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**Exploring the Dual Identity of the Community Musician-Researcher:
Challenges and Opportunities in Youth Orchestra Participation
Research**

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Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory study into the challenges and opportunities encountered by a community musician and scholar engaged in research on youth orchestra participation. It highlights the positionality of the researcher investigating the dynamic interplay between the role of a participant in a youth orchestra and the researcher seeking to understand the multifaceted aspects of youth orchestra participation. The study explores the opportunities that emerged through this unique insider-outsider perspective. The study identifies instances where the researcher's dual identity facilitated a deeper level of understanding, fostering trust and openness among the youth orchestra community. Accessing the inner workings of this community presents challenges, necessitating dedicated time and sensitivity to foster trust and secure cooperation from those involved in youth orchestras. The paper explores potential challenges linked to being an 'insider,' including the inherent risks of bias and subjectivity, the process of gaining participants' trust, and the imperative of maintaining confidentiality within the community. The paper introduces thought-provoking questions, probing into the researcher's multiple identities, tensions within these identities, and their profound impact on the research process. It explores how these challenges contribute intrinsic value to the research, highlighting the nuanced understanding derived from the dual perspective of community musician-researcher.

Keywords: Community musician; Youth Orchestra; Insider-outsider perspective; Challenges; Dual identity; Positionality

Introduction

This paper presents an exploratory study into the challenges and opportunities encountered by the author, who identifies as a community musician and scholar engaged in research on youth orchestra participation. The dual identity of a community musician-researcher is defined by the intertwining of artistic practice and academic rigour, a combination that brings a unique perspective to the study of youth orchestras. Schippers and Bartleet (2013) explain that community musicians frequently take on a variety of roles, including educator, facilitator, performer, and cultural advocate. These roles demand not only a thorough understanding of the communities they engage with but also a flexible and empathetic approach to their musical



practices. This identity is particularly significant in understanding the multifaceted aspects of youth orchestra participation, which include not only the musical development of the participants but also their social, emotional, and cognitive growth within the community. According to Higgins (2012), “Community music seeks to create inclusive and participatory music-making opportunities, empowering individuals from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds to engage meaningfully in musical experiences (7).”

As a community musician and researcher, my positionality provides me with a distinctive vantage point. I am deeply embedded within the musical community, fostering trust and openness among the youth orchestra members. This insider status allows me to have a nuanced understanding of the community dynamics and the lived experiences of the participants. Conversely, as a scholar, I maintain an outsider’s analytical distance, necessary for observation and interpretation of data.

In this study, I aim to explore the opportunities that emerge through this dual identity, particularly how it facilitates a deeper level of understanding and connection with the youth orchestra community. By navigating the roles of both participant and observer, I can uncover insights that might remain hidden from a traditional researcher. This dual identity also enables me to act as a bridge between the theoretical frameworks of academia and the practical realities of community music-making.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to identify instances where my dual identity as a community musician-researcher has enriched the research process, leading to more meaningful outcomes for both the scholarly field and the youth orchestra community.

About the research

My doctoral research, titled *An Ethnographic Study Mapping Youth Orchestra Participation in Ireland: Education, Community & Wellbeing*, explores the role of youth orchestras in the lives of young people in Ireland. It aims to fill a critical gap in understanding participation in the Irish youth orchestra landscape, examining how involvement in these orchestras impacts young people. The research unfolds in two distinct phases.

The first phase focuses on the demographics of youth orchestra membership in Ireland, conducted in collaboration with the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras (IAYO). This phase investigates the age profile of participants, the geographical spread of youth orchestras, the distance members travel, their socio-economic backgrounds, and their ethnicities. Using this demographic data, the second phase delves into the holistic and social experiences of the young musicians. The research seeks to centre the voices of youth participants, which contrasts with the more common approach of prioritising adult perspectives, a practice that can limit our understanding of children's agency as cultural contributors (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007). This shift is crucial in recognising the role of young people as active cultural agents, providing a deeper understanding of their contributions to cultural production.

The research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. In the first phase, surveys were distributed to all 108 youth orchestras affiliated with the IAYO. The surveys were sent to participants over 18, as well as to the parents or guardians of those under 18. Participants under 18 completed the surveys with parental or guardian supervision. This survey data provides a comprehensive demographic profile of youth orchestra participants in Ireland, offering insight into socio-economic and geographic factors that influence participation, echoing similar findings in research on music education accessibility (Hallam et al., 2017).

Building on the findings from the first phase, the second phase takes an ethnographic approach, informed by previous studies in ethnomusicology and music education (Campbell 2018). This phase includes semi-structured interviews with selected participants from 3-4 youth orchestras, representing a broad range of experiences. In addition to interviews, I observed rehearsals to better understand the social dynamics of participation. Following Barz and Cooley's (2008) approach, I used observation to capture unexpected social interactions that might not be easily measured. Ethnography is particularly effective for understanding the lived experiences of youth orchestra members, allowing for a deep exploration of how music participation shapes their social and emotional development (Barz & Cooley, 2008).

Further ethnographic interviews were conducted with two key age groups: 14-17-year-olds (with parental supervision) and 18-26-year-olds. The inclusion of the younger cohort is particularly important, as 14-17 is the median age range of IAYO participants, who are often balancing their



orchestra commitments with junior cycle or leaving certificate exams. This group includes those who may or may not be studying music at school, offering insight into how participation intersects with formal education. Recent studies, such as those by Guhn et al. (2020) have shown that musical engagement during adolescence can positively influence mental health, emotional regulation, and social outcomes, making this cohort's contributions essential for understanding the broader impact of youth orchestras.

Similarly, the 18-26 age group provides insights into how participation in youth orchestras shapes individuals' development and their decisions regarding further engagement with music education beyond secondary school. The surveys were developed in consultation with my academic supervisors and the IAYO, and the research explores the social impact and well-being outcomes for participants. These insights will be gathered through focused observations of specific communities and focus group discussions. The study's dual focus on the 14-17 and 18-26 cohorts will offer a deeper understanding of how youth orchestra participation influences early adolescence and young adulthood, shedding light on its role in personal development and educational choices.

This research contributes to the growing recognition of the broader benefits of musical engagement, beyond technical skills, by social, cognitive, and emotional benefits, fostering well-being and resilience in participants (Creech, 2019). By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how youth orchestra participation shapes the lives of young musicians in Ireland. According to Willingham (2019) at its core, community music is about breaking down barriers – barriers of access, social hierarchies, and cultural silos. It is about making music a shared, inclusive practice, accessible to all, regardless of background or ability. This underpins my research rationale.

My Role as a Community Musician-Researcher

My role as a community musician-researcher has been shaped by a broad range of experiences, beginning with my early involvement in youth orchestras and extending into my professional work as a music educator and facilitator. These experiences have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the youth orchestra environment and my approach to doctoral research.

My musical journey began at the age of 10 when I joined a youth orchestra, playing classical piano accordion and flute. During my time in the orchestra, I performed at ‘prestigious’ venues such as the National Concert Hall in Ireland and participated in international tours across Europe. These formative experiences provided me with deep insights into the youth arts environment, including the challenges of ensemble performance and the interpersonal dynamics that shape a youth orchestra. My engagement with orchestras continued through my university years, where I served as an elected orchestra manager. In this leadership role, I managed the orchestra’s daily operations and collaborated closely with the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras, further developing my understanding of the organisational and administrative aspects of youth orchestra management.

In my professional career as a music educator, I have worked extensively in post-primary schools, delivering a wide range of extracurricular musical activities, including school musicals, choirs, instrumental groups, and music for wellbeing programmes. I have guided over 200 students weekly, designing programmes that catered to both exam and non-exam students. My approach as a facilitator focused on empowering students to take ownership of their musical experiences by allowing them to choose and lead their activities. Through these experiences, I gained a deep appreciation for the power of music to foster personal growth, collaboration, and community engagement.

However, my role in this research shifts away from facilitation to that of an active participant within the orchestra. As a flautist in the ensemble, my focus is no longer on guiding or leading the music-making process but on immersing myself in the collective musical experience. This transition from facilitator to participant has allowed me to engage fully in the technical, emotional, and collaborative aspects of performance. I am now part of the musical fabric of the orchestra, contributing directly to the ensemble’s sound and experiencing the same challenges and triumphs as my fellow musicians. This active participation gives me a unique vantage point from which to observe and understand the inner workings of the orchestra, including the development of interpersonal relationships, the resolution of conflicts, and the shared sense of purpose that comes from performing together.

While my previous experience as a community music facilitator has informed my understanding of group dynamics, the emphasis in this role is on active participation rather than leadership. The skills I developed as a facilitator—such as empathy, collaboration, and listening—are still valuable, but they are now applied in a different context. As a participant, I am deeply engaged in the ensemble's music-making process, focusing on how my contribution as a flautist can enhance the overall performance. This shift in focus has allowed me to experience the orchestra from within, rather than from an external guiding position, giving me a richer understanding of the lived experiences of youth orchestra members.

In this dual role of musician and researcher, I engage in reflexive practice, continually reflecting on how my position as both an insider and an outsider influences my research. As an insider, I am deeply embedded in the orchestra, gaining first-hand knowledge of the social and musical dynamics at play. My participation allows me to gather rich, authentic data that captures the nuances of youth orchestra participation, providing insights that would be difficult to access from an external, detached perspective. At the same time, as a researcher, I maintain a degree of analytical distance, to critically assess my observations. This balance between immersion and detachment is crucial to ensuring the rigour of my research, allowing me to navigate the potential biases that come from being an active participant.

My experience as a musician-researcher is shaped by the constant tension between these dual roles. I must be fully immersed in the music-making process to understand the intricacies of youth orchestra participation while maintaining the critical distance necessary for scholarly analysis. By engaging in reflexive practice, I continuously scrutinise my own perspectives and assumptions, ensuring that my findings are grounded in both the lived experiences of the participants and the broader academic context. This approach enables me to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of youth orchestra participation, highlighting the social, emotional, and musical dimensions that are often overlooked in music education research.

My Positionality as a Participant and Researcher

The dynamic interplay between my roles as a participant in a youth orchestra and as a researcher presents a complex yet enriching journey. Engaging in the musical activities of the orchestra grants



me a first-hand understanding of its inner workings, from the intricacies of musical collaboration to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Through active participation, I not only experience the highs and lows of youth orchestra membership but also cultivate a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose with my fellow musicians.

However, simultaneously occupying the role of a researcher demands a certain level of objectivity and critical reflection. As I navigate the boundaries between participant and observer, I must maintain a degree of detachment from the immediate musical engagement. By adopting a reflexive approach, I continuously scrutinise my own perspectives and assumptions, thereby enhancing the rigour and validity of my research. As Etherington (2004: 140) emphasises, “reflexive researchers acknowledge the impact of their own history, experiences, beliefs and culture on the processes and outcomes of inquiry”.

In the context of my dual roles reflexive practice means actively questioning and evaluating how my involvement in the orchestra influences my observations and interpretations. As a participant, I gain valuable insights and first-hand experiences that inform my research. However, to ensure these insights are not clouded by personal biases or over-identification with the community, I adopt a reflexive approach. This approach echoes Etherington’s (2004) view that recognising the role of self in research can lead to creative and personal transformations for the researcher.

To mitigate any potential biases that may emerge from my research, I continuously reflect on my positionality and how it shapes my understanding of the youth orchestra dynamics. By integrating reflexive practice into my research, I aim to enhance its rigour and validity. This involves scrutinising my own perspectives, interrogating underlying assumptions, and being transparent about the influence of my dual roles on the research process.

Conversely, my outsider status as a researcher provides a fresh perspective that complements my insider insights. Approaching the study of youth orchestra participation with a degree of distance and objectivity, I am able to critically analyse my observations, question underlying assumptions, and draw broader conclusions about the phenomenon. Integrating both insider and outsider perspectives, I strive to develop a comprehensive understanding of youth orchestra participation that reflects its complexities and nuances.

Opportunities Arising from Dual Identity

Navigating the dual identity of a community musician and researcher offers unique opportunities that significantly enhance the research process. This dual role facilitates a deeper level of understanding within the youth orchestra community, fosters trust and openness among participants, and provides enhanced insights and perspectives from an insider-outsider viewpoint.

The Impact of Dual Identity on Deeper Understanding in the Youth Orchestra Community

Engagement in rehearsals and performances as an active participant exposes me to the technical and emotional challenges inherent in musicianship. As Jorgensen (2008: 14) notes, "musicianship is a holistic endeavour that involves technical skill, emotional depth, and an understanding of the human condition", underscoring the multifaceted nature of musical engagement.

Within the daily interactions of the orchestra, I am immersed in the complex interplay of relationships that unfold over time. Observing the evolution of friendships, the resolution of conflicts, and the cultivation of camaraderie provides valuable insights into the social dynamics within the ensemble. Small (1998) notes that music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The meaning of music lies in the activity itself, not in its objectified form. This intimate knowledge transcends mere observation, offering a deeper understanding of the interpersonal connections and group dynamics that shape the orchestra's cohesion and functioning.

Participation in ensemble activities offers direct exposure to the collaborative processes driving the orchestra's progress. Whether navigating sectional rehearsals, engaging in ensemble problem-solving, or experiencing moments of musical synergy, my involvement provides a visceral understanding of real-time collaboration dynamics. This perspective is essential for analysing the multitude of factors contributing to effective teamwork and collective musical achievements (Robinson 2018: 123)

Building Trust and Openness Within the Youth Orchestra Community

Building trust and openness within the youth orchestra community is crucial for gathering authentic and meaningful data. My unique perspective as both a musician and researcher significantly aid in fostering these elements. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017:104), "shared experiences between researcher and participants can foster trust and rapport, enhancing the quality of data collected." This assertion underlines the importance of the insider role I play in the orchestra, facilitating deeper connections with the participants.

My active involvement in the orchestra means I share many of the same experiences as my fellow musicians. This shared experience creates a foundation of mutual understanding and respect. Bartleet and Higgins (2018) argue that shared experiences between researchers and participants foster trust, which enhances the candidness and depth of communication. When orchestra members see that I am genuinely engaged they are more likely to view me as a trusted insider rather than an external observer. This trust encourages them to share their experiences and perspectives more openly. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:154) suggest, "the researcher gains a depth of understanding that goes beyond mere observation, as they are embedded within the social and cultural context being studied."

Ethical transparency is also essential for building trust. Being transparent about my dual role and the purpose of my research is crucial. I clearly communicate my intentions, how the data will be used, and the measures in place to protect participants' confidentiality. This transparency reassures orchestra members that their contributions will be respected and handled with care, further fostering an atmosphere of openness and trust. Bryman (2016: 134) emphasises that "transparency in research practices is essential for building trust and ensuring the ethical treatment of participants." This practice not only enhances their willingness to participate but also ensures that the data gathered is reliable and ethically obtained.

How Enhanced Insights and Perspectives Arise from the Insider-Outsider Perspective

Balancing my insider and outsider perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of youth orchestra participation. As an insider, I possess detailed knowledge of the orchestra's routines, norms, and unwritten rules. This allows me to ask more informed questions, probe deeper into specific issues, and interpret data within the appropriate context. My insider status enables me to

uncover subtle nuances that an external researcher might miss, providing a richer and more accurate portrayal of the orchestra's inner workings.

On the other hand, my role as a researcher requires me to maintain a degree of detachment and critical analysis. This outsider perspective helps me step back from the immediate experiences and view the data with an analytical lens. As Denzin and Lincoln (2017: 12) suggest, "the interplay of insider knowledge and outsider objectivity can enhance the validity and depth of qualitative research." I can identify patterns, question assumptions, and draw broader conclusions that contribute to a more robust understanding of the youth orchestra experience. For instance, while I might empathise with the stress of performance as a participant, as a researcher, I can analyse how different coping strategies impact overall performance quality and group cohesion. This dual approach ensures that my findings are not only empathetic but also analytically sound and comprehensive.

Furthermore, the integration of insider and outsider perspectives allows me to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and practical musicianship. Creswell and Poth (2018: 52) notes that "bridging the gap between the researcher's lived experience and their analytical perspective can lead to more impactful and relevant findings." I can translate the lived experiences of orchestra members into scholarly insights that resonate with both academic audiences and the musical community.

Challenges of Dual Identity

Navigating the roles of community musician and researcher within a youth orchestra presents several challenges, particularly in terms of access and trust. These challenges include the risk of bias and subjectivity, the necessity of building trust and ensuring confidentiality, and balancing personal experiences within the research.

Potential Biases and Subjectivity Faced by Community Musician-Researchers

One of the primary challenges faced by community musician-researchers is the risk of bias and subjectivity. Being deeply involved in the youth orchestra community means personal experiences and emotions can influence research findings. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016:14) notes, "Researchers must constantly navigate the terrain between subjectivity and objectivity,



recognising that their positionality inevitably influences their perceptions and interpretations."

This highlights the necessity of acknowledging and addressing potential biases in research.

Personal bias can colour my perceptions and interpretations based on past experiences, leading to a partial view of current situations. The challenge here is to maintain a neutral perspective, which can be difficult when past experiences cast a long shadow on current observations.

Emotional involvement also poses a significant challenge. My emotional ties might make it difficult to critique certain aspects of the orchestra's operations or interactions without letting personal feelings interfere. The close relationships built over time with fellow musicians can create a sense of loyalty that may hinder my ability to offer an unbiased analysis.

To mitigate these challenges, I employ several strategies. One key approach is engaging in regular self-reflection to separate personal experiences from observations. Keeping a reflective journal helps document these biases and work through them systematically. For example, after each rehearsal or performance, I note my personal feelings and compare them with the data collected. This practice helps me to identify and acknowledge my biases, allowing me to work towards more balanced and impartial conclusions.

Another strategy is triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources and methods to cross-verify findings. As Fusch et al., (2018: 19) explain, "Triangulation is essential to qualitative research as it enhances the credibility and validity of the results by cross-verifying information from multiple sources." This ensures that my conclusions are not based solely on personal experiences. Triangulation might involve combining interviews, surveys, and direct observations to build a comprehensive picture. By gathering data from various perspectives and methods, I can cross-check the information and reduce the influence of my personal biases.

Finally, seeking feedback from colleagues and mentors through peer review provides an external perspective and helps challenge any potential biases. Discussing my findings and methods with other researchers helps highlight blind spots and areas where my personal experiences might have unduly influenced my analysis. Peer review acts as a safeguard, ensuring that my research maintains credible. By incorporating these strategies, I strive to balance my dual roles and produce research that is both reliable and insightful.

Gaining Trust and Ensuring Confidentiality as a Community Musician-Researcher

A significant challenge for community musician-researchers is gaining the trust of fellow musicians, conductors, administrators, and other stakeholders within the youth orchestra community. Despite being an insider, immediate trust is not guaranteed. As Glesne (2016: 142) emphasises, "Establishing rapport and trust with participants is a crucial part of qualitative research, as it facilitates open and honest communication, which is essential for gathering rich, in-depth data." Building these relationships requires time, effort, and a delicate balance between participating in the community and maintaining the necessary distance for research purposes. Ensuring confidentiality within a close-knit community is also challenging, as participants may be hesitant to share candid insights if they perceive any breach of trust.

Gaining access to the inner workings of the youth orchestra community involves overcoming initial scepticism and demonstrating reliability and integrity. Achieving this requires consistent presence and active participation in rehearsals, performances, and social activities to build rapport and demonstrate commitment. Regular involvement shows dedication and helps me become a familiar and trusted figure within the community. Transparency is also crucial. Clearly communicating the goals of my research, how the data will be used, and the measures in place to protect participants' confidentiality helps in building trust and dispelling any concerns about hidden agendas.

Building trust and securing cooperation from participants is a time-intensive process that demands sensitivity and respect for the community's dynamics. Actively listening to participants' concerns and experiences, showing empathy, and validating their perspectives demonstrate genuine interest and foster a sense of mutual respect and trust. It is equally important to respect personal and professional boundaries, ensuring that participation in the community does not compromise my objectivity or the participants' comfort. Recognising when to step back and maintain a professional distance is crucial for preserving these boundaries.

Ensuring confidentiality is essential for fostering trust, particularly in a close-knit community where members are likely to know each other well. To address this, I use pseudonyms and omit identifying details in research reports to protect participants' identities. This reassures participants that their contributions will not be linked back to them personally. Additionally, implementing

robust data security measures to safeguard participants' information and reassure them of their privacy is vital. This includes secure storage of data and clear protocols for handling sensitive information.

By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, I can navigate the complexities of my dual identity effectively, enhancing the depth and quality of my research while fostering trust and openness within the youth orchestra community.

Intrinsic Values from the Challenges of Dual Identity

Challenges are not roadblocks but rather pathways to growth and discovery within the research process. Embracing and navigating these challenges offers invaluable opportunities for researchers to enhance their understanding and insights, particularly in exploring intricate phenomena such as youth orchestra participation.

Promoting Growth and Resilience

Challenges serve as catalysts for personal and professional development, pushing researchers beyond their comfort zones. By overcoming obstacles, researchers cultivate resilience and adaptability, equipping themselves with valuable skills that empower them to tackle future challenges with confidence and efficacy. This growth is essential for researchers, as it enables them to handle the complexities and uncertainties inherent in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013: 75) notes that "the iterative nature of dealing with challenges helps in building a more resilient and adaptable approach to research," which enhances their overall research capabilities.

Encouraging Creativity and Innovation

Confronting challenges sparks creativity and fosters innovative problem-solving approaches. Researchers are compelled to explore unconventional methods and perspectives, breaking free from traditional thinking patterns to address obstacles and advance their research objectives in novel and impactful ways. According to Barbour (2001: 1116 "methodological challenges can lead to creativity and innovation in research practices," driving researchers to develop new techniques that deepen their inquiries. This innovation not only enriches the research process but also contributes to the broader field by introducing fresh perspectives and techniques.

Fostering Critical Reflection

Challenges prompt researchers to engage in critical reflection, interrogating their assumptions, methodologies, and interpretations. By delving into the underlying reasons behind encountered difficulties, researchers deepen their understanding of the research process, refine their methodologies, and cultivate a more nuanced approach to inquiry. This reflective practice is crucial for ensuring the validity and reliability of the research. Finlay (2002: 532) asserts that "critical reflection is a vital component of rigorous qualitative research," enabling researchers to interrogate their own biases and assumptions.

Contributions to Understanding Youth Orchestra Participation

Navigating challenges within the research process contributes significantly to a comprehensive exploration of youth orchestra participation, enriching both the researcher's insights and the body of knowledge in the field. Addressing these challenges not only enhances the depth and quality of the research but also fosters a more holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics within youth orchestras.

Enhanced Insight into Dynamics and Complexities

Overcoming challenges grants researchers first-hand experience of the intricate dynamics and complexities inherent in youth orchestra participation. Through navigating obstacles such as bias, trust-building, and ethical dilemmas, researchers develop a deeper appreciation for the multifaceted nature of the youth orchestra community, leading to more nuanced analyses and interpretations. Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 15) points out that "deep engagement with challenges allows researchers to uncover the layered realities of the social world they study," providing a richer and more detailed understanding of the community.

Facilitating Reflexive Engagement

Challenges prompt researchers to engage in a reflexive examination of their roles, identities, and methodologies. By acknowledging and addressing biases, tensions, and ethical considerations, researchers cultivate a more profound understanding of their positionality and its implications for the research process. Berger (2015:220) notes that "reflexivity enhances the credibility of qualitative research by ensuring that the researcher's perspective is thoughtfully integrated into the analysis." This reflexive engagement fosters greater self-awareness and helps maintain the

integrity of the research. Barz and Cooley (2008) note that the researcher's role as both an insider and outsider is a delicate balancing act, where reflexivity becomes crucial to understand how one's positionality shapes the interpretation of musical and social dynamics.

Enriching Data and Interpretations

Overcoming challenges yields rich and authentic data that capture the realities of youth orchestra participation. The insights gained from navigating obstacles inform nuanced interpretations of findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, dynamics, and implications of youth orchestra involvement. Creswell and Poth (2018: 76) states that "the depth and richness of data obtained through overcoming research challenges significantly enhance the overall quality and impact of qualitative research." This depth of understanding is achieved through persistent and thoughtful engagement with the challenges faced during the research.

Conclusion

My dual role as both a participant and researcher in the realm of youth orchestras provides a distinctive vantage point that deeply shapes my doctoral investigation. Commencing my journey in orchestral engagement at a young age and advancing through university to professional educational positions has afforded me a comprehensive grasp of the youth arts landscape. This duality enriches my research by offering both an insider's intimate understanding and an outsider's analysis.

In conducting my doctoral research, I draw extensively from my diverse experiences to delve into the multifaceted role of youth orchestras in young people's lives. Collaborating closely with a partner organisation, my study encompasses quantitative demographic analysis alongside qualitative exploration of participants' holistic and social experiences. By centring on the perspectives of the youth themselves, this research illuminates their agency as active contributors to cultural production and consumption, transcending the historically prevalent adult-centric viewpoints of youth musical involvement.

Balancing my dual roles necessitates navigating the fluid interplay between immersion in musical activities and the detachment essential for rigorous analysis. This reflexive approach bolsters the integrity and credibility of my research by acknowledging the influence of my personal history,



experiences, and beliefs on the investigative process. Furthermore, my dual identity not only facilitates a deeper comprehension of the youth orchestra community but also fosters trust and openness among participants. Through conscientiously addressing potential biases and upholding ethical transparency, I uphold the reliability and authenticity of my findings.

Ultimately, the challenges inherent in this dual identity foster personal growth, spur creativity and provoke critical reflection, significantly enriching the comprehensive exploration of youth orchestra participation. These challenges not only enhance the research process but also contribute to the broader knowledge base in the field, furnishing nuanced insights into the complex dynamics and lived realities within youth orchestras. This dual identity, therefore, serves as both a methodological asset and a lens through which to gain deeper insights into the transformative potential of youth orchestra participation.

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