was effectively exemplified by Marcos (see section 5.3.3). In his semi-structured interview, he reflected upon his own teaching career and his inability to successfully 'reach' every student. However, he expressed his belief that empathy would ultimately cut through the inequities of schooling:

There's a Saying in Spanish: *cada cabeza es el mundo* – every person's head is a whole different world. Having the privilege of connecting with all my students expanded my whole worldview. And it's just been really eye-opening (Marcos, semi-structured interview; see section 5.3.3).

He followed up his comment with an observation that students can get caught up in a perception of not belonging:

There's a saying, 'Ni de aqui, ni de alla,' which means, 'Not from here, nor from there'. At times, I've felt that because I'm not really Mexican enough to go and live over there, but over here, I'm still Mexican. However, I try not to let that identity pigeon-hole me. Instead, the only identifier I need is my name because every head is a different world (Marcos, semi-structured interview; see section 5.3.3).

Spoken with the matter-of-fact simplicity of someone who has spent his whole life negotiating an ethnic minority identity within an educational system which often reifies ethnic and cultural difference, Marcos points out that it is generally not possible for someone who is not part of the dominant majority to fully belong. I asked Marcos if he had suggestions on how to address the issue, in respect to music education. He admitted that the question was a 'stumper', but he proffered one pragmatic solution:

A lot of students fail to realise the opportunities that are right in front of them, like, 'Hey, you have orchestra. You have a school-assigned instrument that we went out and we purchased.' I feel like we're failing to show students that education is their way out. It's like, 'You don't want all of these problems? You don't want to deal with this, that, or the other? Then go to school. Get your grades up. Join orchestra. Learn viola, cello, or what have you. Practice. Work hard. You can get a scholarship.' I know it's easy for me to say this, but it's important to let students know that these opportunities do exist (Marcos, co-constructed narrative).

In advocating for this, Marcos essentially advocates for the musical (and educational) equivalent of 'desde aqui, y desde alla' or 'from here, *and* from there'. In effect, he argues that minority students are not at risk for cultural loss, but rather, they are in an ideal position for cultural gain. It is not unlike the additive nature of bilingualism.

Orchestra students are perhaps faced with recurring instances of symbolic violence (see section 5.1), and these can be especially pronounced for students from underrepresented populations (see section 5.2). Whilst such findings place an imperative upon music educators to acknowledge their own complicity obstructing social justice, it also alleges that many students are still finding ways to take advantage of the available cultural capital. As sophisticated and autonomous consumers of their own music education provision, students are in effect determining which aspects of music education habitus they want to make their own whilst retaining their own individualised identities and habitus. It is as if they are metaphorically becoming multilingual in spite of the proclivity of

American music education to try and conform them to a supposedly universal language of western classical music.

In respect to the theorisations of social justice presented earlier (see section 2.2.1), my research not only affirms the pluralistic and autonomous ways in which social justice is pursued by the students in the orchestra, it also suggests that social justice is a deeply personal and individualised experience, resistant to grand narratives. Such possibilities are emphatically stated by arts education researcher Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013), who contends that the arts are unable to *do* anything of themselves. Rather, they fundamentally remain a medium of experience and expression, rather than a cultural intervention:

It is imperative that advocates who are committed to social justice resist being seduced by the dubious simplicity of being able to say, 'The arts do this' – whether *this* is to make students more imaginative, inspired, critical, socially engaged, understanding, or more open to difference. The idealization of the arts required by this logic may seem attractive and persuasive, yet I argue that it dangerously flattens the complexity – as well as dilutes the richness – of those cultural practices that are sometimes, although not always necessarily, associated with the concepts of 'the arts' (p. 638).

Accordingly, Gaztambide-Fernandez would certainly argue that social justice is not a process that can be enacted by an orchestra programme. Rather, social justice comes about as individuals navigate and influence the societal structures which pertain to them. The arts are implicated into this process, but ultimately, they share in the process, rather than driving it.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS**

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## **Section 7.1: Summation**

In this final chapter, I bring this auto/ethnographic study on music education and its entanglements with cultural hegemony to a close. Throughout this thesis, I have sought to provide honest reflections on the fraught way in which music educators, such as myself, often pursue their work without fully comprehending the cultural messages they are conveying. And given that the field of music education is so closely intertwined with issues of enculturation, inclusivity, and social justice, my study provides a poignant glimpse into music education's often unacknowledged entanglements with cultural hegemony. Against this rather sobering reassessment of the field of music education, I have also sought to highlight the hopeful message that not only are many students able to keep themselves relatively unharmed from such cultural imperialism, they are still able to derive benefit from music education programmes, even in the midst of those programmes exerting a conforming influence upon their respective habitus.

The purpose of this section is to provide an overall summation of this study. I do so by revisiting the study's origins, reiterating that my conflicted-ness as a high school orchestra teacher ultimately lead me to consider sociological questions in the context of using music education for the purpose of social justice. Thereafter, I identify a few of this study's key takeaways, asserting that music education and cultural hegemony are deeply entangled one with another, in turn suggesting that schooling can have a decided impact upon individuals' habitus.

### **7.1.1 Cultural Hegemony and School Orchestras: Revisiting this study's origins**

When I first embarked upon my research pursuits, I was largely motivated by a desire to better understand a specific aspect of my work as a practicing music educator, namely, the way in which social justice pursuits could become entangled with cultural hegemony (see section 1.2.3). Although

I had become enamoured with the confidence energy of the Sistema movement (see section 1.1.1), I had also become troubled by the way in which I was potentially reinforcing a cultural dominance by privileging the orchestra tradition (see section 1.2.1). Yet, this same orchestra tradition seemed to be a promising way to address racial and socioeconomic inequity (see section 1.1.2). Accordingly, I found myself experiencing the same type of ideological circles Gavin Campbell (2000) described as pertaining to the music reformers of Gilded Age America (see sections 1.2.3 and 2.1.3). As I wrestled with my own conflicted-ness, I ultimately determined that I would need to personally engage in research pursuits to understand the sociocultural complexities I had propelled myself into (section 1.2.3).

About the same time, the Sistema movement had propelled itself toward ideological impasse as researchers began to argue over whether social justice was being delivered or supplanted in the various El Sistema and Sistema-inspired programmes throughout the world (see section 1.2.2). In the midst of such impasse, I discerned that the Sistema movement could function as a heuristic for ‘looking in the mirror’ and examining some of the underlying ideology of my own music education profession (see section 2.1.4). In overlaying a Sistema lens upon American music education (see section 2.1.1), I determined that ‘social justice’, ‘inclusivity’, and ‘enculturation’ should be my primary areas of inquiry (see section 2.1.2).

In designing a study, I settled upon an auto/ethnographic approach (see section 3.1), arguing that a dialectical positionality – as a reflexive music educator and as an ethnographic researcher – would provide unique perspective and invaluable contributions towards an understanding of the complex ways in which music education intersects with cultural hegemony (see section 3.2). For my fieldwork site, I selected El Centro, the community in which I had begun my teaching career (see section 4.1). In selecting such a fieldwork site, not only would I be able to privilege my auto/ethnographic positionality (see section 4.2.1), I would also be able to place myself in the midst of a high-performing high school orchestra programme which exists in the type of community where school orchestras typically do not thrive – rural, high population of ‘underrepresented’ ethnic minorities, and widespread socioeconomic disadvantage – but which mirrors the type of programme Sistema proponents strive to create (see section 4.2.3). Across six weeks of fieldwork, I engaged in three primary types of data collection: participant observation, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews (see sections 3.3 and 4.3).

By undertaking such research, I have been able to gain insight into the complex negotiations of cultural hegemony that American high school orchestra students must make in order to participate in their respective orchestra programmes. Additionally, I have been able to gain insight into my own prior work as a high school orchestra director, and thus confront my own entanglements with cultural hegemony. It was my own misgivings about my work as a school music teacher that acted as a catalyst for exploring these ideas. Through my research, I had perhaps hoped to disentangle myself from the complexities of cultural hegemony, but as I conclude this project, I am confronted with the realisation that it is unrealistic to try and transcend cultural hegemony. Because music and culture are inseparably connected (see Blacking, 1973; Nettl, 2015) and because hegemony and education are similarly linked (see Freire, 1974; Bourdieu, 1990), music education has been – and perhaps will always be – deeply entangled with cultural hegemony.

By first acknowledging and then articulating some of the entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony, it is my hope that I will aid other music education practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in being more intentional in their treatment of cultural hegemony. Thus, they will be better equipped to take on the enormous ethical responsibilities of music education, as well as schooling more generally.

### **7.1.2 Bourdieu, School Orchestras, and Habitus: Key takeaways**

In this study, I have pursued questions of cultural hegemony, symbolic violence, social marginalisation, and habitus formation, situating these broad sociological questions within the context of a high-performing high school orchestra comprised of ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged adolescents in the American southwest. In such a context, I found that the orchestra does act as an important habitus-forming institution, enculturating many of the values of western civilisation to those who participate in it. Related to that, some students exhibited attitudes which suggested that they were becoming dismissive of their own sociocultural backgrounds and/or community, potentially indicating that they were becoming complicit in the marginalisation of those who do not conform to the prevailing habitus of the dominant culture. However, it also became clear that many of these students were finding sophisticated and nuanced ways to mediate symbolic violence and thus claim cultural capital from their orchestra participation

in spite of the seeming juxtaposition between the doxa of the orchestra and their diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

Amidst these divergent findings, I have been able to consider my own entangled relationships to music education and cultural hegemony. For more than a decade I have been endeavouring to use school orchestras as a medium for delivering social justice in communities which have traditionally had limited access to orchestra-based music education. I have increasingly become sensitised to the complexity of such endeavours, and my research has confronted me with the likelihood that in much of my past work, I have been highly complicit in perpetuating cultural hegemony. However, my research has also presented me with the reassurance that students have more sophisticated means for mediating the effects of cultural hegemony than I had previously realised.

As a result of pursuing this research and seeing how deeply entangled music education can become with cultural hegemony, I assert that music education can – and should – become more culturally responsive in its sociocultural positioning. Only then will the field of music education become really enabled to deliver on its promises of social justice. Until then, the field is overly reliant upon the students being able to mediate the complex terrain of symbolic violence and cultural capital, by which they reappropriate their music education experiences to their individualised and respective needs.

In the end, perhaps one of the most lasting takeaways from my research is that critical, self-reflective practices will be necessary for any educator who intends to engage in ethically sound and culturally sensitive teaching practices. Because cultural hegemony is so pervasive, there is high likelihood that well-intentioned educators will inadvertently be perpetuating symbolic violence unless they can become sensitised to their own entanglements with cultural hegemony. For such individuals, perhaps my research can function as a starting point in their journey to acquire sensitivity to such matters.



## **Section 7.2: The Schooling of Habitus**

In this section, I revisit this study's research questions and draw some cautious conclusions, namely that school orchestras may have a predisposition toward cultural hegemony, that orchestra students are able to utilise their individual autonomy to mediate many of the undesirable effects of such cultural imperialism, and that through this study, I have become further sensitised to issues of cultural hegemony in music education. Following each of the respective conclusions, I offer related implications.

### **7.2.1 Conclusion: A predisposition toward cultural hegemony**

Much of this study has largely been guided by the research question, *To what degree are school orchestras entangled in issues of cultural hegemony?* (RQ1, see section 2.4.3). Findings from my study strongly suggest that the Kumeyaay High School orchestra is highly entangled in cultural hegemony, overlaying a macro-structure of social and cultural reproduction upon orchestra students' music-making activities. A number of this study's findings pertain to the diversity of ways in which students were required to adjust their habitus to come into alignment with what Bourdieu would describe as the cultural arbitrary of the orchestra. Such conformity manifest itself in the dynamic between success and adjudication (see section 5.1.1), the performance of sophistication (see section 5.1.2), and the incongruity between orchestra repertoire and personal taste (see section 5.1.3). Moreover, it was amplified by an ever-present racial awareness (see section 5.2.1), the suppression of culturally-relevant musical expressions (see section 5.2.2), and the complete dependence upon the school music programme because of the financial burden of seeking outside-of-school music education opportunities (see section 5.2.3). In aggregate, these findings suggest that students participating in the school orchestra programme are constantly being bombarded with reaffirming messages of the normative place of dominant culture.

My findings perhaps also suggest that school orchestras' entanglements in cultural hegemony may be so normalised as to fade towards invisibility, especially amongst music educators. In this study, I have taken an auto/ethnographic approach, which has equipped me with a means for highlighting and drawing attention to some of the macro-structures of social and cultural reproduction. By engaging with the fieldwork site in an autoethnographic way, I have been able to activate my own emic insight of what it is like to teach orchestra in a high school setting. Even more pertinent, I have been able to blend those emic insights with my own theoretical commitment to Critical Theory. Early in the formulation of my study, I had determined that a social justice lens would necessitate the incorporation of Critical Theory, for Critical Theory is largely designed to uncover and unmask latent structures of oppression, a theoretical perspective which I felt was crucial for determining the efficacy of social justice efforts (see also section 2.2.1). Accordingly, I aligned an aspect of my study with Freirian and Bourdieusian thinking (see sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). Such a commitment has brought cultural hegemony into strong relief.

According to theorists of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 2014), the dominant social class perpetuates control over others by ensuring that the cultural values of the dominant class become the shared values of all. Once these cultural values become the accepted norm, then the disparities in status, capital, and power between classes and groups of people are perceived as natural and justifiable based upon a self-perpetuating and shared ideology. The end result is that underrepresented populations become caught in a cycle of underrepresentation.

Though the tendency is for educational institutions to perpetuate cultural hegemony (Bourdieu, 1990; Althusser, 2014), the Brazilian educationalist and critical theorist Paulo Freire (1974) argues that schools can be the locus for change. Fundamentally, Freire argued that education should be an act of social consciousness in which the underlying ideological and political constraints of state-sponsored education is continually acknowledged. In Freire's view, students should be emancipated into being agents in their own educational decisions by knowing about their own complicity in reaffirming the socio-political agenda of state-sponsored education. By awakening a critical consciousness towards cultural hegemony, and engaging in ethical practices of co-creation of knowledge, dialogics, and the acknowledgement of one's incompleteness, Freire (1974) argues that schools have the potential to be liberating.

In placing the findings of my study in direct juxtaposition to the educational views espoused by Freire, it becomes clear that school orchestras may have an inherent predisposition towards reproducing the values and culture of the western middle class and normalising such cultural expressions as universal. And such a positioning is deeply entangled in cultural hegemony.

### **7.2.2 Implication: Awakening music education to issues of cultural hegemony**

*My research acts as an invitation to practicing music educators to (re)consider the immense ethical responsibilities placed upon them as they engage with social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation.*

In light of the conclusion that school orchestras may be particularly predisposed toward issues of cultural hegemony, I assert that cultural hegemony is a much more pressing concern in music education than music teachers might realise. Because school orchestras can function as habitus-forming institutions, music teachers can exert a deep influence in a child's life. Far more profound than teaching a child to play a particular musical instrument or to perform a particular song, music teachers can influence a child's habitus, identity, and values. Such influence carries far more ethical responsibility than is perhaps generally acknowledged, especially if such habitus-formation runs counter to the habitus-formation taking place in the child's home.

Researches have noted that music educators do not always think deeply upon the profound impact they can have in shaping students' lives:

Music teachers long ago abandoned...the public sphere, retreating into the relative isolation of their profession while losing touch with the wider political ideals and movements that once inspired them (Woodford, 2004, p. 57).

In other words, rather than being aware of the deep impacts they might be having upon students' habitus and values, music teachers have largely become fixated on the self-perpetuation of the profession. They embrace the clarion call of music education advocacy, while obfuscating the deep ethical implications of what they are endeavouring to do.

Similarly, music education researcher and philosopher Randall Allsup (2016b) argues that the advocacy aphorisms of Sistema enchantment have spread like a fog, confusing well-intentioned

people into believing that music education's primary purpose is to fashion students into well-trained performers of western classical music, and thus distracting them from considering on the ethically complex terrain of its complicity in reshaping the values of an entire generation of music education students:

[El Sistema] tell us what we want to hear: music saves lives; society can be remade through art; music makes us less savage; the poor and disenfranchised can be elevated through quality art; music teachers matter (the list goes on).

These are cheap sentiments. But not because I don't believe them...I do think society can be made better through a quality music education. Rather, these sentiments are cheap because Abreu and the supporters of El Sistema – as documented by Baker – profit by strategically confusing our hearts and our heads; they have built an empire on enchantment. Still, there is a case for music in the schools, but its justifications are too complex and too equivocal for most trustees, politicians, policy-makers, critics, and administrators to accept. Music is more perilous than so-called 'praxial theory' allows. More culturally-bound than a theory of the sublime affords. Music makes us smarter ... somehow. Access, study, and performance are related to class and power. There are practices, methods, and genres at once elevate, and at another moment they destroy. Advocacy is a short term strategy. I wonder if Baker knew what he was walking into. Whether he did or whether he did not, he has written the music book of our times. Baker has started a conversation that we need to have – yes, with our heart and with our heads (p. 334).

Perhaps it is poetically appropriate that, it was because of El Sistema's enchantments that I began to awake to my own complicity in perpetuating cultural hegemony (see section 1.1 and 1.2). And it was also El Sistema that acted as a catalyst and a heuristic for pursuing this study.

So, in coming full circle, my research acts as an invitation to practicing music educators to (re)consider the immense ethical responsibilities placed upon them as they engage with social justice, inclusivity, and enculturation. My hope is that fellow music educators will be able to find transferability in the reflexive way in which I have situated myself in the study. And in doing so, I am also hopeful that they will recognise the many entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony. Once they do so, they will awake to the immense ethical responsibilities placed upon them. And by becoming more self-aware, they can also become more sensitive to issues of cultural hegemony (see section 6.1.2) and develop increased empathy for each of their students (see section 6.1.3).

### **7.2.3 Conclusion: Agency acts as a mediating influence to cultural hegemony**

The second research question which has guided this study is *How do high school orchestra students negotiate any encounters with cultural hegemony?* Findings pertaining to this question suggest that students' individual agency acts as a tempering influence on cultural hegemony, in turn allowing students to acquire cultural capital without suffering extensively from symbolic violence. My findings suggest that some students reappropriate their orchestra experience to their own varied and individual purposes (see section 5.3.1) and also draw a sharp distinction between their own music and school music (see section 5.3.2). Together, these findings imply that these students use their own agency to navigate – and mediate – the macro-structures of cultural hegemony.

Additionally, there is the possibility that students' individual autonomy allows them to benefit from the additive nature of participation in multiple cultural settings (see section 6.2.3). For example, by gaining the cultural capital of participating in school orchestra, students are metaphorically able to have the bilingualism of both school orchestra music and their own music. And it is ultimately left up to the individual student whether to remain 'bilingual' or to reject one of the musical expressions.

In considering on the students who are participating in the orchestra (see section 6.1.1), it is perhaps useful to note that each of these students has successfully found a way to navigate the tensions between cultural capital and symbolic violence (see section 3.4.3). By implication, it is possible that each student in the orchestra has found a distinctly different way of mediating the symbolic violence in order to claim the available cultural capital (see section 5.3.3). Whilst my findings were able to identify two specific ways in which students exercise their autonomy within the macro-structure of school orchestra and cultural hegemony, it is quite likely that there are dozens of additional ways in which students navigate their encounters with cultural hegemony. A follow-up study could explore the nuanced specifics of these pluralistic expressions of students' individual agency, but in terms of the present study, it seems that students effectively use their own autonomy to find highly individualised ways of reappropriating their music education experiences to their particular needs.

In conducting this research, my hybridised auto/ethnographic methodology aided me in identifying evidence of individual agency and its role in mediating cultural hegemony. Because I approached much of my fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective, I was able to obtain an emic understanding of the experiences students were having as they participated in the high school orchestra. It quickly became apparent that they each engaged in varying degrees of negotiating their encounters with

cultural hegemony. Arguably, the students who persisted in their orchestra participation were the ones who were either the least affected by symbolic violence or they were the ones who had developed the most sophisticated means for negotiating such encounters. Correspondingly, it could be said that the students currently participating in the orchestra are likely not suffering egregiously from the effects of symbolic violence.

However, it remains unknown whether the relentlessness of cultural hegemony may have led to some students discontinuing their participation in the orchestra programme (see section 6.1.1). Such questions are decidedly outside the scope of this study, but are clearly implicated in the conclusion that orchestra students are able to mediate the effects of cultural hegemony through their own agency. Yet, even if students are leaving the orchestra programme because of their encounters with cultural hegemony, their departure would still be an act which reaffirms their individual agency.

#### **7.2.4 Implication: Education policy should encompass a plurality of views**

*My research acts as a call to music education policymakers to be cognisant of the competing sociocultural demands being placed upon children and adolescents.*

One of the overarching conclusions of my study is that students are successfully navigating the complex terrain of cultural hegemony, and using their own agency to acquire cultural capital without suffering extensively from the effects of symbolic violence. This conclusion suggests that the macro-structures of cultural hegemony (as described in section 7.2.1) are largely mediated by students' autonomy over their own music education experiences (see section 7.3.1). It could be said that one of the implications of my study is that there is not necessarily a need to address cultural hegemony in music education, because the students are capably dealing with it on their own (see section 7.2.2). However, although my study indicates that students capably mediate aspects of symbolic violence in order to maximise access to cultural capital, I believe my study still raises questions about who should shoulder the responsibility for this work. Notwithstanding the importance of helping adolescents become sophisticated and pragmatic consumers of their own educational provision, there seems to be a certain educational haphazardness about having students sort through the myriad of sociocultural complexities pertaining to cultural hegemony. In my view, the education system should own up to its haphazardness in unapologetically projecting cultural hegemony upon its students.

In contrast to the image of schools – and school orchestras – being a unilateral dispenser of dominant culture, I argue that schools can be a symbol of pluralistic consensus. If the education system were to be even more regarded as a partnership between the state, the students, and their families, then it is possible that schools could devolve themselves somewhat from their entanglements with cultural hegemony. Related to this, the role of the educational policymaker should be to ensure that all the stakeholders' needs are being considered, including those of the students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and the state. That level of consensus building is often neglected in favour of dominant voices and/or the maintaining of the status quo. However, I assert that if the education system is going to address its complicity in the reproduction of social inequities and the institutionalised marginalisation of minority students, consensus building is desperately needed.

Following this paradigm of consensus building, school orchestra programmes have the capacity to engage in culturally-responsive pedagogy (Lind & McCoy, 2016). Though school orchestras are predisposed to many issues of cultural hegemony, orchestras themselves are not themselves problematic. The way for policymakers to ensure that music education remains responsive both to the cultural practices of the community and to the collective needs of the educational stakeholders is for policymakers to take the lead in bringing constituents together in ways which simultaneously celebrate cultural plurality as well as allowing for cross-cultural experiences. Such an approach to music education in the schools would require deep commitments to challenging the status quo and allowing collective democratic consensus to become the guiding policy consideration.

What culturally-responsive teaching looks like in the orchestra classroom will be the subject of follow-up and derivative research (see section 7.2.6), but Miller's (1999) suggestion that social justice must encompass all the individualised understandings of social justice ultimately implies that the many stakeholders will need to be involved in the decision-making process if social justice is going to hold veracity.

### **7.2.5 Conclusion: Acknowledging my own complicity with cultural hegemony**

The third research question guiding this study is, *To what extent have I been complicit in cultural hegemony through my work as a high school music teacher?* In this section, I address this foundational question, concluding that although I may have been highly complicit in perpetuating cultural hegemony through my work as a high school orchestra teacher, it is quite likely that many of my students have been able to remain relatively unharmed by such a positionality.

By pursuing fieldwork in El Centro, I was continually confronted with echoes of my own career. By looking outwardly – i.e. ethnographically – at the Kumeyaay High School orchestra programme, I was also examining myself deeply – i.e. autoethnographically – and thereby reconciling a deep-level discomfort which had pervaded my teaching ever since I had first conceived my career as being akin to enacting social justice (see Prelude). And through the heuristic of Sistema scholarship (see section 2.1.4), I was able to identify issues of cultural hegemony which are highly relevant and applicable to many school orchestra programmes.

Here, at the conclusion of this study, I am presented with the unavoidable discovery that through my work as a high school music teacher, I have been ‘reinforc[ing] [my] own values, [my] own moral vision, and [my] own definition of democracy’ (Campbell, 2000, p. 262). In doing so, I have joined rank with the music reformers of Gilded Age America, the Italian Ospedali of Vivaldi’s day, the brass bands of Victorian Britain, and the growing throngs of Sistema enthusiasts in both Venezuela and throughout the world (see section 2.1.3). Each of these venerated socio-musical institutions propelled them into ideological circles as the internal dialectical tensions of social justice worked themselves up to theoretical impasse (see section 2.2.1). In an effort to transcend such impasse, I have determined to use such dialectical tension as a focal point for both engaging in research and examining my own positionality.

Correspondingly, in my study, I have drawn upon the thinking tools of Pierre Bourdieu in order to disentangle some of the knots pertaining to education, culture, and social class. In doing so, I have found at least one way to bring increased attention to the oft-overlooked possibility that efforts to infuse music education with a social justice agenda may be predisposed towards issues of cultural hegemony. Through my research, I explored whether it is possible step outside of one’s worldview sufficiently long enough to identify and then comment upon the extent to which one is entangled in cultural hegemony. My research as an auto/ethnographer has uniquely presented me with opportunities to comprehend some of the peculiarities of my own field of music education, a field



which I had previously taken for granted. As I disclose throughout this study (see section 2.1.4), I have increasingly grown in my ability to articulate the subtle elisions between education and cultural hegemony, an ability which was quite limited when I began researching Sistema programmes (see section 1.2.3).

Ultimately, this study has legitimised and validated the importance of listening to my own misgivings about teacher positioning, particularly in relation to projections of culture. If my fieldwork participants can be regarded as symbolic of the many students I have taught over the years, it is evident that the students have sophisticated ways of dealing with cultural hegemony, regardless of whether they – or I – recognise it as such. Such findings are deeply comforting, and suggest that even in the midst of an imperfect socio-musical endeavour, students will still be likely to derive their own benefit.

#### **7.2.6 Implication: Ideas for future research and teaching**

*Because my research has sensitised me to some of the entanglements between music education and cultural hegemony, my future research and teaching will be highly impacted by such understandings*

In pursuing this research and coming to acknowledge my own complicity in perpetuating cultural hegemony, I find myself recommitted to the ideals which originally motivated me to pursue music education, namely my desire to utilise school orchestras for the purpose of reaching out to marginalised and underrepresented populations, thereby enacting meaningful change in their lives. Through my research, I have been confronted with my own complicity in perpetuating cultural hegemony, but I have also become sensitised to how quickly well-intentioned efforts can elide into expressions of symbolic violence. Accordingly, I am better prepared to address cultural hegemony throughout my forthcoming career as a researcher and teacher.

Following the completion of my PhD, I anticipate that my career will largely be focused upon music teacher education and the pursuit of additional research. In both of these areas, the insights I have gained through this study will be invaluable. For the undergraduate students whom I will mentor in preparation for careers as music educators, this study equips me to introduce them to some of the sociocultural complexities and ethical responsibilities of teaching, in advance of them encountering such unfamiliar terrain. Moreover, by sharing my auto/ethnographic account of pursuing this

research, I have a means for sensitising them to the entangled nature of cultural hegemony, which in turn, will aid me in inviting them to reconsider their various commitments to enculturation, inclusivity, and social justice. In essence, by being actively involved in teacher education, I hope to influence the field of education towards greater sensitivity regarding cultural transfer and the inadvertent perpetuation of symbolic violence.

This research also acts as a powerful catalyst for further research, particularly in the area of culturally-responsive teaching. To my knowledge, very little research of culturally-responsive teaching has been made in the domain of school orchestras, though it is an area of scholarship which has entered music education discourse more generally (see Lind & McCoy, 2016). Having pursued this study, I am now in a position where I can be at the forefront of exploring culturally-responsive teaching in the context of school orchestras, a field that has received scant attention from university-level researchers and teachers though there have been resounding calls for it by a wide range of string performing artists (Mooke, et al., 2019).

Finally, by probing the ethical dilemmas represented by efforts to use music education for the purpose of social justice, I have been able to gain insight into some of the ethical dilemmas inherent in public education more generally. Largely, this thesis has been presented in the language of music and music education research, however, in many respects, it actually transcends the field of music education, finding resonance in the sociology of education. Thus, I argue, it is transferable to many educational contexts. The questions of cultural hegemony, negotiation of competing sociocultural imperatives, inclusion of marginalised populations, and habitus formation are all issues which are pertinent across educational contexts. Thus, in addition to the music education related implications of my study, my research also acts as a starting point by which I – and others – can conceptualise and eventually pursue larger-scale issues of cultural hegemony in education.

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## **POSTLUDE**

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## Postlude

As the rain streamed down, I sat enchanted and transfixed. On the stage in front of me was one of my childhood heroes, the internationally celebrated cellist Yo-yo Ma. He and the Silk Road Ensemble were performing an outdoor concert as part of New Haven's 2011 International Festival of Ideas. I myself was in New Haven as a guest of Yale University, where I had just participated in the Yale Symposium on Music in the Schools and been a recipient of the Yale Distinguished Music Educator Award. The Silk Road Ensemble's performance on a rain-filled evening signified the conclusion – and also the high point – of a stimulating weekend. For me, it also signified the beginning of a new way of imagining and perceiving the world around me: as a dynamic interaction of art, culture, and ideas.

The Silk Road Ensemble describes itself as seeking 'to spark new ways of looking at the world' and striving 'to create unexpected connections, collaborations, and communities in pursuit of meaningful change' (Gramley, 2015). Perhaps then, the Silk Road Ensemble acts as an effective metaphor for what I have intended to accomplish through the pursuit of this thesis, namely, sparking new ways of conceptualising education and society, making connections amongst previously disjunct educational practices and theories, and collaborating with a music education community for the purpose of enacting meaningful change. In line with the Silk Road Ensemble, I assert that music is a particularly poignant tool for expressing the confluence of art, culture, and ideas as well as being particularly effective medium for communicating ideas which cannot yet be distilled into words.

The Silk Road Ensemble perhaps acts as a metaphor in an additional way. At the conclusion of this thesis (see section 7.2), I presented implications for practice, policy, and research. I intentionally kept these recommendations broad, preferring my thesis to act more as a provocation than a solution,

and yet provocations and solutions are sometimes entangled. And so, here at the very end, I present the Silk Road Ensemble as a metaphorical embodiment of the varied implications of this thesis.

Just as the ancient Silk Road represents the place where ideas and culture were shared, where cultural awareness was developed, where new ideas were formed, and where new artistic ventures were conceived, so also does the Silk Road Ensemble attempt to build an artistic practice around such cultural interchange. The Silk Road Ensemble is intentionally flexible collection of world class musicians, representing diverse cultures, nationalities, and musical practices. These musicians come together with the shared purpose of intercultural music creation. As they interact with one another, new genres, ensembles and musical idioms are created, and each person is celebrated as an individual.

Perhaps music education – and indeed schooling itself – could be reimagined as being more akin to the Silk Road Ensemble, where students and teachers alike engage in the intercultural sharing of musical expressions. Perhaps then music education could free itself from some of the tangles of cultural hegemony and instead become a symbolic place where the intercultural imagination is activated.

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## **APPENDICES**

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## **Appendix A: Authorisation from School District Superintendent**

### **School orchestras, social justice, and me:**

A multi-layered (auto)ethnography of music education as/for sociocultural (re)production

#### *Supplemental Information*

The following document is designed to supplement the research proposal materials that have been provided elsewhere (please see Research Summary and/or Executive Summary). Specifically, this document responds to the information requested in school board policy documents (see AR 6162.8) regarding research:

#### **Name of researcher(s) and academic credentials**

Stephen Fairbanks is currently a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge. He holds the following academic credentials:

BM Music Education – Brigham Young University (2005)

MM Conducting – Brigham Young University (2008)

MPhil Educational Research – University of Cambridge (2015)

#### **Purpose and scope of the project**

The research is focused upon developing a greater understanding of perceptions of social justice within the context of music education. Specifically, it examines the sociocultural complexities which can arise in a school orchestra setting when students view the music program as being imbued with social mobility. Accordingly, the research will be pursued entirely within the context of the orchestra's curricular and extracurricular activities. It will take place between February 2017 and May 2017, involving a combined total of 6 weeks of classroom visits.

#### **Method of study or investigation to be used**

The primary method of study is ethnography, which requires that the researcher becomes an authentically participating/contributing member of the orchestra class. While the specifics for facilitating participant observation is up to the discretion of the school's orchestra teacher, it is conceivable that the researcher could be regarded as a volunteer teaching assistant. His background as a high school orchestra director would suggest that he could render capable help in such a capacity. The researcher would attend the orchestra class daily and write down his observations about what he sees taking place. These observations will primarily be recorded in written format at the conclusion of the school day. No recording – visual or audio – will take place during the class.

#### **Extent of participation expected of students and staff**

Students and staff will be expected to carry on with the regular business of holding class. No change, other than welcoming a visitor into the classroom, will be needed in order to conduct the research. At the outset of the research, students and their parents will be provided a letter which discloses the research intentions of the researcher, allowing the students to opt-out of the research if that is deemed preferable. Opting out would ensure that no observations are recorded about the particular student and the researcher would generally avoid interactions with that particular student.

#### **Use to which project results will be put**

The research will be used for a PhD dissertation and derivative academic writings.

**Benefits to the school(s) or the district**

The school will enjoy two primary benefits by engaging in this research:

1. Because the researcher will be conducting an in-depth sociological study of the school's orchestra, specifically addressing the unique and remarkable sociocultural positioning in which the orchestra exists within the school, the community, and wider contexts, it is likely that when he shares the results of the study with the orchestra director and the school officials, there will be an increased understanding of the way in which music education programs can be best utilized for the benefit of the students.
2. This research presents an opportunity to have an experienced orchestra teacher available to assist in the orchestra classroom. Likely, this will result in greater ability for the school's orchestra director to deliver his curriculum with greater ease, efficacy, and individualization.

Response from superintendent:

8 Feb. 17

Stephen,

Based on your proposal and the school's interest in learning from your research, I authorize your request to conduct your research study at [Kumeyaay High School].

Thank you,

Renato Montaña, Superintendent

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter



February 2017

Dear Orchestra Student and Parent(s),

Your orchestra class has been selected to participate in a research study being conducted by Stephen Fairbanks of the University of Cambridge. This letter is intended to briefly introduce you to what the research study entails, indicate what your likely involvement will be, and assure you that your anonymity will be preserved in the writing-up and dissemination of the research. Also, this letter provides instructions for how to get more information about the study, and how to opt out of the research, should any parent or student desire that.

### *Purpose of the research*

The purpose of the research is to better understand the sociocultural complexities involved in school-based music education programs, particularly those which use the genre of western classical music, the medium of western classical music, and which are located in places where the predominant, collective, and shared musical identity of the wider community is not generally associated with orchestras and/or classical music.

### *Your involvement*

Students will be able to carry on with doing orchestra as normal. The researcher desires to observe the orchestra class pursuing their everyday and ordinary activities. He will be visiting the classes for a total of six weeks between now and the end of the school year. Students can anticipate interacting with him the same way they might interact with an assistant teacher in the classroom.

### *Anonymity*

In the writing up of the research, students' identities will be anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

### *For more information*

To get more information about the research and/or to ask any questions, please visit directly with Stephen Fairbanks or contact him at [email address]. Alternatively, you can be in contact with [orchestra director] or [principal].

### *Opting-out instructions*

Should you prefer to not be involved in this particular research study, you are kindly asked to fill out the attached page and return it to Stephen Fairbanks or [the orchestra director] before the end of the week. If you chose to not participate in the study, the researcher will omit any mention of you from the study, and he will particular effort to avoid interacting with you and/or engaging you in conversation while he is visiting the class.

With Appreciation,

Stephen Fairbanks  
*University of Cambridge*

Music Education as/for Sociocultural (Re)Production

Stephen Fairbanks, University of Cambridge

*I DO NOT wish to participate*

If you desire to NOT participate in the University of Cambridge study on music education as/for sociocultural reproduction, please indicate below:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments (optional):

*I DO wish to participate*

If you desire to participate in the University of Cambridge study on music education as/for sociocultural reproduction, you do not necessarily need to return this form. However, you may return this form and suggest a possible pseudonym.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments (optional):

## Appendix C: Matrix of Thesis

Key Literature			RQs	Findings & Discussion	Conclusions
Introduction	Unpacking the research interests				
<b>Sistema Impasse</b>  Tunstall (2012)  El Sistema is 'one of the most significant social and artistic developments of the twenty-first century'  Baker (2014)  El Sistema is a model of tyranny, a neo-colonial ideological domination which reinforces the very cultural class systems which its proponents have asserted that El Sistema transcends.	<b>Problematising 'Social Justice'</b>  Cremin, Sellman & McCluskey, 2012 Social justice derives from a plurality of imperatives  Jorgensen, 2015 Cites Miller (1999) to articulate the multi-dimensionality of social justice in music education  Spruce, 2017 Theorises social justice in music education from two differing paradigms -- distributive and relational	<i>Theorising with Bourdieu</i> <b>Cultural Capital &amp; Symbolic Violence</b>  Bourdieu, 1984 Cultural capital—being able to use cultural norms and expectations to reposition oneself in the existing structure of society  Bourdieu, 1990 Symbolic Violence – The imposition of an ideology which legitimates domination and inequality	What hegemonic sociocultural entanglements do students encounter in the context of high school orchestra?	1. Primacy of Adjudication 2. Performance of Sophistication 3. Repertoire 4. Incongruity from Peers	Students are sophisticated consumers of their own music education provision. They mediate instances of symbolic violence in order to maximize cultural capital
	<b>Problematising 'Inclusivity'</b>  Elpus & Abril, 2011 Demographic profile of underrepresented populations in American music education  Bradley, 2012 Decolonizing music education	<b>Field</b>  Bourdieu, 1993 Fields represent the places where people struggle for social position. The have relatively autonomous sets of rules, knowledges, and forms of capital.	How do orchestra students negotiate such encounters with cultural hegemony?	1. Those classes taught by white teachers 2. Silencing of mariachi 3. Money matters	Students from underrepresented populations are often required to shed the very sociocultural features which distinguish them as 'underrepresented' in order to fully participate in high school orchestras
	<b>Problematising 'Orchestra Culture'</b>  Kingsbury, 1988 music students and their teachers negotiate a rarefied cultural system around the processes of studying classical music  Perkins, 2013 conservatoire learning cultures are intertwined across social, cultural, hierarchical, and performance specialisms  Green, 2002 Popular musicians have distinctly different approach to music learning than classically trained musicians	<b>Habitus</b>  Bourdieu, 1977 Habitus—the embodied dispositions which influence the ways in which individuals perceive and interact with the social world around them	In what ways might such entanglements become more pronounced for 'underrepresented' students?	1. Reappropriating orchestra to their own varied purposes 2. 'Our music' and 'school music' 3. Every head is a world	There seems to be evidence to suggest that school orchestras function as habitus-forming institutions.