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Capital, Class, Status, and Social Reproduction in Music Education: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This is a critical review of Section II in the *Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education*, on "Capital, Class, Status, and Social Reproduction." Overall, the authors in this section of the Handbook (mostly representing affluent, white perspectives) put forward a functionalist sociology of class, avoiding more critical perspectives. Subsequently, little acknowledgement is given to the critical role of the ACT journal and the MayDay Group in shaping the subfield of sociology in music education, and Bourdieu's robust critique of capital is generally diffused through an emphasis on cultural identity and diversity. In this review, the capitalist totality, which Marx conceptualized as a social force, is posed as The Game in which the smaller games associated with school music are situated. Bourdieu's account of cultural capital and his critique of social reproduction are defended, and the role of the professional field of school music education as a potentially oppressive force is underscored. The article concludes with an argument for anti-classism—educating music teachers to understand and counteract deficit views of people living in poverty.

Keywords

Capital, class, status, social reproduction, music education, Bourdieu, cultural capital

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To contextualize my review of "Capital, Class, Status, and Social Reproduction" (Section II in the *Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education*), it may be helpful to know about my background. Some might find it unseemly to refer to oneself in scholarly writing, but because the "I" is always present, a degree of disclosure feels warranted. A key insight from the field of sociology is that minds, hearts, and bodies are socially constructed (Groys 2012, Berger and Luckmann 1966); there is a lot of history behind why we experience the world in such diverse ways. Given that most academics have middle- to upper-class backgrounds (Fain 2019), and that one's worldview is unavoidably shaped by socioeconomic class (Aries and Seider 2007), the perspectives offered in this review—stemming as they do from a socioeconomic minority position—may have complementary value.

I grew up in relative poverty. Our family income, with all family members working, was less than half-way to the US poverty line and, as a child and teenager, I was often concerned about things like whether there would be enough food to go around, or how long I could continue wearing and repairing the same pair of shoes. I have childhood memories of life without electricity or indoor plumbing. By global standards our family was well enough off, but our relative status in the extended society in which we lived placed us squarely within the ranks of rural "poor white trash" (see Bates 2011). Through a strong public education system and federal grants to attend university, I became a music teacher and eventually worked my way into a job as a professor of teacher education in an open-enrollment university. Attaining lower middle-class socioeconomic status, however, does not equate with growing beyond lower-class roots—culturally, affectively, or physically (if "poor white trash" stereotypes come to mind, of course, this is the point where one might check their implicit bias). I still feel deeply the injustice of socioeconomic stratification, exploitation, and deprivation. When I attend academic conferences, I still feel more kinship with the people who serve the refreshments and clean the hotel rooms than with fellow academics. I still bear a "chip on my shoulder" (often to my own detriment) when it comes to socioeconomic inequality and differential power, wary of any hint of marginalization, hierarchy, or elitism. For better or worse, this is the mind, heart, and body I bring in answering the invitation from the editors of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* to review the section of the *Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education* (hereafter referred to as the Handbook) pertaining to social class and capitalism.

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I learned about the sub-field of music education sociology at the turn of the century from one of its early proponents and organizers, Stephen J. Paul, who was my doctoral mentor at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Sadly, Steve died suddenly of a heart attack before I completed my dissertation. Nevertheless, he had a positive and lasting impact on my professional life in the nearly two years that I knew him (not the least of which was introducing me to *his* doctoral mentor, Hildegard Froehlich). Not long before he passed, Steve co-authored a chapter on the sociology of music education for *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (Colwell and Richardson 2002). Editors Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson invited scholars in various subfields to write chapters—newly organized material intended to give a comprehensive overview of the profession—with the idea that someone relatively new to music education scholarship could use the handbook as a guide to the field. Steve took this invitation to heart and invited a co-author, Jeanne H. Ballantine, who was professionally specialized in sociology. Their chapter, "The Sociology of Education and Connections to Music Education Research," provided an overview of foundational sociological theories—functionalism, conflict theory, and social interactionism—and "contemporary theoretical approaches," as well as an historical overview of the sociology of music education from early 20th century American music education theorists and practitioners through the 1990s, including contemporary scholars such as David Elliott, Tom Regelski, Lucy Green, and Roberta Lamb (Paul and Ballantine 2002).

Steve also introduced me to the MayDay Group; he was one of the original participants in the now long-standing tradition of MayDay Group colloquia. There I became somewhat closely acquainted with Tom Regelski and David Elliott, whose praxial philosophies of music education (critical sociologies, in many respects), resonated with and extended my music education worldview. As a recognized critical social theorist, Tom gave a keynote address on Bourdieu and music education at a Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education (ISSME) in Denton, Texas, in 2003. At that time, he was editor of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* (ACT), the MayDay Group's first academic journal, and he published the ISSME proceedings as Volume 3, Issue 3. While Tom was editor, I started assisting with the production of the journal, and then served as production editor when Wayne Bowman was editor. When David Elliott began editing ACT, I took on the role of associate editor and, during that time, invited Petter Dyndahl, Sidsel Karlsen, and Ruth Wright to edit a series of carefully peer-reviewed articles from the ISSME in Hamar, Norway. This became ACT's second ISSME special issue.

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Later, as editor, I invited a similar issue from Ed McClellan who hosted ISSME in New Orleans, Louisiana, which ran concurrently with that year's MayDay colloquium. Finally, Gareth Dylan Smith and Clare Hall approached me to include a special issue with articles based on an ISSME that took place in the UK. In addition to these four special sociology issues, ACT has produced numerous articles and issues situated firmly within the sociology of music education, including articles by most of the authors in Section II of the Handbook.

Given this historical context, as well as my own work in critical social theory and music education,[1] I was deeply interested in reading and reviewing the Handbook. I feel a significant degree of respect and appreciation to the editors and authors for their insight and labor in a vitally important field of inquiry. I interpret the invitation to review Section II of the Handbook as both an opportunity and a *responsibility* to reflect critically on the content and try to amplify or extend it—not to be coy or otherwise detached from the material, but to address it directly and thoroughly—adding my voice, experience, and scholarship to the conversation as an individual case potentially reflecting aspects of the social groups to which I belong. Some might find this type of straight-forward critique personally offensive, but it is not intended as such. Just like in a musical ensemble, collective efforts can benefit from criticism. Finally, it can be difficult for those of us who enter academia after years of teaching music in the schools to catch up on all the reading and research; the field is simply too wide to take it all in. We need each other's voices and perspectives (especially the divergent ones), which, to me, is the principal benefit of a scholarly project such as the Handbook.

Conflict Theory

Isaiah Berlin, in a classic biography (1939/2013), argued that Karl Marx is "the true father … of modern sociology" (147). Whether or not one agrees with Berlin's assessment (the father designation is often reserved for Auguste Comte), it would be untenable to minimize the Marxian roots of the field or the central role of *conflict theory*, which centers class struggle. This important scholarly tradition is often juxtaposed with *functionalism*—theoretical and empirical inquiry focused on understanding how society works or functions, each part playing a necessary role in the larger structure. As a more descriptive approach, functionalism shares a commonality with philosophy as conceptualized by Marx in his famous critique: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is

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to *change* it" (Marx 1845/2002, no. 11, emphasis in the original). From a social constructivist perspective, it is predictable that Marxian conflict theory would resonate with academics like myself who have formative backgrounds in poverty. Socioeconomic injustice, experienced first-hand, can prompt one to try and do something about it—even to make it one's life mission. To be sure, description and interpretation can be invaluable in working toward a more just society, but taken by itself without transformative or revolutionary intent, it runs the risk of supporting an unequal and hierarchical status quo.

The hypothesis that we each gravitate toward sociological or other scholarly approaches reflecting our social standing appears to have empirical support. In their survey of research on "the psychological roots of inequality and social class," American social psychologists, Paul Piff, Michael Kraus, and Dacher Keltner (2018), noted two trends (among others). First, the affluent are more likely than the poor to believe that hierarchical and meritocratic social structures are fair and just (82). Such beliefs could incline socioeconomically privileged groups to adopt more functionalist sociological stances in efforts (whether conscious or not) to preserve privilege and rationalize social stratification. Second, middle and upper classes have comparatively reduced levels of compassion and are less interested in social justice initiatives (87). While it is common to analyze oppression and conflict through functionalist perspectives and methodologies, to truly feel and enact any sort of allyship with the poor and working classes requires a more critical stance toward the exploitive, colonizing, planet-destroying role of neoliberal capitalism as it is practiced and embraced by nations, corporations, and consumers throughout the world.

In the introduction to the Handbook, the editors set a functionalist stage for Section II:

> Section II includes Chapters 11–22, describing a wide variety of ways in which perspectives of capital, class, status, and social reproduction constitute fruitful points of departure as well as focus areas for discussing the social functions and consequences of music education. Indirectly, these descriptions and discussions also indicate how music education may contribute to the larger, public conversation of society. Moreover, by doing so they also point to the social responsibility of music education as well as music educators in these matters. (Wright et al. 2021, 8)

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"Social functions and consequences," of course, could include a variety of detrimental consequences and socially reproductive functions in music education that warrant careful criticism. There *is* room here for conflict. But, overall, this reads as more descriptive than critical. To me, having personally experienced negative aspects of "Capital, Class, Status, and Social Reproduction," this paragraph feels too positive—a delightful excursion perhaps, with "fruitful points of departure," engaging "descriptions," and polite "public conversation." Why is there no mention of capital's most deleterious qualities: oppression, suppression, poverty, exploitation, planetary destruction, and so forth? To say the least, this framing does not appear to honor Marx as a founder let alone "the true father" of modern sociology.

Capital

In everyday usage, capital is understood as an economic construct, but for Marx it was sociological, constituted within and by human interaction. In his introduction to *Capital* (1867/2018), Marx explained, "it is the ultimate aim of this work to reveal the law of motion of modern society" (cited in Schmidt 2017). Thus, as motion, capital is conceptualized more as a social process than an economic object. This may sound familiar to music education sociologists, given that it parallels formative efforts within our scholarly sub-field to verify the social nature of music as "musicking" (e.g., Small 1998, Elliott 1995). In this sense, *capital is something people do*. Historical sociologist Mathieu Hikaru Desan (2013) put it this way: "For Marx, capital is doubly social in that it entails in the first instance a social relation of exploitation and in the second instance the totality of social relations that reproduce this fundamental relation's conditions of possibility" (322). Marx did write about capital in terms of material currency and commodities (just as critical sociologists in music education still sometimes write about music in terms of artifacts), but it was all necessarily situated within and constituted by a sociality of domination and inequality.

As I argued recently in an article for a special social theory issue of *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (Bates 2021), this enactive, performative framing can apply as well to Bourdieu's theories of capital. In fact, Bourdieu (1986) wrote about cultural capital as a power or force wielded by dominant groups to maintain privilege. Socioeconomic classes, as Bourdieu (1984) noted, are differentiated by a diversity of cultural values and practices. For instance, even though their tastes appear to have become more diverse, the affluent continue to be more likely than

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the poor to appreciate Western classical music (Veenstra 2015). In an egalitarian world without social classes, cultural distinctions such as this might be understood simply as reflecting a rich tapestry of cultural interests and traditions. However, within capitalist rationalities, cultural distinctions are misinterpreted as causative in determining and maintaining one's place in the socioeconomic hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993): the rich are thought to be rich primarily because of their superior culture, and the poor are thought to be poor due to a so-called "culture of poverty" (Gorski 2011). It is through this *misrecognition* that socioeconomically dominant groups rationalize inequality and exploitation—forms of violence that are both material and symbolic. Thus, something as potentially innocuous as an affinity for Western classical music continues as a suppressive and repressive force when "well-meaning" music teachers share (impose) their "refined" cultural values with (upon) often-unwilling students, while also giving special encouragement and attention to students with backgrounds homologous to their own.

In the Handbook, cultural capital and other forms of symbolic capital are conceptualized primarily as resources that can be leveraged for comparative advantage in competitive social fields. For example, in Chapter 18, Pamela Burnard and Garth Stahl (2021) write: "Theorising capital through a Bourdieusian approach involves thinking of it as a convertible resource generated, accumulated and exchanged within schooling systems, home contexts, and related social fields" (259). They consider a wide variety of capitals (economic, professional, emotional, community building, career positioning, inspiration-forming, bestowed gift-giving, social, cultural, and symbolic) that resourceful individuals can use to their advantage. Also, in Chapter 12, Gwen Moore (2021) poses cultural capital as something that "can be acquired" (186), noting that the "dynamics of the field" wherein some have acquired superior quantities of cultural capital "provide undeniable advantage to some rather than others" (185).

At the beginning of a famous essay, Isaiah Berlin quoted the ancient Greek poet Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing" (Berlin 1953/2013, 3). I suggest that the fox is reflected in the theory that there are many types of capital, understood as sociocultural resources to be discovered, acquired, and leveraged within competitive social fields. An especially influential fox theory of symbolic capital appeared in *Race Ethnicity and Education*, in an article written by Tara Yosso (2005), a teacher educator and critical race theorist. She builds on Bourdieu's work to develop a theory of capital highlighting the diverse cultural wealth of groups historically marked as deficient. This is a

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powerful and relatively popular argument that corresponds with my own modest attempts, within the field of music education, to point out the cultural and musical wealth of people who live in poverty (Bates 2011, 2017, 2021). But because I also see the ongoing utility in Marxian and Bourdieuian critiques, I have *not* conceptualized the cultural wealth and advantages of marginalized or minoritized groups in terms of capital. While I promote a relativist view of culture, a flat view of capital poses capital (domination and exploitation) as an object and assumes its overall goodness. By flattening cultural capital, Yosso (2005) elides the class struggle in favor of a diversity or cultural identity approach. In this, however, she fully recognizes and acknowledges that her theoretical choice is a response to a common *misreading* of Bourdieu, in which his conceptualization of capital may be *misconstrued* as a deficit perspective:

> While Bourdieu's work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital *has been used* to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. *This interpretation* of Bourdieu exposes White, middle-class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of "culture" are judged in comparison to this "norm." (76, emphasis added)

In fact, as Yosso intimates, Bourdieu dug much deeper into social stratification to point out the arbitrariness of hierarchical valuations of culture—basically as a power play by elite groups to maintain their privilege. Derek Robbins (2015), a professor of international social theory, underscores how Bourdieu did, indeed, recognize the cultural wealth of subaltern groups, but "that the educational system denied the validity of what Bourdieu was later to call 'unconsecrated' culture and was, therefore, a conservative force institutionally in relation to other forms of culture and value transmission" (742). In this sense, Bourdieu's theory is more of a hedgehog theory; while capital manifests in various forms (social, cultural, economic), the "one big thing" of dominant groups is to appropriate cultural and other distinctions to rationalize and perpetuate capitalist exploitation—to make symbolic capital out of cultural diversity. And the "one big thing" for conflict theorists, then, is to highlight and confront the injustice, hegemony, and symbolic violence in these arbitrary, hierarchical judgements of taste. Class and education theorist Paul Gorski (2011) points out how and why deficit thinking needs to be countered on this deeper level:

> The function of deficit ideology [symbolic violence] … is to justify existing social conditions by identifying the problem of inequality as located within, rather than as pressing upon, disenfranchised communities so that efforts to redress

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> inequalities focus on "fixing" disenfranchised people rather than the conditions which disenfranchise them. (3–4)

Understood as more or less a singular social force, capital (whether cultural or economic) presses upon (oppresses) the poor, misrecognizing or misinterpreting human diversity as the cause of economic inequality, and thus empowering privileged or dominant groups in rationalizing inequality (i.e., inflicting symbolic violence).

Class and Status

The Handbook includes both class and status in the title for Section II. This reflects the distinction—made by Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, and others—between economic and sociocultural elements of stratification (see Scott 2007). Although it has become common now to clump status and class together as *socioeconomic*, the perception (whether it is accurate or not) that Marx's theory of capital is too economistic—not sociological enough—leads theorists to improve upon or oppose it with evidence of stratification based on purportedly more cultural or symbolic qualities and quantities. In this vein, John Scott (2007), a British sociologist, identifies four elite status groups that supersede basic economic groupings, and he outlines how they each apply to different forms of domination: *Lions* are represented in the "military apparatus," which uses coercion and violence; *foxes* control economic resources and include "entrepreneurs and financiers in the corporate sector"; *owls* are "lawyers, doctors, accountants, and other profession groups" who work with cultural and intellectual resources; and *bears* are the "bureaucratic officials and managers" in positions of institutional power and influence (28). Within this typology, the intellectuals and professionals who have produced the Handbook would fit within the category of owls (and, as the author of this review, I could be considered an aspiring owl). Even though their university appointments generally support a middle-class lifestyle, they constitute an elite group whose scholarship frames this specialized sub-field, determining what part of its history will be shared or emphasized, defining key terms and concepts, and choosing whose voices will be represented.

Of the fourteen authors in Section II of the Handbook, those who appear to be working in their country of origin include three academics from Norway, one from Ireland, two from Australia, and three from the UK. Also included are two authors originally from Australia and working in the UK, one from Brazil and working in Canada, and one from the UK also working in Canada. Three of these fourteen

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authors are also editors of the Handbook. Females are under-represented (five authors out of fourteen) and, even though the Handbook overall includes some racial diversity, Section II appears almost exclusively to reflect White voices. Socioeconomic class background is more difficult to ascertain with certainty. Only one author, Peter Dyndahl (2021), shares anything directly about his upbringing, which he aptly connects to his theoretical stance:

> In this context, I also feel the need to declare that I—as a long-time academic, albeit without an academic class and family background—have found Bourdieu's sociology far more conducive to my reflexivity of the social, cultural and historical processes of becoming a subject than Rancière's philosophy and Biesta's educational thinking. (178)

Overall, the authors included in the Handbook appear to represent a "convenience sample" of the editors' professional associates and friends. Dyndahl might not be the only one "without an academic class and family background," but given socioeconomic trends in attaining graduate degrees and the cultural capital required to win a position at an elite academic institution (particularly in music), there is at least a possibility that the authors come from economically privileged backgrounds, which would unavoidably impact their views—whether aspects of those views are explicit or implicit.

I will give just three examples for how authors background class struggle in Section II of the Handbook. First, the chapter by Patrick Schmidt (2021), which otherwise provides important insight into the inner workings and social complexity of the New World Symphony, minimizes the reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. He qualifies the framework for his research as follows:

> It is not possible to talk critically, meaning in a thoughtful and sociologically responsive way, about Western classical music today without conceiving and conceding to its colonialist history and influence. While such critiques have become almost *de rigueur* in music education, my aim is not to once again obviate the limitations of the genre—for instance, classism—and all the sociological entanglement it has generated. (235)

Critique, according to Schmidt, should be "thoughtful" and "sociologically responsive," suggesting a discourse that is polite and constructive. Anti-colonialism is situated as merely fashionable ("*de rigueur*") and class analysis as too obvious. This latter contention is advanced despite evidence that class is often overlooked or is taken for granted in music education scholarship (Bates 2019). One could also argue that unabated colonization and increasing levels of global inequality warrant a preponderance of critical attention. Schmidt's aim, however, appears to be more

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descriptive and perhaps distanced: "to use this particular social space to highlight how social theory can provide multiple and helpful ways to look at/examine a facet of social reality" (235). In addition, the thoughtfulness, complexity, and nuance that Schmidt deploys in downplaying socioeconomic class relies upon a degree of conceptual and semantic ambiguity. For example, he introduces the concept of "ontological gerrymandering" to explore how, despite perceptions of elite status and cultural hegemony, the symphony orchestra can be a place of complexity and change: "The term was suggested by Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) 30 years ago to highlight the ways in which social problems or ideas can achieve distinct or modified meaning, even in the face of significantly unchanged realities" (232). I understand well enough what gerrymandering is, living in a metropolitan area strategically split just this year among the state's four congressional districts by a Republican-dominated legislature intent on diluting the Democratic vote. It is difficult, however, to see how this applies in Schmidt's definition of ontological gerrymandering. Nor does the subsequent sentence help much:

> At a time where social interaction and social spaces suffer daily intervention through highly pervasive social media, sociological work, and social theory are essential in combating the distortion and cooptation of critical ways of knowing and thinking and the consequent entrenchment and ossification of personal and institutional positions" (232).

In Schmidt's subsequent paragraph, it sounds as if ontological gerrymandering might be basically a process of spinning the facts to suit a biased political agenda:

> Arts education and arts environments have also been at the receiving end of an ontological gerrymandering that aims to place social ills, not as a result of institutional or governmental economic policy or education and cultural disinvestment, but rather as consequence of misguided ontological priorities such as community empowerment and welfare, cultural plurality, and arts mediated identity politics (232–33).

I ended up reading through Schmidt's introduction over and over to try and understand how he was using the concept of ontological gerrymandering. Frustrated, and beginning to doubt my own cognitive acumen, I cast about for a clearer definition. Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) introduced the term to problematize the approach of social constructivists who make "problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends" (216). Anthony Puddephatt (2021), reflecting on the

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scholarship of his mentor, Dorothy Pawluch, recently gave an even more succinct definition: "to treat certain actors' claims as socially constructed, while at the same time making realist claims about social conditions" (1). Like the practice of political gerrymandering, boundaries are drawn for conceptual advantage or necessity, to buttress one's otherwise socially constructivist or culturally relativist arguments or perceptions. In fact, Puddephatt (2021) argues that a degree of temporary ontological gerrymandering can be useful in critical thinking and action. As insightful as Schmidt's analysis is, it does not appear to be directly about this type of ontological gerrymandering, although one could argue that Schmidt (2021) himself avoids ontological gerrymandering by promoting a nuanced and complex view of Western classical music (via the New World Symphony). In fact, Puddephatt (2021) noted that this type of "strong constructivism" allows one to avoid entanglements like class struggle; it can serve "as a way to avoid taking sides and getting caught up in political agendas" (2).

Another appeal to complexity and nuance is deployed by Øivind Varkøy in Chapter 17: "Neoliberalism as Political Rationality" (2021). He generalizes previous treatments of neoliberalism in music education as "harsh," with the concept itself misused as "an all-purpose denunciatory category" (247). He offers a "more profound understanding of neoliberalism; as a political rationality" (247). Varkøy describes three definitions for neoliberalism. The Marxist definition poses neoliberalism as "an attack on the class compromise after the Second World War" (248); it is a definition, in other words, focused on capitalism, class struggle, and economics. A related definition, "in dialogue with a Marxist perspective," conceptualizes neoliberalism more as a "political philosophy or ideology" and is "common among people in mainstream history and political science" (248). Varkøy favors a third definition, situated "within a Foucauldian tradition" where neoliberalism is understood "to be a kind of *political rationality*" (248, original emphasis). This formulation, he suggests, transcends binary politics, implicating both the left and the right in perpetuating neoliberalism. It is important to note the hierarchy in this tripartite presentation, beginning with an economistic Marxist position focused on capitalism and class, progressing through a "common" political extension of Marx (e.g., Bourdieu), and finally transcending ostensibly crude, clumsy, or outmoded Marxism in favor of Foucault.

From the list of references, it looks like Varkøy's chapter was completed around 2015. In the more than five years since then, social theorists have produced critical Marxian analyses of neoliberalism that one could argue are sufficiently up-

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to-date, profound, and sophisticated. Quinn Slobodian (2018), for instance, offers a book-length genealogy of neoliberal ideology and policy that extends back to the early 1900s and before. He conceptualizes neoliberalism as follows:

> The neoliberal project focused on designing institutions—not to liberate markets but to encase them, to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior, and to reorder the world after empire as a space of competing states… (loc. 92–96).

By this definition, neoliberalism is a global capitalist social structure, but it is also necessarily a pervasive, dominant way of thinking and being. Wendy Brown (2015) builds from the tradition of critical theory when she argues that neoliberalism is "a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality, [which] transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic" (loc. 57–61). Varkøy's definition is idealist in a sense, attempting to excise the material reality underlying neoliberal structures, and backgrounding the capital in neoliberalism. This allows him to downplay class struggle, arguing for a more refined and inclusive definition of neoliberalism that is, at the same time, averse to the Marxian critique of capital—the theory that arguably still holds the most promise for the socioeconomically oppressed.

Finally, in Chapter 21, Geir Johansen (2021b) attempts to stake new scholarly ground, finding it "surprising that studies explicitly addressing hidden curriculum are scarce within the scholarship of music education" (301). Among curricula "hidden in plain sight," Johansen identifies the perennial focus on Western classical music as well as parallel ideas of musical supremacy even when more popular genres are adopted in higher music education. Curricula "yet to be discovered" include a focus on entrepreneurship, reflecting neoliberalism and right-wing ideologies and, quoting Mouffe, the "ability of one class to articulate the interest of other social groups to its own" (305–306). Next, curricula "revealed to some, hidden for others" centers on sexual discrimination and LGBTQ rights. Under "final considerations," Johansen deprioritizes class by accommodating the idea that neoliberal aspects of the hidden curriculum, like entrepreneurship, might serve a useful purpose. At the same time, he asserts that racism and sexual harassment in the hidden curriculum must be exposed and eradicated. Although Johansen identifies neoliberal ideologies under "curricula yet to be discovered," in his final section he downplays the harmful impacts of social class bias and capitalist hegemony, posing class as less injurious than other oppressions. In addition, the idea that some aspects

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are "yet to be discovered" overlooks previous research on the topic. For instance, he fails to mention Tom Regelski's (2012) critical discussion of the hidden curriculum. In fact, reviewing his list of references, it is curious that Johansen avoids citing anything from *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, not even the special sociology issues, one of which included his own article where he mentions the hidden curriculum. Plus, he could have drawn from a myriad of ACT articles on cultural hegemony, neoliberalism, and marketization.

The Game

Coming from an impoverished family of eleven (mom, dad, and nine children), we each usually received just one relatively modest present under the tree at Christmas. One year my sister's gift was *Risk*, a boardgame that begins with each player strategically placing an equal number of plastic tokens, representing armies, on a map of the world. Battles are fought by rolling dice against an opponent; winners earn more tokens and losers remove tokens. It can be a deeply demoralizing game, as one player gradually beats others back from country to country until their armies are annihilated. My sister usually won, or at least was on the verge of winning. Inevitably, an angry player would reach out and fold the board, effectively ending the game. The social field of capitalist production, with its attendant rationalities (rationalizations), can be conceptualized as such a game, with various rules and strategies, advantages and disadvantages, winners and losers. The major obstacle to simply "folding the board," however, is that capitalism is the only game around. It is virtually impossible to end it. And this game is so pervasive that we might fail even to recognize it for its game qualities. It is The Game—a material, sociological, and psychological totality. Anyone whose habitus is less homologous to The Game is at a potentially lifelong disadvantage. For instance, the more compassionate and cooperative dispositions of people living in poverty can become deficits, given that The Game requires more competitive inclinations (see Piff, Kraus, and Keltner 2018). This, of course, is compounded when material conditions are unequal from the start.

Within The Game are many subfields, smaller games that support and extend it. In her chapter in the Handbook, Gwen Moore (2021) gives an eloquent framing for a game that is played within university music departments:

> The concept of "field" can be applied to the micro-context of a music department within which different knowledge fields compete for space on the curriculum and

Bates, Vincent C. 2023. Capital, class, status, and social reproduction in music education: A critical review. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 22 (1): 54–82.
https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.1.54

> to the macro-context of higher education policy. The field embodies the socio-historical institutional context, settings, dispositions, and values that students and lecturers must negotiate. However, the ways in which the field is negotiated and experienced can depend on the students' musical background or habitus, and prior music education or cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, the dynamics of the fields provide undeniable advantage to some rather than others. In describing how this manifests, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 98) use the analogy of a game where some are equipped with "trump cards" and a natural "feel for the game." (Moore 2021, 185)

Multiple authors in Section II of the Handbook highlight how the music education game privileges students who have an affinity for or prior experience with Western classical music (Carroll 2021, Fautley 2021, Johansen 2021b, Philpott and Spruce 2021). Gareth Dylan Smith (2021) aptly ties this cultural hegemony conceptually to capitalist production or marketization. Otherwise, as intimated in the previously mentioned introduction, the analyses throughout Section II of the Handbook center on cultural diversity and identity (important considerations) more than exploitation and conflict. In the fictional *Squid Game*, a popular television series on Netflix, indebted and impoverished South Koreans are enticed into signing up for a series of high-stakes children's games, which take place in a secret island arena. It is not until they begin the first game, *Red Light, Green Light*, that they learn how high the stakes really are. As an enormous doll at the opposite end of the arena turns away from the players and sings a short song, the players see how far they can run toward her. When she turns around, all runners must freeze. If the doll detects movement from any of the participants, they are immediately shot to death! The show's creator, Hwang Dong-hyuk, intended the show as a straight-forward critique of capitalism.

> We are fighting for our lives in very unequal circumstances…. It's not profound! It's very simple! I do believe that the overall global economic order is unequal and that around 90% of the people believe that it's unfair. During the pandemic, poorer countries can't get their people vaccinated. They're contracting viruses on the streets and even dying. So I did try to convey a message about modern capitalism. As I said, it's not profound. (Jeffries 2021)

Winners, situated within winning institutions and geographical regions (e.g., the US, Canada, the UK, Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand—countries represented in this section of the Handbook), may be less likely to fully appreciate the destructive power and injustice of The Game (capitalism), focusing instead on the fields reflected in their own everyday struggles and professional surroundings, and taking the larger, global context for granted. One could, of course, quibble over

Bates, Vincent C. 2023. Capital, class, status, and social reproduction in music education: A critical review. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 22 (1): 54–82.
https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.1.54

aspects of *Red Light, Green Light*. Does the game's design privilege some people over others? What strategies (e.g., hiding behind someone else) could players use to their advantage? Do advantages in other contexts (e.g., superior stature) become disadvantages is this one? How can individuals leverage their unique personal traits to their advantage? How quickly can players adapt to the nuances and complexities in this uniquely challenging game? But *Red Light, Green Light* is just one aspect of a much bigger dilemma! One would have to take the *Squid Game* for granted to see any efficacy in adjudicating the fairness of *Red Light, Green Light*. Furthermore, because the greater problem is harmful in the extreme, one might even wonder at the motives of anyone who focuses primarily on *Red Light, Green Light*.

Applying this as a metaphor to the field of music education, the global capitalist totality literally is a game of life or death for much of the world, particularly in light of pandemics and climate change. Within this totality, music education is just one game among thousands. Of course, its stakes do not directly compare to those in *Red Light, Green Light* by type or degree, but to focus on the social fields within music and music education, outside of the capitalist totality, at best seems ineffectual for confronting the highest stakes and deepest impacts of capital, class, status, and social reproduction. At worst, to ignore or minimize The Game brings up the possibility of being in on or otherwise benefitting from it.

Conceptualized by Bourdieu as a dominating social force or power, the function of symbolic capital/violence is to reinforce, reproduce, and rationalize inequality, domination, and exploitation. It is a key strategy in The Game. One objection to Bourdieu's theories running throughout Section II of the Handbook is that they are too deterministic and pessimistic. For example, Gwen Moore (2021) writes, "Indeed, Bourdieu's concepts have been widely criticised as being too structured and deterministic" (186). And this is what Patrick Schmidt (2021) has to say, bringing Edward Said into the critique as well: "Both Said and Bourdieu showed us the impact of discursive and symbolic constructions in normalizing power relations and establishing Status and the Other. And while understanding these delineated boarders is instructive, they can also feel restrictive" (235). Admittedly, Bourdieu's theory *is* both deterministic and pessimistic. It is a theory about how the capitalist structure—The Game—persists despite the damage it inflicts on human bodies (not to mention the planet). More specifically, Bourdieu focused much of his attention on understanding why academic achievement gaps persist. In the US, for example, socioeconomic achievement gaps have increased slightly since the

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https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.1.54

1960s, despite the federal government instituting direct financial aid to low-income schools. There is also evidence that socioeconomic achievement gaps have increased worldwide over the same period (Chmielewski 2019). The education structure—reflecting the capitalist totality (neoliberalism)—presses upon students, significantly impeding their individual and collective agency. To posit this order of things as anything *but* deterministic and pessimistic is to gloss over the symbolic capital/violence that effectively subordinates impoverished and working classes.

I further suggest that this disavowal of Bourdieu's theory of habitus is itself a strategy in The Game. In their chapter, Chris Philpott and Gary Spruce (2021) problematize structure and agency, exploring the possibilities for helping music teachers become critical pedagogues. However, they ignore the possibility of differential levels of agency based on one's social class. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that privileged classes tend to place high value on freedom and individuality, while impoverished and working classes are more likely to attribute success or failure to outside forces or chance (Piff, Kraus, and Keltner 2018). The happy, choice-oriented middle-class mindset reflects the ease with which dominant groups, with their homologous habitus, play The Game. For impoverished and working classes, on the other hand, social structures really are more restrictive and deterministic. The insistence that we all can simply change our habitus, acquire more or different cultural capital, or just have a more positive mental outlook seems self-serving. The words of C. Wright Mills (1956/2000) may be relevant:

> People with advantages are loath to believe that they just happen to be people with advantages. They come readily to define themselves as inherently worthy of what they possess; they come to believe themselves "naturally" elite; and, in fact, to imagine their possessions and their privileges as natural extensions of their own elite selves. In this sense, the idea of the elite as composed of men and women having a finer moral character is an ideology of the elite as a privileged ruling stratum, and this is true whether the ideology is elite-made or made up for it by others. (14)

Social Reproduction

Finally, I turn to the concept of social reproduction and the key role of symbolic violence. In his introduction to Section II of the Handbook, Geir Johansen (2021a) promises that symbolic violence will be addressed throughout:

> Offering critical description of the societal and cultural conditions of their local environments as well as connecting them with social macro perspectives, the authors discuss the ways in which this happens [the ways education shapes society] by social reproduction and symbolic violence" (168).

However, it is not until the final chapter in Section II, by Ruth Wright (2021), that symbolic violence is mentioned. She applies a precise definition for the concept:

> Education … plays a key role … in performing an act Bourdieu (2000) described as symbolic violence whereby *the marginalized and excluded accept their right to be so, through misrecognition of the basis of their inequality*—believing the myth of meritocracy over the reality of class and cultural-based advantage and discrimination. (319, emphasis added)

In this instance, Wright locates symbolic violence in the ignorance of the "marginalized and excluded" rather than in the elitism and stubborn obliviousness of socioeconomically advantaged groups—those who benefit most from the myth of meritocracy. In other words, symbolic violence is understood as a type of false consciousness; impoverished and working classes are deceived into believing that their subordinate positionalities are somehow warranted. Bourdieu's definition is broader; he and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990) discussed symbolic violence as "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (5). Rather than a cognitive deficit or disorder, symbolic violence is posed as a sociocultural force emanating from privilege and pressing upon (oppressing) "the marginalized and excluded."

Nonetheless, Wright's definition suits her scholarly purposes as she describes the life trajectory of Plan B (Ben Drew), a white, male, lower middle-class, London suburbanite who successfully leveraged his good looks, masculinity, youth, and musical talents to become a famous hip-hop artist in the UK. Now, Drew visits lower-income schools to make a difference in the lives of students, inspiring them to overcome their poor and supposedly abusive backgrounds. This appears to be primarily a deficit perspective, not focused on changing the overall social structure, but on redeeming individuals from what are perceived as deficient backgrounds. Wright (2021) suggests: "A coherent internal subjectivity developed through and with music by a young person/young people in tandem with a sympathetic educator might lead to a co-constructed, shared, sense of exteriority, and constraint" (321). She borrows the concepts of exteriority and constraint from Icelandic sociologist Thoroddur Bjarnason (2009), who explains: "Exteriority refers to experiencing the social world as an objective, predictable reality, while constraint refers to the extent to which one experiences a personal commitment to the demands and expectations of society" (135). Thus, the sociological concepts of exteriority and constraint appear to support a functionalist view of society. Considering the neoliberal capitalist rationalities that prevail in most societies, developing a better

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sense of exteriority and constraint sounds a lot like the following from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1993): "The logic of adjustment of dispositions to position allows us to understand how the dominated can exhibit more *submission* (and less resistance and subversion) than those who see them through the eyes, i.e., the habitus, of the dominant or the dominated dominant, that is, less than the intellectuals would envision" (81). In this case, it is a "life-hack" that allows Drew to adjust to, fully accept, and become a winner within the capitalist totality. Efforts to replicate one person's social mobility and bring large numbers of "marginalized and excluded" students into the mainstream can enact a form of symbolic violence based on problematic assumptions (e.g., the superiority of the sociocultural mainstream, the easy transmutability of habitus, the availability of higher paying jobs).

The recommendation by Philpott and Spruce (2021) that music teachers become critical pedagogues is a tall order. As I argued in the previously mentioned PMER article (Bates 2021), habitus runs so deep within all classes that it appears virtually impervious to significant change. The more affluent classes are socially constructed to be classist, to rationalize inequality and inflict symbolic violence, and to see the enduring nature of habitus as a deficit. Anti-classist initiatives, without the voices and direct involvement of impoverished and working classes, are prone to reproduce global capitalist rationalities and structures. Dyndahl (2021) explicates how this might work when music educators include popular music in the curriculum:

> Even where music educators and researchers with the best intentions attempt to install alternative discourses in order to counteract established power structures, they may contribute to the fact that they (we) consolidate their (our) subjectivity as *good guys* while they (we) also favour themselves (ourselves) as heterodox challengers to a power bastion that they (we) are ready to take over in the next round (181).

Things get turned around because music educators, researchers, and policy makers have not fully plumbed the depths of the capitalist totality, including their own classism. Best intentions in addressing other axes of oppression can end up veiling the neoliberal capitalist totality.

Tom Regelski (2009) suggests that music educators adopt the Hippocratic Oath (first, do no harm), working to improve "musical good health" by focusing on "the actual improvements to a student's musical life that are to be advanced as a result of the teacher's professional 'services'" (20). Theories of social reproduction and symbolic violence highlight potentially harmful aspects of music education,

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especially in the sense of music curricula and pedagogies enacted through schooling. In regions where social inequality is the greatest, it seems, the full force of school music is aimed at rationalizing inequality (i.e., inflicting symbolic violence) through competition and cultural elitism. For instance, participation in a symphony orchestra, the embodiment of elite musical culture, is still promoted as a pathway out of poverty, and successful competitors are held up as proof of the initiative's effectiveness. Yet, in the process of producing a severely limited number of elite musicians, the majority often have little to show for their participation. In schools where competitive, elite, Eurocentric music ensembles are all that is offered, it might be better use of time for students living in poverty to choose more relevant and empowering courses.

Of all the authors in Section II of the Handbook, Gareth Dylan Smith (2021) stands out for his direct critique of neoliberal capitalist rationalities and structures. He levels his critique at nefarious entities within the government:

> It is safe to assert that the English government knows full well the power of an enabled, confident, creative populace, and intends as fully as possible to suppress the people, lest a more socially just society should emerge in which capital of various kinds is more evenly distributed and educational opportunities are available more fairly and equitably" (221).

This criticism, albeit pointed, is ameliorated somewhat by the assumption that economic and symbolic capitals are resources that can and should be distributed evenly. Economic resources can and must be distributed more evenly to attain a more egalitarian society. But, as I have argued, the idea that cultural capital should be distributed evenly is itself symbolically violent, underscoring the desirability and efficacy of arbitrary valuations of culture. Smith also shies away from economic solutions to poverty, taking issue with Warrick Harniess's economic approach to neoliberal punk scholarship: "education has 'gone punk'; young people have instilled in them at school that they should be pragmatically proactive in terms of how they approach their education as a stepping stone to employment" (cited in Smith 2021, 227).

In my view, school music may be able to address poverty in at least three ways. First, music educators can highlight class struggle through song lyrics, song-writing, and critical discussions of classed aspects of music and musicking. Second, music educators can empower students for lifelong musicking, which may serve an important therapeutic purpose, especially as societies continue the current trajectory of increased inequality and planetary destruction. Third, a select few students

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will find employment as musicians and music teachers. But because this third possibility applies only to a limited number of students, music curricula and pedagogies should not be constructed around vocational aspirations. School music can become a distraction from more promising routes to social mobility and can even inflict symbolic violence, reproducing inequality through competition and cultural elitism. I am not recommending that students skip music class for vocational training; school music can still address poverty in the first and second ways mentioned above. Plus, even though helping students compete for higher paying jobs seems like the most reasonable strategy to overcoming poverty, the number of higher paying jobs is limited. It is still necessary to empower impoverished and working classes to confront the capitalist totality, to continue the fight for shared ownership, higher wages, and better working conditions.

Even though Smith (2021) offers a solid critique of capital, he overlooks symbolic violence by aiming his critique at biological (rather than cultural) classism.

> Success and failure in this paradigm are attributed to inborn genetic, biological qualities in individuals and families, despite being overtly nurtured through a fundamentally unequal education system. This cruel myth of biological responsibility is compounded by and conflated with individual accountability in the fierce late capitalist neoliberal age, where an individual's efforts are squarely held to blame for the deliberately reproduced inequities and injustices of a corrupt and brutally hierarchized system. (222)

Given preoccupations with sociocultural identity and political correctness, most social justice discourses have moved beyond biological classism, finding deficits in the socially constructed habitus instead. Yes, there still are plenty of people who think that impoverished people are genetically inferior, but those narratives (particularly when class intersects with race) have become outmoded, especially in academia. As I argued a couple of years ago (Bates 2019), cultural classism (and racism) can go unnoticed when the focus is on easily debunked views of biological classism (and racism). Not fully critiquing cultural capital as an oppressive force undermines Smith's otherwise powerful critique of neoliberal capitalism and his critical insights into how music education is situated within The Game.

Final Thoughts

Maybe I have erred in this essay by not pairing criticism with extended discussions of the more promising ideas within this section of the Handbook. I read through my complimentary copy of the Handbook with interest, placing stars and

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exclamation marks generously, assigning accolades to key points throughout. The authors really do add important insight into the complexities and nuances of capital, class, status, and social reproduction. Athena Lill's (2021) chapter is especially perceptive in its account of how tweens' ever-changing social imaginaries can create a sense of community across nations and continents. Given that young people are increasingly embracing socialist alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, it certainly could be fruitful to investigate this element of social imaginaries and how it relates to musical genres and practices. For instance, in what ways might various forms of music influence political beliefs and biases? Much of Section II has similarly hopeful potential. Geir Johansen (2021a) frames Section II of the Handbook in positive terms, highlighting how music education can shape society just as much as can any other facet of education. Philpott and Spruce (2021) underscore the promise of critical thinking in overcoming oppressions and bias: "We shall argue that in order to be agentic, music teachers need to be critical pedagogues and that this critical pedagogy should encompass critical engagement with the discourses of education, music education and musicology if they are to raise the possibility of 'good agency'" (288). And Wright (2021) elucidates the positive impacts that critical professional music educators can have in the lives of individual students. Nothing in my critique should be taken as a personal attack on the authors, or as challenging the overall value of their scholarship.

Still, my primary contention, coming from a background of poverty, is that class is about unequal access to material resources and about the social processes used to reinforce, rationalize, and reproduce material inequality. To address socioeconomic inequality in and through music education calls for an emphasis on capital, understood sociologically as exploitation. In this, of course, Marxian sociology and conflict theory have much to offer. Social reproduction theorist Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) writes:

> As soon as we, following Marx, restore labor as the source of value under capitalism and as the expression of the very social life of humanity, we restore to the 'economic' process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component: living human beings capable of following orders—as well as of flouting them (70).

The narrative whereby sociology progresses from crude Marxist economism to complex and nuanced analyses of culture and identity is ill-founded at best. At worst, it is a strategy to veil or minimize the capitalist totality and class struggle. Gwen Moore (2021), at the end of her chapter, asks a thought-provoking question: "How can we attend to ideologies and values of the dominant musical habitus and

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cultural capital in the field of higher education in music, in order to break the social reproduction cycle?" (193). I am suggesting that "the dominant musical habitus and cultural capital," rather than either constituting or causing socioeconomic inequality, serves as its rationalization or justification. Nonetheless, changing the ideologies (false consciousness) of the affluent (to the extent that it is even possible) could go a long way to sway public opinion in favor of redistributive policies—some sort of socialist or otherwise more democratic alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Many impoverished and working-class people already see through the arbitrariness of cultural capital. It is readily apparent in their critical anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism. Musically, the genres most appreciated by the less affluent are often explicitly opposed to "highbrow" culture. Their alleged level of false consciousness is not the problem. Rather, it is the disconnect between school music and habitus, musical or otherwise. It is the music programs that prioritize competition over collaboration. It is classist music teachers, scholars, and policy makers who accept meritocratic dogmas as common sense. Again, to fix all of that is a tall order indeed, but it involves fixing the rich, not the poor.

About the Author

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Note

[1] My own scholarly endeavors fit squarely within the sociology of music education. In my dissertation, I attempted to give a sociological/constructivist analysis of scholarship by, at the time, leading theorists in music education—philosophers as well as empirical researchers (Bates 2005). Also, in two articles, I explored the role of human needs theory in music education (Bates 2009), based on my first ISSME presentation, and an ethic of care, based on my first MayDay colloquium presentation (Bates 2004). After that, through autoethnography, I started looking critically at my own background at the intersection of poverty, rurality, and whiteness as it relates to music education and what the ramifications might be for similar populations (Bates 2011). This led to a series of articles on social class, rurality, and intersectionality (Bates 2012, 2013, 2019). I also sought to develop a sociology of music curriculum integration (Bates 2016). Living through the impacts of late capitalism and climate change, I have more recently been considering ecomusicology and new materialism—endeavoring, along with co-authors Dan Shevock and Anita Prest, to extend the sociology of music education to include concerns about land and more-than-human environments (Shevock and Bates 2019; Bates, Shevock, and Prest 2020). Last year, ostensibly as a recognized social theorist in music education, I was invited to contribute an article on cultural capital for a special issue of the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* reflecting on common dimensions of philosophy and social theory (Bates 2021). There is more that I could mention to contextualize my positionality, but I have already transgressed generally accepted norms for self-citation. To say the least, this review of the Handbook that I now write is not my first venture into the sociology of music education. Rather, I have breathed the dust of this field throughout my entire academic career.

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