Music and Arts in Action | Volume 8 | Issue 2 | 2023

The Simultaneity of Cultural Capital and Symbolic Violence in Youth Orchestras: a tale of two students

STEPHEN FAIRBANKS[1], ISRAEL LIZARRAGA[2], JOSUÉ CORONA[3]

[1] University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne| U.S.A.*

[2] California State University, Fullerton| U.S.A.

[3] Imperial Valley College| U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

Corresponding with the recent worldwide enthusiasm regarding Sistema youth orchestra programmes, social justice has increasingly become a rationale and justification for ensemble-based music education. Proponents of Sistema programmes enthusiastically cite the social benefits of orchestra participation and argue that all children should have access to such benefits. Sistema critics question the good that can come from an epistemological stance which is aligned with neo-colonial cultural hegemony. Current Sistema scholarship is largely polarised between these two binaries and facing an impasse. Drawing substantially upon a Bourdieusian lens to conceptualise cultural hegemony and adopting a narrative voice, I explore the extent to which the lived experiences of two musician-alumni of an American high school orchestra programme conform to notions of 'cultural capital' and 'symbolic violence'. Ultimately, I argue that the students' experiences are indicative of a complex, nuanced, and complicated synthesis of cultural capital and symbolic violence, asserting that the students have sophisticated ways of mediating the inherent tensions between symbolic violence and cultural capital. I suggest that by embracing the complexities of students' lived experience, music educators could transcend the ideological impasses which preclude them from delivering their social justice initiatives with even greater depth and richness.

KEYWORDS

Youth orchestra; El Sistema; cultural capital; symbolic violence; social justice

*1114 W. Nevada St., Urbana, IL 61801, USA; stf@illinois.edu

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, youth orchestras have been strongly promoted as facilitating social justice. Advocates of these youth orchestras assert that a myriad of social benefits are derived through ensemble music-making, including raised aspirations, increased self-esteem, heightened discipline, and greater life satisfaction (see Tunstall, 2013). The argument goes that the benefits of youth orchestra participation should be made available to all, regardless of cultural or socioeconomic circumstances; doing so is a matter of social justice. However, critics of these programmes contend that music expression is culturally-situated and thus inappropriate to impose upon disadvantaged youth by the dominant culture. Placing marginalised and minority students in settings where they are effectually asked to affirm the legitimacy of the dominant culture is seen as ethically tenuous and the antithesis of social justice (see Bull, 2016). Accordingly, youth orchestras have become a point of contention in music education, leading a number of music educators to debate whether students are ultimately being benefitted or harmed by their participation in the programmes. Such diverging viewpoints have resulted in an ideological impasse regarding the role of youth orchestras in respect to social justice: orchestral participation is either seen as a form of social justice in which the lives of disadvantaged youth are transformed by engaging in rich cultural experiences, or it is seen as a neo-colonial subsuming of students' rich musical lives through elite cultural assimilation. The purpose of this study is to explore the degree to which the lived experience of students in a youth orchestra conforms to such a polarised concept of social justice.

To such an end, I recount – and then interweave – three separate narratives. First, I present my own narrative, drawing upon my own autoethnographic experience as a music-educator-turned-researcher to introduce, elaborate, and then comment upon the debates currently taking place regarding social justice and youth orchestra participation; I also present a Bourdieusian framework for reconceptualising such debates as an inherent tension between cultural capital and symbolic violence. In large measure, my narrative serves as a review of the scholarly literature and an unfolding of the study's methodology.

Second, I present the narrative of co-author Israel Lizarraga, who illustrates from his ethnic minority perspective that his participation in youth orchestra has ultimately empowered him with sufficient cultural capital that he has since been able to obtain meaningful and satisfying employment as a music educator. Third, I present the narrative of co-author Josué Corona, who found that in spite of possessing substantial cultural capital, certain structures of symbolic violence still precluded him from being able to enter the field as a professional symphony musician. Following the narratives of Israel and Josué, I weave the stories together to suggest that youth orchestras cannot be flattened into a simple binary of either promoting social justice or undermining it. Rather, I present the assertion that youth orchestras must be conceptualised as representing a simultaneity of cultural capital and symbolic violence.

STEPHEN'S STORY

In 2008, the Venezuelan youth orchestra programme known as El Sistema had essentially become an international sensation, 'capturing the public imagination' (Creech, et al., 2016, p. 35) by boldly proclaiming that many of the ills of poverty and social marginalisation could be rectified by providing adolescents with increased access to youth orchestras (see Borzacchini, 2010). At the time, I was a secondary school orchestra teacher, based in Park City, Utah, a resort community

in the Wasatch Mountains known for its outdoor recreation, the Sundance Film Festival, and world-class skiing. Because my career had largely been devoted to widening young people's participation in orchestra and reaching out to disadvantaged populations, El Sistema's message resonated with me, and I promptly counted myself as a Sistema enthusiast. Indeed, I set to work launching a Sistema-inspired youth orchestra in my community, modelling my programme after the many Sistema-inspired programmes which had recently been launched in major metropolitan centers throughout the United States.

For several years, 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 – and continues to be – 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 'at-risk' of failing academically or dropping out of school.

In response to this achievement gap, I proposed that a Sistema-inspired programme could help, arguing that by bringing students from these two populations into a context of shared music making, the students' musical interactions with each other would foster a sense of interdependence, thus addressing many of the educational effects which are caused by social exclusion. 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 region's professional symphony invited participants and their families to attend concerts as special guests; and an impact evaluation determined that the programme was successful in addressing and overcoming the achievement gap between white and Hispanic/Latino students (PCEF, 2013). Notwithstanding these successes, I found that I had a growing sense of malaise, a sense that I had not fully conceptualised the fully ramifications of the Sistema-inspired work I was tumbling into. I ultimately decided to pursue full-time study and research, hoping, in part, to be able to give voice to my inexplicable malaise.

Upon commencing study, I almost immediately encountered the ideological impasse represented by Sistema authors Tricia Tunstall (2012) and Geoff Baker (2014). Tunstall (2012) is adulatory about El Sistema, proclaiming that 'the fast-growing international movement to replicate this [El Sistema] model is one of the most significant social and artistic developments of the twenty-first century' (p. 6), whereas Baker (2014) is decidedly critical of El Sistema, contending that El Sistema symbolises neo-colonial cultural imperialism, giving rise to a culture of discipline and fear; dependence upon programme leadership; and continued marginalisation of indigenous cultures and their musical expressions. As I applied these ideas to my own Sistema context, I began to have language to describe both my earlier enthusiasm and malaise. Moreover, I began to realise that in the face of such strong and polarised disagreements about whether Sistema programmes epitomised or subverted social justice, I desired to find a way to bring together these divergent conceptualisations about Sistema into a single framework. In particular, I felt that such a framework would be necessary to describe my own lived experience as a director of a Sistema-inspired programme,

The writings of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990) provided me with a way to first theorise and then move beyond what seemed to be a growing Sistema Impasse (see Fairbanks, 2014). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital, and symbolic violence are powerful ways to conceptualise educational endeavors, especially when such endeavors are intertwined with culturally situated practices such as music making (Burnard, 2012). Bourdieusian 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). Habitus also 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). '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. The term 'capital' signifies objectified power (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). However, cultural capital exists in a complicated and dynamic relationship with 'symbolic violence.' Symbolic violence refers to the effective violence which is experienced when a power differential between two individuals can be ascribed to sociocultural positionality; in essence, symbolic violence occurs when an individual's valued cultural background – *i.e.*, habitus – is recast as being of very little worth (Bourdieu, 1990). Accordingly, the twin notions of cultural capital and symbolic violence offer an interpretive lens for examining habitus because certain aspects of habitus will align with the acquisition of cultural capital, while others will encounter symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990).

Once I had acquired this Bourdieusian language for analysing the sociological implications of pedagogical interventions, I realised that the Sistema impasse could be reframed as an illustration of the dynamic tension between cultural capital and symbolic violence (Fairbanks, 2017). Thereafter, I determined that I would pursue fieldwork into the lived experience of students who had participated in a 'Sistema-like' youth orchestra. Specifically, I wanted to know, by hearing from the students, how they would place themselves in this framework of cultural capital and symbolic violence. Accordingly, I engaged in ethnographic fieldwork in El Centro, California, which is where I had been based previous to Park City. My aim was to re-engage with students I had formerly taught in a high school orchestra which was – and still is – particularly evocative of a Sistema-inspired youth orchestra.

Predating the Sistema movement in America by several decades and serving a predominantly ethnic minority community, the 'Kumeyaay' High School orchestra exists in an area of pronounced socioeconomic and educational need: 74.8% of the student body are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged; 42.9% are designated as English Language Learners; and 9.7% qualify for migrant education (ICOE, 2017). Notably, 92.5% of the student body identify as Hispanic/Latino. In seeming defiance of what music education researchers have identified as the demographic characteristics of where school orchestra programmes typically exist

(see Smith, 1997), this orchestra consistently ranks amongst the top performing high school orchestras in the country.

Amidst my larger fieldwork efforts in El Centro (see Fairbanks, 2019), I encountered two former students who had pursued postsecondary music studies and were now transitioning into music careers. Based upon the poignancy of their experiences, and realising that their narratives could speak profoundly to the complicated relationships between cultural capital and symbolic violence, I invited these two former students to share and comment upon their experience(s) participating in orchestra as adolescents, advancing through university-level music study, and ultimately pursuing careers as professional musicians. In documenting and presenting their experiences, I draw substantially upon narrative inquiry (see Stauffer & Barrett, 2009), which in turn, provides the rationale for identifying these research collaborators as co-authors, rather than research participants (see Nichols, 2016).

In the following two sections, I briefly introduce each of these two students, whereafter I present substantial portions of their co-constructed narratives (Bignold & Su, 2013). To the degree possible, I present these narratives intact, because as Sandra Stauffer notes,

> Well-wrought critical stories raise questions that provoke readers to dig deep and think again, from a different perspective. Narrative scholarship can empower researchers, readers, and the participant storytellers to question, to think, to act, and to question yet again. The power of narrative inquiry lies in the possibility of troubling certainty, and once troubled, in the possibility of change (Stauffer, 2014, p. 181).

After recounting each of the respective narratives, I overlay a Bourdieusian analysis, suggesting that although their responses are markedly different, they each highlight some of the complexities pertaining to whether youth orchestra participation sufficiently provided them with the necessary cultural capital to overcome pronounced and systematic symbolic violence. In the end, their stories cause me to circle back upon my own story, leading to further discussion of how efforts to use music education for the purpose of social justice are entangled in a dynamic tension between cultural capital and symbolic violence.

ISRAEL'S STORY

Israel was one of my high school orchestra students between 2005 and 2007, and his experience as a high school music student was sufficiently empowering that he chose to become a music educator himself. He earned a bachelor's degree in music education and has taught secondary school instrumental 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.

> I started violin in 5th grade, when I was 10 years old. I had wanted to play the violin because my parents put classical music on. I specifically remember *Spring* from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. I would listen to that on repeat before learning violin. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I want to learn *that!*'. Then at school they had a big assembly where they talked about

> joining the orchestra. That same day I took the form home and told my Mom, 'I need a violin, like next week!' She was like, 'Okaaay'.
>
> My parents were supportive and rented a violin and all this stuff - just went right into it. So, that was 5th and 6th grade. Then in junior high, things started taking off from there. I started taking private lessons and my whole life began to revolve around music. By my senior year, I was all in. There was like no English possibility. Or science major or anything like that. No, I was going to do music. So, I went to conservatory. It was really intense at first. I knew the first few weeks of theory; that was fine. But the sight-singing! Sight-singing was incredibly difficult for me. I didn't know my range. I couldn't audiate all those notes. But a lot of the other music majors could! I felt way behind. And I was one of only two Mexican-American students in that freshmen year. Everyone else was white. I felt like I was behind. Technically, I was "on-track," but it just seemed easier for everyone else. That was something that definitely stood out at the time.
>
> It wasn't until my first year of teaching that I realized that my race actually mattered. That's when I found that it's an advantage actually to have some cultural connection with Mexico. Being Hispanic here in the U.S. means that Hispanic kids can have someone to look up to. They can see somebody like me and say, "He made it, and so can I!" But I also think we have failed to instill a little bit of perspective into students nowadays. I feel that a lot of students fail to realise the opportunities that are right in front of them. For students who have a tough home situation, somehow we're failing to show them 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 don't know – to somewhere!' It's important to let students know that these opportunities do exist; the opportunities that they have now are incredible! I know that when I was in school, I didn't have that perspective either. I know that sometimes it's really hard, especially in the day-to-day; sometimes we lose perspective and not inform students that all these opportunities are here, but it is our job to let students know that these opportunities are available. The responsibility falls on us.
>
> You know, returning to the whole race issue, it struck me when I was back home last week for Homecoming football game – I was in the stands playing trumpet and I looked up at the rest of the band: you had Hispanic kids, you had white kids, you had some black kids in there. And they were all members of the band! And the same thing with the orchestra. I think music lends itself very well to that kind of togetherness, to bringing people together. When you are out there drumming your brains out – or playing your heart out – race just doesn't matter.

Israel's educational and career trajectory has certainly been one of success after success. Looking back upon his experiences, he substantially credits the orchestra as providing him with the necessary cultural capital to achieve his dreams. Notwithstanding his strong commitment to make similar experiences available to Hispanic students, he remains uncertain about the role of his ethnicity in navigating his own university studies, and whether ethnicity even 'matters' when an ensemble is making music together. This conflicted-ness hints at the complex negotiations

Israel makes as he considers his own cultural capital in respect to how he is navigating his way through symbolic violence.

JOSUÉ'S STORY

Josué was also one of my high school orchestra students during the years 2005 to 2007. In the intervening decade, Josué has invested all of his resources and energies into becoming a professional symphony musician. His story indicates that in spite of his ability to win auditions and otherwise prove himself through his playing, certain structures still preclude him from being able to fully enter the field of professional orchestra playing. As Josué progressed through his conservatory-level training, he encountered insurmountable financial obstacles, which effectively precluded him from continuing to put himself forward as a viable candidate for symphony auditions. Consequently, Josué has returned to his hometown, knowing that although his playing ability could warrant him a career as a professional symphony bassist, the opportunity might be pre-emptively foreclosed to him.

> I joined orchestra in the 8th grade. Originally, I tried joining band on trumpet. I must have not scored well on the "entrance exam", being that I didn't get offered one of the few school instruments. At the time, they had this sort of vetting process to be in band and orchestra, or to qualify for a school instrument, one of the two, or both. I remember that before anyone had started orchestra or band, we all took this ear-training test, based on intervals. We had to write down whether the second pitch was above or below the first pitch. People who scored high enough were given priority with the school instruments. Unfortunately, I didn't score high enough, so I wasn't offered a trumpet, or any instrument for that matter. I went back a later day to see if the band teacher would loan me ANY instrument, but he had just given out his last trombone, so he was freshly out of instruments. My final attempt at joining band was asking my mom for a trumpet, but that was a no go as well.
>
> I tried joining orchestra in the 6th grade as a cellist, but was weirdly denied. I walked up to the orchestra teacher and asked her if it would be possible to join orchestra as a cellist. She ended up giving me some long response that was definitely not a yes, but didn't sound like a no. I just remember leaving confused and embarrassed. I made a final attempt at joining orchestra the end of my 7th grade year, this time by phone. I asked if I could join orchestra on bass, and she finally said yes. The very last day of the school year she took me out of my first period class, and for that next hour we went through the *All For Strings*, Vol.1 book. And that was it! She let me keep the book, so, for that entire summer, I taught myself how to play the bass using a kitchen broom and my right arm.
>
> The moment I realized orchestra was important to me was when I was 17 years old. That year, I auditioned and got into one of the Southern California honor orchestras. I arrived late to the first rehearsal, but at that moment when I walked into the rehearsal room, the orchestra started playing the beginning of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings. The culmination of walking into a room with the beginning three chords of Tchaikovsky's Serenade being played, along with it being played by the most talented group of peers I'd ever seen, AND knowing that I got there all on my own, made me realize that not only was it something that was important, but somewhere I belonged.

During my senior year, I got accepted to university to study music. The University's 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 travelled all the way there and did the placement test, and then came home. Eventually, I got a letter from the university, where they gave me my financial package. I was still short. My financial package was able to cover tuition and 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. I took it on advice from my uncle not to do anything with taking out loans for education. That's why I ended up staying home and going to community college.

And then, that next year, I was like, "Nope, I gotta go!" So, I worked hard to be gone the year after that. I ended up taking out a loan, and it was an even bigger loan than I had considered the previous year because I needed to pay for a private school. But I ended up going that route because I was more desperate to get somewhere, and the private school ended up being the school with the least requirements to transfer into, so I chose that. At first, I was planning on a bachelor's of music education, in preparation to get a master's in conducting. And then I started taking the bass more serious. That's when I realised, 'Well, I could go somewhere with this!'. I had a night of epiphanies where I was like, 'I don't want to live life wondering if I would-have-could-have-should-have made it as a professional bassist'. So, I was like, 'Yeah, I'm just going to go for it'. I switched over to being a performance major, and that's when I chose to actually look into schools which are known for taking people places. I did a little bit of research and found out Indiana University had a good reputation with students winning jobs. That's when I decided to make that my priority of schools. And yeah, I just went for it.

I got in. I did one year of the Bachelor of Music [Performance] 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, 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 home. That's why I am back at the community college. If I went back to IU and paid a fee, I could still do my recital, but I don't know if that will happen.

While I was doing my PD, I auditioned for a couple of professional symphonies. With one of them, I made it all the way to the finals, but the other person got the position. A year later, I found out that almost everyone that was hired that day was already associated with the orchestra, so it was already predetermined pretty much. I mean, that's what happens everywhere. That's part of the game and culture. But this one was annoying because they were saying that they wanted someone who could identify with 'the community' – which was mostly Latino. They had me – the Latino – and then they ended up choosing the other dude who was a sub already. They kind of snuck him into the position. They had someone

> who actually fit the description of what they were looking for, and they ended up giving the position to someone else. That's kind of what it felt like in the end. So, because of that experience, I was just like, "Nah, I don't really feel like putting myself out there and trying to get something and then end up not getting it. I'm kind of done. I'm tired of doing these things and not having them work out. I don't make enough money to do this all the time, so I will just go back home and try something else for the time being." I just kind of burned out of wanting to go for it.

Josué's story is one of marked resilience. In his narrative, he relates repeated encounters with symbolic violence, and yet, notwithstanding such encounters, he consistently chooses to persist. At nearly every stage, he receives encouragement that his accumulated cultural capital distinguishes him as distinctive.

INTERWEAVING THE NARRATIVES

These two narratives provide important insights into some of the complexities which can be present when music education becomes imbued with a social justice agenda. A superficial reading of these narratives might suggest that Israel's story is illustrative of cultural capital and Josué's is one of symbolic violence. However, I would assert that neither Israel nor Josué experienced either one exclusively. Rather, their experiences were more complex and nuanced, a complicated interweaving of both cultural capital and symbolic violence.

Israel explained that his upbringing – his habitus – advantageously equipped him for subsequent violin study. Not only were his parents willing and able to cover the costs of renting an instrument and obtaining violin lessons, he found himself already knowledgeable about some of the music he would be studying. From the start, Israel received messages that he possessed the requisite cultural capital to succeed in orchestra class. In contrast, Josué was immediately presented with messages of symbolic violence; his childhood habitus had essentially been pronounced inadequate by an ear-training assessment. Thus, he could not receive a school-owned instrument. Because the school would not provide him an instrument, and because his family was unable to, he was precluded from initial participation in the music class.

By teaching himself to play the bass – using a kitchen broom! – Josué was able to overcome the impenetrable nature of his early encounter with symbolic violence. Such resilient independence soon became the cultural capital which would eventually propel his subsequent music studies. He explains that when he encountered 'the most talented group of peers I'd ever seen AND knowing that I got there all on my own', he had the realisation that this was 'somewhere I belonged'. Such belonging-ness gave him the resilience and the courage to continue to put himself forward even in the face of persistent financial obstacles. He noted, 'I got accepted to university to study music'; 'I just went for it'; and 'I got in'. Josué evidently found much self-validation in realising that his own efforts had resulted in success within the field he was striving to join. In contrast, Israel was confronted with an unexpected message of symbolic violence as he graduated from high school and took up a place at conservatory. He suddenly discovered that amidst the broader context of classical music and conservatory training – as opposed to his own high school orchestra experience – ethnicity seemed to be a distinguisher of one's likelihood to succeed academically in music. Correspondingly, Israel associated his seeming underprepared-ness for sight-singing with his ethnic minority status, noting that 'it just seemed easier for

everyone else [who was white]'. In effect, his habitus had been rendered as being of lesser worth, notwithstanding the fact that he had won a place as a matriculated conservatory student.

Like Josué, Israel was able to convert this momentary message of symbolic violence into one of cultural capital. When Israel subsequently became a teacher, he noted that 'it's an advantage, actually, to have some cultural connection with Mexico'. He explained that because he has been able to navigate American higher education as an ethnic minority student, he could serve as a role model for other ethnic minority students, proclaiming with the authenticity of lived experience that if a student doesn't 'want all of these problems…then go to school [and] get your grades up'. And yet, although Israel positions himself as an advocate for the pursuit of more education, he seems conflicted about whether race matters – or doesn't matter – in educational contexts. He notes that his ethnic minority status 'definitely stood out at the time' when he was a conservatory student. He also confides that when he began teaching, he 'realized that [his] race actually mattered'. However, he also wants to assert that when you are engaged in making music as an ensemble, 'race just doesn't matter'. Josué similarly found himself reflecting on his ethnicity. In relation to his symphony audition, he had anticipated that he would be at an advantage because as a Latino, he knew he could 'identify with the community'. Like Israel, Josué found that his ethnicity suddenly mattered, and could be an advantage for him. However, based on the outcome of the symphony audition, it seems that that particular qualification for the job was not as important as Josué had anticipated that it might be. Moreover, Josué discovered that in spite of the encouragement he was receiving that his playing abilities would result in a job offer, such cultural capital was still subsidiary to economic capital. In the end, financial barriers precluded him from fully belonging: 'I ended up being short like $13,000'; 'I ran out of money'; and 'I don't make enough money to do this all the time'.

DISCUSSION: TOWARDS UNFLATTENING THE SIMULTANEITIES

Even when taken separately, these two narratives suggest that the recent polarisation of Sistema scholarship into Sistema proponents and Sistema detractors is incomplete at capturing the multifaceted lived experience of the participants of youth orchestras. Taken together, the narratives suggest that because cultural capital is so deeply entangled amidst the structures of the dominant culture, there will inevitably be side effects of symbolic violence when cultural capital is used as the justification for programmes intending to deliver social justice. Both Israel and Josué seem to be caught in an iterative cycle of cultural capital and symbolic violence.

To merge their stories with mine, I should acknowledge that my intention as a music teacher is to present students with access to cultural capital. Through my career, I am increasingly realising that such efforts necessarily implicate symbolic violence, for cultural capital cannot be disentangled from acknowledging the privileged status of certain cultural values of the dominant culture, which in turn represents symbolic violence. A similar observation was noted by historian Gavin Campbell, who noted in his research about music education in the early 20th century that,

> In the end, music reformers forever spiraled 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' (Campbell, 2000, p. 262).

In my estimation, Sistema scholarship has propelled itself into a similar ideological circle, one which has flattened itself into an impasse over whether youth orchestras act as catalysts for cultural capital or symbolic violence.

This flattening runs counter to the complexity which is inherently present in the arts. As arts philosopher and researcher Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) succinctly states,

> 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).

When El Sistema first burst onto the international scene, there seemed to be a widespread enthusiasm and hope that this was an arts education programme which had discovered a way to transcend some of the undesirable social limitations which had eluded well-meaning music educators for centuries. However, it is possible that approaching youth orchestras in this polarised way will ultimately dilute the richness and flatten the complexity of what is being pursued.

As illustrated by the narratives presented in this paper, I assert that youth orchestras – including Sistema-inspired music education programmes – carry the potential of simultaneously delivering both cultural capital and symbolic violence. On one hand, they equip individuals with greater ability to understand and navigate the wider sociocultural world in which they exist. Specific examples of cultural capital pertaining to youth orchestras could be 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., p. 73). An increase in cultural capital corresponds with an individual's increased agency over their social status, allowing them greater ability to reposition themselves more advantageously amongst the dominant culture.

However, because such an increase in agency is premised upon being able to navigate the social world of dominant culture (*i.e.*, the values, dispositions, and musical expressions of the upper middle class), this also reaffirms the dominance of the dominant culture. Effectively, this thrusts the collective habitus of the dominant culture upon those navigating it, thereby enacting a form of symbolic violence. This particular form of symbolic violence likely remains hidden to those administering music programmes such as youth orchestras, for it pertains not so much to the programmes themselves, but rather reflects the way in which classical music initiatives often position themselves in relation to other music-making endeavors. In particular, when classical music is used as a cultural intervention for disadvantaged populations, it carries the implicit message that the pre-existing culture of the disadvantaged population – musical and otherwise – is deficient (see Bull, 2016).

Reflecting the narratives presented in this paper, I suggest that pedagogic intervention can act as a catalyst for both cultural capital and symbolic violence. In the following figure, I illustrate how cultural capital and symbolic violence may take place simultaneously, and in an interrelated way (see Figure 1).

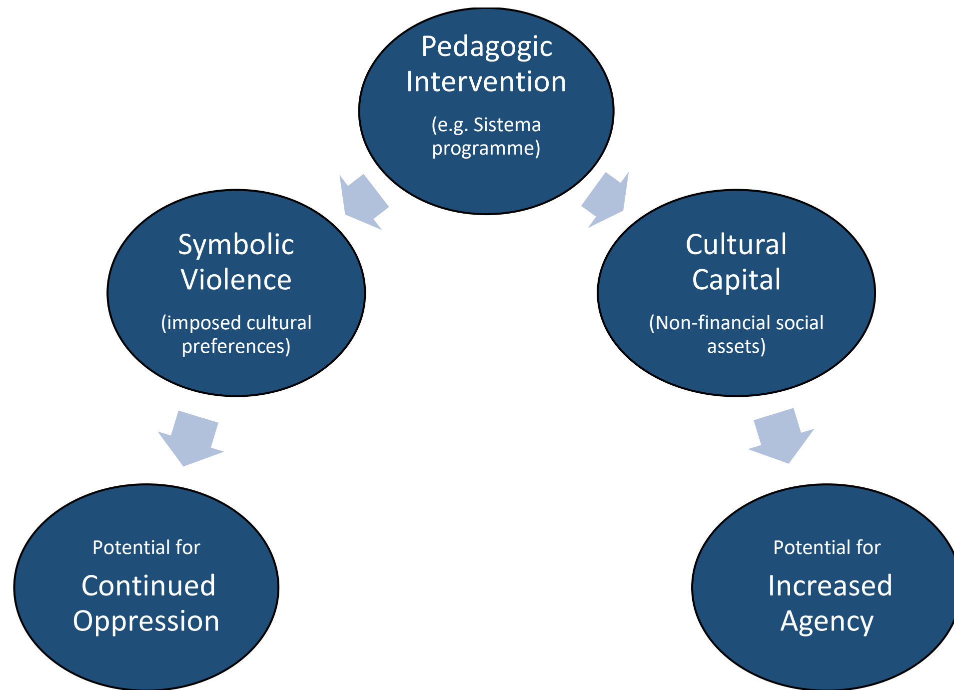

Figure 1. Pedagogic intervention and its effects upon agency/oppression
Source: Adapted from Fairbanks, 2014, p. 52.

On one hand, pedagogic intervention corresponds with an increase in agency because it equips individuals with an increase in cultural capital. On the other hand, this increase in agency is premised upon being able to navigate the social world of dominant culture. Thus, pedagogical interventions – such as Sistema programmes – 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). In short, pedagogic intervention can result in a simultaneity of cultural capital and symbolic violence, especially when it originates from cultural practices of the dominant class and when it is directed toward populations which have experienced a marginalisation from that dominant class.

CONCLUSION

Returning briefly to my own experiences as the director of a Sistema-inspired programme in Park City, I am better able to articulate why I had experienced a sense of malaise. Even though I had been actively addressing an achievement gap and overcoming a social divide, I had also been unsettled about the way in which my own cultural expressions were being privileged over those of my students. Looking retrospectively upon that experience, I realise now that I had intuitively sensed that I was underconceptualising the inherent complexities pertaining to the use of cultural expressions as a social intervention. And through this underconceptualisation, I was essentially relegating the mediation of these complexities to the participants in my programme.

Students in Sistema-inspired youth orchestras are likely experiencing a simultaneity of cultural capital and symbolic violence, especially if participation in the orchestra represents a departure from their own respective cultural upbringings. I propose that an acknowledgement of this simultaneity could represent an effective first step toward disentangling, reconceptualising, and otherwise transcending some of the ideological gridlock which has pervaded recent scholarship on Sistema-inspired music education endeavors.

By focusing upon the lived experience of the individuals involved in youth orchestra programmes, it will become possible to better understand the sophisticated ways each of them has for mediating the inherent symbolic violence. I have argued elsewhere that students are cosmopolitan and pragmatic consumers of their own music education provision (Fairbanks, 2019). Although this might suggest that students could always derive benefit from participation in Sistema-inspired youth orchestras, I assert that it is imperative for Sistema leaders to sensitize themselves to these sociological complexities. Moreover, I assert that as Sistema leaders – and music educators more broadly – better understand the simultaneous nature of cultural capital and symbolic violence, they will be better equipped to transcend the ideological impasses which preclude them from delivering their social justice efforts with greatest efficacy. By better understanding their students' ongoing and sophisticated mediations of sociological considerations, music educators can adjust their own practices to minimise the effects of symbolic violence, thereby ensuring that students can fully access the cultural capital which is being offered to them.

REFERENCES

Baker, G. (2014). *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bignold, W. & Su, F. (2013). The Role of the Narrator in Narrative Inquiry in Education: Construction and Co-Construction in Two Case Studies. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 36*(4), 400-414.

Borzacchini, C. (2010). *Venezuela: the miracle of music*. Caracas: Fundacion Bancaribe.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, 2e. London: Sage Publications.

Bourdieu, P. (2002). Habitus. In J. Hillier & E Rooksby (Eds). *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Bull, A. (2016). El Sistema as a bourgeois social project: Class, gender, and Victorian values. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education, 15*(1), 120-153.

Burnard, P. (2012). *Musical Creativities in Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, G. (2000). 'A Higher Mission than to merely please the ear': Music and Social Reform in America, 1900-1925. *Musical Quarterly*, *84*(2), 259-286. doi: 10.1093/musqtl/84.2.259

Creech, A., Gonzalez-Moreno, P., Lorenzino, L., Waitman, G., Sandoval, E., Fairbanks, S. (2016). *El Sistema and Sistema-Inspired Programmes: A Literature Review of research, evaluation, and critical debates*, 2e. San Diego: Sistema Global. Available at http://sistemaglobal.org.

Edgerton, J. & Roberts, L. (2014). Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality. *Theory and Research in Education, 12*(2), 193-220.

Fairbanks, S. (2014). *An ethnographically-informed case-study of an El Sistema inspired*

programme in England: Critically framing practitioners' negotiations of 'social justice' and the transmission of culture. Unpublished MPhil Thesis. University of Cambridge.
Fairbanks, S. (2017). Arts Education as Social Justice: Problematising 'Sistema'. In P. Burnard, V. Ross, E. Mackinlay, K. Powell, T. Dragovic, & H. Minors (Eds.). *Building Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Bridges: Where Practice Meets Research and Theory*. Cambridge: BIBACC Publishing.
Fairbanks, S. (2019). *Schooling Habitus: An auto/ethnographic study of music education's entanglements with cultural hegemony*. PhD Thesis. University of Cambridge.
Freire, P. (1974/2003). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition. New York, NY: Continuum.
Gartman, G. (2012). *Culture, Class, and Critical Theory: Between Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School*. London: Routledge.
Gaztambide-Fernandez, R. (2013). Why the arts don't do anything: Toward a new vision for cultural production in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *83*(1), 211-236.
Grenfell, M. (Ed.). (2014). Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts. Durham: Acumen Publishing.
ICOE. (2017). Yearbook 2016-17. Imperial County Office of Education.
Logan, O. (2016). Lifting the veil: A realist's critique of Sistema's upwardly mobile path. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education, 15(*1), 58-88.
Nichols, J. (2016). Sharing the Stage: Ethical Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry in Music Education. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 63*(4), 439-454.
PCEF (2013). Impact Evaluation of McPolin Strings. Report in possession of author.
Smith, C. (1997). Access to String Instruction in American Public Schools. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 45*(4), 650-662.
Stauffer, S. (2014). Narrative Inquiry and the Uses of Narrative in Music Education Research. In C. Conway (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research in American Music Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Stauffer, S. & Barrett, M. (2009). Narrative Inquiry in Music Education: Toward Resonant Work. In M. Barrett & S. Stauffer (Eds.). *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education: Troubling Certainty*. New York: Springer.
Tunstall, T. (2012). Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, *El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
Tunstall, T. & Booth, E. (2016). *Playing for Their Lives: The Global El Sistema Movement for Social Change Through Music*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Stephen Fairbanks is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research explores the phenomenon of cultural transmission in education, specifically focusing on the ethical dilemmas which can arise when classical music is promoted as a medium for social justice. A lifelong string player and orchestra enthusiast, he continues to actively seek out orchestral music-making opportunities. Stephen holds degrees from Brigham Young University and the University of Cambridge.

Israel Lizarraga is a graduate student in violin performance at California State University, Fullerton. He holds an undergraduate degree in music education from the University of the Pacific and has been a public school music teacher for nine years.

Josué Corona is actively pursuing his Associate's Degree from Imperial Valley College in El Centro, CA. Previously he had pursued music study at Azusa Pacific University and Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. In 2013, he was employed by MusAid to work as a teaching artist for El Sistema, El Salvador.

This article is published in Open Access and licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license – full information at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/