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# *No one is going to rock up and tell you!* How a hidden blend of family capitals facilitates access to and success in structured instrumental music education in Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

While the dominant orthodoxy within the field of educational research tends to document educational inequalities, it often fails to name the key drivers of advantage. By reflecting on core concepts of Bourdieu this article seeks to name the complex blend of parental capitals that enable access to and success in structured, extra-curricular activities (ECA) such as instrumental and vocal music education (IME). Besides the intrinsic benefits of IME, the article points to a particular extrinsic benefit that is unique to Ireland, in that performance is one of the essential activities on the Leaving Certificate (LC) music syllabus. This is important as it has implications for universal equality of access and opportunity. The research draws data from selected interviews conducted with mothers whose children were engaged in structured IME. In highlighting the often hidden and taken for granted capitals needed for IME access, the research also raises the issue of intra-class differences which can and do impact on outcome when navigating the structured IME market in Ireland. It also seeks to operate as a springboard for a set of broader theoretical arguments and highlights the role of institutional demands and material forces when considering the power of family capitals in this context.

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## Introduction

In recent decades neoliberal policy and perspectives assume that through their private resources and efforts, parents as rational consumers will support their children and look to the market to enhance and enrich their education both in and out of school. The subject of this article is, out of school, structured instrumental and vocal music education (IME), delivered by a qualified teacher, for school-going children in the Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland). In this context, IME is a parent-resourced, extra-curricular, and fee-paying activity (ECA). The article aims to describe the IME market in Ireland and to identify and examine how and why a blend of parental and family capitals can enhance access and success possibilities in this education-related ECA. Success in this context encompasses a student's continuing engagement in IME rather than a measurement of

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progress. The study contributes to extending knowledge on how through the medium of music, having the correct blend of field-specific parental capitals can be key drivers in terms of advantage and raises questions of equality of access, opportunity and equality of condition within IME. This is important given the intrinsic and personal benefits of IME which include the development of musical and aesthetic sensitivity, the enhancement of academic learning (Dai and Schader 2001), and the development of emotional well-being (Hallam 2015; Hallam and Himonides 2022). The issue of capitals-enabled access is also important given that musical performance is one of the essential activities on the Leaving Certificate (LC)<sup>1</sup> music syllabus. In the Irish context, the LC examination presents as a high-stakes examination in accessing higher education and employment (Smyth and Banks 2012). This is of concern, since there is a void in infrastructure for universal in-school IME provision, those who can access it through the market maintain a real advantage within the assessment process of this state-sponsored examination subject.

ECAs for school-going children have become a growing trend internationally (Bray et al. 2014, 2; Bray 2020) and research has highlighted the role of parents and the part they play in managing their children's future (Chin and Phillips 2004; Reay 2004; Savage 2019; Weininger, Lareau, and Conley 2015). Also, a significant corpus of literature on market-based parental involvement in education-related ECAs has focused on the influence of family-school partnerships (Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1994; Lareau 2011). The role of parents in ECAs has been given some attention in Ireland, especially in terms of their individual capabilities in managing the process of entering the private education market (Smyth 2009; Smyth 2016).

One such ECA is privately sourced, market-based IME lessons. These can be accessed by some families for their children from a very young age with many students continuing their engagement throughout their school-going years. Yet literature specifically addressing access to fee-paying, market-based IME in Ireland is scant. The study by Deloughry derives its findings from the voice of teachers, and their perceptions of student enrolment in terms of class stratification. This research concluded that students who attended state-supported IME in Ireland largely come from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds (Deloughry 2014). Internationally the work of Lilliedahl provides an excellent insight into parental involvement in public schools with specialised music programmes in Sweden. Drawing on data from parent interviews, Lilliedahl's study demonstrates that involvement varies according to social class, resources, and school culture (Lilliedahl 2021, 245).

Although such literature examines the role of parents and their considerable impact on providing advantageous opportunities for after-school activities for their children, the role of parental capitals in the field of structured extra-curricular education is narrowly framed in that it fails to call out the key drivers that facilitate and enable participation and success. Moreover, the voice and role of parents is under documented in the context of structured IME in Ireland.

## **Provision for structured IME in Ireland**

Within mainstream schooling, regardless of geographical location or socio-economic position, all children have a right and the opportunity to attain a state-funded and

state-regulated general education. However, access to IME operates as an area of privilege within the wider educational sector. Deloughry describes instrumental music education in the context of the state-supported sector:

[IME] is conducted at a remove from mainstream schooling ... is accessible to a minority of children and young people, is restricted on a geographical basis, and is subject to fee-payment ... inhabiting a world of its own – a ‘secret garden’ hidden from outsiders view. (Deloughry 2014, 85)

Expanding on Deloughry’s research, the scope of this article includes IME lessons in both the state-supported and the private sector. The available options for such tuition are, the private music teacher, the private music school, some Education and Training Board (ETB) services, funded as cooperation hours in partnership with the Department of Education, and the state-supported music schools, all of which are market based and parent sourced.

Although not market-based *per se*, other pathways to performance music education include several privately funded class string tuition programmes in DEIS<sup>2</sup> (disadvantaged) schools (see Conaghan 2014) and Music Generation (MG). Established in 2010, MG operates, through a matched funding model which is led by Local Authorities, together with funding from the Department of Education (see Conaghan 2022).

While conducting interviews with parents and with IME teachers during the data collecting process, it was surprising that only a very small number of parent and teacher participants were aware that Ireland had only six state-supported/publicly-funded pre-college music schools. Furthermore, none of the participants were aware that this provision is far below the European average of up to 100 music schools for countries with a similar population to Ireland (see EMU 2020).

What is noteworthy in this context of state-supported music schools is that there is no statutory requirement or responsibility for music school provision by government, local or national, on a population-based need. As a result of this lacuna in state policy and with the absence of a music school law, (European Music School Union 2020, 6, 13; Conaghan 2022), together with a huge demand for music lessons, a large, private, unregulated market has developed alongside this sparse state provision. It is important to point this out in the context of the ECA market since all candidates taking music as a subject for LC must present for performance as part of the assessment process. The examination is divided into the following sections all of equal weighting.

Listening – including aural skills	25%
Composition – including melody and harmony	25%
<b>Performance on any musical instrument and or voice</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Elective – Options are for candidates to choose between increased performance or music technology</b>	<b>25%</b>

### ***Leaving certificate music – syllabus assessment format***

This assessment process is good news for students who have been taking private instrumental and vocal lessons over time and who choose performance on a musical instrument or voice as their elective option. For these examination candidates, performance can count for 50% of the total marks. Such students have a distinct advantage, in terms of their performing abilities, music literacy and aural skills, over examination

candidates who commence the study of music in their secondary school years and who rely on their classroom teacher to prepare them for the essential performance component of this examination. And, although there is no reliable data on outcome, anecdotal evidence suggests that students who have access to the private IME market invariably score high in the essential performance element of the LC Music examination.

## Theoretical framework

As stated previously, this article aims to describe the IME market in Ireland with the purpose of identifying and examining how and why a blend of parental and family capitals can and does enhance access and success possibilities in this education-related ECA. For the purposes of this article, Bourdieu's social capital theory provides an appropriate context in which to examine how specific family capitals work to advantage access and success in IME in Ireland (Bourdieu 1986).

Bourdieu developed a concept of capitals, habitus and field by which he sought to understand how power is developed, maintained and transferred within society, how capitals work in different contexts or fields and how they impact on the way we lead our lives. His work acknowledges the different forms of capital, for example, economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital in the form of cultural knowledge. Bourdieu's insights also reveal that the family is key to the hidden practices or habitus of class that mediate through and between family. However, the capitals that families bring to this field and the social relations or social capitals needed to navigate pathways must be relevant and abide by the rules for that game, that is, they must be field specific. Thus, knowing the rules of the game is a form of cultural capital or cultural knowledge that acts as an advantageous roadmap for navigating the field.

Much research following the work of Bourdieu has analysed the role of capitals in creating educational advantages (Andersen and Hansen 2012; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Reay 2000; Reay 2004). The work of Annette Lareau (Lareau 2011) focuses on parenting styles and her research reveals that middle and working-class parents interact with society and with their children's schools in different ways. Lareau suggests that a lack of cultural knowledge can produce and contribute to the perpetuation of old and new social inequalities (Lareau 2015). In other Bourdieu-grounded research, the work of Jo (2022) departs from the family-school focus and suggests that a new concept of 'market-based parental involvement' has emerged as a separate category of parental involvement. In his research, Hyunmyung Jo applies Bourdieu's social capital theory to understand parental involvement in ECA while highlighting the impact and power of middle-class mothers' networks within the education marketplace.

Drawing on existing studies on equality and education (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Moran 2006; Lynch and Crean 2018), capitals (Bourdieu 1986), and parenting styles (Lareau 2011), the research demonstrates how a nuanced blend of parental capitals is essential for access, participation and success. In doing so, the research operates as a springboard for reflecting on the core concepts of Bourdieu and Lareau's theories and points towards a set of broader theoretical arguments that reveal intra-class and capital differences.

## Study design, data collection and ethical consideration

### *Study design*

Through the voice of parents, this article applies Bourdieu's social capital theory to identify how family capitals enable participation in IME in Ireland. The article draws data from the author's reflexive diary along with experiential and observational knowledge as a professional in the field. It also draws on quantitative data collected from music schools and from qualitative data derived from transcripts from parent-participant audio interviews.

### *Data collection*

The author has spent over 30 years working in a variety of music education settings, including secondary school teaching, specialist instrumental teaching in the state-supported and private sector, founder of string teaching programmes in disadvantaged schools in Ireland and in Denmark, string teacher trainer, youth orchestra founder and conductor and currently as a music education consultant in a variety of European countries. This insider status has afforded considerable prior knowledge into the field of study and especially in gaining access to research sites. In terms of observational and experiential knowledge, this was recorded in a reflexive diary over a period of four years. The purpose of this writing was to process my own experiences and observations in the field. Informed by my continuous professional engagement, these observations took the form of ethnographic research and have enabled me to capture and bring to this study, the rich and important insights that this lengthy experience in music education has afforded.

In the data gathering phase, care was taken to locate a wide range of music school and teacher typologies to include, private, state supported, ETB music services, urban and rural settings. In preparation for this phase, I spent a period of time mapping the field and interviewing music school principals both from the state-supported and from the private sector ( $N = 13$ ). These interviews were informal since their main purpose was to act as a portal to access the primary source of data, that is to say, the voice of parents. While engaging with the principals, I gathered quantitative data in the form of student enrolment numbers, annual fees and enrolment procedures from both principals and administration staff.

A strategy to recruit parent participants for the study was agreed upon with each individual principal. Principals from the larger schools, who were in effect the gate keepers, delegated this task to a selected group of teachers whereas the principals of the smaller schools largely sourced parent participants themselves. Information on the nature of the study and interview protocol was sent to 36 potential participants along with a consent form to sign and including the option for the participant to withdraw at any stage from the interview if they so wished. In sum, a total of 33 parent participants agreed to be interviewed for the study, the remaining three did not reply. In this article, the views of just six participants are cited, as their accounts most succinctly and relevantly represent the issue of parental and family capitals with the IME sector. It is important to mention that the interview sample comprised a pre-selected group of parents, in that they had previously elected to source IME lessons for their children.

## **Ethical consideration**

While mapping the field, ethical permission was applied for and granted by University College Dublin, Human Science Research Ethics Committee (UCDHSREC). All interviews with music school principals took place in-person and were audio recorded. Each interview took 60–75 mins. The interviews with parents were conducted over the telephone and lasted between 35–50 mins. Audio-recorded material was transcribed by this author, to allow more intensive familiarisation and engagement with the data that might have been lost in a transcription if typed by another. Special attention was given to protecting the anonymity of each participant and to ensure confidentiality pseudonyms were employed.

## **Study limitations, author bias and analysis**

### **Author bias and study limitations**

While including experiential knowledge and evidence from the reflexive diary and my own teaching and performing career in music, consideration was given to the challenges arising from my own positionality as an insider in terms of potential bias. For example, I had to stand apart from my own preferences and allow the study participants to express their own views and aspirations. While the benefits of being a professional insider were considerable in terms of knowing and having access to the field, there were also limitations.

Although the full range of market-based IME providers is included in this sample study, the scope and range of the field work is small if considered nationally. Furthermore, not all study participants were sourced directly by the researcher, the majority being sourced by their music school director or their private music teacher. In sourcing participants on my behalf, IME providers had the opportunity to choose families who complied with the rules and norms of the music school or private teacher, that is to say, relatively satisfied customers.

### **Analysis**

Positioning myself as an insider in my own professional field required me to stand apart, by adopting a balanced and open perspective while carrying out the analysis for this research. While as a researcher I related to this study both personally and professionally, I adopted an open approach in order to appreciate and allow for alternative points of view and discourse to emerge from the data collecting process (Denscombe 2010, 106, 129).

Thematic Analysis (TA) based on the framework afforded by Braun & Clarke was applied to examine the qualitative material compiled from the parent-participant interview transcripts. TA is a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data which can be applied to analyse the interview transcripts and other qualitative data, such as my experiential and observational knowledge. An advantage of TA is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun and Clarke 2019; Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield 2022; Clarke and Braun 2013). Thus, unlike many other qualitative methodologies, TA is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical

perspective which makes it a very flexible method and provides a good reason for using it as a roadmap in this three-pillar study design.

## A nuanced blend of interacting capitals

### *Economic resources*

Due to the elective nature of IME in Ireland, it is a parent-dependent activity that does not take place without prior planning and continuous management. All parent participants in the aforementioned study made a conscious decision to invest economic resources to fund music lessons for their children. Nonetheless, due to income differences between families, for some, this was a challenge while for others it was not. The following accounts demonstrate how these differences can and do impact participation. Both Paula and her husband were high-earning professionals with four school-going children, all of whom attended music lessons with private teachers. When asked about her financial commitment to IME she replied:

And the cost of lessons? We are in a position ... we are lucky we don't have to think about the cost that much. So let's see ... For everything ... about [pause] I never counted it up, so about €900-€1,000 a month. We can easily afford this. (Paula, mother of four)

The pause in Paula's reply reveals that she had not previously considered or counted the total cost of music lessons. She could easily afford lessons, it was not something they had to think about. This comment reveals that her family is in the upper-income bracket.

A contrasting scenario arises with Eve and her family who had come to live in Ireland for better life opportunities. Eve and her husband were shift workers whose earnings were marginally above the minimum rate. The family came from a country where structured music lessons were available at little cost to all children. Thus they viewed music lessons as an essential part of every child's education. When embarking on the journey to navigate the field, they were surprised that IME was not provided for by the state and is classed as a cultural activity that is only available to those who can pay. The following excerpt demonstrates the intersecting nature of how capitals work with and among each other; in this case, finance and time:

We had to discontinue lessons with a private teacher due to high costs. We liked going there because we could choose our [lesson] time. But then we got a place at the ETB school of music. This was much cheaper, less than €500 for the whole year, I mean for everything. The only problem was that we had to take a lesson early on a weekday afternoon [pause] so it is a challenge getting there in the middle of a working day. So we go to lessons when we can. (Eve, mother of two)

The interaction between the capitals of finance and time is clearly illustrated in the preceding two interview excerpts. Although Paula and her husband worked full time and were time poor, they had ample financial resources to access the expensive, non-subsidised private market to arrange lessons to suit their working lives. On the other hand Eve and her husband, who were also time poor but with limited financial resources could not stretch to afford the high cost of a private teacher, an option that would have given more flexibility with lesson times for their children. The example of Paula's family circumstances illustrates the claim made by Lynch and Moran (2006,



24), who argue that economic capital remains the more flexible and convertible form of capital.

### **Cultural knowledge**

It is estimated that the private IME market in Ireland delivers at least 85% of tuition countrywide, (See Conaghan 2020, 122). However, there is no official, collective body where IME teachers can register. In the absence of a register of qualified, trained instrumental music teachers, a parents' journey when navigating this market, can be fraught with risk, frustration and uncertainty. The following interview accounts reveal, how in this context the possession or absence of cultural knowledge can either enhance or hinder outcomes of participation. Olive, a stay-at-home mother of three who had herself attended extensive IME tuition as a child, tells her story:

We started in a private one [music school] on the other side of the city, the eldest was just a tot, age three. It really wasn't worth the journey for what they were getting. And then I heard about this [music] school from other mums. All the teachers were qualified. I knew someone who went there so we went to see their concert. All the students played well. So I have all my three [children] there now. (Olive, mother of three)

The relationship between cultural knowledge, experiential knowledge and the power of social networks is evident in this account. There are four forms of interacting capital at work here; cultural knowledge, time, finance, and social capital in the form of networking. First, Olive used her social networks of 'other mums' to increase her local cultural knowledge, a point made by Hyunmyung Jo (2022, 761) who argues that the value of such networks for middle-class mothers can prove effective when interacting with the education market place. Next, Olive had cultural knowledge in that she was aware that music schools are market-based, and choice-based and that she could choose to move music school to suit her family's needs. In her quest to find music lessons for her children, Olive decided to attend some music school concerts where she was able to evaluate the teaching quality and standard of performance because of her experiential knowledge. By doing so, Olive used the cultural capital in the form of the musical knowledge she had accrued as a student to evaluate the quality of teaching on offer. This action concurs with the work of Vincent and Maxwell (2016), Weininger, Lareau, and Conley (2015), Lareau (2015) and Ball (2003) who assert that the use of cultural knowledge is valuable and matters when navigating institutions. This value is evident in Olive's agency when navigating music schools for her children who as a stay-at-home mother had the hidden capital of time to harness her capacity and accumulated capitals to successfully advantage of her family's music learning experience.

### **The secret garden**

The above accounts clearly demonstrate that capitals do not work alone. This is especially salient in the context of sparse provision in the publicly-supported IME sector. Fee subsidy in this sector is considerable, making it an attractive and cost-effective option for families, yet it is only the capitals-rich who can avail of this option. Alluding to the secret garden analogy, it is not surprising that these schools rarely advertise, yet they have lengthy waiting lists due to the limited amount of tuition placed on offer to

the general public. Accordingly, visible and hidden screening processes for entry are in place.

### **Early start- ‘no one is going to rock up and tell you’**

Early Start, or pre-instrumental classes are a feature in many private and state-supported music schools throughout the country. Depending on the individual music school, early start classes are generally attended by children from pre-school age up to the age of six or seven. These group classes provide basic tuition in musical skills and literacy preparing young students to move on to tuition in a chosen musical instrument. And, as described by Hallam (2015, 2022) and Hutchins (2018), an early start in musical learning is essential in terms of mastering an instrument and for solid progression. If this early start is not accessible to all then there are implications for equality of opportunity. Usually, young children must be accompanied to classes by a parent or guardian and younger siblings cannot attend. If these lessons take place during the working day, such conditions immediately exclude parents and especially mothers who are engaged in full-time employment outside of the home, who have other children and family commitments, or who cannot access a place due to transport and other related costs. This process of inscription is described by Alice, a full-time working mother of three:

Generally speaking, as far as I know, and remember mine couldn't do these pre-instrumental programmes, because I was working, my husband was working ... So the school, it's not at all easy to get in there unless you come up through the early start. They would get first preference. But you have to find out all this for yourself ... no one is going to rock up and tell you! [what is available] (Alice, full-time working mother of three)

This account by Alice demonstrates how a capitals-dependent screening process operates to create barriers for some while prioritising certain groups. If the conditions of enrolment for early start programmes act as barriers for certain families, then there are implications for equality of opportunity. The sense of unfair access criteria to a highly subsidised place was palpable in Alice's voice when she described how the children of time-rich families had a distinct advantage over her own. Her comment ‘*no one will rock up and tell you*’, refers to the lack of information and transparency in knowing how certain institutional processes work and how these processes can be hidden behind an illusion of equal opportunity (Kennedy and Power 2010; Lynch and Moran 2006).

Another strategy or route to entry into one of the state-supported music schools is through audition, requirements for which are posted online. Leah, a stay-at-home mother, who had no musical education as a child, describes her strategy in preparing her daughter's pathway for entry into a prestigious (state-supported) music school:

I have one child, she's 8. We went for the interview, I mean the audition, in two of the better music schools. We were well prepared because she took lessons privately for about two years beforehand. I am free to do this and sit in on the lessons so as I can help her at home with the practice every day. She could play a few pieces very well and then we were offered a place in both schools. So I asked my group [of mothers] which was the best [school] to go to. That's how I chose. (Leah, stay-at-home mother with one child)

Leah used a blend of capitals to ensure her daughter's access and success. Preparing for the audition required her to harness her cultural capital, her time and her economic means. We also see how Leah compensated for her lack of musical knowledge by attending lessons with her child; this was possible for her since she was a stay-at-home mother and had time. Her entire strategy required activating her blend of capitals; planning of time, networking and economic means, which ultimately allowed her to inculcate into home life the cultural practice of learning a musical instrument.

### **Hidden doxa of participation and success**

Since access to IME in Ireland is capitals dependent, how a specific blend of capitals is inherited, accrued and transferred in and between families is important for this study. Moreover, due to the elective nature of IME, the existence of institutional demands or rules of the game have a role to play. The significance of this role is voiced by Lareau:

Capitals are only valuable when they comply with institutional standards or the 'rules of the game. (Lareau, Evans, and Yee 2016 , 280)

The contingent value of capitals is illustrated in the following account. Jane, a mother of four, was brought up in a large family where 'the money just wasn't there for things like music lessons'. She now had the means to send her own children to lessons. However, in the intervening period between sourcing participants for this research study and the interviews taking place, Jane's son (age 10) no longer attended lessons. Nonetheless, she was willing to proceed with the interview for this study. When asked about her son discontinuing she replied:

Yes, he really wanted to do it and he liked the lessons. But it didn't work for us. There is a massive amount he should be doing at home. We didn't know this before paying, and anyway we wouldn't have the time with all the activities for the other children too. He [the teacher] expected us to sit with him [son] each evening and do a massive amount of practice. We didn't know this, you see I didn't talk to the teacher and ask about anything at the start. (Jane, mother of four)

In this account, we see how Jane used her economic capital to enrol her son in music lessons. Yet she was unaware of the time-intensive, supervised and parent-led daily home practice that was expected by the music teacher. This is an example of how the accepted status quo and hidden doxa of participation are rarely discussed because they are taken for granted by music professionals and those with cultural knowledge; assumptions that contributed to creating a barrier to her son's progress. Moreover, knowing or having the skills and confidence to ask if there are rules or expectations of parental support outside of paying lesson fees is another dimension of capital difference that can act as a barrier to sustainable participation and success.

We can assume that Jane grew up in a low-income family in that there was never any money for things like music lessons. Her experience when interacting with the music teacher concurs with Lareau's theory that middle- and working-class children and their parents interact with society in different ways, especially in relation to education and schools. In this case, Jane who had no prior experience with the private IME market did not feel she needed to or could interact with the teacher and ask questions. Jane assumed that enrolling her son and paying the fees was all she had to do to

ensure the son's participation and success. Here, Jane's parenting style was not in sync with the institutional expectations and demands of IME practice and doxa (Lareau 2011, 79, 82, 178-180). This account from Jane also illustrates how Bourdieu's relational theory intersects family capitals, agency and institutional demands. It also illustrates how a mismatch between the dominant or accepted status quo can have a negative impact on the experience of a child.

## Discussion

As stated at the outset, this article has sought to name the key drivers of advantage in the context of parental capitals in the IME market in Ireland. Through the aforementioned data collecting process and subsequent analysis, these key drivers of advantage have been identified by the following themes and sub themes; economic capital, cultural capital, which includes prior cultural knowledge of how IME works, and time or lack of time along with parental workplace flexibility,

### *The ideal family*

During the course of preliminary discussions with music school principals and teachers, the subject of the ideal family was raised. The question raised was; *what is your ideal family in terms of commitment and success?* Although the IME sector in Ireland is varied, in that there are urban and rural based schools, large and small schools and some with just one single teacher, there was a certain pattern or uniformity among the responses to this question. Families, where parents were former music school students, were favoured above all others. The reason for this lies in the prior knowledge these families have in that they know how IME works such as knowing that it is best to start children young, being aware of inscription processes and waiting lists. The experience these families have also extends to musical know how in the home. That is to say, families who were aware of the demands and expectations of music schools and teachers. For example, knowing the importance of daily practice and having musical knowledge to guide this practice were the ones music teachers predicted as favourable for continuing IME engagement for students. This preference is voiced in the words of the principal of a large music school who opined:

we like families that know what we do ... families that start them young ... parents who were students here themselves ... it's just those same families that stick to it

The above-cited quote is an example of a cultural institution that favours families who have prior cultural knowledge. And as was evident in Leah's account, being aware of the time-sensitive benefits of starting a child's engagement at a young age and knowing about the inscription process' and waiting lists also contribute to ensuring optimum student engagement. These are important types of cultural knowledge or capitals that can be accrued by parents.

Parental time was identified as key to access and success. The words of one music teacher sum up the advantage of family or parental time in the context of success in IME:

we like mothers who don't work, who can come to lessons in the afternoon, who can sit in on lessons and who have time to supervise practice at home.

What is noteworthy in the context of time is that, at no stage in any of the interviews with music professionals was there concern voiced on how to address the lack of time for time-poor families in terms of attending lessons during the working day and engaging with daily home practice, especially when parents did not have flexible working hours.

In terms of economic capital, all study participants had the disposable income to engage their children in IME lessons. However, the ease and flexibility they had in terms of choosing teachers, music schools and lesson times was determined by the level of their economic resources and by the amount of time they had at their disposal. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the parental capitals needed in this context are culturally, class-related capitals. This concurs with the research of Deloughry and Lilliedahl who claim that participation in IME varies according to social class and resources.

In my own experience teaching in IME, and from my reflexive diary, I noticed that the attrition rate for families who scheduled lessons on a Saturday morning was far greater than for families who attended on weekday afternoons. It took some time to realise that parents from the Saturday classes were working full time during the week, leaving little time to follow up and supervise home practice. Thus unintentionally, my ideal family was, unlike Jane's cited above, one that had all the necessary capitals to fit into my schedule and the time to comply with my professional demands. These processes of engagement not only support a kind of opportunity hoarding but also encourage and perpetuate the use of insider knowledge to maintain the status quo, especially by laying down conditions only the well-resourced and IME-informed can meet.

The above-described criteria and conditions although displaying belief and support for a meritocratic system of entry and success, do not take into account that competitors for these places are not equally resourced and positioned in terms of capitals. Such institutional expectations, or rules of the game, assume a blend of hidden capitals that align with middle-class family habitus, (Lareau, Evans and Yee 2016), as well as knowledge and parental agency, (Vincent and Ball 2007; Vincent and Maxwell 2016). By endorsing the processes of access and engagement that require knowledge and time of how success in IME works, including having parental backup with fees and time for daily home practice, professionals have created and continue to maintain a sure and failsafe form of persistent and structured inequality in IME in Ireland.

In all sectors of IME provision in Ireland, the segregating effects of economic, cultural and time-based capitals are compounded by the parent-dependent conditions embedded in IME pedagogy and practice. The enabling and empowerment of IME participation in Ireland is not only a family or an individual parental issue, it is a political and class-related issue. This inequality of access, participation and success is built into the historically-maintained pedagogical and transmission process of IME and is structurally supported by music professionals and music institutions; traditions and practices that favour children from families with multiple and music-related capital resources. Having access to private, extra-curricular IME does advantage students in terms of their musical knowledge and skills, much of which is acquired prior to beginning to study the LC examination syllabus. There are hidden inequalities in this state-sponsored examination in that allowing the option of assessing a pre-acquired skill which is only available through the market, undermines equality and social justice-based opportunity.

It is proposed through this study to advance Lareau's argument in terms of middle-class cultural knowledge and how it advantages interactions with institutions (Lareau

2015). Unlike Lareau's study, the participants in this research all came from families where sufficient financial resources were available to engage with the IME market. Yet from the data, intra-class differences emerged in that not all of these families possessed the correct blend of IME-related capitals that are essential for participation and success in Ireland. Through continued support from capital-rich parents, professional insiders and professional music educators ensure that outsiders have little chance of entry to this 'secret garden'. This parental support and institutional structure also ensures that potential students are already insiders and that current students can continue to expand their chances and opportunities within the system.

## Conclusion

This study is a testament to the impact private family capitals have on the choices and success possibilities for students in IME in Ireland. The research raises the issue of intra-class variables that act as barriers for parents when navigating this specific field of education. In drawing attention to the issue of intra-class differences, Lareau's theory relating to middle-class families and parenting styles is disrupted in the context of the capital demands required for IME participation in Ireland. That is to say even with some capitals, not all middle-class families constitute as suitable raw material for engagement with IME. If one piece is missing such as a mismatch between time, finance or the status quo in terms of institutional demands, then the project can fail. This was evident in the case of Eve and Jane, where a lack of flexibility and transparency within the IME system exacerbated the challenge for their families. Thus, participation in IME can be problematic for students whose families, do not have the capital resources to facilitate an early start, to attend regular lessons, to facilitate and supervise regular home practice, and to pay annual tuition fees. It is argued that a student's participation in the IME market in Ireland is extremely restricted and subject to a selection process that synchronises with the requirements of music schools and providers, and one that is almost entirely dependent on a blend of field-specific, class-related, parental capitals.

The article raises the issue of privately resourced IME and how it can and does advantage students directly in public examinations such as Leaving Certificate Music. This is an example of an educational practice where professionals operate to routinely advantage and reward those with family and parental capitals.

What is important here, and is the main thrust of the argument running through this article is recognising that the motor for access and maintaining engagement in IME is located within the family (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu and Nice 2010). The research opens up a new set of conversations relating to the relationship between structured IME, the power of parental capitals, institutional demands, market-based parental involvement, and the accepted status quo. Rather than formally providing equal teaching and learning conditions for all students for the practical section of a public examination, the State is complicit in favouring a pre-selected group who through their capitals maintain a real advantage within the assessment process of a state-sponsored examination subject. The silence surrounding this arrangement assumes that IME is the domain of those who can afford it.

One of the most striking findings from this study was parents' acceptance of the unwritten doxa and status quo along with an awareness of how to use their capitals to

advantage their children. Such issues could act as a springboard to address the conditions for sustained engagement laid out by professionals and institutions alike. It is striking too that qualified and trained instrumental and vocal music teaching professionals have not collectively created, on a countrywide basis, a politically-directed movement to lobby for universal provision and capacity for state-supported access to structured IME as a legitimate right for all students and not just for the privileged few.

This study offers a contribution to the broader, ongoing research of making hidden intra-class differences more visible, especially in education. The research also contributes to extending knowledge on how social class, ECAs, cultural knowledge and practices, and the private educational markets are deeply integrated in ways that are advantaging the already privileged. This is especially salient in the Irish context where most tuition is privately provided through an unregulated market, where pathways to entry and progression are generally hidden and only become apparent through social networks and experience, because:

no one is going to rock up and tell you!

## Notes

1. In Ireland, the Leaving Certificate Examination is the final examination taken by students at the end of their secondary or second level schooling.
2. Delivering Equality in Schools.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributor

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