

Orchestrating Communities:
An Investigation of *El Sistema* and its Global Influences

by

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Abstract

El Sistema is a community music program for underprivileged youth that mainly uses classical music and the orchestral medium as a tool for social development. The program's success as a music program has influenced music educators around the world to adopt its philosophies and methodologies in their respective communities. In this thesis, I use an interdisciplinary approach, including empirical sociological studies and critical pedagogy, to examine the social and cultural implications of using music, particularly classical music, as a vehicle for social development within Venezuela. I also investigate ways in which other communities have adopted the philosophies and methodologies of *El Sistema*. In particular, the Leading Note Foundation (LNF), a program in Ottawa, Ontario, will be my case study for examining *El Sistema*'s global influences by engaging in the ways in which LNF has adapted *El Sistema* to reflect the needs of Ottawa.

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Introduction

On the weekend of March 29, 2012, The Leading Note Foundation (LNF) held the final installment of the International Society for Music Education's (ISME) three-part symposium on the topic of *El Sistema*. It brought international members from various *El Sistema*-inspired initiatives to discuss the prospects of a Canada-wide *El Sistema* organization.

The four-day event started with Carleton University's presentation of an honorary doctorate for Dr. José Abreu, the founder of *El Sistema*. A quartet of LNF students played several pieces from their repertoire with the celebrated Símon Bolívar String Quartet, who came to Ottawa for this occasion. Founders of *El Sistema* projects around the world attended this symposium, including Richard Hallam, the founder of Sistema Scotland; Dantes Rameau, the Executive director of the Atlanta Music program; Jonathon Govias, an *El Sistema USA* Fellow and public speaker in Music Education; and Tina Fedeski and Margaret Tobolowska, the founders of LNF. The purpose of this symposium was to facilitate an educational dialogue about *El Sistema*, including a clarification of *El Sistema's* mandate, multiple ways in which music can benefit children's lives, how LNF has developed their program over the years, and new directions for the expansion of *El Sistema* in Canada. On the evening of the symposium, the LNF and the Símon Bolívar String Quartet premiered a work composed by a young composer named Nicholas Piper from Ottawa, who was commissioned to write a work for this specific event.

The event encapsulated the international enthusiasm for *El Sistema's* innovative philosophies in music education. The performances symbolized the

musical dialogue and acknowledgements between both organizations, while giving opportunities to local contemporary composers and young performers. The recognition of Abreu's success with the honorary doctorate exemplifies the international dialogue occurring between *El Sistema* and the international music community. This occasion created a space for the sharing of practical and critical knowledge, collaborations between local and international communities, and new avenues for community formation through the orchestral medium. *El Sistema* and Dr. José Antonio Abreu were the clear inspirations for this symposium, establishing a national network of community orchestras in Venezuela and convincing people around the world of the power of music to be used as an effective tool for community development.

However, these three days also highlighted some concerns I will address in my research on these organizations. For instance, the music being played remained in the European art tradition. *El Sistema* and LNF use the term "classical music" as a colloquial term to represent the European art music tradition and repertoire. Therefore, I will use the term "classical music" as such for the purpose of this thesis. During the symposium, the importance of representing cultural diversity and/or looking towards musical forms besides the classical tradition was discussed. However, there was little discussion of actually applying it to the programs. This issue during the symposium resembles one main issue I will be focusing on in this thesis. But firstly, I would like to present my personal interests and influences that have guided me to this subject and affected my research interests.

I first heard of *El Sistema* from a colleague of mine during my undergraduate music studies at the University of Western Ontario. As a “classical” musician, I struggled with the societal relevance of my degree, and with classical music’s impact on society in general. As a result, my interest was piqued after hearing about a program that used classical music as a tool for positive social change amongst impoverished Venezuelan youth.

My immediate interest in this program led me to questions such as: from a music educational perspective, what are the innovative pedagogical and methodological approaches being used to accomplish their goals of social equality? How is this program using classical music to bring about positive social change? What are the specific social issues addressed by *El Sistema* in each community? In a country rarely associated with the classical music tradition, what are the cultural ramifications of establishing a classical music program for children all over Venezuela? Is there something unique about music/classical music that can be used advantageously for social development?

My research will address these questions about *El Sistema* using literature and concepts from multiple disciplines and discourse. More importantly, I will also be discussing issues about the international attention and effect this program has had on music education. Apart from the critical issues I will be addressing regarding the Venezuelan *El Sistema* program, I will also be focusing on the adaptation of this program in other parts of the world.

The Leading Note Foundation—where I conducted my research—is an organization that started in Ottawa, Canada in 2007 with strong philosophical and

personal ties to *El Sistema*. Although there is no official structural connection between the programs, LNF is clearly inspired by the *El Sistema* model and philosophy (leadingnotefoundation.org), and has been in contact with the *El Sistema* organization. I will be using LNF as a case study to observe how *El Sistema* can be applied in different cultural contexts. Both programs believe in social equality through music, yet the cultural context distinguishes the specific goals and infrastructure of each program. In the case of *El Sistema*, I will focus on how classical music can serve as a powerful tool for keeping at-risk youth away from violent street and gang culture. In contrast, LNF uses music to help immigrants integrate into Canadian society. This thesis will compare the philosophies and goals of *El Sistema* and LNF by discussing the many positive attributes of these programs as well as some of the ways in which these programs can benefit from critical engagement.

During my research, I had the opportunity to volunteer and work for LNF to improve my understanding of the organization. Because of LNF's flexibility and loose structure, it would have been difficult to truly understand the organization through formal documents, journalistic articles and interviews with members of the program. It was necessary for me to personally experience the organization. My experiences at LNF and the personal relationships that I formed there have undoubtedly affected my research and my views of the organization. My main intention in writing this thesis is to help LNF better serve its youth; I offer my critical engagement with this organization in a spirit of collegiality and deep respect.

The timing of my research was serendipitous. Music educators and musicians throughout Canada have recently started to initiate *El Sistema*-inspired projects that are similar to LNF, and a growing number of cultural workers are engaging in a dialogue about how the *El Sistema* model should be adopted in Canada. Through this discussion, new critical questions arise. What makes *El Sistema* so effective? What aspects of *El Sistema* are being adopted to fit the needs of each Canadian community? How close will the relationship be with *El Sistema*? Multiple music education organizations such as ISME (International Society of Music Education) have organized conferences and symposiums that have specifically addressed *El Sistema* as the topic of discussion. As a Master's student studying music and culture from a cultural theory perspective, I hope this document will uncover new perspectives on *El Sistema*, allowing for further critical dialogue between communities and an exploration of how music education can function as an agent for positive social change.

Methodology and Chapter Overview

My first chapter will provide a theoretical framework for my discussion of *El Sistema* and LNF. I will discuss the philosophies and theories behind influential figures in critical pedagogy, including some of their influences from early pragmatist and progressive educator John Dewey and Marxist-oriented thinkers in critical theory. Next, I will examine educational discourse, specifically multicultural education and music education. Lastly, I will provide an overview of musicologist Christopher Small's concept of "musicking," and some of Homi Bhabha's

contributions to post-colonial theory, his concepts of hybridity and “third space” specifically.

My second chapter will provide an in-depth look at *El Sistema*: how it functions, its guiding philosophies and its history. I will discuss some of the innovative approaches that *El Sistema* has used to address the social issues in Venezuela, such as the economic uncertainty it faces as a petroleum state, the country’s vast inequalities and poor public education system, and the widespread youth gang culture. Finally, using some theories discussed in the first chapter, I will critically examine the cultural implications of using classical music in the Venezuelan context by applying Christopher Small and Homi Bhabha’s theories to *El Sistema*.

My third chapter will focus on LNF, discussing its history, programming, philosophies and relationship to *El Sistema*. In this chapter, I examine the similarities and differences between *El Sistema* and LNF, focusing in particular on how LNF has adapted *El Sistema* philosophies to suit a Canadian context. To do so, I will compare sociological findings of the social issues present in Canada and the cultural differences that have affected the adaptation of *El Sistema* to Ottawa. I will also research the benefits of music on child development and the intended developmental goals LNF believes to be implicit in the process of music making. The main cultural difference I have discovered stems from Venezuelan national identity vis-à-vis the plurality of Canadian culture. This observation will lead me to use concepts from multiculturalism to suggest ways in which LNF can expand its program to strive for social equality through multicultural musical practices.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will provide a literature review of the important cultural and educational concepts that have guided the analysis of my research. Beginning with a discussion of American pragmatism and its relationship to education, I will provide a brief summary of critical pedagogy and its main influences from various cultural theories. Then, I will discuss several theories of music education and the ways in which critical pedagogy has affected music educational discourse. This will lead to a discussion of multicultural education and, more specifically, multicultural music education. I conclude this chapter by discussing the concept of “musicking” as put forth by Christopher Small and the concept of hybridity as postulated by Homi Bhabha.

The Early Years: Pragmatism

Pragmatism laid the foundation for critical thinking in progressive educational theory. It is a philosophical belief that holds that the way we shape reality and knowledge is based on our practical uses for them. Truth and values, according to pragmatists, are defined and shaped by personal experiences. Accordingly, morality is not fixed on any absolute truth or universal assumptions. Knowledge is relative. Any objective claim for truth is only based on one’s assumptions formulated by individual and cultural experiences. William James was a philosopher who published one of the first major works on pragmatism in the early 1900s, entitled *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907). James uses pragmatic logic, originally introduced by Charles Peirce in 1878,

to suggest that beliefs and values depend on their function to an individual. Defining values or beliefs as objective truths suppresses other experiences that may lead to different values and realities. Therefore, pragmatists such as James and John Dewey advocated the importance of validating and discussing a plurality of values and beliefs. In many ways, this is the philosophical basis for democracy.

John Dewey, another influential pragmatist philosopher who was heavily influenced by James' writing, applied pragmatic logic to educational discourse. In his book, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey stresses the necessity of an educational model that benefits both the interest of the individual and the good of society. He argues that a person acting on his or her own interest and through individual strengths is far more efficient than a person who is forced to do a task for which he or she is either under- or over-qualified. He uses the inefficiencies of slave labour to illustrate his point:

Slave labor was ultimately wasteful even from the purely economic point of view – that there was not sufficient stimulus to direct the energies of slaves, and that there was consequent wastage. Moreover, since slaves were confined to certain prescribed callings, much talent must have remained unavailable to the community, and hence there was a dead loss. (Dewey, *Democracy and education* 308)

Dewey's philosophies on education sit between the traditional approach and progressive approach (Westbrook 279). Traditional education tends to promote rote learning, memorization and obedience to authoritative practices. For instance, William Torrey Harris, a traditional educator from the late 1800s, believed that allowing a child to question authority would lead to "empty agnosticism" and "excessive conceit of self" (Rosenkranz, Brackett, and Harris 271). Progressive education, on the other hand, emphasizes child-centered learning, where the lessons

are heavily based on a student's interests. Dewey agrees with many aspects of progressive education such as the belief that students are not empty vessels for objective knowledge consumption. Furthermore, like progressive educators, he emphasized the need to address students as individuals with their own past experiences and unique perspectives on the classroom. However, progressive educators such as G. Stanley Hall believed the natural impulses of the child should dictate the starting point of the classroom curriculum (Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* 276). Dewey critiques this notion by arguing that "interests in reality are but attitudes towards possible experiences; they are not achievements; their worth is in the leverage they afford, not in the accomplishment they represent." (*The Child and the Curriculum*, 30) In other words, it is important to listen to the students in order to understand their interests and strengths, but the students' interests should not dictate what the educators teach. The purpose of education is to develop a student for a healthy public and professional life. Thus, the maturity and experience of the teacher will still take precedence over the immediate desires and immature interests of a child in the classroom.

Another influential concept Dewey and progressive educational philosophers discussed was the understanding that schooling is a social process. Social ideals must be considered before establishing a concept of schooling –hence the title of his book, *Democracy and Education*. He firstly discusses the importance of formal education, saying that it is necessary to develop an environment devoted to learning. From this basic assumption, the school environment and socialization within schooling becomes an important educational tool. School becomes a

microcosm for the social structure of society by reproducing social relationships. Therefore, it is critical to engage in the social and political ideologies being perpetuated in the social structures of schooling. Under democratic ideals, Dewey believes that the school should promote an attitude that “gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (Dewey, *Democracy and Education* 99).

The inculcation of social ideals and ideologies is an integral (if often overlooked) part of all forms of education. Therefore, they must be critically engaged.

A New Way of Teaching: Critical Pedagogy

There are many similarities between Dewey’s philosophy on education and the assumptions that guide the discourse of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy began in the early 1970s as a radical movement, influenced by Marxism, and was developed by theorists who critiqued the inequalities implicit in many aspects of formal education. Ideology is a common term used in critical pedagogy and Marxist discourse. In its most basic definition, it is a system of beliefs and values based on certain assumptions or experiences (OED). Theorists such as Antonio Gramsci discuss how the dominant class often determines the ideology of a state. Giddens remarks, “shared ideas or beliefs,” or the common ideology of a state, “...serve to justify the interests of dominant groups” (*Sociology*, 1020). Gramsci used the term “hegemony” to refer to the expression of an ideology that perpetuates dominant

interests (Bates, *Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony*, 350). In Marxist discourse, this dominant interest refers to the interest of the bourgeois class to remain in political, social and economic control. In this view, the hierarchical structure of most classrooms within the public education system can be seen as hegemonic for they replicate and perpetuate the hierarchy of social life, training students to passively accept and assume their pre-ordained roles within the social order.

Critical pedagogy influenced education by providing an alternative perspective that draws on cultural and critical theory. Most influences, such as Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, came from the "Frankfurt School," which attempted "to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (Giroux 8). Generally, the Frankfurt school used this methodology to expose the underlying hegemonic social relations and political structures of society, especially the relationship between power and the production of knowledge. Michel Foucault, a critical theorist who wrote many influential texts on this topic in the 70s, argued: "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault and Gordon 93). This self-reflexive insight into the relationship between power, knowledge and the production of knowledge illuminates the contradictions of critical theory. Firstly, this statement regards everyone, including academics and intellectuals such as Foucault himself, within the inescapable relation between power and knowledge. For instance, in critical theory discourse, the rejection of ideology is in itself an ideology replete with certain biases and power dynamics. Universities, schools,

governments, and churches, cannot escape fundamental values and underlying assumptions that perpetuate the institutions themselves.

Louis Althusser described the ways in which various states have historically maintained hegemony through his concept of "state apparatuses." He differentiated between two types of state oppression: repressive state apparatuses (RSA) and ideological state apparatuses (ISA) (Althusser 142). ISAs refer to institutions that reconstruct the assumptions that allow a dominant class to stay in power through unquestioning ideology. Examples of ISAs include religion, schools, family structure, the legal structure, and media. In contrast, RSAs are state institutions that primarily use violence and physical repression as a form of control such as the army, the police, and the government. According to Althusser, the ISA's purpose is to manipulate and control public and private life in order to perpetuate dominant structures. In this view, human agency is an illusion. These public and private institutions create a complacent public consciousness.

According to Giroux, Althusser's concept of the ISA is flawed because it fails to acknowledge the dialectical nature of social life and the power of individual and group agency (Giroux 82). Gouldner also argues that the inevitable dissemination of ideologies through schooling can be used positively, rather than negatively. While Althusser mentioned the educational system as an example of an ISA, he did not further specify how it and other ISAs function. However, theorists Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles undertook this task in the late 1970s.

In their landmark work *Schooling in Capitalist America: Education Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*, Bowles and Gintis critique the misconception that

public education is the “great equalizer” of American social inequality. They question the assumption that if every child attends the same standardized school system, each of them will have the same opportunity to succeed. Bowles and Gintis critique the public education system as an ISA. The social structure in the schools “replicates the hierarchical divisions of labor” in society (Bowles & Gintis 131). In essence, Bowles and Gintis expand Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus within the framework of the public school system.

One concept exemplary of critical pedagogy, similar to ISAs, but more specific to education, is the “hidden curriculum.” In 1979, Michael Apple defined the hidden curriculum as “the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of ends or goals” (Apple 84). Like many cultural theories, the hidden curriculum exposes underlying social structures that recreate hegemony. In this case, the concept of the hidden curriculum teaches an ulterior curriculum where students are taught to comply with the social norms of society. Later chapters will apply this concept of the hidden curriculum to *El Sistema* and LNF, discussing how each program exposes the “political socialization” by making explicit the social aspects implicit in the process of music-making. I will also explore other ways in which the hidden curriculum can be applied to these programs that are not expressed in their mandate, resulting in consequences that may or may not have been intended by the programs.

Henry Giroux’s book *Theory and Resistance in Education*, written in 2001, discusses the formation of critical pedagogy and its influences from critical and cultural theory. Giroux categorizes the various theories into two categories: traditional education

and radical pedagogy. He regards neither side of the debate as sufficient for a truly critical pedagogy (235). Traditional educators typically ignore the social and political relationships involved in the production of knowledge. Radical educators, according to Giroux, are often too radical and analyze any current educational practices as hegemonic. Giroux also critiques their theories as being impossibly idealistic, noting that many of their theories are difficult, if not impossible, to implement effectively in practice. For instance, some texts by radical theorists, such as Ivan Illich's book *Deschooling Society* published in 1971, have advocated for the complete elimination of institutionalized schooling. Despite the critiques of radical pedagogy, many radical pedagogues/theorists have provided insights into alternative approaches to education that recognize power relationships and problematic assumptions, and attempt to empower students to think critically and fight against hegemonic power relationships.

Paulo Freire was an important contributor to critical pedagogy who influenced many educational policies throughout Latin America and the rest of the world. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, originally written in 1968, is often seen as one of the first texts on critical pedagogy. This book describes the perpetuation of societal oppression in a general sense, through improper educational models. More specifically, Freire understood literacy as an important tool for emancipation, but only when learned congruently with a training of self-reflexivity, a concept Freire called "conscientization" (*Education for Critical Consciousness* 137). Conscientization is a process of engaging in the issues surrounding one's local environment and social life. It is the ability to reflect upon oneself, understand oppressive forces and recognize one's agency. This concept led to a large-scale movement to improve literacy rates in Latin America. Freire practiced a

specific methodology that taught literacy while raising awareness about local social issues. Freire critiques dominant education models for creating a curriculum that ignores social issues, creating complacency within communities. Freire calls this process dehumanization, as oppressors make the oppressed rationalize their dehumanized state, through a “false consciousness.” Ira Shor describes false consciousness as a force that “conditions people to police themselves by internalizing the ideas of the ruling elite. The great power of dominated thought is that people deny the means of their own liberation while taking responsibility for acting in ways which reproduce their powerlessness” (55). Freire and Shor’s concept of false consciousness is similar to Antonio Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony, for to them, false consciousness describes the state of mind of people who live under hegemonic rule.

Freire also recognizes the need for a dialogue among oppressed communities, starting with empowering students *and* teachers as creators of knowledge. This dialogue, according to Freire, must consist of a non-hierarchical social relationship between the student and teacher, an understanding that the student has agency over his or her own learning, and conscientization. Freire also points out that “teachers learn in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 31). The student/teacher dualism becomes a dialogical dialectic wherein knowledge is not an object to be consumed but rather is something that is acquired through a continual process of interactions between agents within an educational environment. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss the ways by which these concepts inform the pedagogical methods of *El Sistema* and LNF.

Critical pedagogy lays a solid framework for understanding the complexity of the underlying social processes and hegemonic structure of schooling in the Americas. In addition, critical pedagogy and critical theory examine the relationships between knowledge production and various power structures. Although many critiques of critical pedagogy exist – such as the widespread bias towards Marxist values among critical pedagogy theorists– concepts from this discourse have illuminated new ways to look at education. Therefore, critical pedagogy provides us with a theoretical framework to discuss some underlying agendas of traditional education models. For instance, educational theorists have used concepts from critical pedagogy to expose the widespread focus on European traditions and subjects in many public education settings rather than using an approach that acknowledges a multiplicity of cultures. This new field of education is known as “multicultural education.”

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is defined by educational theorist James Banks as “a field of study...whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class and cultural groups” (*Handbook for Research on Multicultural Education* xi). Multiculturalism in Canada became a prominent issue during the country’s debate over the nation’s so-called “founding cultures”: French and English. Many people argued that the discussion focused too heavily on French and English, ignoring the multitude of other cultures and languages in Canada (*An Introduction to Government and Politics*, 56). Brian Mulroney created the

Multiculturalism Act in 1988, which was passed to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of Canadian culture (*The Canadian Multiculturalism Act*).

James Banks, in his book *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*, written in 1995 was the first to formulate the most complete definition of the way we see multicultural education today. He believed that a truly multicultural education would mean a radical transformation of all social and curricular aspects of schooling. Banks lists five dimensions of education that require structural and social changes: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure.

Content integration refers to the course content using examples and key concepts from a variety of cultures. Music is a perfect example of a subject in school where teachers often use European instruments, study European classical composers, and prioritize the European art music tradition. Multicultural content integration would implement more culturally diverse examples and models of music playing.

Knowledge construction refers to way knowledge is constructed. Similar to critical thinking, knowledge construction encourages students to reflect on the history of knowledge formation, and the possible reasons behind the production of knowledge. To use another musical example, students are often taught that European music theory and notation is a universal system of notating music. However, Western notation is only one among many highly developed music notational systems from diverse cultural locations. Knowledge construction would question the reasons behind why this specific notation system is so widely used and taken for granted.

Equity Pedagogy questions the way classes are structured, and whether the pedagogy of the classroom favours certain forms of cultural thinking over others. Cultures that value collectivism over individualism may have stronger incentives to do well in co-operative settings, rather than working alone. Some students may learn more effectively from a hands-on approach rather than reading from a text-book. This dimension not only refers to cultural differences, but also to individual differences among students, such as learning styles, and strengths and weaknesses among students. Modifying the pedagogy to be more inclusive to individual strengths will benefit the entire classroom and foster different learning styles.

Prejudice reduction is a responsibility of all teachers. Regardless of the pedagogy, course content, or curriculum, teachers must be sensitive to the prejudices occurring among the social life of students, and do their best to ensure that they are not tolerated in the classroom. Prejudices can also arise in teachers, consciously or unconsciously. For example, Nancy Frazier discusses the sexism that is disseminated by teachers due to perpetual stereotypes and social norms (178).

Empowering school culture and social structure involves attempting to change the social relationships and tensions between different social groups inside and outside the classroom. This can be brought to students' attention in a formal classroom setting, and through the general attitudes of the teachers and students. Author bell hooks discusses some of the ways in which racial and gender stereotypes are re-enforced in classroom settings. In her 1994 book *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks uses Freire's concepts of dialogical learning and exposes the racism and sexism that still exists in the classroom, despite attempts for educational reform to remedy such issues. One example

that hooks discusses is the desegregation of American public schools. Desegregation theoretically allowed African Americans and European Americans to socialize, but the deep-seated racism amongst both groups still existed in the classroom and social life.

Thanks to the efforts of cultural workers and academics such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire and James Banks, professional organizations including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and The International Society of Music Education (ISME), have come to recognize the importance of cultural diversity in the curriculum. Multicultural education not only acknowledges cultural diversity, but also attempts to redress the social inequalities that are a part of the colonial legacy. In Chapter Three, I will use concepts and philosophies drawn from multicultural education to open discussion about the structure of the Leading Note Foundation, given the culturally diverse community of students.

Music Education

Music education is an interdisciplinary field with varying perspectives, modes of analysis, and pedagogical methods. One assumption that is common to most music educators is the idea that the study of music is essential for the full development of children. This idea has been investigated and supported in diverse pedagogical methods such as Dalcroze, Orff, Kodály, and Suzuki; by empirical analyses on the effects of music in children (Hallam); and by cultural analysis of the sociological implications of music-making (Small, *Music, Society, Education*). Music education encompasses not only music curriculum in schools, but also pedagogical methods outside of school. The

interdisciplinary nature of the literature on music education renders it impossible to provide an entire literature review on the discourse as a whole. Instead, I will present a few key concepts in music education, starting from the influential pedagogical practices of Dalcroze, Kodály, and Suzuki.

The most influential music pedagogical models have arguably been the methods of Èmile Jaques-Dalcroze, Zoltán Kodály, and Shi'ichi Suzuki (Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States* 376). Dalcroze, a Swiss composer and music educator, introduced a concept known as “eurythmics” to describe a pedagogical model that emphasized learning through body movement and awareness. He also emphasized the importance of solfège and improvisation, a musical element often underdeveloped in many contemporary European-derived models of music pedagogy. Inspired by this system, Kodály likewise emphasized solfège, but also used traditional folksongs to teach musical elements. As a Hungarian, his pedagogical practice emphasized his native folk music in order to continue a Hungarian tradition and values. His philosophy also emphasized singing and listening as pillars for all other musical learning (Dobszay, “The Kodály Method and Its Musical Basis” 25). The Suzuki method, one of the most commonly used pedagogies, especially for string instruments, is perhaps the pedagogical method most similar to *El Sistema*. Suzuki emphasizes the importance of the environment in which a student learns. His pedagogy was guided by a philosophy that concerned the full development of a student beyond musical skill (Suzuki, *The Suzuki Concept* 3). He advocated learning by rote, group learning and frequent performance opportunities for the purpose of instilling positive social values and musical and artistic appreciation. His

pedagogy is still practiced today around the world, and is among the most important forces within music instruction.

Music educational discourse has focused extensively on music advocacy. Music educators within the North America public school system continually have had to justify their importance in public education (Mark, *Music Education* 44). Many education administrators see music and other arts as having little importance in the school curriculum. Budget restrictions have often placed priorities on other subjects, fragmenting music education and weakening musical standards. In many educational settings in Canada, funding cuts have resulted in a lack of qualified music teachers and severe time constraints when it comes to public music education (Coalition for Music Education in Canada 6). Many public schools lack music programs entirely.

Empirical sociological studies have researched the positive effects of music on intelligence and social and personal development, often for the purpose of musical advocacy. There is evidence to suggest that music lessons help students develop higher overall IQs (Schellenberg). Other studies have shown improvements in multiple intelligences including literacy and language acquisition (Patel & Iverson; Tallal & Gaab), mathematics (Whitehead), visual-spatial reasoning, creativity (Kalmar; Hamann, Bourassa, & Aderman) and social and personal development. Studies have also shown a higher level of academic attainment among students involved in music (Lillemyr; Whitwell). Other research, focusing on children of low economic status, or from urban low-income neighbourhoods, has shown music's positive effects on confidence and self-esteem (Marshall; Costa-Giomi). Many of these sociological studies have given music educators a better understanding of the effects of music on students. However, one

element these studies often fail to recognize is the multiplicity of musical forms that exist.

Traditionally, music schools in North America have focused predominantly on music drawn from, or heavily indebted to, the European classical tradition. However, the increasing cultural diversity in North American has encouraged music educators to realize their neglect of other cultures and rethink music education accordingly (Keene, *A History of Music Education...*, 388). A growing number of them are questioning the cultural values inherent in the music that they teach, the ramifications of neglecting other musical cultures, as well as ways in which other cultures can provide a deeper understanding of musical elements and cultural diversity.

Many progressive music educators reject the problematic notion that music is a “universal language” (Elliot, “Key Concepts in Multicultural Music Education” 13). All cultures may have musical traditions, but they are markedly different. All cultures speak, but in different languages coded with different meanings, intricacies and cultural references that must be learned and experienced. These cultural aspects encoded in language and music can often divide people as much as they unite them as evidenced by the role that music and language play in the formation and performance of national identities.

Reflection on the cultural differences between various forms of musics has pushed towards a more multicultural music education. Multicultural music education questions our received notions of music and the educational models that perpetuate them.

David Elliot writes:

What values are projected by a musical culture that insists that students play what is written; listen with “immaculate perception”; de-emphasize a music’s context

of use and production; and follow the leader? At the very least, North American music education seems to sanction a hierarchical and, paradoxically, a rather undemocratic view of society. (Ibid, 13)

Here, Elliot does not simply critique the cultural inequalities of the Eurocentric music education model, but criticizes the unquestioning use of the European tradition more-or-less exclusively. He argues that music education must be responsible for reflecting good societal values, including cultural diversity.

Music, as a cultural form, provides unique opportunities for educators to teach students about cultural diversity. An assortment of music educators and cultural theorists has proposed various ways of doing this (Morton; Baxter; Abril; Volk). The Ontario curriculum for the arts has drastically changed within the past decade, moving away from a Eurocentric model to a more culturally diverse and well-rounded educational curriculum. To compare, the Ontario curriculum in 1998 expressly emphasized the necessity of teaching the main European musical eras (Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic) (OAC 1998); in contrast, the revised Ontario Arts Curriculum published in 2009 removed the emphasis on European classical music and replaced it with a general understanding of musical elements through music from multiple cultures (OAC 2009). This positive step towards cultural diversity in the Ontario curriculum shows the positive effects that music educational discourse has made on implementing multicultural music education policies in public schools.

The diversity of musical traditions around the world poses new pedagogical challenges. What cultures do we include in and exclude from the curriculum? How do we avoid essentializing and exoticizing musical forms in a multicultural model if a teacher is not from that culture? What is the relationship between music and culture? To

understand these questions, I would like to turn to musicologist Christopher Small. His concept of “musicking” is particularly useful in understanding music as a social and cultural process.

Musicking and Hybridity

Christopher Small’s concept of “musicking” redefines music “not primarily a thing or a collection of things, but an activity in which we engage” (*Music of the Common Tongue* 50). Traditional models of musicology have tended to treat music as an object, extracting meaning from the scores, prioritizing the composer’s intentions. In this view, any cultural understanding of musical works supplements the understanding and meaning of the music. The term “musicking,” transforms “music”, a noun, into “musicking,” a verb. This new perspective leads to an analytical approach in which the object of study becomes the experiences of a social process, rather than an object to be dissected outside of performance and listening practices. The listener, performer, and composer thus impose their individual meanings and interpretations on a work. Small understands these multiple perspectives as equally important to the meaning of the music as the composer’s intentions. Through this form of musicological analysis, the composer’s authority is diminished, and meaning is constructed through the social act of musicking. Small was one of many musicologists and theorists who shifted the musical subject from an autonomous musical object to a cultural analysis of an event/set of events. The composer’s score and intentions are still a part of musicking. However, the experience of the performer(s) and listener(s) are by definition part of musicking, and therefore should be a part of the musicological study. This also implies that playing a

piece of music in one social setting (e.g. professionals playing in a concert hall) can carry an entirely different set of meanings than the same piece being played in another context (e.g. children playing in a community centre).

Small highlights the politicized relationships not only between the sounds, but also between the people involved in the musicking experience (Ibid, 56). He critiques the hierarchical structure and symbolic authoritarianism of a traditional classical concert. He describes how performances of classical music are organized hierarchically: the conductor controls the orchestra, holding the highest authority over the outcome of the performance, second to the composer; the concertmaster, consistently a violinist, symbolizes the hierarchical European tradition that string players represent the pinnacle of Western musical achievement. The social barrier between the musicians and audience members glorifies the musicians as untouchable. In essence, Small frames the European art tradition as the embodiment of a highly stratified social order. He perpetuates the common bias that classical music is necessarily an authoritarian musical practice, by critiquing the social rituals of the classical music performance as a microcosm of industrial practices (*Musicking* 36). However, as Small himself highlights: “who one is, is based on relationships; who one is is how one relates, to oneself, to other people, to the natural and even to the supernatural world, and musicking is concerned with the exploration, the affirmation and the celebration of relationships” (*Music of the Common Tongue* 56). From this quote and his definition of musicking, we learn that one’s identity, and the identity of a musical form, is based on individual interpretations of the social event. Therefore, any form of musicking cannot be reduced to one ideology or cultural identity, especially when talking about an entire cultural tradition. The intensions

of the musical form can change as the context of musicking evolves through time. Roland Barthes' essay written in 1967 entitled the "Death of the Author" argues that the high value placed on a work's original intention only limits the potential interpretation and therefore significance of a work. This influential essay deconstructed the importance of a work based on its past, and gave precedence to the significance of a work exclusive of its original context and intention. In the context of musicking, not only is the work reheard, but the work is also recreated. This recreation, according to Small, carries its own significance each time it occurs. Similarly, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Third Space presents an opportunity to better understand this idea of reinterpreting cultural forms, and how the emancipation of a fixed identity can be beneficial in post-colonial discourse.

The discourse of post-colonial theory attempts to reconcile the global ramifications of colonialism. Using a post-structuralist approach, Bhabha deconstructs the binaries used to discuss colonial relationships such as black/white, oppressed/oppressors, colonizers/colonized. His central idea of cultural hybridity has influenced post-colonial discourse by raising questions about the fixity of cultural identity. I would like to discuss the idea of hybridity in more detail and to explain the ways I will be applying it to *El Sistema* and LNF.

The term "hybridity" carries with it a negative past, connoting "impurity" towards people of mixed race (King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization* 17). However, the re-appropriation of the term is an exemplary use of the concept itself. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is influenced by Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Orientalism is the idea that colonial representations of "the Other" (in the case of his book *Orientalism*, Asian

and Middle East cultures), are often exoticized and essentialized by imposing narratives based on colonial perceptions of these cultures. Bhabha further explores the representation of other cultures by examining the mixing of cultural forms. One way this mixing of cultures can occur is through mimicry, which is the act of an oppressed culture or individual imitating the social norms of the dominant culture. Mimicry, according to Franz Fanon's book *Black Skin/White Masks*, written in 1952, often perpetuates the idea that for the unempowered to gain social status, they must follow the social structure of the elite, and ignore and invalidate their own culture. However, Bhabha argues that this act of mimicry will unintentionally disrupt the determining social hierarchy and create a "third space" that deconstructs the dichotomous relationship between two cultural groups. When a member of a marginalized group reaches an acceptance from the dominant class, the line between both classes is inevitably blurred and potentially questioned between the cultural/social groups.

Mimicry is not the only way by which hybridity can be achieved. Hybridity describes any form of cultural mixing, including those associated with unbalanced power relationships. Hoogvelt describes hybridity as being "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (158). Bhabha recognizes that a cultural form is never fixed; its context is always changing. Therefore, the identity of and significance of cultures—including those associated with colonialism—can be redefined (Grandis 6). This concept questions our understanding of the fixity of identity, for cultural identity is no longer fixed as an objective historical reality. The past is recognized, but does not define cultural identities. Hybridity allows

for this third, interstitial space where its liminality allows for the negotiation of power. Bhabha states: “It is that Third Space... which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.” (55)

Bhabha’s concepts represent post-structuralist tendencies to reject assumptions, blur definitions and attempt to find new cultural spaces for the redefinition, and therefore, liberation of marginalized groups. To truly open up a dialogue, this also must be applied to cultures with a legacy of colonial rule. If a cultural form is used differently than it was in the past, the cultural significance of the cultural form changes. Essentializing cultural forms that stem from colonial cultures recreates colonial narratives. Perpetuating colonial narratives will also perpetuate the subject of which is colonized. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity defines a space where cultural forms can negotiate identities and the power relationships between them.

In the following chapters, I will merge the two concepts of hybridity and musicking to analyze the music and pedagogical approaches of *El Sistema* and LNF. I will first show how the modes of musicking taking place in these organizations differ from each other, as well as within the orchestral tradition. Extending the concept of the musical subject to the social process of musicking, these organizations can be seen to foster forms of cultural hybridity. This cultural hybridity can then help theorize a response to the concerns surrounding the use of classical music in the two programs.

Hopefully, this chapter has provided a sufficient understanding of the literature I will be using for analyzing and comparing these two organizations. I am drawing on the

concepts of critical pedagogy, music education, multicultural education, musicking, and hybridity theory because I believe they are the most applicable concepts in the vast field of contemporary cultural theory for analyzing these organizations. The next two chapters will examine *El Sistema* and LNF and the literature that surrounds them, applying the theoretical framework presented in this chapter to each organization and examining their similarities and differences.

Chapter 2: *El Sistema*

In the present chapter, the concepts discussed in Chapter One will be used to critically examine *El Sistema*. However, before doing so, I will describe the history, structure, and operations of *El Sistema*. I will then contextualize the program's relationships to some of the social issues Venezuela has faced, and the social issues that *El Sistema* has addressed. I will then apply some of the concepts outlined in the previous chapter to critically engage with this program. Specifically, I will use the concept of the "hidden curriculum" to show how *El Sistema* exposes it, and promotes positive social values. This discussion will inform a further critical analysis of the cultural issues surrounding the appropriation of the European musical tradition as a basis for *the El Sistema* program. Using Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and third space, I will examine the issue of cultural hegemony in relation to *El Sistema*, suggesting that the use of Western classical music is not necessarily oppressive. I will also discuss the progress that *El Sistema* has made in its attempt to establish accessible ensembles and orchestral centres in small communities all over Venezuela, and ways by which they highlight Venezuelan culture. But first, I will describe the organization and its history.

What is *El Sistema*?

A substantial body of literature exists on *El Sistema*, including various descriptions of its operations and main philosophies. Much of this literature has been authored by journalists or individuals and organizations involved with *El Sistema*. Therefore, the literature may be biased. This chapter will examine this literature in order to develop a critical discussion of *El Sistema's* philosophy and methods.

The official name for the program is La Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela (FESNOJIV). However, the program is colloquially referred to as *El Sistema*. It began as a small community orchestra in 1975, led by economist and musician Dr. José Antonio Abreu. Abreu received his PhD in economics in 1961 and studied piano, organ and harpsichord at the Caracas Musical Declamation Academy (YOA). His first community orchestra was comprised of only eleven students from the José Ángel Lamas music school. He started the National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela in Caracas in hopes to inspire children from impoverished communities to make music together while keeping them off the streets. By the time of their first concert in the spring of 1975, 83 students had already joined the orchestra. In 1979, the government of Venezuela initiated the Simón Bolívar Music Foundation to help fund and operate the National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela. Simón Bolívar is a name often used as a symbol for national independence against imperialism (Lynch 280), since he was a revolutionary 19th century political leader in Venezuela who became an iconic hero through the liberation of Venezuela from Spanish imperialism. Abreu's experience and knowledge of the political system, having served as Venezuela's Minister of Culture in 1983, allowed him to garner consistent support from multiple governmental bodies over the past 36 years. The foundation was able to support other orchestra initiatives in communities across Venezuela. In 1996, these orchestras became established as a national social service under the organization as it is known today, FESNOJIV. Its mandate is to implement a systematic and sustainable national network of orchestras to facilitate musical and social development among impoverished youth. Interestingly, this foundation operates under the Ministry of Health and Social

Development, not the Ministry of Culture, an indication of its priority as a social program rather than a music program.

Serving over 180 cities and communities in Venezuela alone, *El Sistema* programs have been implemented in every state in Venezuela. In 2008, the government of Venezuela committed to tripling the funding and number of students, in order to reach 500,000 students by 2015 (Cuesta 2). Although this program has existed for over 30 years, it has only begun to gain widespread international recognition within the past decade. *El Sistema* and Dr. Abreu have been awarded over fifty international awards since 2000, including Dr. Abreu's most recent honorary doctorate at Carleton University awarded on March 30, 2012.

In 2009, Dr. Abreu received the TEDPrize, which includes \$100,000 and one "wish," funded, and in collaboration with, TEDtalks. Abreu's wish was to create a global movement of community music programs to be implemented in communities around the world. *El Sistema USA*, a fellowship program at The New England Conservatory, has been established to train musicians and community leaders to start music programs in their own communities. *El Sistema USA* teaches the organizational, musical, financial and social aspects of starting a community music program. Many musicians have initiated similar programs internationally, following the general philosophy of *El Sistema*. This program is still expanding within Venezuela and influencing international communities. *El Sistema* has inspired music educators in over twenty-five countries to start similar programs, including the United States, Canada, most countries in Latin America, and the UK. Having discussed the history of this program and its positive influences in

Venezuela and the music education community, I will now examine the philosophies and structures of *El Sistema*.

Structure and Philosophy

Each *nucleo*—or centre—within *El Sistema* contains at least one professional orchestra, a youth orchestra and a children’s orchestra. Many of these centres have a variety of other ensembles such as choirs, chamber ensembles, and special interest orchestras. The *nucleos* vary from community to community. Indeed, each community runs autonomously, making their own decisions. The connection between each *nucleo* and *El Sistema* would be the similar structure and the sharing of resources, including allowing students to receive scholarships to attend another orchestra. The members of the local community make the decisions within each *nucleo*. Similar to Freire’s pedagogy for critical consciousness, *El Sistema* emphasizes the necessity of understanding the local community’s needs before establishing a *nucleo*. Abreu describes the flexibility of the organization, stating: “*El Sistema* is based on a new and flexible managing style adapted to the features of each community and region” (*José Abreu on Kids Transformed by Music*). This allows the teachers and students to shape each program based on social and cultural relevance, available resources and the size of the community. Despite the flexibility of each *nucleo*, Jonathon Govias, a music educator and representative of *El Sistema*, identifies five fundamental principles that define and guide its programs and operations: social change, ensembles, frequency, accessibility, and connectivity. I will use Govias’s five fundamental principles to organize my description of the structure and mandate of *El Sistema*.

Social Change

The primary objective is social transformation through the pursuit of musical excellence. One happens through the other, and neither is prioritized at the expense of the other” (Govias “The Five Fundamentals”)

El Sistema’s primary mandate for social change sums up the essence of the organization. The other four principles are based on this sole principle. Essentially, *El Sistema* fosters the development of musical communities as catalysts for positive social change. The *El Sistema* model is rooted in the belief that social transformation happens “through the pursuit of musical excellence” (fesnojiv.gov.ve). Students learn self-improvement skills such as dedication and commitment, while developing a sense of community and social belonging. The *El Sistema* philosophy sees both musical excellence and community development as interconnected and mutual. Traditional music programs often prioritize musical excellence by excluding students who lack ability, prior musical training, or the financial resources necessary to help run the program. *El Sistema*, prioritizes musical excellence by providing qualified music teachers, having students attend the program almost every day, while accepting every student regardless of ability, or financial situation. The title of a documentary on *El Sistema* sums this concept up well: *Tocar y Luchar* (“To Play and To Fight”). In this documentary, Abreu explains the meaning of this title: “For *El Sistema’s* musicians, ‘To Play and to Fight’ means undertaking music as a collective experience which also involves individual effort; it entails a relentless pursuit of excellence and, above all, it means persevering until dreams become reality” (Arvelo).

Ensembles

The focus of El Sistema is the orchestra or choral experience (Govias “The Five Fundamentals”).

Students are placed into ensembles from the first day they register. These ensembles foster positive social communities as students work together for the common goal of musical excellence. Students practice in the *nucleos* with the help of teachers and other peers, rather than at home in solitude. With a large number of students in each *nucleo*, peer-to-peer teaching is encouraged, empowering students while challenging the dichotomy of traditional student-teacher roles, as Freire stresses in his pedagogical model. Freire’s idea that teachers learn through the process of teaching is realized in the *El Sistema* model, giving students the opportunity to learn through teaching. Abreu stated:

Teaching is not something hierarchical. It’s a pleasure. We consider ourselves privileged to be a teacher, especially because in Venezuela we didn’t have the profession of music teacher in the past. There’s a sense of pride to achieve through your students. (“Thirty Minutes with Maestro Abreu”)

As many *El Sistema* and Leading Note collaborators have commonly stated, “if a student only knows how to play four notes, it is his/her responsibility to teach the student who only knows three” (Tobolowska 2012).

With this fundamental principle, students consistently experience music with other people. This association defines music, and the practicing of music, as a social, community activity, rather than a solitary individual task. This helps achieve the specific goal of community development and group identity. The importance of community development in the program is evidenced by Booth’s observation that more than one day of absence by a student without notice is actively pursued (Booth 5). Teachers will often go to a student’s home out of genuine concern for the student. In Gustavo Dudamel’s

words, “We start by making sure each child feels like an asset, because they don’t come in feeling that” (Booth 5).

Lastly, ensemble playing and co-learning uses fewer resources while developing higher musical achievement. This program asks for no registration or program fees from students, as they expect the students to give back to their community as soon as they have the ability to do so. The students are not merely made to feel *like* an asset, they *are* an asset.

Frequency

El Sistema ensembles meet multiple times every week over extended periods (“The Five Fundamentals”).

The frequency of the music lessons and rehearsals helps keep youth away from street violence and gang culture while promoting musical excellence. Students will spend up to four to six hours every day, five to six days a week in the program. More time spent in *El Sistema* communities allows for a larger influence on the student’s life, keeping them away from the violent culture on the streets. It creates deeper and longer lasting relationships between teachers, students and peers, and students experience a greater degree of personal growth, confidence, and musicianship.

The high frequency of lessons and ensembles also allows for a less stressful environment on a daily basis. Traditionally, weekly lessons force the teacher to sacrifice and/or neglect essential musicianship skills such as sight-reading, ear training, composition and improvisation. The student is then expected to practice at home by him-/herself for a week with little or no guidance before the next lesson, which often leads to poor practice habits. In *El Sistema*, students develop better practice techniques as teachers and peers are present to guide their practicing on a daily basis.

Accessibility

El Sistema programs are free, and are not selective in admission
 (“The Five Fundamentals”).

One of the most important preconditions for positive social change is creating an inclusive environment. Every student comes to the *El Sistema* program for free, and no audition is required. Moreover, musical literacy (i.e. prior musical training) is not required. *El Sistema* runs on a system of “meritocracy” in which students are evaluated on the basis of effort and commitment to the program: the program believes in “passion first, refinement second” (fesnojiv.gov.ve)

El Sistema is devoted to the idea that music is a human right. The United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, republished most recently in 1990 states: “Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community” (United Nations). Similarly, Abreu states: “Essentially this is a social system that fights poverty...a child’s physical poverty is overcome by the spiritual richness that music provides” (*José Abreu on Kids Transformed by Music*). Thus regardless of class, gender, race, or socioeconomic status, everyone has the right to music. A young Venezuelan student from the *El Sistema* program says: “There is no difference here between classes, nor white or black, if you have money or not. Simply, if you are talented, if you have the vocation and the will to be here you get in, you share with us and make music” (Arvelo). This spirit of inclusivity is further evidenced by the fact that *El Sistema* has recently initiated multiple ensembles targeted specifically at people with disabilities.

Connectivity

Every nucleo is linked at the urban, regional and national levels, forming a cohesive network of services and opportunities for students across the county.
 (“The Five Fundamentals”)

If one were to directly translate “*El Sistema*,” it would mean “The System.” However, because of the ominous connotations of the term in English, many have translated the name to “The Network.” This is a fitting moniker to describe an interconnected series of community orchestras striving to provide every child in Venezuela a chance to be a part of a musical community by learning an instrument or singing in an ensemble. This collaboration between orchestras all over Venezuela benefits all of the ensembles involved. It is precisely this connectivity that has led to the organization’s success, expanding *El Sistema* into a national service. It allows for each *nucleo* to share resources in order to ensure the success of every program.

As expected, major cities tend to have more advanced orchestras, more students and access to better resources. However, every state in Venezuela consists of at least one *nucleo*, each with a professional orchestra, a youth orchestra and a children’s orchestra. Choirs and other musical ensembles are often present at these locations as well. Smaller towns and villages develop their own ensembles, while acting as feeder schools for the larger orchestras. If a student shows a high level of dedication and commitment, he or she is awarded a scholarship to attend a *nucleo* in a larger city, where the musical caliber is higher and the material more challenging.

The flow of musical talent and knowledge is not unidirectional. As students acquire more musical knowledge, many return to their home communities, bringing their knowledge back to the *nucleo*. A number of them become teachers in the town, localizing leadership and inspiring younger students through the personal observation of others’ musical progress and achievement. This circular process ensures sustainability and develops higher levels of musicianship, even in smaller communities. In essence, this

networking of orchestras and *nucleos* across Venezuela is how “*El Sistema*” succeeds as a national network.

Govias describes a general infrastructure for the program rather than a specific curriculum within his five fundamental principles. He compares *El Sistema* to a health system, referring to “a multitude of service providers and agencies, rather than a specific medical procedure” (“Inside El Sistema” 52). *El Sistema* integrates the five fundamental principles identified by Govias in the overall structure and operations of their program and through the daily routines of the teachers, students and staff. *El Sistema’s* innovations are in its infrastructure and philosophies, not specific teaching approaches or methodology. This program is unique because of its emphasis on creating an environment that fosters community growth for at-risk youth. Journalists and authors often remark on *El Sistema’s* successful attempt to keep kids off the street, while fostering some of the best musicians and youth ensembles in the world of contemporary classical music. Simon Rattle deemed it “the most important thing happening in classical music” (Arvelo).

The environment in which teaching occurs shapes and fosters certain pedagogical approaches. For instance, the high frequency of lessons will influence the environment in which the classes are taught, affecting the pedagogical approach. More time in lessons creates a less stressful environment for both the student and teacher. The teacher will have more freedom to observe and aid how the student practices, learn more repertoire, and incorporate more elements of musical training, such as ear training, theory, sight-reading, and improvisation. As the methodology of *El Sistema* programs differs from community to community, it is difficult to define a consistent pedagogy. *El Sistema* has

collaborated with many prestigious musicians to teach, conduct, or lead masterclasses for the students. Therefore, one can assume that this range of teachers, musicians, and collaborators will incorporate a mixture of pedagogical influences within the structure of the *El Sistema* model.

The program's lack of a prescriptive curriculum is intentional, aligning with *El Sistema*'s values and intentions of localizing decisions to fit the needs of local environment. The operation of each *nucleo* will depend on factors such as the expertise of the teacher, the number and age of students, and the resources available. Many *nucleos* have initiated various innovative ensembles to fit the needs of the community due to the flexibility of the program's structure.

Special Ensembles

El Sistema has developed a variety of new ensembles and programs in response to particular needs and special interests among disadvantaged members of Venezuelan society. These initiatives include: a luthier program, the special education program, penitentiary symphony orchestras, and various folk ensembles. I will describe these ensembles in more detail, as I believe they encapsulate the ways by which *El Sistema* has adapted to localized needs and social issues.

Luthier Program

In 1982, Abreu hired a luthier to build instruments for the program and train other luthiers in Venezuela. Since then, the Academic Luthier Center has drastically expanded to accept the demands and needs of the growing *El Sistema* communities. Apart from the

ten different luthier academies in Venezuela, *El Sistema* has trained luthiers in Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru to build and repair orchestral and popular instruments, and to modify instruments for people with physical disabilities. The luthier program also helps reach youths with different interests looking to develop different skills by providing alternative opportunities from the instrument classes. In addition, the luthier program helps offset economic costs by building instruments locally.

The Special Education Program of FESNOJIV

Since 1995, various projects across Venezuela have used *El Sistema* to integrate people with disabilities into their respective *nucleos*. These programs adapt traditional ensembles and instruments to allow people with disabilities to be a part of the *El Sistema* community. People with and without disabilities can participate in any ensemble, creating integration rather than isolation. Ensembles include La Banda Ritmica (The Rhythm Band), el Coro Infantil (The Children's Choir), el Ensemble de Percusion (The Percussion Ensemble), el Ensemble de Campanas (The Bells Ensemble), el Cuarteto Lara Somos, (The Lara Somos Quartet) and el Coro de Manos Blancas (The White Hands Choir).

The White Hands Choir, which was founded by Professor Naibeth Garcia in 1999, consists of children with hearing impairments who choreograph sign language with white gloves, while other members of the group, often with visual impairment or other disabilities, sing. Twelve White Hands Choirs currently exist in Venezuela that include members with and without visual and oral impairments, integrating the entire community in these ensembles. These ensembles have developed since the late 1990s. Each of them

has been created under different directors and conductors with members coming from various *nucleos*. Over 700 children are currently involved in the Special Education Program.

Penitentiary Symphony Orchestras

The Penitentiary Symphony Orchestras Network was started in 2007, and it specifically targets prison inmates. These ensembles act as a social space for building positive relationships, social rehabilitation and societal reintegration through music. The program also uses music to promote interest in general education for prisoners. Studies have shown the rehabilitative benefits of educational programming and cultural activities like music making in prisons (Shihadeh and Nedd 229).

Folk Ensembles

The *Orquesta de Musica Popular del Estado Guarico*, the Harp Ensemble and the Simón Bolívar Latin Caribbean Orchestra are examples of *El Sistema* ensembles devoted to the development and recognition of the rich musical and cultural heritage of Venezuela and Latin America. Although these folk ensembles may not be the norm in the *El Sistema* program, these folk ensembles provide an indication of *El Sistema*'s desire to preserve and promote Latin American culture and identity. Like many of these ensembles, individual community members that see a need for special ensembles initiate these folk ensembles in response to specific needs and opportunities in their own communities.

A growing number of cultural workers and academics have voiced concerns over *El Sistema*'s focus on Eurocentric repertoire and the potential for the success of this program to suppress Venezuelan folk tradition. These folk ensembles signify *El Sistema*'s awareness of these concerns. In addition, much of the repertoire among *El Sistema* orchestras comes from Latin American composers such as Silvestre Revueltas, Antonio Estevez and Evencio Castellano (Programme, *Glenn Gould Foundation*).

Each of these *El Sistema* programs was created to integrate specific marginalized people into their communities through musical engagement. Such initiatives foster a positive community with musical enjoyment. These relatively new ensembles show ways *El Sistema* has critically engaged in local issues (special ensembles/penitentiary ensembles), cultural/national heritage (folk ensembles), and questions of financial sustainability while boosting local economies (Luthier program). I would now like to examine the social, political, and economic context surrounding the *El Sistema* program in Venezuela in greater detail.

Venezuelan Youth: A Look at the Issues

El Sistema keeps at-risk youth off the streets of Venezuela by creating a safe community, while developing social and musical skills. Abreu states: "Music is the number one prevention against prostitution, violence, bad habits, and everything degrading in the life of a child" (*José Abreu on Kids Transformed by Music*). In this section, I explore this idea in more depth, and describe how *El Sistema* attempts to prevent these social problems among Venezuelan youth.

A brief look at Venezuelan history, politics and economics can help explain the root of some of the social problems plaguing the nation. One of the largest factors contributing to social inequalities and violence is the nation's dependency on oil, and its direct impact on the economic, political, and cultural past of Venezuela. The economic dependency on a single natural resource, oil, leads to an unsustainable economy, often described as "fast capitalism" (Pred and Watts 19). The initial oil boom in Venezuela gave rise to economic prosperity and high expectations, with the promise of societal progress. As the oil industry became nationalized in the 1980s, oil prices started declining (Hellinger, *Venezuela*, 126). With less national income, austerity measures were enforced. The constant economic fluctuation due to the oil economy directly affected the Venezuelan people, and led to widespread mistrust of the government. This mistrust in the government manifested as massive protests and violence on the streets. In turn, the Venezuelan government resorted to physical violence to maintain order in the streets (Magaly 179). On top of this, Venezuela has experienced widespread and well-documented political and institutional corruption at all levels of authority, ranging from presidential leaders to military and police officers (Marquez 115).

This political and economic instability factors into Venezuela's high rate of poverty and criminal violence, especially among young men in organized gangs (Magaly 187). Poverty affects over a third of Venezuelan households, with approximately ten percent living in extreme poverty (Cuesta 3). The lack of decent public education has led to the increasing juvenilization of poverty in Venezuela, a process where children increasingly grow up in families living in poverty. R. Magaly Sanchez states, "The long-term segregation of people within neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty produces,

across generations, ways of life and household strategies that necessarily adapt to conditions of deprivation. They come to rely on violence as a basic tool for survival.”

(181) The aim of *El Sistema* is to provide an alternative for these at-risk Venezuelan youths.

Youth violence in Venezuela is widespread and is an increasing concern. This issue is especially prevalent in major cities such as Caracas, the capital. This is also where one of the biggest *El Sistema nucleos* exists. In 2003, the homicide rate in Caracas reached 119 reported homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, which is extremely high compared to other countries (Zubillaga 84). In a population of two million people, this means 2,400 homicides in Caracas alone in a single year. Most of these deaths involved young men from low-income neighbourhoods. Zubillaga conducted a sociological study on Venezuelan youth involved in gang culture. Through interviews with young Venezuelan men, she discusses four values contributing to their criminal behaviour and violence: preservation, affiliation, economic participation, and ascendance. Preservation refers to the widespread perception among impoverished young Venezuelans that violence is necessary for survival—a “kill-or-be-killed” mentality. Many of them do not trust the police force or legal institutions in the country. Affiliation describes the sense of social group identity many of these youths value. In many lower-class neighbourhoods, illegal activities such as theft, drug trafficking and prostitution are the perceived norms for material and economic gain. Thus, many Venezuelan young people see this form of economic gain as the most achievable way to survive. These youths often view gang culture as the only opportunity for social acceptance and economic gain.

Zubillaga's study, conducted in 2008, discusses the steps that need to be taken for the "reconversion" of youth to non-violent lifestyles. Her insights are worth quoting at length:

...from a cultural perspective, [the reconversion to non-violent lifestyles] would require the establishment of a platform of meaningful activities through which youth can build the recognition sought from identities different from the masculinity linked to power and domination. We refer here mainly to expressive activities such as music, dance, sport; that is, spaces to dramatize identities liable to be recognized and appreciated by their performance being linked to a particular sensibility – musical, for example (Zubillaga 95-96)

El Sistema provides the type of alternative that Zubillaga calls for, an empowering positive community for Venezuelan youth using expressive mediums to create an alternative identity, away from violence and criminal life.

Being a part of *El Sistema* means the students will spend the majority of their time in a safe environment. Moreover, *El Sistema* offers opportunities for students to develop positive social relationships and a sense of affiliation with the *El Sistema* community. A strong sense of belonging exists in every *nucleo*, as the participants work together for a common goal through their process of co-learning. In addition, learning music can provide economic opportunities for *El Sistema* participants; indeed, many *El Sistema* alumni have gone on to become professional musicians, or music teachers within *El Sistema*. The networking of orchestras in *El Sistema* allows students who work hard to move from small community orchestras to more advanced ensembles, creating opportunities for higher musical development and a feeling of accomplishment. *El Sistema* responds to—and fulfills—the social needs of many youth in Venezuelan neighbourhoods.

The Hidden Curriculum

It is clear that *El Sistema* has many positive benefits for Venezuelan society. I have discussed the immediate needs of the Venezuelan community, and how *El Sistema* has successfully changed the lives and culture of many Venezuelan youths. Using concepts drawn from critical pedagogy, I would now like to critically examine some of the cultural implications of *El Sistema*'s musical means for their social goals. I will focus on *El Sistema*'s "hidden curriculum."

Henry Giroux defines the concept of the hidden curriculum as "those *unstated* norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life" (Giroux 47). *El Sistema* exposes these unstated norms, values, and beliefs in their mandate, and expressly uses music as the tool for developing the hidden curriculum. Similar to Giroux's critiques of critical pedagogy, the concept of the hidden curriculum is loaded with pejorative connotations. By explicitly stating the transmission of these norms, values and beliefs as the organization's main goal, *El Sistema* is able to engage in the values being taught in the program, turning the content of the "hidden curriculum" into the *exposed* curriculum.

El Sistema is not new in insisting that music can be used to instill values and transferable skills in the student. Shin'ichi Suzuki once stated: "I want to make good citizens, noble human beings. If a child hears fine music from the day of his birth, and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart" (Shapiro 253). Suzuki's philosophy is concerned with the values and social development of the student, similar to the values within the hidden curriculum

and *El Sistema*. Clearly, *El Sistema*'s philosophy strongly aligns with the Suzuki system. The difference is that *El Sistema* specifically focuses on marginalized communities, and tries to address localized social issues within each community.

In general, the hidden curriculum is thought of as an ideological state apparatus that is used to disseminate hegemony from an early age. Hegemony is a concept that describes the attempt by a dominant class to continue a specific ideology for their own interest. *El Sistema* also attempts to spread a specific ideology, but the beliefs and values they disseminate are in the interest of the students and social equality. The "hidden curriculum" is no longer hidden, but the expressed intention of the program. However, upon closer examination, there may be another hidden curriculum in *El Sistema*, one that is rooted in the musical content being taught in the organization, one that may be hidden from the teachers, students and the organization itself. This hidden curriculum is the perpetuation of the classical music tradition and the hierarchies contained therein.

Abreu and many musicians in the program have spoken of the "universality" of music. Many commentators on music education, especially those working in multicultural music education, have discredited this narrative for its tendency to minimize the substantial differences that exist between different modes of music making. To assume that music is universal is to assume everyone can understand and appreciate all forms of music making. This is clearly not the case. Music from different societies contains specific social, political and cultural codes that are not universal.

Abreu is aware of the elitist history and legacy of classical music and acknowledges its history. He states: "Today we can say that art in Latin America is no

longer a monopoly of elites and that it has become a social right, a right for all the people” (*José Abreu on Kids Transformed by Music*). However, he fails to acknowledge the various musical forms other than classical music within Venezuelan culture. If he were to consider Latin American folk music and popular music as art, it would be hard to consider art as a monopoly of elites.

The lingering tendencies of cultural imperialism are implicit in his definition of art in Venezuela. Bullock refers to cultural imperialism as “the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture” (Bullock and O. Stallybrass 303). In the case of *El Sistema*, ignoring local traditional Venezuelan music and giving the impression that the European musical tradition is saving Venezuelan youth from poverty can be interpreted in such terms.

Interestingly, the current President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, explicitly resists many forms of cultural imperialism (Clairmont 1799). However, most of his anti-imperialist policies react against forms of economic and political imperialism emanating from the United States. Chavez does not appear to interpret *El Sistema* as a case of European cultural imperialism.

The difficulty with cultural imperialism is that our cultural relationships are now far more complex than they were the past (Kraidy 4). Therefore, to deem any use of classical music as cultural imperialism risks essentializing and ignoring the complexity and constant mixing of cultural forms. Further critical analyses through more contemporary theories are necessary.

The intentions of Dr. José Abreu are important. His intention is not, as he clearly states, to train brilliant musicians. Nor is it his intention to gain any economic/political benefit or dominance. He believes in the power of classical music as a tool to create positive social change. Yet, one might argue that teaching classical music perpetuates an unintentional form of hegemony.

Christopher Small has criticized the structure of the classical music tradition as inherently hegemonic. Small describes almost every facet of classical music through traditional performance practices. He then interprets each feature of the performance as an example of the hegemonic structure and hierarchy of classical music. I will not attempt to debate the validity of Small's argument; however, I will address a few main differences in the performance practices of *El Sistema*, and how they can be interpreted differently from the hierarchical structure and elitist ambience of the traditional classical concert.

Firstly, the performers, audience members and teachers represent a different socioeconomic status from traditional classical music culture. Traditionally seen as a higher cultural form, a certain amount of affluence is required to participate. For instance, one must be able to afford music lessons; ticket prices to symphony concerts can be costly. In comparison, *El Sistema* charges nothing for students; community concerts are often free; and excess "leisure time" is precisely the *problem* impoverished Venezuelan youth face.

Secondly, Small interprets the classical performance as a perpetuation of the idea that public music making is for professionals only (Small, *Musicking* 65). Small assumes that unless you are a professional musician, you are not performing the music; you are a

listener. *El Sistema*'s orchestras consist of poor Venezuelan students with varied levels of musical knowledge. The idea that classical music is for elite professionals only is precisely what is challenged by *El Sistema*.

I do not believe it is Small's intention to essentialize classical music as an elitist form. Nonetheless, I wish to highlight the specificities of his interpretation of the classical tradition. He discusses the physical space and social barriers in a typical concert hall, the dress code, expectations from the audience and performers, programs, intermissions, and the like. He states that "the symphony concert as it takes place today might have been designed and indeed was designed, even if not necessarily consciously, as an instrument for the reassurance of the industrial middle and upper class" (*Musicking* 193). However, he goes on to note: "I emphasize the importance of relationships because it is the relationships that [a musical performance] brings into existence in which the meaning of the musical performance lies" (Ibid). The performances and process of musicking in *El Sistema* can be reinterpreted as a new set of relationships and meanings. To his credit, Small leaves space for change and reinterpretation. The complexity of the social relationships taking place between those in the process of musicking is irreducible to a particular political ideology or social structure. In the context of *El Sistema*, the structure of the orchestral medium is employed to build a community that works together for a common goal. The rehearsals and process of co-learning exemplifies this social structure. To explore these new relationships further, I would like to discuss Homi Bhabha's post-colonial perspective on culture. Specifically, Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity, mimicry and third space can be fruitfully brought to bear on the complex cultural power relationships in this program.

Sounding the Third Space: Music, Mimicry and Hybridity in *El Sistema*

The idea of mimicry can be directly applied to an analysis of *El Sistema*. To many theorists, mimicry symbolizes an act of conformity and complicity, a perpetuation of cultural imperialism. As discussed in chapter one, mimicry refers to a pattern in which the colonized impersonate or mimic the colonizer's culture for the intention of accessing the power of the colonizers. This transformation is made under the assumption that the culture of the colonizer is "better," "more correct" or "more evolved." Fanon's book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, discusses mimicry and its relationship between whites and blacks. "The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become," writes Fanon (2-3). Similarly, Freire cautions the oppressed about the logic of this desire -- he states that imitating the oppressors does not liberate oneself, but only perpetuates the system of domination. He exposes the myth that attaining the power of the oppressors will grant freedom. This of course is not true freedom, but the re-enactment of oppression, dehumanizing both the self and other (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 44).

However, Bhabha outlines an ironic outcome of mimicry, which is the act of dissent. Despite mimicry's unintended perpetuation of established power dynamics, there is a *positive*, if unintended, consequence of mimicry. By impersonating the cultural form of the colonizers, Bhabha argues that a deconstruction of the binary between the colonized and the colonizers occurs. Mimicry allows for the recognition of the arbitrariness of power and the cultural symbols of power. The strict identities between two cultures become unstable and a negotiation of power can take place. He explains: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a*

difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). For instance, *El Sistema* uses traditional classical music repertoire and orchestral instruments. However, the practice of this tradition is altered in its intentions and pedagogy. Therefore, the musicking of *El Sistema* is "almost the same, but not quite." The act of mimicry questions the power relationships between the colonizers and the colonized based on the assumption that the Other is inherently different; it destroys the binary between the powerful and the powerless. Mimicry creates ambiguity and exposes contradictions in colonial discourse. Therefore, this act will create an opportunity for the colonized to gain access to the power of the colonizers, including a voice.

There is a contradiction between Freire's critique of the oppressors/oppressed binary, and the "ironic compromise" developed through Bhabha's concept of mimicry and hybridity (122). The difference lies in the intention. For instance, Fanon understands the "black" man's appropriation of the "white" man's culture through the rejection of his native history. However, when colonial culture is appropriated as a tool to define, or redefine, one's own culture, mimicry can be used positively, creating cultural hybridity.

The cultural imperialism associated with classical music and its relationship to *El Sistema* is a complex issue. Next, I will examine the cultural implications of this program, questioning whether it perpetuates elitist culture and dominant ideology, or appropriates Western culture in order to negotiate the power relationships between these cultures.

Firstly, the potential for mimicry to be used as part of the process of liberation must be recognized and acted upon. In the case of *El Sistema*, it is clear throughout the program that the music is being used for liberatory means. Eric Booth observes:

At every *nucleo*, all educators and staff can tell you exactly what the goals of El Sistema are—a stunning unified vision and purpose. Even more impressively, each individual uses her or his own words, images and stories to describe these goals. This is powerful advocacy: consistent, unified vision and message, from the national leaders to the local leaders to all the teachers to every janitor. (Booth 76)

This unified *El Sistema* vision strives to use music as a tool for instilling positive community values and improving the social life of impoverished communities. The orchestral medium can be seen as a microcosm of an ideal structure of public life, where every player is provided the resources to contribute to their communities for a unified vision of harmonious life.

The performance traditions of *El Sistema* ensembles can be perceived as a visible form of cultural hybridity. In a *Time Magazine* interview, Abreu describes *El Sistema* performances as containing “a primordial, ardent Latin vitality combined with a high level of technical rigor” (Padgett). The orchestra is known to wear bright jackets with the colours of the Venezuelan flag in performance while dancing up and down the stage playing their orchestral instruments, gestures that would rarely be seen in a traditional classical concert. One critic, Dammann from *The Guardian* wrote of a performance conducted by *El Sistema*'s famous alumnus and current director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel, stating: “Conducting from memory and less concerned with pushing boundaries in interpretation than with simply getting the best out of his players, he inhabits both score and orchestra, offering a seamless conduit between the two” (Dammann, 2011). This comment illustrates how Dudamel's emphasis is not only on the music itself, but also on the musicians playing the music. *El Sistema* performances are, in many ways, distinctive from the traditional classical concerts. The significance of

this music to the *El Sistema* community is reflected in the performances, signifying a visible form of cultural hybridity.

Small's theories of musicking suggest that musical meaning is constructed through the relationships created in the process of musicking. The musical form can indeed affect the relationships embedded in musicking. However, it is ultimately the social relationships that define its cultural meaning. The concept of musicking expands our understanding of music as a cultural form, encompassing performance details, audience reception, and the relationships involved inside and outside the abstracted musical work.

Bhabha considers what is necessary for a successfully subversive use of mimicry, stating: "In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference." (122) In the case of *El Sistema*, mimicry exposes the constructedness of classical music as an elitist art form. *El Sistema* engages in a cultural and musical dialogue with a supposedly elitist tradition. By mimicking the colonial cultural practice of classical music, *El Sistema* breaks the assumption that it is just for the elite. The program shows that anyone, not just the rich upper-class elite, can play and appreciate classical music. As Abreu states:

[El Sistema] no longer put[s] society at the service of art, and much less at the service of monopolies of the elite, but instead...at the service of society, at the service of the weakest, at the service of the children, at the service of the sick, at the service of the vulnerable, and at the service of all those who cry for vindication through the spirit of their human condition and the raising up of their dignity. (*José Abreu On Kids Transformed By Music*)

The success of *El Sistema* has forced the international classical music community to take notice. Although *El Sistema* has initiated many ensembles through their innovative approach such as the Venezuelan folk ensembles, jazz ensembles, White

Hands Chorus, and the Penitentiary Orchestra, international coverage on *El Sistema* continues to focus on the program's use of classical music. This fact is precisely the irony Bhabha discusses in his discussion of mimicry. In this case, the institutions interested in recreating the classical tradition promote *El Sistema*. This international recognition of *El Sistema* has brought additional resources through donations and awards and, most importantly, has given *El Sistema* participants a voice in the international music community. Without the excellence and recognition of the classical ensembles, the significance of this program may have gone unnoticed and unsupported. *El Sistema* has used their successful classical ensembles to open a dialogue with the international classical community, bringing significant attention to Venezuela and the country's innovative approach to social development through music. For example, Gustavo Dudamel, one of *El Sistema*'s major success stories, is not only the director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, but also of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, the original *El Sistema* orchestra. Dudamel grew up in the *El Sistema* program, studying violin at an early age, and later taking up conducting under Abreu. His success as a member of the first *El Sistema* cohort in 1975 has brought international attention to his unique youthful conducting style, and he is often touted as a testament to the successful pedagogy of *El Sistema*'s methodology. As the new director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, he has brought the influence of *El Sistema* to the city by starting Youth Orchestras Los Angeles (YOLA). *El Sistema* is using this hybridity as a productive cultural space, exemplified by Dudamel's ability to initiate YOLA through an American classical music institution.

Other than YOLA, many projects inspired by *El Sistema* are being implemented around the world. Some of the better-known programs include Big Noise Scotland, Sistema New Brunswick, Harmony in New York City, and the Leading Note Foundation in Ottawa. Many of these programs have been in collaboration with Abreu and the Venezuelan program. The *Abreu Fellowship Program* at the New England Conservatory prepares leaders to initiate *El Sistema* programs in the United States and around the world. The next chapter will examine the adaptation of the *El Sistema* program in the Canadian context. I will use The Leading Note Foundation in Ottawa as a case study for the adaptation and implementation of the program in a different social and cultural context.

Chapter 3

The Leading Note Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that has adapted the fundamental philosophies of *El Sistema* to work with underprivileged youth in Ottawa, Canada. In this chapter, I will first describe the history and structure of the program and examine its mandate, mission statement and philosophy. Drawing on my own experiences as a teacher at LNF and on interviews that I have conducted with members of the organization, I will discuss some of the similarities and differences between LNF and *El Sistema*, focusing in particular on the implications of adapting a program from one cultural context to another. Using critical pedagogy, I will examine the philosophies and structure of The Leading Note Foundation, and look at how LNF has adapted these philosophies to fit the needs of its local community. LNF faces a variety of issues including working with low-income and immigrant families. I will also draw upon theories from music education and discourses surrounding multiculturalism to explore ways in which LNF can better serve its diverse demographic using music as a tool for social development. Lastly, I offer some ideas that may help LNF incorporate multicultural perspectives into its programming. But first, I will outline the brief history of LNF.

History and Structure

The Leading Note Foundation began in 2007 after Tina Fedeski, a classical-music store owner in Ottawa, learned about *El Sistema* through a documentary film released in 2006 called *Tocar y Luchar (To Play and To Fight)* (Fedeski Interview). She aspired to use her knowledge and skills as a classical musician to contribute to the greater Ottawa

community in a similar way. She started formulating a plan for The Leading Note Foundation with her husband, Gary McMillen, an amateur musician, and Margaret Tobolowska, a teacher, children's music composer, and professional cellist for the National Art Centre Orchestra (leadingnotefoundation.org).

In the summer of 2007, Fedeski visited Venezuela to learn the pedagogical approaches of *El Sistema*, developing professional and personal relationships with Abreu and other *El Sistema* leaders, and initiating organizational relationships between their respective organizations. Fedeski learned the philosophies of *El Sistema*, how the organization's environment optimized the intended goals and missions of *El Sistema*, and how Fedeski could start a similar initiative in her community. Upon returning from Venezuela, Fedeski, Toboloska and McMillen started developing their own version of the program. Although there is no formal, organizational relationship between *El Sistema* and LNF, there are personal ties and collaborations between both organizations such as the symposium mentioned in the introduction. With the help of local businesses, organizations, schools and volunteers, the first Leading Note Foundation class started in the fall of 2007 in the Bronson Community Centre, close to many low income families and "beacon schools" (schools under the jurisdiction of areas associated with low income families). At first, limited resources restricted the LNF to 46 students, although there were over twice as many applicants. Teachers came from various organizations within the Ottawa community, including the National Art Centre Orchestra, the Suzuki School, the Ottawa Youth Orchestra Academy, and the University of Ottawa (leadingnotefoundation.org).

In 2008, LNF initiated the KidSingers choral program and OrKidstra program, allowing for over 90 students to be enrolled in LNF's second year. In 2009, the program expanded to over 100 students, and LNF was asked to participate in *The Glenn Gould Prize Celebration of Music* international conference in Toronto, to celebrate and discuss the use of music for social development. In 2010, registration rose to 150 students at the Bronson centre, and LNF's first satellite project, "KiddlyWinks," was initiated at the York Street School, a public school in Ottawa's Lower Town neighborhood, another area with many low-income families. This program engages younger students (ages 5-8) through the aforementioned pedagogical practice of the Orff Approach, which is based on a philosophy of teaching that emphasizes play, such as singing, dancing, clapping and chanting (American Orff-Schulwerk Association). The KiddlyWinks program, LNF's first satellite program, serves as a feeder to the LNF's other programs.

Organizationally, LNF now consists of a board of directors, a staff of teachers, mentors, and volunteers. Tina Fedeski serves as the executive director of the board and Margaret Tobolowska serves as the organization's artistic director. As a grassroots organization, the members of LNF tend to collaborate and make decisions together. Tobolowska is generally in charge of the pedagogy, repertoire, and classes (Tobolowska Interview). Fedeski takes care of many of the administrative tasks such as grant writing, media relations/publicity, and participant registration (Fedeski Interview). The teachers are professional musicians and experienced music educators, while the mentors are often high school students or students from the University of Ottawa. This collaboration with the University of Ottawa gives students in the undergraduate music program academic course credits to be a mentor at The Leading Note Foundation. In addition to the board,

staff and mentors, there is a growing body of volunteers comprised of parents, other musicians and community members who help support LNF in various ways.

Ensembles

LNF currently runs three “OrKidstra” programs: KidPlayers, KidSingers and KiddyWinks. KidPlayers is a winds and strings program, while the KidSingers is a choral program. The KidPlayers participate in large ensembles, group lessons and masterclasses (individual lessons in front of peers). The KidSingers consists of three choirs (junior, senior and chamber choir) based on age, experience and ability. The timing of these various programs rarely conflicts, allowing students to be part of both the choral and orchestral programs. KidPlayers Strings and KidPlayer Winds have separate ensembles and practice times, but often play together for full orchestral pieces.

Like *El Sistema*, LNF centers their programming on ensemble learning and playing—most classes are conducted in groups, with numbers ranging from three students to an entire orchestra of fifty members. The masterclasses –group lessons that focus on one student at a time—allow teachers to give individual attention to each student’s progress, while fostering a positive social environment and engaging multiple students at the same time. This peer-to-peer approach allows students to learn from one another. Positive peer relationships can motivate students to keep up with the rest of the class, especially in group-lessons where students must play together.

KidPowered

KidPowered is a new initiative introduced by LNF that allows students to determine their own involvement in (and level of commitment to) the organization. Through KidPowered, students can choose one of three streams: community, commitment, and dedication. *Community* requires the least time commitment: the student only attends group lessons and large ensemble rehearsals, which generally means that the student comes in once or twice a week. These students are still taking part in the community, interacting with peers and playing in the large ensembles, but musical excellence is not the intention. Teachers try to surround these students with peers in other, more intense, streams so they feel motivated to participate more in the program.

The *commitment* stream includes semi-private lessons where sessions are one-on-one, but peers of a similar level observe and participate in some of the lesson components. The expectations for this stream are higher and more demanding. The expectations are not based on musical ability, but rather on a higher degree of commitment and dedication to the program. Punctuality, readiness and consistent practicing are all expected at this level. These students also take part in the group lessons and large ensembles.

The last level, *dedication*, includes all the lessons of the other levels, but also involves collaborations with other ensembles in the Ottawa community. Students in this level will be given a scholarship to attend another community ensemble in Ottawa, such as the Ottawa Youth Symphony Orchestra or Ottawa Regional Youth Choir. This allows them to further develop their overall level of musicianship while at the same time acting as representatives of LNF to the rest of the Ottawa musical community. This is another example of LNF creating community partnerships with the resources locally available.

Similar to El Sistema's approach of "passion first, refinement second," these levels continue to prioritize commitment over ability. With a focus on passion and commitment, refinement and ability will follow. Success is not based on musical ability, but based on personal development and commitment to the program.

Now that I have presented the overall structure and history of the program, I would like to discuss the objectives behind LNF, drawing upon their official mandate and mission statement, interviews from staff and members of the organization, and personal observations on how the organization attempts to fulfill this mandate. My role as an intern at LNF in 2011 and 2012, during which I taught the beginner and intermediate violin group lessons once a week, gave me insights into the program's structure and pedagogy. The classes consisted of a small group (4-6 students) of beginner/intermediate violinists, as well as youth mentors from the University of Ottawa and high school students involved in the Ottawa music community. My experiences at LNF gave me further insight into ways in which the organization strives to enact its mandate and mission statement.

Mandate and Mission Statement

LNF's mandate is to "give children from under-served communities the opportunity to learn and make music together and the chance to benefit from the individual skills and community values that are inherent in music-making" (leadingnotefoundation.org). The LNF website elaborates on this mandate with a mission statement that identifies four goals and principles: ensembles, personal growth, community involvement, and arts outreach.

Similarly to *El Sistema*, LNF emphasizes ensemble playing in every class. Both programs are predicated on the belief that ensemble learning develops a sense of community through the inherent values in musicking, an example of LNF using music as a tool for developing the hidden curriculum of community values. Ensemble playing is the central principle that achieves personal growth and community development, “instill[ing] and reinforc[ing] mutual respect, discipline, teamwork, creativity, and self-confidence – all values and skills that are inherent in music-making” (leadingnotefoundation.org). Community involvement emphasizes social responsibility among all participants in the program and connects the organization to the wider Ottawa community. From personal observation, I can attest to the fact that LNF is constantly involved in a variety of community initiatives in addition to their regularly scheduled performances, providing concerts for the wider Ottawa community. For example, LNF students gave a featured performance for Governor General David Johnson’s inauguration ceremony in 2010; they performed with the National Arts Centre Orchestra; and they collaborated with the Simón Bolívar String Quartet, a world-renowned quartet from *El Sistema* in the spring of 2012. Arts outreach activities such as these are inherently linked to community involvement and the idea that music has the ability to foster positive communities and personal growth.

The LNF mission statement includes terms that require clarification before it can be critically analyzed. For instance, what does “under-served communities” mean? What are the inherent community values and individual skills developed in music making? How does this program work to maximize these skills and values in the music-making process?

Part of LNF's community values is the belief that everyone, regardless of ability, income or musical experience, has the right to make music. The program believes in equality and accessibility to music as an essential part of social life. Many orchestral ensembles require a certain level of musical proficiency to join; private lessons are often necessary to become part of the musical community. Both organizations see the objectives of musical excellence and positive social change as inherently linked. Despite accepting all students regardless of their musical, ethnic or financial background, the teachers will still push the students to perform to the best of their ability, teaching them hard work and dedication.

Skills

As stated in LNF's mandate, there are two distinct, but interrelated, goals that LNF hopes to foster in its students: individual skills and community values. A distinction must be made between the two to help clarify the meaning of this mandate and they are developed in the program. Skills are abilities that help us accomplish certain tasks. Skills can include physical motor skills, or intellectual and personal skills that make up a person's strengths and weaknesses. LNF assumes that there are individual skills inherent in music making, obviously including musical skills such as playing an instrument or singing.

In addition, students learn a wide variety of transferable skills by studying music. Many empirical studies have shown the positive effects of music education on intelligence and social and personal development. For example, sociologist Susan Hallam consolidated the wide range of studies that have explored the ways various aspects of

music have affected students' lives intellectually, physically and interpersonally. Musical training and music-making have been proven to enhance, or at least have strong positive correlations with, "language development, literacy, numeracy, measures of intelligence, general attainment, social skills, creativity, fine motor co-ordination, concentration, self-confidence, emotional sensitivity, social skills, team work, self-discipline, and relaxation" (Hallam 1).

As a social music program, LNF emphasizes the development of both personal and social skills through musicking. The program's emphasis on ensemble playing helps increase interpersonal skills by providing opportunities to foster positive peer relationships, self-esteem and a safe community. My personal observations at LNF reinforce the organization's commitment to personal and social development. For example, before the beginning of each term, the teachers meet to discuss the progress of each student, and formulate a schedule that would best suit every one of the students. Discussions about the schedule consider each student's personal situation, including how far they live, other extra-curricular commitments, siblings in the program, etc. The teachers ensure that the program is easily accessible for all their students and that they will not lose one due to scheduling conflicts or other minor problems that can be avoided.

Values

In contrast to *skills*, the term *values* refers to "the principles or moral standards held by a person or social group; the generally accepted or personally held judgment of what is valuable and important in life" (OED). Thus, values guide our actions through our moral and ethical understandings of the world. Individual influences, community

practices, and societal structures can affect these values. When discussing the abstractness and cultural complexity embedded in values, it would be appropriate to turn to the framework of cultural theory and critical pedagogy to describe these complexities.

My experience with LNF has allowed me to observe in how values are promoted through the environment and pedagogical methods of LNF. Like *El Sistema*, LNF exposes and uses the “hidden curriculum” to promote community values. Before we discuss community values, we must discuss what community is. As Colin Bell and Howard Newby discuss in their book *Community Studies*, it is impossible to state an absolute definition of community (53). However, in most definitions of communities, there is an emphasis on the relationship between members. It is these connections that often define a community, whether it is geographical connection, or common beliefs, or identities. Thus, the values of a community are informed to a significant extent by these relationships and connections. *El Sistema* and LNF attempt to instill positive relationships between all members of their respective communities, emphasizing the responsibility of individuals to the community and vice versa. Fedeski and Abreu both describe their program as first and foremost a social program. Fedeski summarizes: “It’s important to know that this is a social program and making music is the byproduct” (Fedeski). Teachers at LNF emphasize commitment and dedication to their instruments, as most music teachers do. However, LNF applies these same values to community practices, and thus students are not simply expected to make a personal commitment to their instrument, but are also given the responsibility and expectation to commit to the community through mentoring and helping others in LNF. LNF differs from traditional music programs through the organization’s emphasis on the community and, by extension, the values of

responsibility, self-respect and cooperation. The emphasis on responsibility can be seen in the daily tasks that are required of LNF students ranging from a child's responsibility to set up chairs for the ensembles, to practicing daily to keep up with the level of the classes. The organization also encourages students to help less advanced students during group lessons and orchestra rehearsals.

One aspect of building a positive community is ensuring that each member feels like they are valuable within the organization. The teachers are determined to support every student, whereby the daily class schedule may change to accommodate a single student's schedule. Students are constantly coming in and out of lessons at different times, for the scheduled class times change almost daily, depending on a student's schedule, a concert's proximity, schedule conflicts, or new classes being offered.

Another example of LNF's flexibility is reflected in the organization's KidPowered initiative discussed earlier, which exemplifies LNF's prioritization of the needs of students by allowing them to choose how involved they wish to be in the program. This is fundamentally different to the approach that *El Sistema* takes, as *El Sistema*'s programming requires the child to be there almost every day after school. In contrast, LNF understands that youth culture and the social issues present in Ottawa differ from those in Venezuela. KidPowered is a response to the busy lives that many LNF participants lead. Many students are involved in other extra-curricular activities ranging from sports teams, student clubs, other arts activities, and even part-time jobs. The urgency of *El Sistema*'s mission to keep at-risk youth away from gang culture and street violence is not as evident in Ottawa. This is not to imply that youth crime in Canada and Ottawa does not exist. Indeed, youth crime and gangs are growing problems

in the Ottawa community. In a 2007 essay, Katharine Kelly, a sociology professor at Carleton University, discusses the issue of youth homelessness in Ottawa and the range of dangerous activities associated with life on the streets (i.e. substance abuse, violence and high-risk sex) (726). Although LNF has not targeted homeless youth in Ottawa specifically, the organization offers a positive, safe environment for any young people who participate in the program.

In addition, students in Canada attend schools for a longer portion of the day than those in Venezuela. Therefore, the fundamental philosophy of frequent attendance is not as emphasized in LNF. Tobolowska said that in this program, “we understand the importance of students to be well-rounded” (Tobolowska). KidPowered makes the program accessible to students who may not have as much time to commit as their peers. However, they are not fixed in a particular KidPowered stream, reflecting a framework that is flexible and constantly changing to respond to the particular needs of each student. No matter which stream a student is in, LNF still emphasizes the importance of community. Every stream ensures the student is still taking part in the large ensembles and group lessons, maintaining their mandate of community values. In these large ensembles, students from every stream play and learn together, while allowing more experienced ones to teach and inspire less experienced students.

Another example of the program’s flexibility and community inclusion is reflected in its multi-layered approach to the large ensemble repertoire. In most cases, teachers will rearrange the orchestral repertoire for the different levels of players. If students are unable to play difficult passages in an orchestral piece, the teachers adapt and rearrange the score to accommodate the students’ technical ability. Tobolowska

explains: “we want the orchestra to be accessible to every child in The Leading Note Foundation. This means ensuring that every child has a part in the large ensemble” (Tobolowska). In this way, students can still contribute to the orchestra to the best of their ability, which is another example of the dynamic and inclusive learning processes occurring in LNF. The organization believes in—and fosters—the positive values innate in the process of making music, community building in particular.

Breaking the binary

The teaching environment of LNF answers Freire’s call to deconstruct the strict teacher-student binary. As music students develop and become more advanced, they often mentor younger/beginner students. The peer-to-peer learning approach turns lessons into a dynamic process, where the roles of each member constantly shift from student to teacher. Freire discusses the oppressive nature of the teacher-student binary—his philosophy is that “whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 31). This is linked to his critique of the “banking concept” of teaching, where traditional school systems perceive the teacher as the subject, and the student as object. Freire states: “In the banking concept of education knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing... The teacher presents himself [sic] to his student as their necessary opposite” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 72). In this model, the students have no agency as they passively acquire knowledge from the teacher. In contrast, Freire suggests that “education must begin with the solution of the

teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Ibid).

The blurred lines between students and teachers in LNF challenge the teacher/student dichotomy. This ensures that students realize their importance to the community by contributing their experience and knowledge to teach others. The mentorship program involving universities and high schools plays an important role in LNF. By helping teachers in group lessons and large ensembles, mentors have the opportunity to learn how to teach music through observation and personal experience, as the mentor plays a role in between that of the student and teacher.

Lastly, the teachers also learn through the teaching process in the community. The number of educators at LNF allow for pedagogical support and mentoring, something I found to be tremendously valuable during my time as a teacher. The teachers discuss pedagogical issues with other teachers. In many cases, these issues are clarified through the mutual understanding of the individual students. This helped me use specific examples when asking questions in order to learn pedagogical techniques from more experienced teachers, improving my skills as a music educator. In turn, I was able to teach classes more effectively. Therefore, the intimate relationship between teachers is beneficial for both teachers and students. Student contact with multiple teachers also helps develop a variety of positive teacher-student relationships while gaining different insights and feedback on their playing.

Although there is no specific methodology, the teachers are well aware of the mandate of the program and use their musical background to foster musical and personal development. While traditional pedagogical models emphasize the relationship between

the student and the music, the Leading Note Foundation emphasizes the relationships among students, mentors, and teachers. LNF's unique pedagogy and structure align with Dewey's important understanding of the social processes embedded in the teaching process and Freire's deconstruction of the teacher-student binary.

Now that I have discussed some of the educational aspects of LNF, I would like to look at the specific context of the Ottawa community, and how LNF sees their role within this community.

Looking at the Issues: Opportunities in Ottawa

To return to the LNF mandate: the organization hopes to provide a musical community for students who are "under-served." According to Fedeski, "under-served" refers to students who are from a low socio-economic status (Fedeski). Although she states that there are relatively more numerous opportunities here for youth than in Venezuela, there is a significant difference between number and quality of opportunities for children from well-off families than for children from poorer families. In response to the many pedagogical opportunities offered in the Ottawa community, Tobolowska describes the program simply as "another option" (Tobolowska).

However, a number of organizations providing cultural opportunities for youth require expensive tuition or registration fees. For instance, the major youth music organizations, The Ottawa Youth Orchestra Academy, Ottawa Youth Choir can charge tuition of up to \$675 a year (OYOA), and also require volunteer service. Many students at LNF lack the financial resources to be involved in these programs. Because of government grants and donations from local businesses and private donors, LNF has been

able to run their organization with tuition rates based on a sliding scale. On the other hand, programs that do not require tuition are often run by volunteers, which could impair the quality and consistency of teaching and the learning experience. LNF's strong community involvement garners many donations from the Ottawa community, and successful grant applications, allowing them to keep the program free, while still hiring qualified music teachers.

Other opportunities to consider are the curricular and extra-curricular music programs offered in schools. Public schools were created to standardize education and create equal learning opportunities for all students. However, as stated earlier, Bowles and Gintis question this assumption: there are numerous political, economic, social and cultural factors that perpetuate existing power dynamics and inequalities within the public schools. Even from the perspective of financial support, schools in richer neighbourhoods often differ drastically from those in poorer neighbourhoods, which are referred to as "beacon schools" in Ottawa. Public schools from richer neighbourhoods tend to have more resources through extra financial support from families and private donors. The schools that surround LNF are mostly beacon schools, where this extra funding is limited.

Other public schools, such as Canterbury High School and École secondaire publique De La Salle, which are designated high schools for the arts, have a significantly higher standard for arts education. However, each school primarily serves a specific region. If a student lives outside of the region, he/she must apply to transfer schools. Moreover, these arts schools require auditions and a certain level of artistic achievement

to be accepted. LNF can provide extra-musical training to help students successfully transfer to these schools (ocdsb.ca).

I spoke to Jennifer Martinez, a schoolteacher and band director in LNF, about the public school system. I asked her how she defined underserved communities: “The first thing that comes to mind” she responded, “is how much music are they getting in the school?” (Martinez). She has been a public school music teacher in Ottawa for many years, and from her perspective, schools in Ontario, especially schools at the lower grade levels, lacks adequate music education. She said, “Generally...we don’t see a steady music program happening” (Martinez). The Ontario Arts Curriculum (OAC) states that the three art subjects, music, visual arts and drama and dance, are mandatory. However, the reality is that many schools are confined by budget restraints and the absence of a qualified music teacher. In fact, many Ontario public schools lack a music program altogether. Fortunately, music programs are generally better established in grades 7-8 due to the OAC’s past curriculum requirements for students to learn orchestral instruments.

In recent years, the Ontario Arts Curriculum has changed its arts curriculum from prioritizing orchestral instruments to a multicultural approach to music. Unfortunately, despite this positive step towards cultural diversity and broader musical concepts, it is now easier for administrators to justify cuts to arts funding. Rather than defining specific instrument requirements to be played in the schools (i.e. orchestral instruments), the curriculum standardizes the concepts that are learned in the schools such as rhythmic, harmonic and melodic elements, and developing a historical and cultural understanding of different modes of musicking (OAC 2009). As the curriculum does not enforce or

specify a minimum requirement of resources for music programs, administrators see this as an opportunity to cut funding while still fulfilling the Ontario curriculum.

I am not necessarily proposing a return to the Eurocentric model of the old school curriculum. Rather, I mention these trends in order to illustrate the relatively meager support that music education has received from the public education system, despite many educators' and parents' attempts to advocate for the importance of music in schools. Schools often prioritize numeracy and literacy because of the standardized tests enforced by the provincial government that emphasize these subjects. Such standardized tests rarely prioritize music, and therefore music is not seen as a priority. This discussion of the school curriculum helps contextualize the opportunities available for children and youth in the Ottawa community. The unenforced musical standards and de-prioritization of arts in schools have created a need for accessible music opportunities outside the public systems.

I have discussed many of LNF's successes, and the organization's ability to adapt *El Sistema's* structure and pedagogy to the practical needs of Ottawa. Within the five years of the organization's existence, it has created a strong musical community, using the philosophies of *El Sistema* to develop an inclusive program that suits the youth culture of Ottawa. I would now like to look at the demographic of LNF's community, and discuss how the program has affected the specific demographics of that city.

LNF and Ottawa Demographics

The majority of students in the program come from low-income immigrant families (Fedeski, interview). At present, over 30 different languages are spoken among

the students and families in LNF. This correlation between low-income families and the immigrant population can be further examined by using statistical data collected by the City of Ottawa and Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, *Community Profile*).

Despite their professional skills or level of education, it is often more difficult for immigrants to find jobs. In Ottawa, full-time employment differs by almost 20% between recent immigrants and people born in Canada between the ages of 25-54 (Statistics Canada, *Community Profiles*). It is often the case that professionals from foreign countries must acquire additional education after moving to Canada due to standardized practices, language barriers, or cultural differences. This can mean starting in a lower income bracket, requiring additional education, with little time and/or money to attain the required qualifications. The average earnings of recent immigrants are significantly less than those born in Canada, a difference of roughly \$10,000 per year (*ibid*).

Many of the parents in LNF do not have the financial resources or the necessary free time to become heavily involved in the program. Fedeski has made repeated attempts to involve more parents in the program, but barriers such as language and cultural differences prevent many of them from being heavily invested. Many parents register their children in the LNF simply because it provides another opportunity for students to learn English and socialize outside of school. A sense of community is often an important value for many immigrant families: statistics collected by the City of Ottawa show that different immigrant groups prefer to live in communities from similar backgrounds (Ottawa Counts). Ottawa's beacon schools tend to be located in the same areas where a high percentage of immigrant families reside.

Given the tremendous cultural diversity of LNF, it is clear that the organization faces vastly differing issues from those addressed by *El Sistema* in Venezuela. Although many immigrant families in Ottawa are heavily involved in their own ethnic communities, parents choose to register their child in LNF to integrate them into Canadian culture. Fedeski sees this program as a way of integrating such children into Canadian culture through a musical community (Fedeski, interview). In my view, LNF should consider ways to adopt a more culturally diverse model of music education to reflect the cultural diversity of their program.

A Multicultural Model

Advocates of multicultural education have emphasized the need for a multicultural educational model that opens a culturally diverse dialogue with and among students, educating them about issues of race, gender, and ethnicity and, in effect, creating conscientious global citizens. Discussions of multiculturalism vis-à-vis music education have examined the standard musical repertoire within schools (Morton), ways to include multiculturalism in music education (Abril), and how global music education can be used as a theme to explore issues of marginalization and social justice (Baxter). As McCarthy notes: “In the latter decades of this century, the ideology of multiculturalism in its various forms and manifestations has penetrated the political structures and cultural fabric of numerous Western countries and their former colonies... [T]he development of music as a curricular subject has been reshaped significantly as a result of this new thinking” (81). Given the fact that LNF serves a culturally diverse group, the fact that the

program's repertoire draws so heavily from the European classical tradition must be acknowledged and critically examined.

Fedeski is aware of the diverse cultural backgrounds of LNF's students and believes that music can be used as a universal language to bridge the gap(s) that result from cultural diversity (Fedeski). However, as David Elliot notes: "...contrary to popular understanding, music is not a universal language: people do not immediately understand, appreciate, or enjoy the musics of other cultures. More accurately, people within cultures and between cultures often speak of 'our music' and 'their music'" ("Key Concepts in Music Education" 11). Assuming that music—Western orchestral music in particular—is a universal language risks ignoring the considerable musical and cultural differences between cultures.

Furthermore, there is a tendency among the staff at LNF to view classical music as the music that speaks to everyone the most. Tobolowska said "show me the music that inspires the kids the most, and we will play it. It just so happens that what energizes the kids is Beethoven" (Tobolowska). This idea that Beethoven and classical music is innately understood and appreciated by everyone seems to imply a sense of cultural superiority, whether intentionally or not.

Especially for youth, identity formation is a delicate and complex issue that is strongly influenced by the ongoing encounters and experiences of a child's life (Nakkula 7). In the case of *El Sistema*, the organization's sense of national identity is based on Venezuela's strong cultural history. In contrast, most students in LNF come from immigrant families. Young immigrants are often faced with the difficulty of finding their identity between multiple cultures and identities. John Berry states in his book about

youth immigrants in Canada: “Young people who come to a new country as children, or who are born to immigrants, face the challenge of developing a cultural identity based on both their family’s culture of origin and the culture of the society in which they reside” (Berry 2006, 5). Canadian identity is often associated with our emphasis on multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act states that the Government of Canada is “committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians” (“Canadian Multiculturalism Act”). In its most general definition, I would like to define multiculturalism as the mixing of multiple cultures in a community. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act attempts to celebrate and preserve the multiple cultures present in Canada.

I believe that LNF could incorporate more cultural diversity in their program. However, this may prove to be difficult as the expertise of most people involved in LNF is rooted in the classical tradition. When Fedeski initially planned to start this program, she had no idea of the demographics of the students that would eventually be coming to LNF (Fedeski). Focusing on culturally diverse programming would have ignored the expertise of the founders of the organization. Perhaps there are opportunities for the members of LNF to use their expertise to challenge the elitism and colonialism associated with classical music.

Like Christopher Small, Tobolowska believes that music is created in the act of performance. “[The children] are the ones making the music” she states. “Not the composers, not the classical tradition. But the kids” (Tobolowska 2012). She also believes that the kids do not know, nor need to know, the historical background of classical music. Tobolowska argues that ignoring the elitism of the classical tradition can,

in the minds of these children, help to erase the hegemonic historical narrative of the Western classical music tradition. I am inclined to raise questions about this assumption: will ignoring the history of a musical form erase the hegemonic narrative of the classical musical style? In my view, LNF does not ignore the elitism, but rather challenges it by teaching this tradition to the underprivileged youth from diverse cultural backgrounds.

LNF has made many strides to challenge the elitism associated with classical music. Firstly, the repertoire includes classical standards, contemporary works by local composers, popular music and film music. This range of repertoire hopes to provide pieces that are more relevant to the students. Secondly, by providing free lessons for underprivileged students in Ottawa, classical music is no longer associated with high-class culture. Lastly, LNF emphasizes social relationships and community growth during the process of musicking, rather than performing the musical work as the end goal.

LNF has already begun to experiment with other forms of music making. For example, in 2010, it organized a series of drumming workshops. In addition, LNF's repertoire in the choral and orchestral ensembles consists of music from a variety of cultures and mediums, from film music and Canadian composers, to popular music and folk music from other parts of the world. The organization recently worked with a young Ottawa composer, Nicholas Piper, who wrote a piece specifically for OrKidstra, KidSingers and the Simón Bolívar String Quartet that was performed in Ottawa. The rehearsals were directed and conducted by the composer, allowing the students to ask questions about the composition directly to the composer. This initiative shows LNF's willingness to try things outside the traditional norm of classical musical training.

LNF's organizers admit that they lack expertise in other musical cultures, which restricts them from teaching music from other cultures on a consistent basis. Despite their best efforts to introduce new forms of music making, their expertise and connections lie predominantly in the Western classical tradition. However, they are taking the classical tradition and challenging the assumption that it is elitist. Similar to *El Sistema*, LNF uses the classical music tradition, often associated as a hegemonic musical practice, to foster a positive community among the youth.

How can LNF use their expertise and the many other positive aspects of their community program to challenge the classical tradition by acknowledging the diversity of musical cultures and integrating them into their repertoire? In its relatively short existence, LNF has undertaken activities that would enable the organization to implement culturally diverse music education programs. LNF has collaborated with various organizations within Ottawa, with volunteers from many organizations, and now it has official collaborations with Ottawa University, Trillium Foundation, The Leading Note Store, Bronson Centre, *El Sistema*, various schools, as well as several orchestral and choral organizations in Ottawa. Although the majority of the organizations with which LNF has collaborated thus far have stemmed primarily from the classical music tradition, the organization's effectiveness at developing partnerships suggests that the potential for developing relationships with diverse musical and cultural organizations is possible.

Another strength of the program is the emphasis placed on accommodating every student and listening to individual students with attention. This act of listening shows the teachers' dedication to the students and their willingness to adjust the program to meet their needs. Furthermore, new programs and classes are added each year in order to

engage more students and offer a wider variety of music making opportunities. The grassroots nature of the organization allows for flexibility in LNF's scheduling. Given the organization's many strengths, I am confident that the Leading Note Foundation could effectively implement more multicultural programming, if they desire to do so.

In addition to being a professional cellist and pedagogue, Margaret Tobolowska has composed and narrated children's music with pedagogical aims (*Tobolowska*, accessed May 1, 2012). Her skills and experience in composition and arranging could be used to integrate different musical forms into the orchestral setting. Of course, the act of composing orchestral music inspired by non-Western musical cultures must be approached respectfully in order to avoid cultural appropriation and cultural colonialism. Building relationships with multicultural organizations could help achieve this goal. In this way, Tobolowska's skill can potentially open avenues for incorporating other musics into this program.

In this chapter, I have discussed the history and structure of LNF, its mandate and philosophies and ways in which the organization has fulfilled its mandate using concepts from critical pedagogy, and how its structure differs from that of *El Sistema*. I then examined the cultural ramifications of using the classical tradition in a culturally diverse society, focusing on some of the social and economic issues immigrants face in Canada, and LNF's role in this environment. I argue that the program challenges aspects of the classical tradition that are hegemonic and elitist. In my view, there is room for the organization to build on its considerable strengths in order to reflect to a greater extent the culturally diverse community the organization serves, so as to integrate, rather than assimilate, youth into Canadian culture.

Conclusion

Having discussed both *El Sistema* and the Leading Note Foundation, I would like to summarize the similarities and differences between the issues faced by each program, and examine how effectively LNF has adapted the Venezuelan model to address social issues that are specific to their context in Ottawa. This program has grown exceptionally in a short period of time, and has already created a positive community for many students, families, and music teachers in Ottawa. In conclusion, I will outline some additional issues facing LNF, and suggest ways in which they can tackle them.

The philosophy and mandate of *El Sistema* and LNF are essentially the same. Both programs prioritize the orchestral medium and ensemble learning as the central component to their programs. Both programs are dedicated to using music as a tool for community development. Each program emphasizes peer-to-peer learning and ensembles to highlight the values of commitment, dedication and responsibility to both their instruments and the community. The mentorship programs, peer-to-peer learning, and pedagogical support among teachers blurs the student/teacher binary. The student no longer sits complacently, but is instead expected to share the responsibility of the teacher by mentoring students with less experience. Finally, both programs share the strength and ability to connect with communities on a local, national and international scale. Another similarity between the programs is their shared belief that music communities must respond and adapt to the local issues that need to be addressed. Because of this belief, I feel as though LNF ought to reinterpret the philosophies of *El Sistema* in order to respond to the specific needs of the Ottawa communities that it serves to an even greater extent.

The cultural differences between Ottawa and Venezuela affect how the philosophy and mandates of each program are manifested. Unlike *El Sistema*, the students of LNF come from various backgrounds and cultural communities. Interestingly, both programs use European classical music and the orchestral medium as the central element of their programs. Like Abreu, the founders of LNF are classical musicians; therefore the use of the orchestral medium is no coincidence. In Chapter Two, I discussed some of the issues surrounding the perpetuation of classical music in Venezuela, arguing that this issue is more complex than simply labeling the program as a form of cultural colonialism. Bhabha's concept of hybridity argues that adopting a dominant cultural form can in fact change its meaning and significance. However, the Leading Note Foundation operates in a different cultural setting, and must be examined in relation to the communities that it serves. The emphasis on classical music in the Leading Note Foundation has a different set of implications. In Chapter Three, I discussed the importance of incorporating multicultural perspectives into the organization in recognition of the cultural diversity of the demographic it serves. In conclusion, I would like to suggest some specific ways in which LNF can incorporate a new multicultural music education model into their programming by building on the strengths and existing structure of their program. I offer these suggestions in a spirit of respect and appreciation. It is my sincere hope that they will be useful to LNF as the organization continues to build on the extraordinary work that it is doing to meet the needs of diverse Ottawa communities.

A new model for a multicultural program

According to Gutierrez and Alvarez, cultural diversity can be integrated into any program in two ways: by incorporating multicultural practices into existing lessons or by creating new lessons that address multiculturalism specifically (Gutierrez and Alvarez 42). They suggest that the best way to incorporate multiculturalism is by using both methods. Introducing different cultures into existing courses allows more students to be exposed to a multiplicity of cultures, musical cultures in the case of LNF. However, introducing diverse cultural repertoire into existing curriculum may result in vague and/or superficial coverage of the material, risking the essentialization of other cultures. Specific classes in multicultural music will allow teachers and students to engage in depth, but will limit the number of students exposed to the music. Specialized classes of this sort run the risk of reinforcing the idea that these traditions are musical “others,” implicitly marking these traditions as separate from the norm. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses. However, both approaches can work advantageously together.

In the case of the Leading Note Foundation, a weekly class devoted to music outside of the classical music tradition would strengthen the organization’s multicultural programming. Partnering with musicians and organizations from various cultures can help the LNF find musicians from diverse ethnic backgrounds to lead these classes. Inviting musicians from various cultural backgrounds to teach other musical forms will allow for a discussion about the cultural contexts of those specific musical traditions. Another way to empower students in the program and to encourage family involvement would be to encourage students and parents to select repertoire that is drawn from their own cultural backgrounds.

David Elliot suggests that the best form of multicultural music education is what he calls “dynamic multiculturalism” (“Key Concepts in Multicultural Music Education” 15). Dynamic multicultural music education studies elements of music using examples from various cultures. The “dynamic” aspect comes from the process(es) through which the plurality of ways of thinking about music influences the structure of the discussion. For example, rather than using the music of non-Western cultures to illustrate Eurocentric notions of music, the dynamic approach uses concepts original to the music being discussed.

As many of the LNF’s students and parents are a part of different ethnic communities and organizations in Ottawa, they may be able to recommend musicians/organizations that LNF can collaborate with in order to reflect the cultural background and identity of students in the program, while simultaneously exposing students to new musical cultures. This will empower the kids to share and celebrate diversity, while hopefully creating more dialogue with the parents/guardians as well.

In my view, it is important that LNF finds a way to incorporate diverse modes of music making into the existing structure of the program. This may prove to be difficult, as the instruments currently being taught are mainly European orchestral instruments. The expertise and experiences of the teachers at LNF are heavily based in the classical tradition. Is there a way to use Western instruments and the orchestral medium to facilitate learning music from other parts of the world?

Margaret Tobolowska, the artistic director of LNF, has experience as an arranger of children’s music. She has written, narrated and recorded two children’s CDs with music scores for students to learn (tobolowska.com). Each song highlights cello

techniques to be learned by the student as they follow along with the story. As the artistic director and conductor of the OrKidstra ensemble, she has the skills to collaborate with hired musicians-in-residence by arranging music from various musical traditions to be played in the OrKidstra program. The proposed collaboration between Tobolowska and the musicians-in-residence would introduce the members of the orchestra to other forms of musicking, emphasizing dialogue and cultural hybridity. This is only one example of how LNF can use their strengths and experiences to incorporate a multicultural model into the program. This can be achieved many other ways, building on the considerable strengths of other members of the program. Hopefully the proposed method will give LNF an idea of how to incorporate new approaches to their program.

This thesis has provided some new insights into LNF and *El Sistema* as well as their social significance in their respective communities. *El Sistema* has inspired many to believe in music as a tool for positive social change. I have made some suggestions for ways in which the *El Sistema* model can be adapted to the Canadian context in Ottawa through the LNF organization. It is imperative that LNF continues to find ways to respond to the specialized needs of the diverse youth communities that it serves.

The intention of this thesis was to investigate the social and cultural implications of *El Sistema* and its global influences. Using LNF as a case study allowed an in-depth analysis of how *El Sistema* can be adapted to fit the needs of another community. Countless other organizations have been inspired by *El Sistema*, using its philosophies to address the needs of various communities around the world. By fostering the idea of social development through music, *El Sistema* has drastically affected the methodologies of contemporary music education, providing new opportunities for social development

and redefining the relevance of classical music today. Tina Fedeski recognizes that “there are many programs that exist out there. What makes *El Sistema* special is the momentum it has created for using music as a tool for social development.” Further research on *El Sistema* can look at other organizations inspired by *El Sistema* and the ways that they have responded to needs in their own specific communities.

LNF and *El Sistema* do not necessarily advocate for classical music specifically. Above all else, *El Sistema* has always advocated for one thing: the idea that making music has the social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual elements for the holistic practice of community life. Music is a powerful tool for social change. Therefore it is imperative that we critically examine the implications of the pedagogical methods and institutional frameworks through which music education is delivered. This thesis has only touched on a few aspects of *El Sistema* and an organization that was inspired by it. Based on my own experiences with these organizations and my research thereof, I believe firmly that programs such as *El Sistema* have the ability to effect localized and globalized change. As Abreu states, musical experiences are “examples and schools of social life. To sing and to play together, means to intimately coexist” (*José Abreu On Kids Transformed By Music*).

Appendix: Samples questions for interviews

1. What is your musical background?
 2. What inspired you to start this project?
 3. How do you define *El Sistema*?
 4. How does this program differ from Venezuelan programs?
 5. What are the intentions of this program?
 6. How are you ensuring the most accessibility of your program?
 7. Is there a specific demographic you are specifically targeting?
 8. How do you envision the future expansion of this program?
 9. How will you be ensuring self-sustainability in this organization?
 10. How involved are the parents in this program?
 11. What sort of collaborations do you have to ensure community practices and positive integration?
 12. What makes the methodology of this program differ from others?
 13. How does the environment of this program change the nature of the pedagogy used in the program?
 14. How do you ensure all the teachers are aware of the mission statements and goals of this program, and what do you do to ensure this happens?
 15. What requirements are there for staff, mentors, and volunteers?
 16. How does your methodology/practice change to suite the needs of your specific community?
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