

Musician/teacher/scholar: a postmodern autoethnographic self-study of the intersections between
teacher identity, teacher be(com)ing, and music education

by

Curtis Westbrook

B.M.E., Kansas State University, 2004
M.M.E., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2019

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Abstract

This autoethnographic self-study interrogates how musician, teacher, and scholar identities are produced and (re)imagined within K-12 music and higher education contexts. Situated in constructivist and postmodern frameworks, this (in)quiry explores the intersections between teacher identity, teacher be(com)ing, and music education. Asking how recursive practice enables critical interrogation, this (in)quiry cycles narratives, structures, and traditions in band; the researchers journey from conductor/teacher/leader to musician/teacher/scholar; and how this process generates educational knowledge.

Using autoethnographic self-study, the (in)quiry draws on layered forms of data from a twenty-year music-teaching career and transition to higher education. A recursive vignette framework structures analysis, each vignette tracing shifts in identity and authority.

Findings question how contest culture, evaluation, and non-renewal shape teacher identity through discourses of disposability, control, and deficit while masking teacher well-being and organizational health. Recursive reflexive practice and be(com)ing epistemology and method (re)position the author as musician/teacher/scholar, reclaiming agency and reimagining leadership as relational and student-centered. This (in)quiry contributes to music education by troubling hierarchical band traditions, grounding teacher narratives as knowledge, and offering implications for music education, school leadership, and the use of autoethnographic self-study as a tool of institutional critique and learning.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Prelude.....	1
Pursuit of Inquiry	3
Activation of (In)quiry	5
Thought Provocations	5
Conceptual framework.....	6
Constructivism	6
Postmodernism.....	7
Troubling language and constructing knowledge	8
Researcher-as-be(com)ing-subject.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Significance for conductors/teachers/leaders.....	11
<i>Contributions to music education</i>	11
Methodological Significance	12
Compositional Framework.....	14
Troubled Words and Concepts.....	22
Intermission.....	24
Chapter 2 – Canon	25
Thought Provocations	25
Exposition	26
<i>Constructivism</i>	26
<i>Postmodernism</i>	28
Constructivism, Postmodernism, & Researchers-as-Subject in the Music Classroom.....	31
<i>Reflexivity and Self-Study</i>	33
Band	36
Contemporary Manifestations of <i>Band</i>	38
Be(com)ing	39
conductor/.....	40
Evolution of my conductor identity	44
/teacher/	46

/leader.....	49
musician/	51
/teacher/	53
/scholar	55
Intermission.....	55
Chapter 3 - Invention	58
Thought Provocations	58
Constructivism	60
Postmodernism.....	60
Be(com)ing in Inquiry: Methodological Ensemble(s)	61
<i>Autoethnography</i>	64
Social World “Instruments”	68
Playing [with] Instruments.....	73
<i>Deconstruction</i>	74
<i>Reflexivity as methodological practice</i>	76
Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness	77
<i>Confirmability</i>	78
Intermission.....	80
Chapter 4 – Framing the Ensemble.....	81
Thought Provocations	81
Exposition	82
Framing [the] Be(com)ing and Otherwise	82
Other Conceptual Instruments	83
<i>Constructivism</i>	83
<i>Postmodernism</i>	83
<i>Self-study as the Immovable Do</i> (Pease, 2016)	84
Framing Ensemble (Chapter) Four	85
Title: A Prelude— <i>The Green Bubble</i>	87
Scene	87
Narrative Entry Point	88
Analytic Pause	88

Reflexive Mem()	89
Artifacts in Dialogue	89
Trustworthiness	91
Practical Echo	92
Title: I - The Veil of Talent	92
Scene	92
Narrative Entry Point	93
Analytic Pause	94
Reflexive Mem()	95
Artifacts in Dialogue	96
Trustworthiness	98
Practical Echo	99
Title: II – Ash, Stars, and Ballet	100
Scene	100
Narrative Entry Point	102
Analytic Pause	102
Reflexive Mem()	102
Artifacts in dialogue	103
Trustworthiness	104
Practical Echo	105
III – Disposable Teacher	106
Scene	106
The Evicted methodology paper	109
IV – Mr. Curtis	110
Scene	110
Analytic Pause	111
Reflexive Mem()	112
Artifacts in Dialogue	112
Trustworthiness	113
Practical Echo	114
V – Return	114

Chapter 1 – Prelude

Overture

One of my favorite memories from my time as a band director is a Friday night football game. It is moments before halftime. I'm kneeling on the back sideline, picking at the turf. The night sky is inky blue-black, stadium lights *brilliant*. Stars, little staccato dots. I am hunched (scrunched) over, balanced on my toes. The tips of my leather shoes bent, creased with worry. My body tight, like a Kevlar drumhead. My stomach coiled, insides swirling, but not from last night's Evan Williams- *bottom-shelf whisky with a green label*. That type of nausea had since passed; this was performance anxiety. Anxiety over, from, performing with/in/through all that carri(ed), shape(d) me here—to the turf, to this school, to musician-to-conductor-to-teacher-to-something else that's still already always happening.

Returning temporally to the crisp, clear, October Kansas night. Chill. Bugs flittering, cutting through the beams of the stadium lights. Stadium lights *towering*, reminiscent of institutional gaze (Foucault, 1977). Uniformed children wandering, bouncing. I was excited; it was a magical moment. I knew the halftime performance was going to be *good*. But the pool of anxiety still sat. Every single performance was contoured by fear. Every performance was an exercise in emotional labor (Hargreaves, 1998; Zembylas, 2003), not the joyful exuberance of music, but the bile of teacher identity grounded in the fear of failure (Ball, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2005).

The principal wandered by; they and I had a brief, rare, pleasant exchange. A hint of institutional approval flirted with the bugs. My attention; competing with the bugs' hyperactivity. Nervous system zapping. Dancing thoughts. Light. Movement. Glints of brass

and uniform. Hope shimmering with performative weight, the anticipation of a great show. Effort rewarded, secured.

I love band. I love conducting ensembles and coaching players. I love jazz and choir and orchestra. I love this artistry as a synthesis of many fun/profound/fulfilling things. As conductors, we move breath with our hands. *We move breath with our hands*. Then, sometimes, wonderful sounds happen. So why did/do I feel trapped in a cycle of over-giving, over-commitment, over-academizing, over-detailing, and over-goal-setting? I question why my value is in what I give, how well I perform, and how precisely I plan.

That marching band season would be one of *our* best. But it would be my last season at that school. Later, I would understand that the institution benefited from my excellence, but could not tolerate my presence. I was chasing things I thought would lead to wholeness. Achievement. Respect. Acknowledgment. Validity. I got those things, but not in a way that felt honest or true. It wasn't enough. This time, the over-functioning paid off, for [what felt like] a moment. It was a moment of clarity, of right-up-the-spine-tingling satisfaction. A sense of community. Accomplishment. Nostalgia in the suburban Kansas City fall air.

Something shifted under those lights. Bright, *towering* stadium lights. It was more than band, more than just *my* band achieving in the way I thought they should; the way I was taught they should. It was a resolution, but a false resolution. I had just finished my long-neglected master's degree the previous Summer. I was nearly a whole year sober. It seemed maybe I could trust that nothing was going to go wrong. That night was a mixture of small-town pride, athletics, pageantry, and artistry.

There is something inherently, undeniably magical about Friday night and *the band*. But the magic is socially constructed, emerging from performative nationalism: music, flags, stadium ritual, and the public display of meritocratic unity (Foster, 2013)—quintessential Americana.

This dissertation is a response to these misalignments; what appears as nostalgia is critique. But, what is/was (mis)aligned? Is it simply that I was ‘burnt out’? Burnout is more than personal exhaustion; it is moral and institutional betrayal (Santoro, 2011). I complain, but I claim that night as a favorite, cherished memory. Isn’t there something dishonest and unsettling about performative (empty) ritual? Friday nights are steeped in Rockwellian wholesomeness (Nicholson-Smith & Debord, 2020). That night, I achieved the box-checking of what is proper, correct, and true in the service of institutions governing my pedagogical subjectivity.

This memory is not background noise; it is a site of methodological emergence. The dissonance between external institutional performance and my internal reality is a source of inquiry. This dissertation is not a linear narrative, but a recursive examination of my occurred-but-still-occurring be(com)ing teacher identity.

Pursuit of Inquiry

I share this memory/narrative as one rhizomatic entry point into my be(com)ing. I use be(com)ing as an epistemology, a critique of identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. Rhizomatic entry (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) conveys the non-linear, decentered process of my be(com)ing. This dissertation will not fit neatly within a single academic, epistemological, or educational framework. It is meant to disrupt through voice, narrative, and theory. I will deconstruct the assumptions the academic and epistemological frameworks rest on even as it/they shap(ed) me. I assert disruption and joy as scholarly method (Lather, 1991; Pillow, 2003; St. Pierre, 2000). My story is a living connection to what I am/have been/will be

be(com)ing. This story is not fresh in my experience, but the moment writes/wrote/is writing me (Barad, 2007).

This memory prompt(ed) a larger-looming thought provocation, an enduringly open question: How do institutional performance structures shape/obscure/shatter teacher identity? This moment, a personal narrative, offers space for understanding teacher identity and leadership (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This is not just *a* story; *the* story—stories are data, theory, and method (Clandinin, 2013; Coia & Taylor, 2009). My memory, this memory, serves as a portal to data production. This story cycles through memory and analysis, resisting linear progress. I offer that chilly October night as methodology. This is not a story of triumph, but an inquiry into what else is “there” (Osgood et al., 2020); what else shape/d my pedagogy and pedagogical self?

I acknowledge that I carry other unresolved, untidy questions about my pedagogy. I wonder: Do I over-think as a form of protection? Do I over-detail as control? Do I/did I overfunction as safety? These questions are not *research questions*; they start me down that path—they are Thought Provocations that invite me into inquiry. Although I welcome the collapse of the tower, *the tower that I built*, and the search for “truth” among the debris, I reject this writing as therapy. Could it function as repair? I certainly hope so. My willingness to investigate two decades of academic residues to honor both the trophies and the written reprimands is not avoidance. It is confrontation. Therefore, I confront how my identity transformation from conductor/teacher/leader to musician/teacher/scholar shapes/is shaped by pedagogical and leadership models governing the educational contexts in which I was/am situated.

Activation of (In)quiry

This (in)quiry aims to interrogate, explore, and deepen my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar through autoethnographic self-study. Examining personal experience in the context of conducting, teaching, and leadership through autoethnographic self-study legitimizes lived experience (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024) as a site of knowledge production. I use be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) as an epistemology, a critique of identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. This (in)quiry arises from twenty years of achievement, failures, and constant change in pursuit of *success* — a concept that remains elusive, nebulous, be(com)ing, too. This inquiry employs autoethnographic self-study to explore how my be(com)ing as an educator contributes to constructivist knowledge-building and how reflexive practice can cultivate enduring expansion in my teaching and leadership. Reflecting on key career moments, this study demonstrates how personal stories can inform teacher identity, leadership models, and pedagogical practices, particularly in hierarchical educational contexts. Therefore, the following provocations (e.g., research questions) shape/d this inquiry:

Thought Provocations

1. In what ways does recursive practice enable me to critically evaluate how the roles of various actors (humans/roles/institutions) are entrenched in the narratives, traditions, and structures that shape music education?
2. Through parallel postmodern and constructivist frameworks, how can I interrogate my evolving journey from conductor/teacher/leader, to musician/teacher/scholar?

3. How does my process of be(com)ing, explored through autoethnographic self-study, inform and contribute to constructing pedagogical knowledge, and what insights does this process offer to education?

Conceptual framework

As a preview of methodological and theoretical foundations, I position this self-study within the complementary/competing frameworks of constructivism and postmodernism. Both theoretical frameworks value and center subjectivity as an integral dimension of inquiry. Constructivism builds, and postmodernism deconstructs. Constructivism treats knowledge as co-constructed through reflection and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Co-construction refers to knowledge gained through interaction. Knowledge is co-constructed through reflexive dialogue with the self, interaction with artifacts, and engagement with theory. Constructivism requires self-study to generate knowledge from lived experience because the researcher cannot be separated from the research. Constructivism validates subjectivity as a source of insight; bias is not a flaw, but a necessary, illuminative, and instructive position.

Constructivism

Constructivism frames knowledge as experientially constructed, situating this inquiry within a framework of meaning-making through lived experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this conceptualization, identity formation is not fixed but emerges through learning and self-examination. Because constructivism supports self-study by positioning meaning-making as emerging from experience, it sets a foundation for self-study as a rigorous method of inquiry. Identity is constantly in flux, be(com)ing is a process, and identity formation emerges through learning and self-examination within the social world.

Constructivist knowledge-building, cultural identity formation, and reflexive practice remain under-explored in shaping teacher identity and leadership. Without a deep, critical exploration of how educators' lived experiences can inform educational theory through self-study, there is a risk of overlooking the personal and cultural dimensions that shape teacher identity and leadership in diverse educational contexts. I claim (I insist, I demand recognition of) the teacher-as-researcher, firmly cementing this study in the framework of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Schön, 1983). Unfortunately, educators' personal experiences, such as mine, are not being fully leveraged to inform pedagogical theories or policy. Understanding how be(com)ing can inform educational theory may lead to more responsive teaching practices and leadership models, especially in diverse and dynamic educational environments.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism (Foucault, 1995; Lyotard, 1984) disrupts hierarchical knowledge structures in music education, supporting my interrogation of identity categories and institutional norms. The central, authoritative role of the ensemble conductor is a critical example of this hierarchy, where all decisions, musical, curricular, and performance, are dictated in a top-down structure. The athletic/military/conservatory influences on band demand questioning of knowledge/power/tradition, and how teachers are implicated in the (re)production of these overarching systems. These traditions reveal an authoritarian lineage and invite criticism for their rigidity. These influences transformed/shaped/damaged the conductor/teacher/leader (me), but they must be deconstructed to be understood, even incompletely. Postmodernism challenges essentialist notions of identity, reinforcing fluidity in be(com)ing.

Postmodernism disrupts fixed identities and hierarchical authority by questioning how power and knowledge circulate through our institutions and interactions (Foucault, 1995; Lyotard, 1984). This theoretical framework interrogates my identity as a conductor/teacher/leader by deconstructing/rejecting traditional hierarchical roles. Postmodernism supports my inquiry by rejecting stable positions such as conductor/teacher/leader. Reflexive practice positions the researcher both as subject and analyst, challenging settled pedagogical norms about authority and control (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Reflexivity is not just practice, but a site of knowledge production. It is where meaning is made. In teaching, conducting, and scholarship, knowledge is an iterative practice in which understanding is always incomplete and context-dependent. Postmodernism rejects the traditional epistemological model in which knowledge is something that one acquires. This autoethnographic self-study is not about reaching a final truth.

Troubling language and constructing knowledge

My use of terminology [be(com)ing, (in)quiry], signals a poststructural approach to language (Foucault, 1972). This text questions the assumption that language is fixed or stable. /teacher/ is a role I once rejected; the word is different now that I have accepted, carried, and left the role. Terms like *teacher*, *conductor*, and *knowledge* are treated as discursively produced (St. Pierre, 1997, 2000). These words are roles inherited, accepted, embraced. Acquiesced—or forced. Words like (in)quiry and be(com)ing are intentional disruptions that signal instability (Derrida, 1976). I trouble these spaces to frame knowledge-making as recursive/reflexive/contingent. This disruption is not *just* chaos; it is part of a broader methodology that acknowledges and invites disruption, departure, the unsettled and unresolved (MacLure, 2013). The provocations (or research questions), grounded in my be(com)ing, are

born from real tensions across personal, professional, and institutional contexts. The provocations are not abstractions or ‘what ifs’; they arise from recursive engagement with educational structures. The coming connection to my sixth-grade writing is not anecdotal (*The Green Bubble*); it marks an early moment of reflexive self-discourse. This creates an arc of self-narrative that spans from childhood to my present middle age—temporally-situated but undoubtedly contouring the always and still-be(com)ing.

Researcher-as-be(com)ing-subject

As St. Pierre (2000; 2013) argues, qualitative inquiry grounded in poststructural theory must internalize how the subject is (re)produced through language and power. Language not only represents thought, but also generates and troubles thought. Following this orientation, I position myself as researcher-as-subject, destabilizing traditional norms of hierarchy and placing reflexive vulnerability as a site of knowledge production. I (the researcher) am not a stable, detached subject. My be(com)ing is fluid, recursive, and entangled with the research. I embrace poststructural subjectivity that is always partial and in flux. The self that leads the (in)quiry and the self that is researched are not separate; they are interwoven through recursive engagement, continuously co-constructing one another through reflection and writing.

Method/ological Orientation

Self-study as a methodological approach connects stories like the one I am currently shaping to the critique of teacher identity formation within existing social structures and systems. Constructivism grounds this (in)quiry by treating lived experience as a primary site of knowledge production, while postmodernism disrupts fixed identity and hierarchical authority. Autoethnographic self-study operationalizes both frameworks by using personal narrative as data/theory/method. Self-study serves as a tool for educators to apply a critical lens to their

practice, to improve/trouble/transform it (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). I have chosen autoethnographic self-study to critique traditional structures and to explore how stories function as sites of knowledge production. Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) describe it as research, writing, story, and method, connecting the personal to the cultural and turning inward toward the scholar.

These approaches (self-study and autoethnography) are powerful for educators (actors, musicians, teachers, and/or/also scholars). By investigating practice, these methods provide a path to analyze tensions between institutional expectations and lived pedagogical experience. They align with reflexive practice and enable self-examination, which is critical to identity research. Reflexive practice, defined as critical self-examination (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Hughes & Pennington, 2017), is central to understanding how power, discourse, and institutional norms shape teacher identity. Reflexivity is both a tool for and a site of knowledge production. I aim to stir, to trouble, poke, and prod the space I have claimed as *professional*. Applying theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and constructivism, I investigate structures/norms/traditions to answer questions about service, knowledge, justice, and other things still unnamed.

Significance of the Study

This (in)quiry, intentionally marked to unsettle traditional notions of inquiry, offers practical implications for conductors/teachers/leaders (including myself), providing insight into how reflexive practice and personal narratives can improve teaching, specifically in performance-based classrooms. This study contributes to music education research by critiquing conductor-centered leadership models, offering an alternative, reflexive, student-centered approach. Teacher identity studies provide a model for integrating autoethnography into self-study methodology. As a model for self-study methodology in K-12 music education contexts

and for constructivist/postmodern educational inquiry, this writing challenges hegemonic structures in music and K-12 education and emphasizes reflexive and deconstructive practices.

Significance for conductors/teachers/leaders

For conductors/teachers/leaders, this is a demonstration of how reflexive practice can improve teaching in performance-based contexts. This study models recursive engagement with personal experience and treats teacher identity as shaped through reflection. Reflexive thought is understood as a form of knowledge production that generates emotional tension, and emotional dissonance is considered valid (Denshire & Lee, 2013; Tarisayi, 2023). This is a parallel, a duplication-extension of the improvement/practice/refinement process engaged in by practicing musicians. Reflexive identity work mirrors the process by which musicians refine their performance through feedback, repetition, and failure. In this text, teaching is treated as craft/artistry. I balance the value placed on performance technique (conducting/musicianship) with pedagogical refinement/mastery/artistry. Teaching becomes something more than instructional; teaching is iterative, /teaching/ is improvisational. This work challenges the emphasis on technique, control, and authority in music education. My (in)quiry elevates pedagogical mastery, vulnerability, and artistry to equal technical/control expertise, as essential components of music teaching.

Contributions to music education

This (in)quiry contributes to music education by critiquing conductor-centered leadership models. I interrogate traditional hierarchies in ensemble/classroom settings, offering reflexive engagement with hierarchy and challenging assumptions about the naturalness or necessity of authority in music education. This writing exposes how hierarchy is institutionalized through rehearsal structure, repertoire decisions, and (performance) evaluation systems. I position my

conductor/ identity as constructed/inherited (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). My identity is/was shaped through training, tradition, and institutional reinforcement. Challenging performance norms that reproduce power and control over bodies/souls confronts how the performance space disciplines bodies (posture/breath/silence) and behaviors (deference/obedience). This framework aligns with Foucault's (1977) discourse on disciplinary power and Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) critique of hierarchy, connecting musical achievement to submission, standardization, and institutional reproduction.

Methodological Significance

This study aims to address these gaps by applying autoethnographic self-study to explore the connections between my lived experiences as an educator and broader educational theories. It will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how personal narratives can inform teacher identity, leadership, and pedagogy within performance-driven, hierarchical education settings. This (in)quiry models autoethnographic self-study as a method of knowledge production. This autoethnographic self-study elevates emotional visibility, personal narrative, and institutional documents as data. Autoethnographic influences emphasize the cultural and discursive dimensions of teacher identity formation, demonstrating that teacher identity can be studied through recursive reflection. Building on prior self-study research in education (Coia & Taylor, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), I offer that professional growth emerges from revisiting lived contradictions. This work integrates critical reflexivity into teacher education, encouraging educators to interrogate institutional norms, role inheritance/acceptance, and authority.

By challenging hierarchical norms in K-12 public schools beyond music education, I apply self-study as a method of institutional critique within K-12 schooling, aligning self-study with critical theory (Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2005; Zeichner, 2007). Autoethnographic self-study draws upon personal archive and emotional transparency as valid knowledge sources (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Poulos, 2021). Demonstrating how lived experience and institutional critique can coexist, I reject the binary between the personal and the political (Pillow, 2003) and the limits on teacher/scholar identity formation. Therefore, this (in)quiry acknowledges the lack of educator voice/agency in policy/practice and the messiness of be(com)ing with/in/through tension. There is room in the academic space for research that explicitly connects personal narratives to broader educational theory using be(com)ing.

While self-study is underutilized in systematically connecting personal narratives with academic theory (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2009), more studies should explicitly utilize self-study to establish connections between lived experience and educational theory in educational research. This is especially relevant in teacher responsiveness to structural inequity. Further, self-study should be used to connect personal narratives with educational theory in music education. Research on teacher identity formation, leadership, and reflexivity has not fully addressed how educators' lived experiences enduringly shape pedagogical and leadership models in education. The lived experience of educators is critical in shaping pedagogical practices, leadership styles, and professional identity in ways overlooked by dominant policy and research discourses.

Educators' personal narratives are undervalued when they share teaching philosophies and engage in professional development (Coia & Taylor, 2009). A lack of reflexivity in teacher identity research exists, especially regarding the intersection of musicianship, teaching, and

leadership. Key gaps include the limited use of self-study (Nethsinghe, 2012) to examine the hierarchical models in music education that reinforce traditional leadership and learning structures, limiting teacher agency and reflexive practice. Space exists for critical interrogation of how institutional norms shape professional identity formation. Without a critical exploration of how lived experiences inform pedagogical and leadership models, education research risks reinforcing hegemonic structures (Foucault, 1977).

Compositional Framework

This compositional framework (positionality statement) is an articulation of the methodological, epistemological, and ethical grounding of my be(com)ing as a musician/teacher/scholar committed to educational justice. Be(com)ing is a reflexive critique of institutional and musical experiences. I occupy the dual position of researcher and researched (Hughes & Pennington, 2017), and the tensions and blurriness that arise from inhabiting both roles. I interrogate my professional trajectory, from conductor/teacher/leader to musician/teacher/scholar as a site of ongoing evolution and knowledge production. Recognizing the ethical responsibilities inherent in self-study, I commit to rigor, reflexivity, and a critical interrogation of biases. These responsibilities extend to how others (students, colleagues, institutions) are represented in my narratives.

The choice to embark on this (in)quiry began as an investigation of the literature rehearsed/performed within the band tradition. Specifically at the middle-school level. Why? Because I wanted to put the *best* music in front of my/the students, already a contentious and contest/ed concept. I wanted our experiences together to be meaningful, profound. I felt the deepest meaning would emerge through great music. I was tugging at the threads of my current scholarly position. My investigation of students' responses to the literature was (perhaps)

grounded in a desire to create space for student agency in my/our classroom. In seeking student voice, I found that my voice was part of the inquiry.

Indeed, if there is a correct way to become a musician, teacher, or scholar, I did not do it that way. As I reflect on previous lived experiences, particularly my time as conductor/ /leader, (I leave the /teacher/ space blank, respecting the space it occupies but does not fill). At that time, my identity as conductor/ and /leader was growing. The/teacher/ remained uninformed, uncertain, and perhaps intentionally neglected. I continue to subjectively construct knowledge even as I trouble new realizations of how I exist with(in), (in)form, and am informed by educational and social power structures.

I tumbled into this topic.

I've tumbled before in/to/through my academic journey. I've tumbled again and again. Not tumbling in a (s)tumble/mistake sort of way. Tumbling is (dis)orientation and deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that leads to deeper insight, similar to *Alice's* tumble down the rabbit hole (Carroll, 2014). Often, when this happens, an English teacher disrupts me, my ways of knowing/being/doing; tumbling me in/to/through something else. Alters the trajectory of my tumbling-be(com)ing. These (s)tumbles were/are instances of language changing me.

The first time was in sixth grade. I wrote a narrative, '*The Green Bubble*', about my mother's pet goat giving birth. The teacher praised my writing and entered it into a writing contest. Ten-year-old me understood in/through those moments that writing itself was recursive and the narrative power that moved me could, in turn, be used to move others.

The next time was in high school. An English teacher taught me about the symbolism in *Pleasantville* (Ross, 1998). I began to understand that meaning is subjective, contextual, dependent.

The last time was when a professor said *stop writing and read Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977). With effort, I connected theory to practice through my lived experience.

My metaphors are method (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015). My metaphors are method... my memory is data...this is not therapy, this is confrontation. My terms (*success, leader, conductor, rigor*) are not just troubled. They are humored, teased, bantered, and tossed about. Discarded. Worshiped. Stripped. Sometimes I am flippant. Sometimes I have to cloak the painful moments in humor. I have no choice. Even though I have laid down *my* swords, the flesh remembers. Humor, tone, and irreverence are intended as tools to guard against academic sanitization (Pillow, 2003).

Sometimes I have to downplay the moments of true, remarkable, rewarding connection. *Success*. Why? Because the light illuminating *otherwise* (Osgood et al., 2020) is/was uncomfortable.

My identity as a musician predates my roles as conductor or leader. Music has functioned as an identity marker, even before teaching, *especially* before teaching. I began band in sixth grade. Carrying my instrument, my saxophone case marked me as part of a group but set me apart from the crowd. There was tension in this role, belonging through music, separation through performance. This was among the first steps in my be(com)ing, but it began as be(long)ing. The uniform (a tuxedo! With school-color cumberbund and bowtie!), solo and ensemble medals, honor band patches. These. Set. Me. (A)part.

But they also mark(ed) me, and eventually, these same identity markers came to restrain me. Bind, control, and punish (and reward) me. This (in)quiry emerges from lived musical experience, thousands of hours of rehearsal. Eons spent alone, practicing. That time was well spent as a student. *Band* was *good* for me. But I had already become complicit in institutions/hierarchies/traditions as I pursued performance-based training. The medals began early; my first participation in a solo and ensemble contest earned a medal in sixth grade. I was (and still am) proud of my all-county band patch from 1994. As a middle school student, I understood that compliance + effort = recognition (*and safety*). My pursuit of success markers became burdensome. As a teacher, each success became just a moment of relief before the next performative demand. Criticism was not an opportunity for growth but a reminder that absolute compliance was expected.

Is there a difference between being a music teacher/being a musician who teaches? Why is there implied tension in those roles? I wonder if I chose music education not because I cared about teaching music, but because I wanted to be the next logical thing after maturing as a member of the ensemble, to be(com)e the *conductor* of the ensemble. Perhaps my mistake—or departure—was assuming my role as conductor was a goal, an achievement. The podium as a symbol/space of recognition, a trophy, rather than a waypoint in a much longer scholarly truth sojourn. What was once a goal I now see as a marker of something else. A departure.

A Positionality Intermezzo

Back to sixth grade. On the yellow bus. The north Florida air thick with humidity. The smell of those weird green not-leather seats. The bad-smelling kids, I would realize much later that the smell meant those children were hungry. This memory is data, an early inquiry into class consciousness. Now it is a part of the reflexive thread of this inquiry.

On that smelly bus, I discovered ‘classical’ music, and off we went. Michael Kamen’s *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* movie score (1991). I listened every day on the smelly/sticky yellow bus. On my Walkman. A present. A gift. The monotony of the bus ride home suddenly became a welcome, sacred part of the day.

Who? Castles! Archers! Trees! Cellos! I recall (probably not accurately) that one can hear the rosin on the cello bows in the first statement of the overture. The first cello note in the overture to *Jurassic Park* is a similar entrance—a parallel emotive response from me.

I wanted to do what that feeling felt like. Forever.

In high school, I (s)tumbled into *Holst’s Planets*. This was when recordings had to be found at a store, a library, or a garage sale. Amazon still only sold books and CD’s, long before dismantling democracy and performative spaceship races had become a business model. Music was discovered through movies, commercials, accidents. My high school band director had a Leonard Bernstein recording of Holst’s *Planets* (Bernstein, 1973). That recording was a portal, a continuation of my journey.

What is this sorcery?

Yesterday (it doesn’t matter which), an episode of *Bluey* (Brumm, 2020), a popular Australian children’s show, overwhelmed me with its moment. Holst returned unexpectedly, not as part of a curriculum but by shared experience. The *Bluey* writers expertly wove *The Planets* into a children’s show. I watched the episode, *Sleepytime*, with a few fifth-grade students.

As my teaching career wound down.

As their elementary careers end, they prepared to fracture as a group and enter different middle schools in a school district collapsing under failed leadership (Morfitt, 2025).

And we were collectively, brutally aware that our lives were changing. Somehow, the intersection of *Bluey*, *Holst*, and the end of my teaching career surprised me that afternoon.

A few weeks after this event, another child in my life fell in love with *Jupiter* from Holst's *Planets* as part of his older sister's graduation playlist. We listened to it. Twice.

That memory of *The Planets* led me down the rabbit hole.

I came home.

Then there was Beethoven (Bernstein, 1969)

Then I had Copland (Bernstein, 1997).

Then I had Barber (Slatkin, 1989).

I returned to these pieces again. An exercise of memory, reflection, sentimentality—enveloped in the canon, unaware of the musical *what else*.

That path was the musician behind the teacher. The musician who rarely makes music because behavior management is the institutional priority. I did not know my immediate acceptance of the hierarchy of ensembles meant my eventual complicity in the hierarchy of institutions. And for my sacrifice, in return for laying down my artistry, I got suspicion and dismissal:

Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach.

At least you get summers off.

Teachers cannot be trusted. Or worse, a position of power is an opportunity to abuse.

Have you ever dated a student?

My position is a delayed shift from music as an identity marker, something that adds value to me and sets me apart. Medals, trophies, ribbons, carrying an instrument, and questioning why those things were necessary in the first place. Did my need for a bit of ribbon have anything

to do with music at all? Was my musicianship as a ten-year-old boy informed by vanity? Is my scholarship as a 44-year-old man a maturation of that vanity? Is this elaborate nonsense, a *closed feedback loop of institutional validation*?

Yes, but power dynamics are involved. Swirling, turning, burning, informing my then human-puppy perceptions of art, success, acceptance, and achievement.

I enthusiastically joined the system and willingly made sacrifices to become a member of the party. As I crouched under the stadium lights, I knew it was over. The uniforms, the branding. Mascots, school songs, chants, cheers. *Beat 'Em, Kill 'Em, Ra Ra Ra!* It is all a bit too organized (too militant?). It is a veneer of community that harshly rejected a Black sophomore percussionist who *dared* kneel during the national anthem, not as a protest but as an expression of tremendous pain (Foltz, 2023).

Instead of recognizing the pain and embracing the child as a community should, the community continues to teach its white children to reject decency (Jones, 2021). I did not understand what was happening at the time. I did not understand *why*. I did notice casual, seemingly flippant racist behaviors from privileged white students that I had not seen previously. Students who existed at an intersection of access and comfort that I envied. I taught these students and cared deeply about them. They were/are racist.

(‘) *a breath mark*

I was not ready to name it until this morning, but my breath is motivated by justice. Both *Lincolnshire Posy* and BBQ are about social injustice (Adkins, 2006; Brewer, 2023). My be(com)ing has led me to a postmodern rejection of singular truths. My truths are relational, contextual, experiential. My truth has been constructed as my learning is/has been/always will

be a social experience. So then, I submit to justice as epistemology. Who decides? And, who decides who decides?

This autoethnographic self-study realizes my teaching/musical leadership experience as primary data. Reflexive entries, critical incidents, and memory work are not anecdotal; they are methodologically grounded in qualitative inquiry and critical postmodern analysis.

I was introduced to research through *Experimental and Descriptive Research in Music* (Madsen & Moore, 2020). Two of my three master's degree advisors were students of a prominent researcher in music education. A third, my committee chair, was a student of the next generation, but an equally prominent scholar. Why is this important? Not only is my musicianship shaped by the conservatory, the school of music, but my scholarly agency is also shaped by the institution(s). The academy has been a powerful space in my career since my teens. My scholarly synthesis is a result of an intersection of lived, personal choices about time/place/how/who/study/academy.

My understanding of qualitative research as anything other than 'not-quantitative' did not come until later in my doctoral program. As I moved into narrative inquiry, arts-based inquiry, and advanced qualitative methods, I began to appreciate/understand/value Queer theory, Feminist theory, and Critical Race Theory. I was not fully aware of these positions until they became weaponized as political discourse. These are shifting moments, documented across correspondence, writings, journals, dissertation drafts, shifts in understanding.

Could I "make" a career as a scholar/writer? Is that possible? Considering the shifting political/federal landscape, will it be possible? Who gets to speak in what spaces? As a white male cisgender educator in authority roles, am I allowed to be a feminist educator? Am I allowed to speak on behalf of/with/for/in care of a young Black man? Be(com)ing means

confronting my position as a white male in a system built for me. The situation is unclear. But I take responsibility for my complicity in those systems. Not performatively, not as a '*diversity club*' (Jones, 2021). As vulnerability. Vulnerability is the point of self-study, woven with autoethnography. This is not self-centeredness; this is a deliberate response to colonial anthropology. Storytelling is not indulgent; it is analytical. Vulnerability is resistance against academic sanitation. Subjectivity is the framework, disruption is the method.

Ethically, I commit to analyzing systems, not individuals. Students and colleagues will not be named. The focus is my experience and interpretation. The research questions emerge from lived contradictions. I do not claim objectivity or generalizability. My perspective is partial, situated, and shaped by my own identity, access, and institutional entanglements. This is not a case study; I am the case.

Troubled Words and Concepts

This section troubles words and concepts through my lived experience, critical theory, and their methodological implications for Thought Provocations 1–3. These are my terms and my definitions. I claim ownership of the language; I claim the power behind meaning.

These troubled words mark rhizomatic points in my be(com)ing, addressing Thought Provocation I by showing how personal meaning-making constructs pedagogical knowledge. (Par)enthesis, sl/ashes/, (in)sertions reflect the (de)constructive process by troubling meaning (MacLure, 2016). My use of be(com)ing, /teacher/, (be)longing, disrupts the stable meanings of these words, reflecting how postmodernism resists fixed identities and rejects hierarchical authority over knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). Sometimes the architecture \ / (Kress et al., 1996) of the text has meaning. The () in be(com)ing, for example, reminds me of St. Peter's Square. Each term will be anchored in poststructural discourse (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1977), critical

pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014), and rhizomatic knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), all frameworks that shape my autoethnographic self-study.

Agency

The level of influence teachers have over governance, policy, instruction, administration (Biesta et al., 2015).

Conductor

The leader of the (band) ensemble. Established as the hierarchical center of decision-making, musical and administrative. A program leader in the public schools, typically holding a wide scope of responsibilities. I have strived towards this title as a marker of identity and achievement.

Teacher

As a young band director, I viewed this role as that of a classroom teacher. Most often personified by an elementary classroom teacher. Early in my career, I resisted this label and this role. Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) argue that teacher identity is continually negotiated through practice.

Leader

A culturally desirable trait in teachers, administrators, and scholars. *Band* often presents itself as an opportunity to develop *leadership* in students (*Bands of America Summer Camp Presented by Yamaha*, n.d.). These ambiguous, but desirable qualities are used to reinforce director-centered, hierarchical power structures.

Musician

A person who engages with music.

Otherwise

A refusal of traditional logics.

Rhizome

A place of exit, or entry. The beginning of this chapter serves as one point of entry into my be(com)ing arc.

Scholar

A producer of knowledge, typically trained/ordained by the academy.

Justice

A mature version of fairness.

Success

The standards that I imagine others hold me to.

be(com)ing

be(com)ing is an epistemology (MacLure, 2016). A critique of static identity. A recursive structure for writing and analysis. The process of my concept of self cycling through the various roles I have de/constructed as my experiences shift my identity.

(In)quiry

A quest inside.

Be(long)ing

What came (be)fore be(com)ing. Longing is desperate need. Be(long)ing is existing as part of something, satisfying a need.

The use of parentheses

I use parentheses to both separate and connect. Parentheses nest (com) the process of growing/moving/changing/nurturing into something *other* (musician/teacher/leader). This example situates transformation within be(. . .)ing. Parentheses remind me of St. Peter's Square, a place of sacred transformation.

The use of slashes

Slashes echo the connection of parentheses, but are meant to draw attention to difference/tension/ambiguity.

Intermission

This *overture* outlines this study's purpose, Thought Provocations, and conceptual frame through a postmodern and constructivist lens for this autoethnographic self-study. This is an intentional pause—a rest—before the next movement. Chapter 2 situates this research within existing self-study, autoethnography, constructivist, and postmodernist literature, clarifying how these conversations inform teacher identity and reflexivity.

Chapter 2 – Canon

Theme and Variations

This (in)quiry aims to interrogate, explore, and deepen my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar through autoethnographic self-study. Examining personal experience in the context of conducting, teaching, and leadership through autoethnographic self-study legitimizes lived experience (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024) as a site of knowledge production. I use be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) as an epistemology, a critique of static identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. What follows is an entanglement of methods, traditions, and epistemologies situating self-study within autoethnographic traditions (Fitzgerald et al., 2009), supported by conceptual framings of constructivism and postmodernism. Constructivism and postmodernism trouble the singular, fixed natures of knowledge and identity, situating these within social contexts and structures of power. Constructivism legitimizes the social construction of knowledge, while postmodernism destabilizes hierarchies and authority. These conceptual and methodological orientations cultivate the exploration of my be(com)ing. Through reflexive engagement with personal experience and institutional structures, I explore what has shap/ed my pedagogical identity. The following provocations emerge from the tensions with/in the roles I cycle and the identities I interrogate.

Thought Provocations

1. In what ways does recursive practice enable me to critically evaluate how the roles of various actors (humans/roles/institutions) are entrenched in the narratives, traditions, and structures that shape music education?

2. Through parallel postmodern and constructivist frameworks, how can I interrogate my evolving journey from conductor/teacher/leader, to musician/teacher/scholar?
3. How does my process of be(com)ing, explored through autoethnographic self-study, inform and contribute to constructing pedagogical knowledge, and what insights does this process offer to education?

This chapter conceptually orients the (in)quiry by examining the literature that underscores constructivist and postmodern dimensions. Honoring the researcher-as-subject, I am explicitly concerned with my experiences as a band director in American public schools. As a scholar, I choose to trouble these spaces through constructivist and postmodernist lenses (Foucault, 1977), connecting these concepts to self-study and its critical application in education, and to how self-study deepens understanding of teacher identity (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). Drawing on self-study's historical, theoretical, methodological, and practical perspectives, this chapter will then briefly survey the American band movement and the formation and development of the genre known as 'band' in American public schools. For this (in)quiry, the term 'band' generally refers to an ensemble offered in elementary and secondary schools, primarily consisting of wind and percussion instruments (Sousa, 1900). As an ensemble, this could include concert, marching, jazz, and mariachi bands. Drumline, woodwind ensemble, brass choir, including visual ensembles, are all commonly considered... *band*. This chapter concludes by troubling the notion of musician/teacher/scholar be(com)ing at the intersections of teaching, learning, music education, and band, utilizing constructivism and postmodernism as conceptual anchors for the upcoming study.

Exposition

Constructivism

Ratner (2002) argues that subjectivity guides every aspect of research: topic selection, conceptualization, methodology choice, and data framing. Subjectivity is inherent bias in the meaning-making process; it shapes how individuals interpret and construct knowledge. Through this bias, knowledge is not discovered but constructed. Constructivism rejects objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and posits that knowledge is socially constructed through experience and interaction. This conceptual orientation assumes that the researcher and the world mutually influence each other, and that the researcher's perspective will influence inquiry and what is illuminated through it. Under a constructivist paradigm, the researcher and the social world are connected by their capacity to mutually shape one another as the research proceeds (Pickard, 2013; Pitard, 2017). Bias is not distortion; it is positionality. Within a constructivist paradigm, there is no objectivity or universal truth. This provides the grounding for Thought Provocation I, knowledge production through be(com)ing.

Vygotskiĭ's (1978) social constructivist view frames learning as a collaborative process in which learners and teachers co-construct meaning through shared cultural-linguistic activities. As a complement, Jean Piaget (1964) proposes that learning is an active, social process, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. Constructivism challenges the traditional, fixed, hierarchical models we often (un)consciously privilege in education—ones that essentialize and individualize authority and authoritative knowledge, thereby minimizing opportunities for co-creation through student agency and dialogue. Band is challenged by constructivism as its pedagogy is inherently hierarchical (Allsup, 2012). Instead, constructivism focuses on knowledge-building through experience. For practitioners, one's lived experience informs professional practice. In this way, knowledge can be constructed through the process of personal and professional be(com)ing. Be(com)ing signifies a constant state of flux

(St. Pierre, 2013), a distillation of the interconnectedness of roles/identities and how these are mutually shaped by social context. My be(com)ing as musician/teacher/scholar is not linear but relational. It continues to be (non)linear, relational, cyclical, much like knowledge-creation—knowledge-making and be(com)ing are already happening, have been happening; and this research—like all inquiry in the social world—enters in the middle; in this case, in the middle of be(com)ing.

Constructivism composes my be(com)ing as simultaneous knowledge-making and identity formation. Within this structure, I am accepting/exploring my identity as a conductor while simultaneously acquiring/nurturing knowledge as a conductor. I develop(ed) my conductor identity while seeking out teacher knowledge that I previously ignored/undervalued. I build my scholar identity as a questioner of hierarchies and institutions. At the same time, I *return* (recurse) to my identity as a musician that is no longer bound to my role as a K12 educator. The bias functions as an analytic lens, not distortion, clarifying identities and roles adopted and imposed. My decade of daily note-taking, journaling, saved artifacts, and past writings are intentionally identified as co-constructed data emerging from the reflexive process. The following section on postmodernism demonstrates how reflexive self-study critiques hierarchical band pedagogy.

Postmodernism

Like constructivism, a postmodernist perspective challenges fixed truths and the privileged notion of seemingly objective knowledge; it promotes multiple perspectives, cultural diversity, and fluidity of identity. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) rejects overarching stories that claim to explain events and experiences universally (such as the Enlightenment). Rather, knowledge is plural, contextual, and shaped by cultural conditions. Grand narratives have lost

legitimacy, and this decline is tied to the rise of decentralized knowledge systems. Local narratives reflect the lived experience of specific groups, challenging dominant claims of objectivity. Technological advancements and societal shifts have elevated localized narratives, illustrating how power structures legitimize certain forms of knowledge over others.

I take a critical postmodern approach to my research. Postmodernism deconstructs the systems that shape what knowledge is considered legitimate and rejects the notion that singular forms of knowing are more valid and valuable. Foucault (1977) insists that knowledge is produced within power structures, shaping what is believed to be truth. Relatedly, power structures define, oppress, and create knowledge. Knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by institutional, historical forces that determine [its] legitimacy. As prolific postmodern thinkers, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) challenge traditional, authoritative structures of hierarchical thought, offering the rhizome as a model of knowledge. The rhizome represents interconnected networks without a central point, allowing multiple non-linear entry and exit points. As I examine artifacts, I seek non-linear, temporality-transcending connections rather than hierarchical themes. The rhizome model rejects linear progression and centralized authority/institutions. Powell and Celeste (2020) present knowledge as a rhizome, offering a portrait of marginalization while holding the center. Rhizomatic knowledge values interconnected meaning-making, reinforcing the multiplicity of knowledge, placing localized narratives in non-hierarchical relationships.

In an era that blurs fact and fiction, what is knowledge, and who decides? The postmodern orientation has implicated the educational process and educational institutions in claims of linearity, singular truths, and objectivity. In academic contexts, postmodernism also manifests as a challenge to the hierarchy between teacher and student, promoting inclusive,

dialogic interactions—questioning who defines musicianship, leadership, and expertise. Constructivism explains how I learned to see teaching differently; postmodernism troubles the structures that made that transition necessary in the first place. Knowledge and reality are subjectively and individually constructed (Anderson, 2006). This is my orientation, my position, and my pedagogical approach. I understand that there is no absolute truth, as truth is contingent upon context and multiple perspectives.

Postmodernism and Language

Extending the postmodern framework to discourse itself, language does not neutrally describe reality; Foucault (1995) offers that language, like knowledge, does not describe reality but is shaped by power structures and historical conditions. Words escape fixed meanings, which are instead derived through difference, the interplay of presence and absence in language (Derrida, 1976). Words gain meaning not from what they are, but what they are not; they are conceptualized in relation to other words and concepts. (Par)enthesis, sl/ashes/, (in)section reflect the (de)constructive process by troubling meaning (MacLure, 2016b). My use of be(com)ing, /teacher/, and (be)longing disrupts the stable meanings of these words, reflecting how postmodernism resists fixed identities and rejects hierarchical authority over knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). I choose to leave space (conductor/ /leader) for identities that are emerging/(un)developed/resisted, such as /teacher/. I trouble words with *italics* to show my distaste for the word, or the implied *meaning*. I question the validity of what the word ‘*success*’ represents. The italics sometimes indicate a scornful attitude towards the word's oppression; they are always heavy with emphasis. These choices are an explicit reflection of the fragility, fluidity, and contingency of my identity on the overarching contexts and structures that seek to shape it. In teaching, conducting, and scholarship, knowledge is an iterative practice in which

understanding is always incomplete and context-dependent. I am not *just* a /teacher/ but constantly be(com)ing—undoing/remaking/expanding that role, (un)aligning with Deleuze’s (1987) rhizome, where identity and meaning are relational, non-linear; constantly shifting.

Constructivism and postmodernism reject the traditional epistemological model in which knowledge is finite and something one acquires. This autoethnographic self-study is not about reaching a final truth. There is no clean arc of triumph and growth. My story is not transcendent; it is not neatly tied up. Rather, messiness and ambiguity represent an ethical stance. This autoethnographic self-study is about explicitly acknowledging the ongoing, reflexive process toward more profound understanding of the intersections between (my) knowledge-making and be(com)ing and the realities that shape/are shaped by my teacher identity, pedagogy, and scholarship.

Constructivism, Postmodernism, & Researchers-as-Subject in the Music Classroom

Constructivism may initially appear to be in tension with postmodernism because of their seemingly distinct theoretical foundations. Constructivism is a meaning-making framework in which individuals actively co-construct knowledge with the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Postmodernism challenges the idea of meaning by deconstructing knowledge into individualized truths contingent on power, language, context, and experience (Foucault, 1977; Lyotard, 1984). Constructivism assumes that knowledge is stable, even though it is constructed and may shift. Postmodernism, however, questions whether knowledge can be stable at all. For this self-study, constructivism explains how my knowledge was built through my experiences. Constructivism helps me narrate my be(com)ing from conductor/teacher/leader in/to musician/teacher/scholar. Postmodernism helps me critique why [engaging with] such a journey remains salient and worth pursuing by examining the systems that frame/d my identity, and that

these systems are always both partial and evolving. By troubling the conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar, I have articulated the story of how I have constructed my identity, but also deconstructed the forces that shape/d it.

Autoethnographic Approaches & Self-Narratives

Having been labeled as autobiography, native ethnography (Chang, 2008), and critical reflexive narrative inquiry (Hughes & Pennington, 2017), autoethnography is part of the family of qualitative approaches that include ethnography, self-study, and narrative inquiry. As one arm of autoethnographic approaches, self-narratives align with postmodernist frameworks that value the voices of ordinary people and reject the elitism of autobiography (Chang, 2008). An autobiography is centered on the author's singular authority of a 'great life'. Self-narratives decenter elitist assumptions about whose stories are worth telling.

Stories are a fundamental way people learn about themselves, their experiences, and their reality/ies; they represent a socially constructed and individualized means of communication (Hartz, 2012). Ellis (2011) suggests that by making lived experience(s) meaningful and engaging through accessible texts, self-narratives may reach a broader and more diverse audience than exclusively empirical research methods. As a qualitative research methodology, autoethnographic approaches leverage researchers' written narratives of lived experience to understand better their emotions and identities (Kessler, 2024). Autoethnographic approaches coalesce overlapping, complementary approaches similar to narrative inquiry, self-study, and hermeneutics (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). The ethnographic dimension of autoethnographic methodological approaches focuses on a deep description of the intersections between social, historical, and contextual factors, using storytelling to convey inquiry findings (Birks et al.,

2009; Speziale & Carpenter, 2011). These methods of inquiry are friendly to audiences outside the academy, bringing cultural understandings of self to others (Edgar, 2020).

Relatedly, this autoethnographic self-study of be(com)ing borrows several salient dimensions from the aforementioned neighboring methodologies (Creswell & Clark, 2017), drawing on descriptions from ethnography, storying from narrative inquiry, hermeneutic circles from hermeneutics, and layered account writing from autoethnography. A layered, personal narrative account examines pre-reflective moment(s) as these ‘collid[e] with a moment of cultural confrontation’ (Pitard, 2017, p. 3); moments in the world that force our thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Such layered accounts often focus on the author’s experience alongside abstract analysis and relevant literature, illustrating how seemingly chronological processes part of *data* [gathering], analysis, and writeup are disrupted in their simultaneous happening (Ellis, 2007). This blurring of methodological boundaries also occurs in self-study’s ontological rejection of the rigid distinction between the analysis of the individual and that of society (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). Self-study concerns itself with the need for structural change, which allows individuals to become aware of how inquiry itself shapes/is shaped by structural injustice through reflective practices already part of one’s be(com)ing (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024).

Reflexivity and Self-Study

We examine ourselves in relation to others and the social world through multiple lenses: researcher/researched, subject/object, and insider/outsider (Coia & Taylor, 2009). In other words, reflexivity uses self-reflection to explore the intersection between self and society (Poulos, 2021). Driven by a desire for expanded understanding (Hughes & Pennington, 2017), reflexivity refers to the process of critical self-reflection that researchers, educators, or practitioners engage

in to continuously examine how their values, beliefs, experiences, and biases influence their work. Reflexive practices in self-study require educators to critically examine their roles and experiences (Machost & Stains, 2023). Autoethnographic approaches like self-study not only humanize teacher inquiry (Tarisayi, 2023) but also expand one's understanding of the connection between past and present selves while enabling personal growth (Kessler, 2024). Reflexivity is an opportunity for the researcher to listen to their internal dialogue and explore the reactions generated by their experience with the data (Pitard, 2017). It requires the researcher to question the origins of their settled beliefs and truths, from where and how these emerge/d, and how these settled beliefs (re)form relations to the social world (Pitard, 2017) and educational practice.

Self-Study in the [Music] Classroom

As autoethnographic approaches like self-study gain prominence and salience within and beyond academia, these approaches have also been applied to sociology, psychology, nursing, and education (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Consequently, the appeal of autoethnographic approaches in education research lies in “confronting the complexity of the school teacher as an active agent in making their history” (Goodson, 2014 p. 2). Teachers and practitioners demonstrate agency when they critically explore their identities and philosophies (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Studies of and about teaching are frequently integrated into the teaching profession, but teacher-scholar voices have often been absent from the field of education (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Autoethnographic approaches like self-study allow individuals (in this case, teachers) to deeply examine personal and professional changes, enduring emotional trials and joys related to connections and agency, and to reflect on these changes, which is integral to academic growth (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Tarisayi, 2023). As teachers are the central figure in the classroom, personal experience is linked to practice

(Goodson, 2014); and autoethnographic approaches, then, offer educators a voice to write compelling narratives without necessarily holding formal literary or performance training (Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, self-study can change how educators carry out some aspects of professional practice (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Educators willing to question their conceptions of themselves (Denshire & Lee, 2013) may create space for growth, innovation, and more nuanced relationships with their educational worlds. Researchers who situate personal narratives within educational theory can bring about systematic change in how academic knowledge is shared and generated (Tarisayi, 2023).

Scholars have explored how musical background, teaching skills, understanding, and knowledge have fused to form a self and for some, also centered as a musician, teacher, and researcher. Nethsinghe's (2012) categorization of musician, teacher, and researcher parallels my be(com)ing as musician/teacher/scholar (a fluid, rather than fixed categorization similar to my be(com)ing). As such, reflective (and reflexive) practices are widely advocated for in educational research spaces (Machost & Stains, 2023). Those who insist on established or post/positivist forms or doing and writing research are often perpetuating a white, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-middle, Christian, able-bodied perspective (Ellis et al., 2011). Researchers should be aware of how research itself is characterized by structural injustice and how they might (un)consciously perpetuate the very structures and practices they critique. Self-study can respond to these existing boundaries by humanizing classroom experiences, often contoured by bureaucracy (Tarisayi, 2023).

As forms of transcending the post/positivist and bureaucratic discourses governing [education] inquiry, integrating digital, sonic (Douglas, 2017; Gershon & Wozolek, 2024), collaborative, visual, and non-narrative tools and forms of expression offer a more accessible and

varied approach; expanding education inquiry's applicability and possibility (Greene et al., 2021; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Many scholars are exploring the digital technology space—specifically email (Berry & Crowe, 2009), photography (Mitchell et al., 2009), visual metaphor (Tidwell & Manke, 2009), and collage in self-study for nuanced inquiry and social action (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). In these ways, personal experiences can be stimulated by examining photographs, correspondence, journals, or recordings (Kessler, 2024). These methodological lines surface the need to situate my autoethnographic self-study within a specific institutional and historical context: Band.

Band

Band, in its earliest American form, had firmly entrenched itself in American public schools by the late 1930s (Revelli, 1937). A significant milestone with modern repercussions was the school band contests held beginning in the 1920s (Hansen, 2005; Hash, 2018). Before the twentieth century, if music was offered in public schools, it was offered as vocal music (Whitehill, 1969). Lowell Mason introduced singing classes into Boston elementary schools in 1838, though little documented instrumental music education occurred until the early 1900s (Holz, 1962). Even then, the orchestra was a more common offering at the beginning of the twentieth century (Whitehill, 1969). However, by the middle of the 1930s, most public high schools in America, large and small, offered a band program (Whitehill, 1969). Not only did band(s) become the preferred instrumental ensemble among secondary schools, but bands could also be found in churches, prisons, universities, department stores, amusement parks, and military and civic units (Hansen, 2005). By the Fall of 1968, there were an estimated 7,000 public school orchestras and 50,000 public school bands (Whitehill, 1969). Band had gone from not existing to enjoying specialized rehearsal spaces, a place in the curricular and cultural heart

of the school, and professional organizations committed to the betterment of the genre (Battisti, 2018; Foster, 2013).

How had the concept of band so quickly and firmly rooted itself in American public schools? How did the phenomenon emerge, the only American art form nurtured in and wholly in service of American schools (Allsup, 2012)? Several contributing factors generated the conditions for the band phenomena, the first being cultural engagement (Hansen, 2005). Public events (the circus!), parades, athletic contests, and community and cultural events require ceremonial music (Battisti, 2018). The band is mobile; its instruments lend themselves to outdoor performance in a way superior to those of string instruments (Whitehill, 1969). Town bands existed as community organizations, providing weekly entertainment (Foster, 2013). Professional touring bands performing popular music exemplified outstanding musicianship (McAnally, 1995). While not a new ensemble before its introduction into the American public schools, these factors contributed to the planting of band into the American musical psyche.

Additionally, the American band movement developed and still has deep ties to the American military tradition. Today, the United States Marine Band is widely considered a fine example of the modern concert band. The Marine Band was made famous by John Phillip Sousa (Sousa, 1900). The Marine Band currently provides music for social and ceremonial events, maintaining traditions that harken back to the genre's early days. Before the First World War, public school music band instructors were often professional musicians employed part-time as teachers. After the war, veterans trained in military bands found positions in schools and organized bands (Holz, 1962). Many early school and university band programs were attached to ROTC units (Hansen, 2005). In 1919, all public high school bands in Chicago were connected to the JROTC program (Whitehill, 1969). The ceremonial military marching band soon found

itself at athletic events associated with schools and universities, leading to band's intersection with competition and drum corps and guard groups (Foster, 2013).

The school band contest, first held in 1923, was a pivotal moment in the American band movement (Holz, 1962). The first event and its successors synthesized the cultural, military, and community influences into a genre firmly rooted in the American public schools (Allsup, 2012). During World War I, instrument manufacturers had expanded to meet the needs of military and civilian groups. The end of the war meant instrument manufacturers needed to find new markets. The emerging school band movement was fully exploited by instrument manufacturers, prompting them to sponsor the school band contests (Holz, 1962). Similarly, uniform manufacturers were interested in providing uniforms to school groups. Commercial interests motivated to expand their customer base were happy to sponsor band contests, offering cash and trophies to winning groups (Revelli, 1937). The convergence of these cultural, patriotic, and athletic demands, supported by the ensemble's adaptability, places the band at the center of American school music. Commercial interests saw an opportunity to fill a need, both to remain economically viable and advocate for music education in public schools. The school band contest placed the band in an arena not unlike an athletic one. With trophies representing tangible indicators of success, band and athletics remain an indelible pairing that signifies achievement, valiance, and glory—meritocratic of American cultural unity (Allsup, 2012)

Contemporary Manifestations of *Band*

The current posture of *Band* is perhaps a fair reflection of American society. The genre is fractured, lacking a coherent identity. Contest/competition culture continues to dominate. Organizations with access to funding are most able to meet contest metrics, establishing themselves as 'successful'. As I observe my colleagues and friends currently teaching, I do not

notice that directors at ‘better’ or more valued programs are happier. I do wonder if *Band* will continue to distill itself into hierarchical/singular models of success.

Be(com)ing

Applying be(com)ing to music education challenges traditional hierarchical models that privilege mastery, the finite, exact, authoritative, and rigid—in music, canonical structure, and practitioner identity formation. Music educators must interrogate structures that produce and sustain professional identity. To trouble the notion of canon, both musical and academic, I frame be(com)ing as a living canon rather than fixed repertoire. Canon is cyclical, a discursive rhizome of voices (interwoven reflections across time) in relation rather than succession, reflecting identity flux. Using canon as a musical form (rounds/fugues), entrances are not after the first; they are with/in relation to the first. Not sequential, not cumulative. Canon generates meaning through inversion, repetition, variation, and relational positioning. My be(com)ing is musical canon, lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) from institutional structures.

Academic canon is traditional, structured, and exclusive. My academic canon, *this* work, is not this, a non-canon. My scholarly voice is not outside the academic canon; it is woven throughout. A dissenting voice both with/in and with/out (Powell & Celeste, 2020). Previous notions of becoming imply a linear progression. I trouble be(com)ing, positioning identity as always already in flux (St Pierre, 2013). This canon model flows to the following conductor/teacher/leader analysis where voices enter/emerge.

The parentheses in be(com)ing signal the instability of identity, shunning a singular form; a being, a state of being, always becoming. My be(com)ing did/does not occur in isolation but at the intersection of power, discourse, and experience (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Reflexivity in be(com)ing requires acknowledging the coexistence of past, present, and future selves (MacLure,

2016). The self is not merely developing, but constructing, dismantling, and reforming. Be(com)ing troubles fixed notions of professional identity, rejecting stable categories such as conductor/teacher/leader. Self-study is about interrogating the conditions that shape identity formation. I have distilled my identity. Now I /de/construct the structures that shape/d it. If be(com)ing is always ongoing, then pedagogy and [my] position must accommodate uncertainty and transformation (Kuby, 2019).

conductor/

While *band* represents a coalescing of dozens of members playing different instruments emitting distinct sounds; these members work toward a unified, singular ensemble, guided by a singular figure. *Band* ensembles, concert and wind, are led by a conductor. In the public school system, this role is often occupied by the classroom teacher. This role is typically supported by identities that are required but adjacent to the music-teaching role (administrator, librarian, personnel director, budget manager). The European orchestral tradition influences the conducting aspect of this role, positioning the conductor as the sole authority, reflecting hierarchical, teacher-centered models (Allsup, 2012). This conductor/teacher/ controls all aspects of performance and program direction; also repertoire selection, rehearsal technique, performance decisions, and literature interpretation. These responsibilities are outside the expectations of professional educators in other content areas.

This hierarchical structure reflects the banking model of education (Freire, 1970), where students are passive rather than active co-creators; despite their individually created sound(s) contributing to the singular ensemble. The conductor acts as ensemble enforcer, regulating bodies, behaviors, sounds, and binding student autonomy (Foucault, 1977); warranting swift action when we recognize, seize, a deviant sound when we hear it. When considering the

historical, military, and athletic institutional influences surrounding band, such an instructional model encourages students to obey, rather than deviate from established musical discourse that the conductor dictates.

The conductor-as-authority model does have advantages. If the goal is simply technical proficiency, the top-down hierarchical obedience of the conductor lends itself to efficiency. The question becomes efficient in the name of... what? Trophies? *Achievement*? Achievement of that singular, unifying sound (or note)? Who does this efficiency benefit and at what cost? Some could argue skill development, and certainly skill development does and must happen in the rehearsal space—but are skills relevant without comprehensive musicianship? Comprehensive musicianship exists at the intersection of various music disciplines, history/theory/performance, aiming to achieve a more complete musical experience (Mitchell, 1969). Students are often initially unprepared to place performance in the context of music history/theory/culture/politics (Allsup, 2012). Large-scale performances require coordination/leadership, but what must be sacrificed in the name of leadership, proficiency, narrow notions of [musical] achievement?

The critique of the hierarchical-conductor model is the lack of student agency; as the conservatory model emphasizes Western classical traditions and excludes diverse approaches to ensemble leadership (Kladder, 2021). Outside of leadership, but including literature, instrumentation, personnel, and even the performance venue in its present form; the band struggles to diverge from its traditional influences (Allsup, 2012). The current model is not always conducive to improvisation and composition, which represent legitimate national music standards that are frequently ignored (Hash, 2021), particularly in the classroom. In this act, the profession manages to contradict itself, codifying the standards of improvisation and composition as core values. Yet, the profession routinely chooses to ignore those modalities.

Additionally, the conductor-centric model suppresses creativity/agency. Rehearsals are structured around efficiency and precision (to ‘score well’ and to ‘win’), at the expense of student exploration, improvisation, and composition. Does the model require students to problem-solve, or is it a replication of norms without an opportunity to question them? Is something missing/lost/unfound/unheard when student voices and sounds are not part of the [musical] conversation on repertoire selection and interpretation? The obsession with *efficiency* may limit interpretive agency, as conductors value correctness over musical inquiry (Reynolds, 2000). This obsession with efficiency and precision may become a critical failure loop, in which true student agency renders the concerns of efficiency irrelevant. This hierarchical view of band, music, and performance reinforces a top-down conception of education, imprisoning the opportunity for other sound-bodies to contour the educational space (Alexander et al., 2023).

Perhaps there is a restrained opportunity here; music making should be an instrument of unity, friendship, and purpose (Revelli, 1937)—not just among age-group peers, but also among those who possess, judge, bestow, delegate, offer, and share the space and the knowing and note-making. Alternatively, student agency, creativity, and collaboration are displaced in favor of efficiency. Student leadership models invest authority in some students over others as nebulous musical leaders. Still, this kind of authority reinforces a hierarchical model in which power stems from a single figure, such as the director. Less often, this *leadership* model is an opportunity for peer-teaching or collaborative exploration of music, (re)enforcing micro-level power interactions (Foucault, 1977). Allsup (2012) discusses how authority in ensembles is distributed through positional leadership structures. The student-leadership model reflects not just disciplinary control from above but also how power is exercised with/in/through student hierarchies (Foucault, 1977). As a result, it is worth questioning whether our attempts to (re)circulate power

in band and music education classrooms represent democratization, or another extension of hierarchical control.

(Un)fortunately, conductor-dominated ensembles are historically hierarchical; and hierarchies are often fiefdoms. Revelli (1937) complains about the lack of uniformity of objectives in early band education, criticizing low-status, poor-quality instruction. Sixty years later, Reynolds (2000) places the conductor/s ego as the seemingly necessary, central motivating factor driving choices in music education, arguing that the conductor's music (or curricular/literature choices) (re)forms and (re)organizes the classroom and student learning.

While scholarly critiques have plagued the wind band, the core ensemble of *band* (Budiansky, 2005), the singularly American genre of Jazz, universally considered a part of... *band*, receives little criticism of its body of literature, and certainly no comparison to the orchestral tradition. Perhaps jazz has escaped the criticism of the wind band because it embodies Lyotard's (1984) micro-truths in contrast to the grand narratives of the orchestral tradition. Jazz emphasizes improvisation, individual expression, and small-group leadership. The structure of the music itself can be considered rhizomatic language, with multiple styles, authorities, entry points, and improvisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Jazz has been excluded from power-knowledge generating/controlling institutions (St. Pierre, 2013). By resisting hierarchical structures, jazz has escaped critique while remaining bound by exclusion. Jazz holds the center, while still occupying marginalized space (Powell & Celeste, 2020). Conversely, the orchestral tradition escapes scrutiny because it is the keeper of legitimacy, protected by elite institutions. The historical dominance of the orchestral tradition has allowed it to monopolize musical standards. Criticism is directed towards the wind band because it attempts to occupy the same

academic/performance space as the orchestra, but is criticized for lacking commitment to musical artistry (Budiansky, 2005; Foster, 2013; Reynolds, 2000).

Revelli (1937) again reminds us that improvement must happen from the bottom to the top, that all [sounds] across and through the ensemble must be recognized. He also levels criticism at the competition, proposing that the rated festival is social advocacy; the competition is not. The rated festival is an event where ensembles perform for evaluation rather than direct competition. A rating is assigned against a standardized rubric, with ratings assigned (typically Superior, Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, or I, II, III, IV, and V). Ranked competitions are direct competitions in which bands score or receive points and are ranked first, second, or third. Competition receives criticism for valuing ranking (Revelli, 1937) over comprehensive musicianship (Mitchell, 1969). Competition is also a marker of identity, awarding institutional approval for pedagogical alignment and professional compliance.

Evolution of my conductor identity

My relationship to the conductor identity has shifted from enthusiastic embrace to critical interrogation. I enthusiastically pursued the role of conductor/ as a student musician and as a music educator. The mission was clear to me: to pursue leadership opportunities both administrative (music librarian in middle school, student assistant in high school) and musical (soloist, principal player, honor bands). These are markers of success/identity along a path that would lead to a public school /teaching/ career as a conductor/.

I secured/achieved all of the opportunities one would expect as a public school student and undergraduate music major—countless honor bands. Membership in collegiate organizations, extensive ensemble participation—I was a drum major in my collegiate marching band. I saw conducting as core musicianship. I was excited to conduct, to teach *band*, to lead an

ensemble. My efforts as a saxophone and clarinet student were motivated by a belief that conducting skill could never surpass instrumental proficiency. This role was certainly an expression of musicianship, something I was striving towards. After my undergraduate studies, I attended workshops/clinics/symposia each academic year in constant pursuit of knowledge. Yet, I chose not to pursue conducting as scholarship for my master's or doctoral degrees.

Why?

Because at one of these conducting symposia, a college band director, considered a legend in our field, said we should 'get rid' of the performance degrees. He argued that they are unnecessary, performative, and flippant. My understanding was that he meant all performance degrees, conducting, voice, cello, piano, and clarinet. Everyone should earn a degree in music education. A Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) degree in performance/conducting becomes a pedagogy/education degree. I do not recall his rationale, yet his surprising stance marked a turning point. This band director, who had served on the conducting faculty at two prestigious band institutions for decades, did not have conducting degrees, but was a passionate advocate for the American band movement.

In that moment, I made a connection between conducting 'masters' and educator-conductors. I began questioning power structures in the band movement. What place does the orchestra-tradition-informed role of conductor have in the American band movement? This evolving identity underpins Thought Provocation II: How reflexive/recursive practice exposes institutional power in music education, because the band movement in American schools is deeply tied to military and athletic traditions, reinforcing a Eurocentric canon, and a hierarchical leadership model (Holz, 1962; Whitehill, 1969). Also, forms of band, Mariachi, and jazz are other culturally significant genres, but classical training marginalizes canon-"alternative" genres

(Kladder, 2021), especially in educational spaces. The American band tradition, grounded in military, athletic, and European classical traditions, is a cultural gatekeeping mechanism that favors Western repertoire and performance aesthetics, from which jazz and Mariachi depart. Western educational paradigms dominate music education (Tarisayi, 2023). However, bands should embrace plurality and traditions beyond the Western canon (Allsup, 2012). Next, I move into the space I have resisted occupying, the label of /teacher/.

/teacher/

The entry into the music education profession itself entails a higher opportunity cost, both figuratively and financially, than in other content areas. Music educators often need to invest more in specialized training than educators in other content fields. Many university programs require additional coursework, ensemble participation, and applied study. Aspiring music teachers must balance performance expectations with coursework, which can result in more preparation time and a more rigid professional entry compared to general education fields. Music schools/departments/conservatories emphasize Western classical training (Kladder, 2021), embracing conservatory/traditional forms of study. In the United States, music education degree programs typically require admission as a music student before admission as a student in a college of education, or the degree is granted through the college/school of music rather than education. Admission as a musician requires applied study on a Western *classical* instrument or voice. The challenge—for teachers and students—is integrating non-Western approaches as part of entry into teaching (Kladder, 2021). Consequently, jazz, folk, and community music—and students who choose to study these approaches—chafe against existing Westernized musical knowledge structures, but struggle for perceived legitimacy. The challenge of integrating non-Western approaches is centered in how Western *classical* training limits pedagogical approaches.

Conductor/teacher(s) find it difficult (or are reluctant) to integrate/embrace non-Western traditions or integrate the often-ignored areas of composition and improvisation (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). Fiscally, individual costs of private lessons, instrument ownership, and travel for performance purposes (re)enforce economic barriers that are often overlooked in critiques of music education, and how these can exacerbate class disparities and amplify elitism. These structures around music traditions for both music students and aspiring music educators reinforces/contributes to elitism and exclusivity within music programs, music education programs, and into PK-12 classrooms. Consequently, I wonder/ed, is my initial identity creation as a musician and as a conductor/teacher/ grounded in this elitism?

Teaching is a critical turning point in my be(com)ing; it troubles the shift in my identity from conductor to reflexive teacher. My early perspectives as a teacher were absolutely grounded in a musician-first, teacher-second (or not at all) mentality. More specifically, I recall my position as governed by conductor/band director *first* and *teacher* [often] *not at all*. As an undergraduate music education major, performance skills were heavily stressed, along with podium time, leadership, and organizational skills. As admission into teacher training requires applied voice/instrument through the Western classical tradition, this model prioritizes performance excellence over pedagogical skill. Scholarships are typically awarded based on demonstrated performance ability, not pedagogical potential. These scholarships are used to populate collegiate ensembles led by conductor/teacher/scholars who are bound to similar power structures as secondary conductors/ (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). As a teacher, my mastery of the performance standards did not always translate into effective teaching. This likely distorted/delayed/disrupted my teaching identity formation because I rejected the title of /teacher/. My rejection of the title of teacher was not uncommon among pre-service music

teachers (Conway, 2012). Does this inoculate a musician-first, teacher-second identity into the preservice teacher? How does this delay or distort [my] music teacher identity formation?

Like many aspiring teachers, challenges of classroom environment (or rather, “management”—often of bodies), differentiated instruction, colleague relations, and parent interactions conflict/trouble/deny settled beliefs and practices; obstacles unsettling my identity as a performer/conductor trained musician. How does this professional-pedagogical-personal dissonance (re)shape [my] teacher reflexivity? Tensions exist between teacher training and real-world teaching. My negative pedagogical experiences illuminate these tensions as I replicate/d authoritarian/tative behaviors I experienced as a student—we teach how we were taught (Lortie, 1975).

My (sub)conscious constructivist approach to teaching and teacher learning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) emerged in my replication of behaviors witnessed as a student musician-aspiring music educator, while lacking the authority/presence/trust to support other possibilities outside those behaviors. My postmodern scholar-self wonders whether and how teacher-training programs [could] interrogate childhood trauma in preservice [music] teachers to expose music teaching as something else than what we think we know, a deviation from the norm.

This study serves as repair work, addressing gaps in pedagogical development, interrogating professional identity, and challenging entrenched institutional structures (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Does this musician/teacher/ (I trouble the conservatory's musician first, teacher second) position in my thesis statement (*conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar*) attitude distort or delay teacher identity formation? My be(com)ing interrogates the integration of a reflexive conductor/ into /teacher/, the integration of multiple perspectives into a single identity—a singularity I thought I needed—upended and unsettled my

early perspectives as a band director, those grounded in a conductor/ /leader mindset. Those whose performance mastery does not lead to effective teaching may experience pedagogical deficiencies, professional frustration, and limited career growth (Conway, 2002). Has my performance mastery led to effective teaching, and have I mastered pedagogical knowledge? What qualifies my performance mastery, my music/al leadership? My musical knowledge? My two music degrees? What seems empowering in tangible evidence of mastery? Now we exit the /teacher/ canon, entering the /leadership voice and how that identity is shap/ed by institutions.

/leader

The military tradition of band leadership in American schools reinforces a rigid hierarchy designed for discipline, obedience, and efficiency (Holz, 1962; Whitehill, 1969). The conductor-as-authority model places the conductor/ as the sole decision maker, conforming to a top-down, teacher-centered structure (Allsup, 2012). This aligns with Freire's (1970) banking model, with students (musicians/) as passive recipients of knowledge-as-possession. Does this leadership structure limit student autonomy, or is there space for leadership to be reimagined and power distributed more equitably? As a conductor/teacher/leader, I occupy the space between the efficiency of hierarchy and the potential of student-centered instruction, a dissonance that informs my (in)quiry of institutional identity in music education.

I have to trouble the word *leadership* as something I initially view/ed as poisonous to expansive conceptions of identity and knowledge; an egregious vehicle for the current academic/political/business environment (Brown, 2015). Too often, the isolating, inequitable, and singularity-inspired venom 'leadership' is used to place blame on those who work but do not benefit. I have experienced *innovation* in leadership as extraction—of time, dialogue, behavior—in service of uniformity, efficiency, or capital. Phrases like 'we all have the same

twenty-four hours in a day' fail to take into account drastic structural inequities. Topical definitions of leadership make excuses for the failure of privileged whites to extend their cornucopia to all. Then, in a final capitalist insult, notions of leadership are distilled into energy-shot phrases and sold as trinkets in airport malls, perennially pursuing profit/ability and eroding decency.

Are teachers trained to lead through control rather than collaboration, and does this prioritize efficiency over creativity? The conductor/(manager) as /teacher/ encompasses a degree of leadership that some (me) initially embraced but eventually found intrusive. The school band director functions as music director, personnel director, curriculum designer, performance evaluator, and business manager (Conway & Zerman, 2004). These demands far exceed traditional teaching roles in other subjects, but can be compared to drama/theater/dance faculty when they are present. Does the administrative burden of *band* reinforce the leadership-control model? Is this self-repeating cycle of control-burden suppressing movement from conductor/leader to /teacher/? Is the burden of overwork used as a justification to invest students with *leadership* responsibilities of supervision and control? The administrative load that makes the /leader efficient also reinforces a leadership style that constrains student agency.

However, transformational leadership models challenge hierarchical approaches by encouraging collaborative decision making, positioning leadership as shared rather than dictated. While agency and creativity are emphasized through transformational leadership, traditional models often reinforce hierarchical discipline and obedience (Revelli, 1937). Does the rigidity of the conventional model allow for transformational leadership? Does the structure itself prevent the distribution of authority? Power is also distributed within student hierarchies, exercised and distributed by the conductor/; challenging the collaborative underpinnings of

transformational leadership. I'm reminded of Foucault's (1995) concept of micro power, which illustrates how student leadership roles can function as an extension of institutional control rather than a source of democratic creativity within the music education classroom.

As a result, reflexivity requires music educators to critically examine inherited leadership models and shift towards student-transformational approaches (Machost & Stains, 2023). Does self-study help the transition from hierarchical to transformational leadership, and can self-study trouble established hierarchies, or does it also/only/just produce individual awareness without action? Can self-study transform institutions? If hierarchical leadership models reinforce inequalities, how can they be dismantled? Should they be dismantled? This (in)quiry investigates how individual reflexive practice interacts with structural power in ensemble settings. The dismantling is an unresolved issue that highlights the tension between personal reflexivity and institutional change that frames this chapter's provocations around leadership and power.

Traditional leadership frames authority as hierarchical control and singular (imposed) musical interpretation. This assumption is in direct conflict with constructivist co-creation and postmodern acceptance of multiple realities. This conflict propels my be(com)ing, I was trained to assert patriarchal authority on the podium and now interrogate how that training silences student agency. The discussion now modulates to how my conductor/teacher/leader identity is re(scored) into musician/teacher/scholar.

musician/

Conservatory-trained, traditional/classical Western musicians often hold privileged status over those trained through informal settings such as K12 music teaching positions requiring formal music training (Kladder, 2021), inspiring contradictions between what is considered

legitimate or elevated musicianship versus what is popular—and are thus viewed as less prestigious. Here, the term "*musician*" is reserved for performers whose legitimacy is granted by formal conservatory credentials/training. Informally trained musicians challenge these prestige hierarchies. Does the—does *my*—musician/ identity prefer performance over pedagogy? If conservatory models elevate virtuosity over teaching ability (Allsup, 2012), I wonder why technical excellence is prioritized over the ability to facilitate learning, and how this settled belief reinforces an elitist, exclusionary model of musicianship. Musician/, then, is those whose identity is grounded in technical mastery and performance distinction, roles reserved for formally trained artists. The common refrain is of performance over pedagogy. If early career conductor/ /leaders may define their success through performance evaluation rather than pedagogical impact (Ballantyne & Canham, 2023), where does the /teacher/ appear—if at all? How do we judge musical achievement? Or my settled acceptance/adherence to the contest-model of evaluated (ranked, rated) success? In band, how are these settled pedagogical refrains functioning as forms of gatekeeping—gatekeeping of... existing power structures in music pedagogy and ensemble, privileged (unified) sound? How am I gatekeeping?

In be(com)ing conductor/ and/to musician/, I wonder/ed if this movement is regressive or cyclical, but St. Pierre (2013) would argue it's both—always already evolving and happening. As I work to problematize musicianship, is musicianship a talent or a product of access? The talent argument masks structural inequities; some students have greater access (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). How does the veil of talent obscure or mask privilege? Are certain identities and instruments? more likely to be associated with or labeled as *talented*? Teachers may favor students who already resemble the ideal student and neglect others (Machost & Stains, 2023). I certainly favored those students who exhibited desirable traits as student-musicians through....

And so, what selves or identities do I/have I favored as conductor/teacher/leader that the musician/ would scrutinize? What selves or identities are more talented than others, as defined by whom, and why do I/have I favored this notion of talent to privilege or mute dimensions of my musician/teacher/scholar identities at different times, in various places, as part of different relations? What sound-bodies amplify, stifle, these intersecting selves I (do not) privilege; and how does my talented musician/-self inform/remain informed by the /teacher/scholar I (am) be(com)ing?

Early career conductor/teacher/s may define their success through performance evaluation rather than pedagogical impact. Aligning with constructivist co-creation and postmodern pluralities, I question whether privileging construct success (re)produces a singular metric of success. As I work to problematize musicianship, I question whether musicianship remains a talent or a product of access. The *talent* argument masks structural inequities; some students have greater access (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). How does the veil of *talent* obscure or mask privilege? Are particular identities more likely to be labeled *talent(ed)*? Teachers may favor students who already resemble the ideal student and neglect others (Machost & Stains, 2023). This critique anticipates the next section's examination of leadership paradigms.

This section informs Thought Provocation I, knowledge production through be(com)ing by grounding how contests shape teacher identity. Thought Provocation III is supported (identity (de)construction through postmodern critique) by surfacing singular success narratives.

/teacher/

Educational policy and public/political discourse often portray teachers as two-dimensional figures who can easily divorce the occupational from the personal. This two-dimensionality frames teachers as responsible for delivering predefined curricula and are judged

by linear progress metrics (Berliner, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Disrupting this rigidity requires reconceptualizing *progress* as relational growth and reflexive (recursive) practice rather than standardized outputs. This is in direct conflict with Goodson (2014), who positions the teacher as an active agent who massages and tweaks their curricular authority in the classroom. Localized, micro-level decision-making is precisely what postmodern theory advocates. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) calls for replacing ‘grand narratives’ (standardized curricula, assessment) with localized/contextual ‘micro-narratives’ (teacher agency informs decision-making).

My *cultural* background and professional identity have influenced my teaching practice; with culture embedding language, race, class, and ontology. Reflexivity allows me to challenge this influence to grow as a /teacher/. This position also requires me to evaluate pedagogical practices. As pedagogical practice emerg(ed), how did/do my background shape my initial rejection of teacher identity? Did my /teacher/ training reinforce the musician-first, teacher-second hierarchy, or did I unconsciously replicate the authoritarian models I experienced as a student? My professional identity was/is rooted in the belief that the conductor/ supersedes the /teacher/. This reflects the hierarchy in music education that equates artistic mastery with pedagogical mastery at the expense of pedagogical skill development (Kladder, 2021).

I explore the tension between self-examination and teacher effectiveness to critically assess leadership style, instructional strategy, practices that resonate with students, and biases in repertoire choices. I question how this self-study allows me to confront and deconstruct my own assumptions about how my teacher identity is/was shaped by institutional expectations rather than personal conviction. Autoethnographic self-study is an ongoing interrogation of practice, assuming the identity of ‘teacher’ is never resolved. I trouble my space with critical self-

examination to disrupt who I am, where I am, and if these structures should be preserved or transformed (LaBoskey, 2004) – and how these disruptions inform/are informed by scholarly pursuits and [my] scholarly identity.

/scholar

I begin by defining the /scholar role before exploring its risks. /Scholar, like /teacher/ and musician/, are fluid roles that are premised on creation (publication, teaching, curriculum design). Scholarship is both a site of authority and control (Bourdieu, 1988). To claim /scholar as an identity is to participate in a system that legitimizes but also produces knowledge. The /scholar shapes discourse around music education and pedagogical practice. It is the /scholar's responsibility to critically examine their own positionality within institutional structures, as they seek to either reproduce or transform educational hierarchies. By naming myself as /scholar, I center scholarship itself as both identity work and an act of knowledge-making. The emphasis on the scholar's role as a site of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977) recurses this inquiry back to Thought Provocation I.

I reject /scholar as a stable, static, positivist role. I trouble the assumption of that identity. I question who decides what counts as scholarship. Does assuming the title of /scholar grant authority? Or, am I at risk of again be(com)ing an unwitting participant in invisible, unknown institutional power structures? I wonder if positioning myself as a /scholar risks repeating my lived experience as conductor/ /leader, where I replicate power structures I seek to question. I trouble the absence of justice when actors become unwilling advocates of institutions whose rules/hierarchies/structures are invisible. Is the position of the /scholar a gatekeeper of knowledge in the same restrictive manner as the conductor/, rather than a facilitator?

Intermission

I construct/ed a framework that draws upon the intersections between theory, literature, and experience to seek justice by troubling the moments that happened and are still happening; ones that require me to pause and inquire, that force me to think about my music teacher-be(com)ing through self-study (Coia & Taylor, 2009). I bind my epistemological stance to constructivism, the theory that knowledge is socially constructed through experience and interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and the postmodern orientation that positions knowledge as impartial, fluid, and always evolving. As a result, I further trouble the construction of knowledge by challenging the power structures that judge, control, and restrict; rejecting authoritarian, fixed, hierarchical epistemologies (Foucault, 1977; Lyotard, 1984)—within and beyond music and music education.

Self-study has been acknowledged for its potential to have a significant impact on teacher education and the transformation of practice (Fitzgerald et al., 2009), through its ability to destabilize, challenge objectivity, and traditional paradigms and hierarchies (LaBoskey, 2004). This inquiry is situated as an autoethnographic self-study. Self-study positions the subject both as researcher and researched, emphasizing reflexive inquiry (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). I structure the preceding movement as an opening of knowledge and knowledge forms so that I may trouble the boundaries between the conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar. The conductor/teacher/leader model reflects hierarchical structures reinforced by European orchestral traditions, American military and cultural influences, and competitive assessment systems (Allsup, 2017; Revelli, 1937). These models prioritize extrinsic, teacher-centered outcomes over student agency and participatory knowledge building (Allsup & Benedict, 2008) and finite, divorced, linear conceptualizations of these roles. These institutions, structures, and traditions

constrain and shape teacher identity formation, reinforcing hierarchies and privileging performance and linearity over pedagogy and fluidity (Kladder, 2021).

I place be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) in the spaces between these seemingly distinct roles, linking my emerging/nostalgic/future identity of conductor/teacher/leader to my aspiration/being/return to musician/teacher/scholar. I utilize reflexivity as a mechanism for engaging with tensions in identity construction (Attia & Edge, 2017) and to interrogate settled pedagogical norms. Here, identity, knowledge, and knowledge production are framed as contingent, contextually situated, and resistant to dominant epistemological authorities (Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Tarisayi, 2023). I position self-study as redefining scholarly knowledge at the intersection of postmodern and constructivist theoretical frameworks. As the next ensemble will illustrate, autoethnographic self-study is an integral tool for challenging hierarchical structures in music/education, for institutional critique, and for challenging binaries between identity and the social world.

Chapter 3 - Invention

Fugue

This (in)quiry aimed to interrogate, explore, and deepen my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar through autoethnographic self-study. Examining personal experience in the context of conducting, teaching, and leadership through autoethnography legitimizes lived experience (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024) as a site of knowledge production. I use be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) as an epistemology, a critique of static identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. What follows is an entanglement of methods, traditions, and epistemologies situating self-study within autoethnographic traditions (Fitzgerald et al., 2009), bolstered by conceptual framings of constructivism and postmodernism. Constructivism and postmodernism trouble the singular, fixed natures of knowledge and identity, situating these within social contexts and structures of power. Constructivism legitimizes the social construction of knowledge; postmodernism destabilizes hierarchy and authority. These methodological orientations cultivate exploration of my be(com)ing. Through reflexive engagement with personal experience and institutional structures, I explored what has shap/ed my pedagogical identity. The following provocations emerged from the tensions with/in the roles I cycle and the identities I interrogate.

Thought Provocations

1. In what ways does recursive practice enable me to critically evaluate how the roles of various actors (humans/roles/institutions) are entrenched in the narratives, traditions, and structures that shape music education?
2. Through parallel postmodern and constructivist frameworks, how can I interrogate my evolving journey from conductor/teacher/leader, to musician/teacher/scholar?

3. How does my process of be(com)ing, explored through autoethnographic self-study, inform and contribute to constructing pedagogical knowledge, and what insights does this process offer to education?

In this summary of methodological choices and rationale, I return to autoethnographic self-study because it connects personal narratives with broader theoretical frameworks (Coia & Taylor, 2009). The autoethnographic dimensions I employed critically examine how cultural, institutional, and pedagogical structures shape my professional be(com)ing (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011). When exploring themes of professional growth, identity formation, and reflexivity, self-study emerges as a method of inquiry that connects personal experiences to broader cultural themes (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). As personal narratives drive self-study, I sought to understand how they intersect with constructivist and critical postmodern perspectives to shape my professional identity (Coia & Taylor, 2009). The remainder of this movement is organized into four parts: Research composition and rationale, data generation, data interpretation, and ethical/trustworthiness.

This chapter outlines the data collection methods, analytical strategies, and ethical considerations used to ensure rigor and reflexivity in the research process. The data collection was structured around layered sources of personal narratives, autoethnographic archives, and reflexive journaling. This study's data analysis followed a multi-tiered approach, binding methodological rigor and theoretical depth in interpreting personal narratives, reflexive journals, and archival data. Professional correspondence, institutional documents, and pedagogical archival materials provided insight into power structures within educational institutions (Alexander et al., 2023). Ethical considerations remained central, emphasizing the importance of consent, confidentiality, and relational ethics in self-study research.

Exposition

Constructivism

Constructivism frames knowledge as experientially constructed, situating this inquiry within a framework of meaning-making through lived experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this conceptualization, identity formation is not fixed but emerges through learning and self-examination. Because constructivism supports self-study by positioning meaning-making as emerging from experience, it lays a foundation for self-study as a rigorous method of inquiry, situating the self in context and in a state of constant evolution. Identity is constantly in flux, be(com)ing is a process, and identity formation emerges through learning and self-examination.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism (Foucault, 1995; Lyotard, 1984) disrupts hierarchical knowledge structures in music education, supporting my interrogation of identity categories and institutional norms shaping this be(com)ing. The central, authoritative role of the ensemble conductor is a critical example of this hierarchy, where all decisions, musical, curricular, and performance are dictated in a top-down structure. The athletic/military/conservatory influences on band demand questioning of knowledge/power/tradition. These traditions reveal an authoritarian lineage and invite criticism for their rigidity. These influences transformed/shaped/damaged the conductor/teacher/leader (me), but they must be deconstructed to be understood, even incompletely. Part of examining this identity fluidity rests in the process of storytelling, an integral arm of autoethnographic self-study. I acknowledge that storytelling is a central part of making sense of the world (Bruner, 1990). This extends to educational contexts, where storytelling represents a teaching model, community-building exercise, and morality exercise (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In the music classroom, music is a language (Elliott, 1995), and storytelling is often a central component of music (Reimer, 2022). Storytelling, analogy, and anecdote are used in music to describe abstract musical concepts/sounds. Many of my favorite memories of rehearsal are of the conductor sharing personal anecdotes to illustrate a musical/emotive/artistic point.

To connect all parts of the ensemble; to connect *with* the ensemble.

I conceptualized storytelling as part of my musicianship, as a natural prequel to this research. *The Green Bubble*.

Be(com)ing in Inquiry: Methodological Ensemble(s)

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

The research design of this study followed a critical qualitative self-study approach (Denzin, 2014, 2017) integrating autoethnography to examine my be(com)ing process of musician/teacher/scholar. Critical qualitative inquiry interrogates how power, hierarchy, and the re/production of institutions/norms circulate. It asks: *How is knowledge constructed? Who decides what 'counts' as knowledge?* These questions frame the methodological and epistemological stance of this dissertation. This writing adopts a critical inquiry approach to examine how knowledge is constructed through reflexive engagements with personal experience. The aim was to trouble how professional identities are produced and reproduced within hierarchical educational structures, and to interrogate how structures oppress and generate knowledge.

This (in)quiry was an autoethnographic self-study that used a constructivist framework to interrogate how I constructed my teacher identity. This study does not claim constructivism as a form of critical inquiry, but instead joins the social context of learning to the construction of teacher identity. In contrast, this inquiry explicitly claims postmodernism as a critical inquiry

framework, applying postmodernism as a post-hoc analysis to my identity creation. By examining how institutional and cultural forces shape/d my be(com)ing, this inquiry rejects positivism, instead embracing subjectivity and institutional critique as forms of knowledge production.

Self-Study

As a methodology, I apply(ed) self-study to investigate my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar. As /scholar, I am not just a storyteller, but a critical analyst of my professional identity and practice (Coia & Taylor, 2009). LaBoskey (2004) defines self-study by its commitment to improving practice through critical inquiry. This self-study is supported by autoethnographic techniques, allowing for a critical examination of my lived experience as an educator while engaging in broader theoretical discourses that shape/have shaped my be(com)ing.

Self-study necessitates the researcher's subjectivity, positioning the researcher as both the observer and the observed. By centering the researcher as the subject, this inquiry adopted a reflexive, critically engaged approach to knowledge-making, rejecting hierarchical, positivist research paradigms that assume researcher detachment and objectivity, and that detach the research from the researcher. Instead, this inquiry prioritized subjectivity as an epistemological stance, acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed through lived experience, cultural context, and discursive structures that shape identity and power (Foucault, 1977; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

My daily existence as various iterations of conductor/teacher/leader over twenty years was relevant as lived experience, but even more so as I sought to (de)construct the/se experience(s). This inquiry was explicitly connected to postmodern and constructivist traditions

that position knowledge as contingent and recursive (Lather, 1991; St. Pierre, 2000), transcending meaning-making in cultural contexts and questioning the assumptions about culture/institutions/norms that bind/restrict/inform music, teaching, and knowledge.

These methodological choices aligned with the study's guiding Thought Provocations, establishing coherence between the inquiry, data collection, and analysis. Self-study recognizes that knowledge is filtered through personal experience. Reflexivity requires critical self-examination of biases, assumptions, and the researcher's evolving relationship with the subject/selves. As Coia and Taylor (2009) describe it, meaning-making is a recursive, reflective process of interpreting one's own experiences to generate insight into practice, linking personal narratives to broader pedagogical and cultural discourses and positioning the researcher as subject troubles the fixed narratives of identity, expertise, authority, and leadership. Reflexivity allowed the researcher, me, to deconstruct assumptions about teaching, musicianship, and scholarship.

Self-study makes identity formation visible and contextually situated, revealing how teacher identity evolved through reflexive practice. Visibility makes clear that identity is not fixed, opening space for (un)learning. The connection between personal experience and theory to generate pedagogical insight and institutional critique is intentional. I positioned my professional trajectory within broader educational structures, interrogating how institutional norms, pedagogical traditions, and personal agency shape/d identity formation (Chang, 2008; Poulos, 2021). Through this orientation, identity is not discovered but constructed through discourse and power (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Foucault, 1977). This positioned my growth not as internal/external, but intersubjective. By making the process visible, this inquiry invites others to engage in reflexive/recursive practice. As others can witness how I engage in my self-

examination, this inquiry provokes a practical examination of institutions/practices/norms.

Applying emotional transparency as scholarly method (Tarisayi, 2023), my willingness to expose myself invites credibility. This was not performative, this was not ‘navel-gazing’. This was deliberate, reflexive visibility that contributes to knowledge production (Denshire & Lee, 2013).

Autoethnography

In this (in)quiry, shades of autoethnography were artifact-triggered; writing functioned as analysis: journals, prior writings, professional and musical artifacts served as sources of data. Invoking be(com)ing as method, I began the (in)quiry by sketching the *story*, the narrative that is a deliberate response to ...*something* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I engaged with artifact(s) as part of the recursive writing process. The personal artifacts, the journals, sheet music, and recordings served as a portal to cultural constructs, such as the band's militaristic discipline and hierarchy. The artifacts were memory activators; they placed me back at the site of meaning-making and knowledge creation. My engagement with the artifact allowed me to experience a shimmer-burst, when an artifact (re)activated a critical memory. Multiple artifacts across time added layers of meaning/understanding but also built a trail, a recursive lineage. My first solo and ensemble medal, for example, reminded me of my early quest for *a bit of ribbon*. Stumbling upon the adjudicator evaluation sheet that justified the medal reminded me of how we sort and categorize students. Engagement with critical moments/artifacts across time demonstrated systemic practice while embracing the messiness of qualitative inquiry. These shimmer-bursts exposed a trail of how hierarchical leadership is internalized. My shimmer-bursts were a direct response to Thought Provocation I's commentary on recursive practice and roles/structures.

The recursive vignette template was developed while writing Chapter 4. As I engaged with critical memories and artifacts and made connections to theory, a framework emerged.

Movement III – *Disposable Teacher* is where the recursive vignette emerged. Movement V – *Return* was the recursive vignette landing in its final form. The other vignettes were guided into the framework as part of the recursive writing process. I named this framework the recursive vignette. Later, I formalized the structure and describe it here:

Vignette Template: *two lines or spaces between motives represent a breath*

Title: *intended to be evocative*

Scene: *I labored to put the reader in my position*

Narrative Entry Point: *anchored in specific times/places/experiences*

Analytic Pause: *here I considered the chaos of be(com)ing, the theoretical interpretation of the vignette*

Reflexive Mem(): *(identity be(com)ing shift), self-interrogation; tracing how my identity shifted through each event, a focus on lived experience leaving open the space(s) in-between the parenthetical boundaries*

Artifacts in Dialogue: *specific objects that provoke/d*

Trustworthiness: *how I honored the reader*

Practical Echo: *the way that these shimmers may or may not have connected with others and contributed to a deeper understanding of (music) education and teaching, how others may/may not connect to my conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar*

As I located artifacts (a concert program, a rehearsal video), other artifacts surfaced (retained correspondence, to-do lists). Sometimes I recalled a specific item I tried to locate; other times, I stumbled upon the activation. I found the dates in my journals. The to-do/grocery lists, notes in margins, scribbles on the page recurse me to the moment. The analytic procedure

was reflexive writing triggered by each artifact (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), woven into the recursive vignette. Handwritten reflections were dated; typed reflections were automatically timestamped when saved. Successive edits were saved and archived, leaving a breadcrumb trail of shimmer-bursts. Connecting these writings, artifacts, and shifts enabled me to trace how hierarchical leadership is/was internalized and reproduced in band.

The literature I performed at my first solo and ensemble competition came from a prescribed list, privileging approved literature over other genres. The list favors Eurocentric ‘classical’ literature, ignoring folk, jazz, or pop genres. Here, my subjectivity was not a limitation but a strength in generating critical insight (Tarisayi, 2023). Reflecting on the curricular gatekeeping (Foucault, 1977) of required literature lists sparked questions about inclusion/exclusion. My interrogation of adjudication rubrics and medals as markers of success and bindings of achievement excavated my personal biases. These reflexive insights revealed how hierarchical norms were reproduced in school band programs. My shimmer-bursts be(cam)e a reflexive vignette, contributing to autoethnographic self-study in music education.

The reflexive-vignettes situate my be(com)ing within the broader sociocultural and historical contexts (Pitard, 2017) of music and public education, providing a lens for deconstructing institutional norms. They exposed how power structures shape/d my professional expectations (Foucault, 1977; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). In alignment with postmodern deconstruction, the reflexive-vignettes challenged hierarchical authority models in music education, questioning the traditional roles of conductor/teacher/leader (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I engaged with the messiness of growth (Coia & Taylor, 2009); I embraced ambiguity and resisted linear narratives of professional development. These vignettes came through cyclical methods of recursive reflection, memory work, and artifact engagement. My

examination was directly focused on my pedagogy. Yet, it began with my experiences as a middle school band student and continues in my current professional roles, establishing an arc of identity formation. By revisiting formative experiences across this arc, I examine the (inherit-accept-reject)ance of the conductor/teacher/leader role and the reproduction of institutional norms. My identity as a conductor is shape/d by institutional hierarchies of music, knowledge, and power-- forces that have structured my lived experience and can be rendered visible through analyzable moments.

Autoethnographic techniques blended my personal experience with cultural critique; critics have labeled these inquiry approaches as ‘navel-gazing’ (see Atkinson et al., 1999). I rejected this criticism while acknowledging vulnerability to accusations of self-service. I conceptualized/honored the teacher as researcher; the act/art of teaching is inquiry (Schön, 1983). Narrative tenets and structuring complemented this autoethnographic approach by recognizing storytelling as a fundamental means of knowledge construction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). By drawing upon personal narratives to support dimensions of my study, I contextualized my professional be(com)ing within the relational, dialogic, and dynamic processes that shape teacher identity (Coia & Taylor, 2009).

This autoethnographic self-study did not seek a singular truth, but instead, troubled fixed notions of educator identity and the educational *truths* we believe, perpetuate, and take for granted as unequivocal and seemingly normal. By employing a postmodern, constructivist framework, I explored how my professional identity has been shap/ed by and continues to shape the social, historical, and institutional contexts in which I operate (Foucault, 1995; Lyotard, 1984). The construction of vignettes enabled a layered, recursive process of meaning-making, in

which my lived experiences served not only as data but also as sites of critical reflection and theoretical engagement.

Social World “Instruments”

Text, Image, and Video Instruments

Autoethnographic research relies on retrospective personal narratives, reflexive journaling, and archival artifacts to construct knowledge from lived experience (Ellis et al., 2011). Personal narratives reveal teacher identity formation as a non-linear, dynamic process rather than a fixed state (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Self-awareness is central to pedagogical evolution, demonstrating how critical incidents and institutional structures influence professional growth (Tarisayi, 2023). These forms of reflexive storytelling provided insight into how cultural expectations and pedagogical norms shaped my identity as a conductor/teacher/leader before my be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar (Machost & Stains, 2023).

This (in)quiry used layered forms of social-world “instruments” (e.g., data-gathering) to examine my process of be(com)ing. This (in)quiry integrated multiple social world sources, including textual, visual, and video artifacts, to construct a multifaceted, reflective analysis of teacher identity and pedagogical transformation. Each instrument contributed to a layered analysis and be(com)ing engagement. These artifacts spanned my time as a middle school band student (1994) to my current position as a Ph.D candidate and assistant professor (Fall 2025). This data exists across analog and digital formats, some stored physically in boxes and folders, others stored electronically across devices and cloud storage. Bloch (2021) situates geographic and temporal archives of meaning as central to qualitative interpretation and argues that they may exist beyond textual formats. Scattered across time and place, the *data* reflect the

dis/jointed nature of my identity as I was/am in flux temporally, physically, professionally, and personally.

My collection of instruments formed an ensemble harmonizing time/space/feeling/memory. My accumulated data was text-based (journals, research memos, essays, institutional material), image-based (photos and screenshots), and time-based (videos of performances and rehearsals). Instruments could have spanned audio cassette recordings of my middle school band contest in 1994, or classroom videos from the Fall of 2024. The layered forms of data include journals and journaling, previous writings, teaching artifacts, professional documents, video journals, research memos, and professional/academic communications. All of my personal journals, beginning in 2017 (when I started recording daily activities), were dated month/day/year. These instruments exist/ed across time and space, digitally and physically; scattered across boxes in storage, tucked into folders and books as mementos, saved as pictures on a phone. Many of the text-based documents were institutional or institutionally connected, such as lesson plans, evaluations, and observation notes. When materials include references to students, colleagues, or places, I anonymized identifying information. I refrained from direct quotation to avoid implicating those loosely connected to my personal be(com)ing stories. My instruments were a reflection of my identity; dis/jointed and un/connected. They allowed for engagement with epiphanies, tensions, and transformations experienced. I distilled, synthesized, and *arranged* these items into recursive vignettes; as personal narratives (key career moments and identity shifts) are both data and analysis.

Narrative Tenets

Personal narratives are retrospective storytelling of key career moments and identity shifts. Professional identity formation is revealed through narrative analysis, emphasizing the

role of career shifts, crises, and epiphanies in shaping pedagogical philosophies (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This study employed narrative dimensions to structure personal experiences as sources of knowledge, revealing how identity, leadership, and pedagogy evolve in music education. While this remained a self-study, tenets of narrative inquiry will informed the social world instruments and the (in)quiry write-up. Personal narrative structures involve retelling of critical experiences, allowing for meaning-making within educational, institutional, and cultural contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999). This method aligned with autoethnographic traditions that emphasize writing as a process of critical thinking and meaning-making (Saldaña, 2011). Drawing on narrative inquiry's centering of stories as a source of knowledge, meaning-making, and identity construction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), this study transforms data from, by, and/or about participants into literary story formats, sometimes called 'creative nonfiction' (Saldaña, 2011).

A complementary, overlapping relationship exists between autoethnography and narrative inquiry. While narrative inquiry structures and embeds elements aligned to storytelling, autoethnography theorizes the self in context, integrating personal experience with critical, reflexive engagement (Saldaña, 2011). The recursive vignettes examine personal experiences as lived stories that inform pedagogical practice, situating my individual narratives within larger educational, institutional, and cultural contexts. Fusing these encourages the construction and analysis of stories to understand identity and pedagogy (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), contoured by critical interpretation that situates personal experience within broader social, cultural, and institutional discourses. The recursive vignette framework structures professional transformation, situating my experience within broader educational discourses (Clandinin, 2013). As I connected experiences, I invoked and embedded narrative and narrative elements to

(re)construct knowledge through storytelling, engaging with my be(com)ing in context rather than through isolated events (Saldaña, 2011); scrutinizing hierarchical models of authority.

However, tensions in lived experiences raise ethical questions in storytelling: Narratives demand transparency and responsibility in representing personal and relational experiences (Ellis, 2007). Therefore, reflexivity is a critical component of the recursive vignette. Stories of professional transformation illuminate shifts in educational philosophy and the power dynamics embedded in teaching practices (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The recursive vignettes represent “data gathering”: They construct my lived experience through first-person accounts of critical moments in professional identity formation. Storytelling in recursive vignettes captured pedagogical tensions, career shifts, and leadership challenges. Archival storytelling interpreted past teaching artifacts as narratives of professional growth. My vignettes support my interrogation of how my be(com)ing process contributed to pedagogical knowledge. Stories of teaching failures and breakthroughs offer insight into instructional practices. The stories included in this dissertation seek clarity as to how institutional structures shape music education leadership.

Autoethnographic Archive(s)

Autoethnography incorporates archival analysis to provide historical context and validate personal reflections through documented evidence. Teaching artifacts, such as lesson plans, syllabi, and professional correspondence, offer insight into how pedagogical philosophies and leadership styles evolve (Kessler, 2024). Comparing past documents with current reflections reveals tensions between past beliefs and emerging understandings, reinforcing the concept of be(com)ing as an ongoing process (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Archival data highlights the structural barriers and institutional pressures that shape teacher identity (Birks et al., 2009).

This data dates back to the inception of my identity construction. The artifacts included were from my formative years in secondary education, my college experiences, and my professional milestones. These items were physical (notes/cards/letters) and were stored in hardcopy and digital formats on my personal devices. Most were language- or text-based, though one was a performance recording of my band, and others were recordings of professional performances. Some of this data I was eager to examine, and other parts I had been actively avoiding (Tamas, 2008), but still revisited. I chose to engage with the item as a self-demonstration of bravery, only to be unable to find it. Professional artifacts (teaching evaluations, performance programs, institutional correspondence) provided historical evidence to support vignette construction and reflexive analysis. Other sources, such as handbooks and adjudication rubrics revealed how teaching philosophies evolve (Kessler, 2024). By using archival materials for triangulation, I strengthened trustworthiness by verifying patterns across personal narratives and external sources (Tarisayi, 2023).

Reflexive Journaling

Reflective journaling—a continuous record of reflexive practice over time—was enacted during this research. Journals capture real-time engagement with reflexive thinking, allowing for an iterative, evolving research process (Saldaña, 2011). The purpose was to capture internal thought processes and professional identity shifts; journaling tracks transformation over time. I intentionally began journaling as a master's student, as part of a graduate course. I continue this practice today and offer my current graduate students the option to journal as an assignment. Journaling reveals tensions in music education leadership, particularly in hierarchical spaces such as the band director's role (Foucault, 1977).

The Green Bubble is an example of my emerging narrative voice reinforced with institutional approval. It has become part of my academic canon; I recursed temporally to that experience, each new rhizomatic entrance into that node building upon my evolving positionalities and perspectives. Previous writings reflect my shifting identity. Combining personal narratives, reflexive journaling, and archival materials provides a robust, reflexive approach to engagement with the social world. Together, the sources reflected this (in)quiry's constructivist/postmodern framework, where recursive engagement with self and context constitutes a legitimate mode of knowledge production.

Playing [with] Instruments

In line with Thought Provocations I and II, data analysis was my engagement and play[ing] with instruments, fusing critical reflexive interpretation and postmodern deconstruction. Reviewing past professional experiences through a postmodern lens allowed for critical deconstruction of the norms and power dynamics embedded in educational settings (Foucault, 1977). As part of reflexive iteration, I read personal journals, scholarly writing, and research projects across multiple timelines. This was not coding, but instead was recursive memoing—not a linear search for themes. I noted when meanings shifted, fragment/shatters/contradictions emerged, writing the shifts into the recursive vignette (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Ellis et al., 2011). Within the vignette, the analytic pause contains the theoretical framework of the shimmer. The reflexive mem() served as a crucible for my be(com)ing. As part of poststructural disruption, I deconstructed the roles of conductor/teacher/leader, using Foucault (1977) to analyze how roles were constructed discursively and reinforced institutionally. I traced be(com)ing over time through selected artifacts, critically engaging theory, memory, and practice.

Deconstruction

Self-study and autoethnographic analysis offer an iterative, recursive process in which the researcher is both subject and analyst, continuously re-examining personal narratives in relation to broader educational, institutional, and cultural discourses. The recursive vignette offers a structure, a vehicle for writing, and a source of thought provocation. Themes are not predetermined but emerge through ongoing analysis (Tarisayi, 2023) and the connection between artifact and memory. The analytical approach followed a critical-reflexive interpretation and postmodern deconstruction, grounded in clarity, depth, and alignment with constructivist and postmodernist paradigms. The reflexive mem() offers intentional space for this deconstruction. The postmodern deconstruction of identity formation deconstructs the settled categories of conductor/teacher/leader, resisting fixed identities (St Pierre, 2013). Recursive practice and the be(com)ing of various roles tie directly to Thought Provocations I and II. I examined the conductor-as-authority model through Deleuze's (1987) rhizomatic theory, challenging linear, hierarchical leadership.

The (in)quiry followed the spirit of Machost & Stains (2023), who advocate that music education research move beyond traditional leadership models and embrace multiplicity and decentralized authority structures. Applying deconstruction and rhizomatic theory as analysis, I interrogated authority structures in music education, questioning the historical dominance of the conductor as the singular leader (Revelli, 1937). I examined contradictions in teacher identity, troubling the division between technical mastery and pedagogical effectiveness (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). These analytic moves are enacted within the recursive vignette.

Alexander (2023) posits that deconstructing personal experience through self-narratives reveals how power circulates in education, particularly in hierarchical spaces such as music

education. The construction of the recursive vignette template is a deliberate attempt to illustrate Alexander's assertion. The analytic pause and reflexive mem() contained within the vignette are where the deconstruction of power and identity is performed. Autoethnography challenges traditional, hierarchical structures in education, positioning the researcher as both subject and analyst. Such method/ological orientations enable deeper critical engagements, and the postmodern deconstruction of institutional power dynamics in music education.

Ethical Considerations

There are ethical concerns in representing personal and relational identities. Interpretation is never fixed or final (Poulos, 2021). Self-study and autoethnographic ethics require self-awareness, transparency, and continuous interrogation of positionality, e.g., bias(es) (Ellis et al., 2011). I must continuously self-interrogate, asking, How do my stories contribute to broader educational discourse? Ethical concerns arose in representing self and others in journaling, requiring critical engagement with relational storytelling (Ellis et al., 2011). Relational ethics in self-study research acknowledges that self-study is never just about the self; it involves others whose voices, actions, and decisions are embedded in the researcher's experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Archival materials, past writings, professional records, and historical documents involved a representation of myself and others. I am committed to ethical reflexivity. How does my narrative affect those indirectly included in the research? What measures ensure my critical reflections do not unfairly position others within power structures? Am I writing in a way that prioritizes academic rigor while respecting relational complexity? As a response to these questions, I combined people/institutions/roles and events. I made efforts to de-identify those directly involved by using composite roles and pseudonyms.

Self-study and autoethnographic inquiry raise ethical challenges in representing personal and relational experiences in research. These research paradigms focus on the self but inevitably include others, colleagues, students, and institutional actors (Ellis, 2007). They are careful to balance personal truth with ethical responsibility, ensuring that stories do not harm others involved in the narratives (Ellis et al., 2011). Informed consent is complex in relational research, and representation must be handled with care and respect (Poulos, 2021). Informed consent was not sought in the assemblage of these materials. This was due to heavy anonymization and minimal risk. Persons and institutions were combined into broad representations to mask individual institutional identities. Confidentiality in reflexive journaling and narrative analysis was ensured by anonymizing personal references, preventing colleagues, students, and institutions from being misrepresented or exploited in the research process (Tarisayi, 2023).

Reflexivity as methodological practice

As an ongoing process, reflexivity resists settling into conclusions, cycling the researcher into an ongoing dialogue with the data. Reflexivity enables the continuous questioning of identity shifts, and professional transformation is critically engaged with rather than passively accepted (Tarisayi, 2023). Narrative elements support reflexive engagement with theoretical critique, allowing for recursive reflection on professional be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016b). This process enables the revealing of assumptions about pedagogy, power, and musicianship, allowing me to reimagine these practices through a more reflexive pedagogy that resists hierarchy and centers student/teacher voice. This process offers practical insights into disrupting hierarchical structures and grounding a student-centered pedagogy; conceptual insight into how identity is fluid rather than fixed; and methodological insights into how self-study can generate pedagogical knowledge from lived experience. Reflexivity enables the researcher to examine

how personal biases and institutional power structures influence decision-making in education (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

Strategies to ensure trustworthiness straddle issues surrounding the responsibilities of storytelling, the challenges of representing self and others. Regarding trustworthiness and credibility, self-study does not conform to positivist validity measures such as reliability or generalizability. Instead, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) positions findings as credible, transferable, and ethically sound. This study used several strategies to establish trustworthiness. Triangulation of sources and analytic memos aligns with constructivist and postmodern research paradigms. Credibility and confirmability in autoethnographic self-study require methodological transparency, reflexivity, and structured analytical processes. Unlike post/positivist research paradigms that emphasize objectivity and replicability, self-study establishes trustworthiness through strategies grounded in credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. I addressed these tenets through systematic reflexive practice and critical engagement with lived experience. This study incorporates triangulation of sources and analytic memos to capture trustworthiness while addressing limitations such as subjectivity, positionality, and ethical tensions.

Credibility

Self-study and autoethnography have faced their share of critiques. There is the acknowledged risk of self-indulgence if reflexivity is not critically applied (Tarisayi, 2023). The risk is mitigated through triangulation with archival data, memory, and theory. The constructivist reframing of triangulation strengthened this research by integrating multiple data sources to cross-reference insights (Denzin, 2012). This is not about verification. This is about depth, contrast,

and recursive engagement (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Personal narratives were analyzed alongside archival materials and reflective journals, scaffolding consistency in tension, resonance, or consonance across sources (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). Layering personal and institutional materials supported depth and transparency. Multiple perspectives (educational theory, institutional context, and reflexive inquiry) provided layered insight into teacher identity formation (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Educational theory served as the interpretive lens, documents/artifacts framed institutional context, and my ongoing collection of journals/memos/writing underpinned reflexive inquiry.

I triangulated personal experience, institutional/professional artifacts, and reflexive vignettes to surface dissonance or consonance between my memory, the archive, and institutional feedback. The opening theme of Chapter 1 serves as an example; my artifacts/journals from that time serve as a temporal portal to that night. I (re)engaged with historical artifacts and retained institutional documents from that time: a fugue, a (re)entrance—a (re)voicing of that night. With the scholarly support of artifact/theory/framework, but also a different (disruptive) voice, each re-entry marks a return to the same event with different positionality. Constructivist and postmodernist epistemologies guide interpretation, reinforcing critical engagement with knowledge construction (Lyotard, 1984). I mem()’d as I intentionally engaged with artifacts to surface selected themes/areas of narrative. For each personal narrative, I identified at least one artifact from that time period. This recursive, contrapuntal analysis revisited the same event through multiple lenses and positionalities.

Confirmability

Confirmability in this inquiry is established through an audit trail documenting interpretive shifts over time. These items are stored digitally and are available to the dissertation

committee chair. I loosely maintained an audit trail that included post-hoc interpretations of journaling, to-do lists, video journals, and research memos. Dissertation drafts, notes, and narrative sketches track theme development. Interpretations/reflections/shifts are traceable over time. For example, I began this journey as an Ed.D. student with the intention of pursuing a career in secondary orchestra. I wanted to continue to be part of the musical community, with the purity that band lacked, repertoire that was a thousand years old, and music-making not exclusively focused on competition/athletic support. This offered an acceptable balance between professional achievement and economic security.

I am now a Ph.D candidate entering post-secondary education as a tenure-track assistant professor. This shift was from an Ed.D. focus on instrumental pedagogy to a Ph.D orientation toward post-structural qualitative inquiry, as traced across documents (MacLure, 2013). Email chains with faculty discussing the logistics of switching programs and clarifying course requirements. Discussions with faculty across programs debating pros/cons. Journal entries. These artifacts form a triangulated record of shifting identity and scholarly alignment. I initially rejected a life of scholarship and doubled down on my commitment to K-12 structures, falsely believing that if I pursued a ‘purer’ form of music-making, I could find balance. A performative outlet and economic security. This shift is traceable through journals (written and video), coursework, shifts in pedagogy, and a deepening of inquiry.

This study sought trustworthiness in self-study through triangulation and recursive vignettes. While self-study presents methodological challenges such as subjectivity, positionality, and ethical tensions, these were addressed through structured reflexive safeguards—a critical limitation involved ethical/relational risk. My narratives include masked/anonymized actors/institutions. There is an ongoing risk of misrecognition or

unintended harm. Writing from a former position of authority creates asymmetrical power: I controlled how events were framed. Even with safeguards, those implicated in my stories may experience them differently than I do, and I cannot control how these representations will be received. My interpretive authority can never be entirely separated from the power structures I critique.

Intermission

This chapter outlined the methodological framework and writing process that guided this (in)quiry. Using autoethnographic self-study, I troubled fixed notions of teacher identity, leadership, and musicianship, positioning reflexivity as a central analytical tool. These methods were not just tools or *instruments*; they were epistemologically consistent with my theoretical framework. The methodology was grounded in constructivist and postmodern perspectives, emphasizing that knowledge is co-constructed through lived experience, discourse, and institutional structures.

This methodology established the foundation for the analysis and findings presented in Chapter 4, where writing emerged as method, where the *data* organized itself into recursive vignettes. The study did not seek fixed conclusions but instead troubled settled assumptions about identity, teaching, and leadership. In the next chapter, I analyzed how my experiences as conductor/teacher/leader challenged, reinforced, and transformed dominant educational narratives, contributing to a more reflexive, critical understanding of musician/teacher/scholar be(com)ing.

Chapter 4 – Framing the Ensemble

This (in)quiry aims to interrogate, explore, and deepen my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar through autoethnographic self-study. Examining personal experience in the context of conducting, teaching, and leadership through autoethnography legitimizes lived experience (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024) as a site of knowledge production. I use be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) as an epistemology, a critique of static identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. What follows is an entanglement of methods, traditions, and epistemologies situating self-study within autoethnographic traditions (Fitzgerald et al., 2009), supported by conceptual framings of constructivism and postmodernism. Constructivism and postmodernism trouble the singular, fixed natures of knowledge and identity, situating these within social contexts and structures of power. Constructivism legitimizes the social construction of knowledge, while postmodernism destabilizes hierarchies and authority. These conceptual and methodological orientations cultivate the exploration of my be(com)ing. Through reflexive engagement with personal experience and institutional structures, I explore what has shap/ed my pedagogical identity. The following provocations emerge from the tensions with/in the roles I cycle and the identities I interrogate.

Thought Provocations

1. In what ways does recursive practice enable me to critically evaluate how the roles of various actors (humans/roles/institutions) are entrenched in the narratives, traditions, and structures that shape music education?
2. Through parallel postmodern and constructivist frameworks, how can I interrogate my evolving journey from conductor/teacher/leader, to musician/teacher/scholar?

3. How does my process of be(com)ing, explored through autoethnographic self-study, inform and contribute to constructing pedagogical knowledge, and what insights does this process offer to education?

The following cycle serves as recursive activations, they are organized as movements—knowledge activations—not findings, with/in/through be(com)ing.

Exposition

Framing [the] Be(com)ing and Otherwise

I use be(com)ing as an epistemology and method, a critique of identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. Rhizomatic entry (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) enacts the non-linear, decentered process of my be(com)ing. The recursive vignette framework embraces emergence over closure (St. Pierre, 2013). I position my identity as always in flux, emerging through reflexive engagement (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Be(com)ing foregrounds the process of identity over the product of performance (Regelski, 2021); it is an ongoing interplay of theory/experience/reflexivity. Guided by Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic entry points, knowledge activations occur at the intersection of lived experience, theory, and reflexivity. In the recursive vignette framework, the researcher-as-subject is embedded in the process of knowledge creation.

Having positioned be(com)ing as an unstable, identity-in-progress epistemological framework, I write toward what St. Pierre (2000) and Lather (2007) call the 'otherwise'. Not a final truth, but a different orientation to self, practice, and knowledge. Drawing from poststructural feminist inquiry, St. Pierre (2000) places *otherwise* as a refusal of traditional logics. Lather (2007) situates *otherwise* against tidy data and fixed representation. MacLure

(2016) offers us ‘glowing data’ and a refusal of linearity; in this study, *be(com)ing otherwise* means disrupting linearity of how identity develops, where, and when—as time, place, pace, and positionality are always intertwined and always evolving. *Be(com)ing otherwise* means refusing the dominant logics of certainty and progress. It means occupying the space of *be(com)ing* without destination. This space is liminal, between worlds. I use *Be(com)ing otherwise* to frame recursive vignettes as knowledge events. These moments must be *thick* because knowledge events are moments where thinking is triggered, expanded, or shifted.

Other Conceptual Instruments

Constructivism

Constructivism frames knowledge as experientially constructed, situating this inquiry within a framework of meaning-making through lived experience as a conductor/teacher/leader (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this conceptualization, identity formation is not fixed but emerges through learning and self-examination. Because constructivism supports self-study by positioning knowledge as co-constructed, it sets a foundation for this study as a rigorous approach to (in)quiry. Identity is constantly in flux: *be(com)ing* is a process, contingent and always under revision.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism (Foucault, 1995; Lyotard, 1984) disrupts hierarchical knowledge structures in music education, supporting my interrogation of identity categories and institutional norms. The central, authoritative role of the ensemble conductor is a critical example of this hierarchy, where all decisions, musical, curricular, and performance, are dictated in a top-down structure. The athletic/military/conservatory influences on band demand questioning of knowledge/power/tradition. These traditions reveal an authoritarian lineage and invite criticism

due to their rigidity. These influences transformed/shaped/damaged the conductor/teacher/leader (me), but they must be deconstructed to be understood, even incompletely. Postmodernism challenges essentialist notions of identity, reinforcing fluidity in be(com)ing.

Self-study as the Immovable Do (Pease, 2016)

When the ‘middle C’ key on Percy Grainger's harmonium became stuck, instead of repairing it, he harmonized around it. This story provided a wind band piece, *The Immovable Do*. When I performed the composition, the story guided my interpretation. I acknowledge that storytelling is a central part of culture (Bruner, 1990). This extends to educational contexts as a teaching model, community-building exercise, and morality exercise (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Here, the tonic, the *Do*, anticipates a destabilized notion of identity and writing and my refusal of that fixity—a *non-chord tone*. I (re)assert storytelling as central to education and surface self-study as harmonizing around a stubborn, immovable self. Music is a language (Elliott, 1995), and storytelling is a central component of music (Reimer, 2022).

During each recursive vignette, I pause the story and engage myself-as-scholar. This is the analytic pause/reflexive mem() work. I investigate and name what is happening epistemologically. *What systems are acting on the self? What institutional or cultural norms are reproduced/resisted?* These are example lines of (in)quiry. Trustworthiness is centered on my vulnerability; some of my recollections are not flattering. However, my honesty is only one dimension of trustworthiness. Individuals and institutions are masked or obscured. I offer triangulation, perhaps better described as fractured light — each artifact refracting the same event differently. As I continue to re/visit journals, videos, performance videos, and *early teaching evaluations*, I offer them as support for the felt impact of each event.

Framing Ensemble (Chapter) Four

This section establishes contextual knowledge activation, not findings. *Findings* suggest something has been discovered/proven/concluded. When applying postmodern and constructivist frameworks, *be(com)ing* knowledge is emergent, context-bound, and never final (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Endings are intentionally left nebulous.

I experience this process as a continuous shifting of my truth(s). In previous chapters, I wrote about my resistance to the role of /teacher/ as I defined it. Through re-engagement with formal evaluations from my first three years of teaching, I am surprised by the consistent recognition of my effort and improvement across the elementary and middle grades. This functions as a knowledge activation because it shifts my position from the toxic nostalgia of struggling to balance multiple grade levels to the security of remembering that I did make a terrific effort to improve. Through these moments, I frame *be(com)ing* as recursive, reflexive, and willing to engage in discomfort (MacLure, 2016). My commitment to *be(com)ing* is joyful, painful, reflexive, and thick.

The vignettes are organized rhizomatically; they are a cycle, not steps. These interwoven scholarly interruptions function as epistemological inquiry. The recursive vignette represents rhizomatic entry points (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), in which learning occurs through multiple nonlinear connections rather than a single path. Activation is the ignition, the spark, the shimmer in which insights are co-constructed from lived experience, reflexive process, and chosen theoretical frameworks. I claim my position as researcher-as-subject as embedded in knowledge creation rather than as an observer ‘reporting back’, consistent with self-study and my methodological reflexivity (Coia & Taylor, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004). Trustworthiness is

addressed within vignettes through triangulation (Fitzgerald et al., 2009) and fragmentation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

These vignettes validate refusal and disruption as knowledge-making acts. They align with rhizomatic structure: non-linear, recursive, and open. Each vignette functions as a movement or solo within the larger ensemble, using similar structural elements. One design aim was to make the vignettes explorations of literary structures I had not previously explored, such as poetry, playwriting, or song, both metaphorical and musical. Titles are figurative or musical, and I retell the experience using body, setting, sensory, and temporal cues.

Vignette Template: *two lines or spaces between motives represent a breath*

Title: *intended to be evocative*

Scene: *I will labor to put the reader in my position*

Narrative Entry Point: *anchored in specific times/places/experiences*

Analytic Pause: *here I consider the chaos of be(com)ing, the theoretical interpretation of the vignette, this is where theory is explicitly surfaced*

Reflexive Mem(): *(identity be(com)ing shift), self-interrogation; traces how my identity shifts through each event, a focus on lived experience, leaving open the space(s) in-between the parenthetical boundaries*

Artifacts in Dialogue: *specific objects that provoke a shimmer*

Trustworthiness: *how I will honor the reader*

Practical Echo: *the way that these shimmers may or may not connect with others and contribute to a deeper understanding of (music) education and teaching, how others may/may not connect to my conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar*

This vignette template will retain explicit labels, except in one case and I provide rationale.

Title: A Prelude—*The Green Bubble*

Scene

I was standing in the backyard, but it wasn't really a backyard. The subdivision used to be a tree farm in north Florida; the 'backyard' was an acre of brown-sugar sand. Bleats and panic had summoned me. I was wearing my middle school band tuxedo. Medals carefully pinned to the lapel, my All-County patch would be sewn to my shoulder the following Spring, my All-State patch the Fall after that.

Today was the Yulee Christmas parade, and *I was ready*.

'Mom!' my younger brother shouted, 'Angel has a green bubble coming out of her butt. '

The scene was absurd.

Angel, one of my Mom's pet goats, was giving birth. The goat was a pet, the pygmy kind meant for entertainment and petting. *Am I going to miss the parade because of this?* I was panicked. *We needed to leave now!*

I *recursed* to this moment that very same year. I wrote the story, '*The Green Bubble*,' for an English assignment. My teacher thought it was hilarious and entered it in a writing contest. I remember needing to type my handwritten story by the following Monday for my teacher. I had access to both a typewriter and a computer at home. I feel anxiety when I recall being stressed

about this. The typewriter was hard to use and did not tolerate mistakes. The computer was easier and fun, but access was gatekept.

Narrative Entry Point

This node took place in Yulee, Florida, during the 1994 holiday season. It was a humid late morning, the air sticky with moisture. Preparing to leave for the parade collided with Angel the Goat's surprise labor. The homes were spread far apart because each lot was an acre—an acre of sand.

Analytic Pause

A shimmer (MacLure, 2016), not a rupture. A flash that draws attention without resolution. The tension between performance obligations and a new pet arrival surfaced recognition of writing as a recursive knowledge-activation process; this foreshadowed a decades-long arc that continues with the vignette *Disposable Teacher*. Both are fragmented, recursive writings that serve as a coping mechanism for institutional tension. Birth-shimmers of a different kind.

This intensification prompted a return to the event through a short story writing assignment. This event, this shimmering node, exposes writing as a moment of knowledge activation. This may be an early enactment of be(com)ing, weaving together the writer and the musician, revealing a scholar. In this space, the artistic identity of the musician in uniform interacts with a scholarly voice, culminating in an entanglement with institutions past, present,

and future. This vignette links recursive knowledge activation to be(com)ing and institutional engagement.

Reflexive Mem()

This was not so much a shift as a surfacing; an early intertwining of my musicianship and scholarship. My commitment to my musicianship and my fear of failure catalyzed the writing, igniting my scholarship and forging a connection between the musician/ and /scholar, a (re)affirmation.

I do not remember what came of the assignment or the award. That Saturday's tension produced a written narrative that earned recognition, proof that writing could clarify chaos and would anchor my be(com)ing methodology. I enjoyed my teacher's attention, but this was not a rupture. I did not intentionally comply with my teacher's instructions, nor did I put effort into writing the story. *I just did it.*

I wrote what came naturally, and the institution elevated me for standing out. The institution also told me my handwritten story wasn't good enough; it had to be better. More polished, more legible, more standard(ized). Less (of) me. This spontaneous sixth-grade shimmer anticipates the recursive logic of my present be(com)ing. Here, improvisatory memory (re)activates knowledge in fractured flashes rather than linear progressions (MacLure, 2016).

Artifacts in Dialogue

I have my Solo and Ensemble medal, a marker signaling my early separation from peers through performance, but belonging to the institution through labeling. This item exists alongside other artifacts: letter patches, honor ensemble patches, and bowl game patches—certificates of recognition.



Figure 1 Solo & Ensemble Medal

My middle school band polo, with *YMS Band* embroidered on the front, is a marker of ensemble be(long)ing. What surfaces is that the uniform provided by the institution never fits *me*. The polo was too large, and the tuxedo jacket did not fit. There is a picture, *somewhere*, of bony-shouldered me in the too-large polo, an early artifact of institutional validation and misfit.



Figure 2 Middle School Band Polo

The original *Green Bubble* story is lost; while recursing through documents I discovered a forgotten award. A high school (1997) English teacher entered my writing in a contest at Regional Teaching University (where I currently am a professor), my childhood writing recognized by the institution where I now produce scholarship. The certificate shows I received an honorable mention for a piece of writing, but I do not recall the assignment. This shattered early writing fragment signals repeated external validation of writing talent.



Figure 3 Writing Award Certificate

Trustworthiness

I have the Solo and Ensemble medals, stored in boxes of teaching artifacts. My YMS Band polo is stored in a storage chest, and the PSAT score report is kept with high school memorabilia. The Regional Teaching University Writing Award sits in the same place of memorabilia. These items have been deliberately condensed through a series of job transitions and moves. All items are tucked away but can easily be accessed as reminders of institutionally/individually sanctioned greatness. These items function as a material check against memory.

Practical Echo

Early institutional recognition episodes can foreshadow later scholarship; music educators might (re)visit shimmers to locate the praxis of performance, pedagogy, and identity. Constructing artifact-based vignettes can be a helpful approach for scholarly engagement, as it may encourage music educators to identify formative intersections. Returning to *The Green Bubble* as a shimmer prompts me to ask what early recognitions my own students carry, and what frameworks might surface those nodes as sites of (in)quiry. How might early recognitions predict later scholarly dispositions?

Title: I - The Veil of Talent

In this setting, I frame talent as a veil that obscures structural conditions. Talent critiques socially constructed labels that hide structural factors. Contests, rankings, scoring and trophies are the markers under scrutiny as they hide labor/privilege, and discipline (uni)formed bodies into performativity.

Scene

‘With a score of 77.55, in First Place in the White Division, Suburba-Rural High-School!’ I couldn’t see my band, but I could hear them as the announcement was made. I could pick out their individual voices in the joyous cacophony, *Anna, Stephen, Luke*. I had worked for years towards that joy. That day was the first time in school history that the marching band had advanced to finals in a prelims/finals competition format. We had performed in that competition 10 times over the previous decade, narrowly missing finals the prior year.

All those times we had ridden *the sad bus* home instead of performing *under the lights*.

The show was themed *Dreams*. *Dream a Little Dream, Sweet Dreams (Eurythmics)*. I enjoyed designing witty shows. *How could I combine familiar tunes to make a musical joke?* In this case, we made *Sweet Dreams* a clarinet feature, intentionally assigning the ‘cool’ part to the ‘uncool’ instrument. The feature's visuals were awesome, lifted from *The Blue Devils*. Staccato, punching body movements visually typing the 1980s synthesized rhythm. This was a state-level event featuring two dozen bands competing across four divisions. The top two bands in each division advance to the finals, with ten bands total performing *under the (tower)ing lights*. The sound they made on the field was tight, controlled, nervous.

Most of the students had started their band instruction with me, daily interaction spanning eight consecutive years. Marching band was competitive, co-curricular, and took place both as a class and as an activity. The season began with a fireworks-stand fundraiser; school budgets do not fund marching band trophies. Summer rehearsals started in June, there are not enough class minutes to build a production. I knew the students; I cared deeply for them. The sound they made when they ‘won’ was not the judged sound they made on the field. The sound was (un)controlled, (un)rehearsed, producing (un)ruly joy. For me, momentary relief replaced the bile.

Narrative Entry Point

This event took place at a state-level competitive marching band event in October 2019. These were the preliminary awards. *A Dear Friend* had shocked the profession by winning the event a few years prior. Our schools were similar in size, demographics, and whiteness. Our

programs were not similar. *Dear Friend* was an alumnus of his program, and his program was/is the accepted model. Singaling a parallel but unequal career, I had struggled to develop a band that wouldn't feel out of place at the event. My heart felt empty, years of comparison thieving my joy.

Preliminary awards are given after the first round to determine who advances to the finals. This moment is a threshold, a rupture where advancement had been missed so many times before. *Dear Friend* and their band were not present at this competition; they would not be here to celebrate with us.

Drum majors and guard captains are on the field; the band is in the stands. Typically, directors would be on the field with the drum majors. This year we were not. I was grateful because I hated being on the field while scores were announced, *so many eyes watching*. I am behind the stadium, next to the equipment trailer, listening after years of misses.

If we made finals, we would be one of the first bands to perform, and the turnaround was quick. The sky was gray; it had rained most of the morning. I was pacing near the equipment truck, ready to discipline bodies back into damp uniforms so their reward could be to perform *again*, this time for *more* criticism.

Analytic Pause

What is talent defined from a postmodern perspective? Is talent what the judges write on the sheets? Is it who gets to perform under the lights? Is it whose sound is heard and whose labor is (in)visible? Perhaps talent is what we assign to a mixture of ability, interest, and environment. Parts of the conductor/teacher/leader identity and the band's performance identity

were shaped around this specific contest, with the evaluation system's demands defining our collective identity. Talent—the finite measurability, momentary evidence of talent—conveys something bestowed, a gift from nature. Programs and teachers who benefit from this myth, from sustained legacies of achievement resonate differently than those who struggle to be(long) on the field. The score – 77.55 – is a single frequency; the point of harmonization, the fixed pitch where years of labor and budget are erased.

Talent-as-gift perception, a labeling of divine elevation, masks labor, access, and power. This was an event where the ensemble and its director were successful. A crowning event where the field is a mask while simultaneously (un)masking burnout and fear. This was a seminal career achievement, obscuring harassment and precarious employment. Critical music education scholarship positions talent as a cultural myth that legitimizes unequal access (Abramo & Natale-Abramo, 2020). Was this shap/ing in the best interest of the students or myself? The answer is obscured, what is clear is that this moment is a node, a recursive evocation of a shift.

Reflexive Mem()

I was at that institution for fifteen years. My conductor/teacher/ identity had become inseparable from institutional recognition. The video before the preliminary performance shows us as us. Our body language was tense and stressed before the competition. Serious, stone faces. My physical tension and my emotional labor in a moment of 'victory' at the competition revealed how much I had internalized band contest structures. Changes in my physical presence after the finals announcement were reflected in the students, they reflected my be(com)ing back to me, the tension/release in their bodies mirroring mine.

A district administrator's harassment co-occurred with this achievement of public success. Emails, threats of constant monitoring. I was visible. I was successful. I was targeted. This vignette refracts how institutional recognition and institutional violence can exist in the same spaces. The conductor/leader was (sur)veiled while the /scholar names the veil of talent. That day began with dread and closed with... deflation.

For the conductor, contest success does not equate to ethical teaching. For the teacher, the culture of talent is performative and exclusionary. That band was successful because we were collectively committed to the show production. The production was well-designed, and the program supported by the community. The success of that day could not mask institutional dysfunction, could not prevent my collapse in leadership, could not keep me employed. The field was a place (an immovable pitch) where my successful face and targeted body (co)exist.

'We will pay your contract out in full with a resignation.'

For the leader, visibility invites institutional control. As an *otherwise* scholar, this vignette portrays talent as a veil, an obscuring force. How do we teach music without centering the contest stage? Who is allowed to be excellent? Who is allowed to be safe? Critically, *talent* operates as a myth that masks labour and unequal access, legitimizing hierarchy under the veil of innate (anointed) gift (Abramo & Natale-Abramo, 2020).

Artifacts in Dialogue

When I sit with the contest moment, the memory is catalyzed by fear—immobilizing performance anxiety (Ball, 2003) be(for)e the performance, and anxiety over how to replicate the success after the performance. There was no break from the emotional labor. There is

heaviness. This *heaviness* foregrounds the artifacts below. A note in the margins lauds me as a successful program builder, but an email exposes me as a precarious employee, a *disposable teacher*.

The preliminary performance videos are fun for me to watch now. I recall that the students and I are tense in the ‘tunnel’ video. The tunnel video is a close-up video of all of the students right before we take the field. The uniforms broadcasting a polished, disciplined body masking self doubt and panic. Marching band uniforms and too-large polos are veils. I miss those young faces. I have pictures and photos from that day, as well as the scores from that day—notes in my journal. One note shifted me.

February 19, 2019, *‘this program is why we stayed in this town/district’* a journal note of a comment made by a parent. This was a (s)tumble, a shock, a fracture. I remember the student, middle school—bright, eager, terrific musician. I do not remember their name, but I remember how I felt. I remember making the note because at that exact moment, I was being hunted. Harrassed by an administrator desperate to make an example. January 22, 2020 would be my last day at that institution. I have the email.

‘Please plan on meeting us at Central Office at 12:45 PM’.

On February 10, 2020, the Board of Education would accept my resignation

The scores and parent praise, the joyful cacophony of student voices are evidence in a performative institution that disciplined me, the email and board minutes contrast the punitive regime with supportive community. The artifacts reveal the sound of performativity and disposability in unison (Ball, 2003).

This vignette honors LaBoskey’s (2004) call for transparency and disruption in self-study. This moment was selected because it troubles success. Public success and private

targeting (co)exist in the same measure, a suspension, both in-and-outside (Powell & Celeste, 2020). I triangulate [(re)fract] score sheets, journal entries, and parent testimony as material veils.

Trustworthiness

The original artifacts I own have been kept through multiple moves as part of an intentional archive. Videos are archived on the internet, and emails are stored on my personal computer. Board minutes are publicly available, where this appears as:

Agenda Item: Terminations and Resignations/Retirements.

Archived items function as material veils and evidence, corroborating my memories of precarity. The artifacts that validate *talent* also document disposability. The preliminary performance video serves as a visual record of labor, stored on my personal computer. A 2019 Marching Band photo album, a gift from band parents, is stored among my personal effects. The preliminary and finals score recap is archived online and freely available. Because the video and score sheets are not de-identified, they are not linked here to preserve confidentiality. My journal entries dated October 9, 2019, and November 1, 2019, surround this event. A forwarded central-office meeting email (January 22, 2020) is stored in my files, and resignation approval in Board minutes (February 10, 2020) echoes online; *This email confirms my agreement with the terms presented in the letter dated January 22, 2020.*



Figure 4 Marching Band Uniform Items

Practical Echo

Music educators should reframe the concept of *talent* in practice. Talent is socially constructed rather than innate. Talent should be (re)placed with the language of access (funding), rehearsal (schedule), collaboration (collective effort), and design (artistry). Marching band requires radical interdependence, sound-bodies working together. Contest culture translates this collective labor into American meritocratic success in band. As conductor/teacher/leader, I was suspended in that chord. I leveraged community rehearsal structures in service of an individualistic system of scores, placements, and the reputation of *my* band. This vignette, as the tonic, exposes the tension between band's communal labor and the neoliberal demand that success be owned by individuals and competitive programs. Evaluation systems should reward collective growth and ethical rehearsal structures rather than contest placement. We should de-center adjudication as evaluation, instead inviting reflective critique and peer feedback as evidence of musicianship. Talent cannot be a veil, obscuring and excusing teacher disposability and harassment. Performance success cannot ethically compensate for institutional harm.

Ethical echoes for teacher/leaders vibrate through the contest field; talent discourse encourages hierarchy within ensembles, which should be disrupted by rotating leadership, redistributing solos, and recursing who receives opportunity or safety. The conductor's visibility must include accountability for care. Music educators should cultivate awareness of how institutional recognition systems reproduce (in)equity and extract emotional labor from teachers.

This pedagogical echo embeds reflexive journaling and ensemble debriefs linking musical labor to social conditions. Repertoire selection and curriculum design must balance artistic rigor with student agency and psychological safety. Contest literature should be used as text to be read critically in addition to being performed. Students analyze how scoring rubrics encode values and restrict performance. Critical music education literature (Abramo & Natale-Abramo, 2020) positions conductor identity as inquiry, documenting tensions between recognition and harm through ongoing self-study cycles (Coia & Taylor, 2009). This vignette performs the recursive cycle. Adjudicators and evaluators should join conversations about the ethics of evaluation, shifting from compliance to reflection.

Title: II – Ash, Stars, and Ballet

Scene

I used to listen to Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* on the drive home from my job, where I waited tables during summers off from college. Copland's sound is American, unapologetically white, blue collar in its message but not in its performance. Driving through rural Kansas—sticky summer nights. Stars out; they can be seen at night out on the Plains. Smelling of CISCO grease and industrial cleaning products, flicking a Marlboro light out my

Ford Escort's window. Chain-branded knit logo clinging to my clammy skin. Pounder of Miller Lite between my legs. Dreaming of an adulthood unencumbered by class and geography and debt.

I would think about the young couple in the ballet. *Flick*. Ash in the back seat.

My labor as a musician—hours in the practice room—my minimum-wage job, serving for an existence, modulate the tonic of my imagined stability. A future secured by hard work, compliance with the social contract, earned through grease and beer and nicotine. The scene, both inside and outside my car, is the pastoral American dream, an audible reality built on my white working-class fantasy.

As a middle school student, I would listen to the soundtrack from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* on my Walkman during the bus ride home. The Walkman was a gift from estranged grandparents, a connection that only existed in birthday cards and infrequent phone calls—the axle of the bus vibrating with longing.

The Planets, written for orchestra, was composed by a man who wrote beautiful music for the wind band. At 17, I understood Mars. Anger. Every man-boy does. I was angry because of circumstances, relationships, injustices I did not understand, and still struggle to quiet.

I understood Jupiter. Joy. I had found Joy as a musician.

But I claim Mercury, the winged messenger, the resonance between realms. My space is liminal, the *otherwise* of child/adult, worker/student, musician/teacher/scholar. Ash, stars, and ballet triangulate this drive; Mercury felt like the part of me that was beginning to understand how to move between spaces (Lubrano, 2004).

Narrative Entry Point

Summer 2001, *Home on the Range* in rural Kansas. My post-shift drive home, 1:00 AM. Mercury escapes into the silent Plains. Under the stars, music is a class portal that slowly transposes me into a conductor/teacher/leader, the tonic (under)scoring my white working-class American dream of escape and legitimacy.

Analytic Pause

Here, music is a portal to imagined places, a childhood escape from the confines of the bus; plains, prairie, and open skies—a teenage escape from the drudgery of food service, isolation from the joy of campus life.

In those moments, music was a portal.

Conducting a physical act of be(com)ing, the site where the musician/ meets the /leader. An intersection of rhizomatic selves (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), a surfacing of the reflexive practitioner (Coia & Taylor, 2009). These recurring encounters with Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and Holst's *Planets* form an assemblage, sonic threads connecting musician/, labor, and /scholar identities in a rhizome of be(com)ing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2015).

Reflexive Mem()

In this space, I compose music as memory, rhizomatic return, and shared meaning, enacting be(com)ing as an epistemology rather than a fixed identity. I connect my own youth, naivety, and wonder of discovering film music, ballet, the orchestra, not just as a talent/skill/task but as something profoundly fulfilling.

I connect that wholeness with students, thus grounding my /teacher/ identity as an extension of my earlier child self. My cycle through/with these pieces at different points of my life demonstrates recursive be(com)ing through repertoire as portal for (re)entry. The *Jupiter* chorale would (re)surface many times during my conducting career, connecting the musician/ and /teacher/ selves. It served as a favorite warm-up choral and as a bridge to more accessible music.

Mercury reminds me of my frantic youth, except now I am in the *youth* of old age.

Artifacts in dialogue

A *Bernstein Century* recording of *Appalachian Spring* exists in its original form in a CD sleeve, true to my millennial self. My copy of Holst's *Planets*, on CD, is still in the same '90s CD sleeve. The fabric CD sleeves beaten and dusty from countless office moves. *Holst* and *Copland/Bernstein* are nestled alongside (non)canon recordings of *Harry Connick Jr*, *Alanis Morissette*, and *The Beatles*. Now, these pieces exist in the cloud, as algorithms, attached to my identity and shared with or without my knowledge. These recordings now trail me in a different way than the CD sleeves did.



Figure 5 Beatles CD's



Figure 6 Bernstein Conducts Copland



Figure 7 Holst, *The Planets*

Recording example: Appalachian Spring – Allegro, Leonard Bernstein – New York

Philharmonic, available at https://youtu.be/aCnku_UGD9Q?si=Y_knVRtJtUcSgt04

Recording example: The Planets, Op. 32: III, Mercury, the Winged Messenger, available at

<https://youtu.be/wYtJ4RA3V4o?si=sieQFgb5ISdcAueK>

Trustworthiness

Evidence of engagement is situated within lived experience. As a reflexive researcher, I position myself as a source of meaning through time. The physical copy of *Appalachian Spring* is stored in a CD binder, but it is actually a different recording of Bernstein conducting Copland. The compact disc of Holst's *The Planets* is in the same binder. My rehearsal notes from journals

referencing chorales as warm-ups are dated and interspersed with meeting notes and grocery lists, which are included as data.

Triangulation is conceptual, not empirical. Artifact, embodied memory, and theoretical lenses are linked through rhizome/be(com)ing/reflexivity (Ball & Olmedo, 2023). Emotional data is treated as legitimate epistemic material, in line with St. Pierre (2014) and Richardson (2000). There is credibility in recursion; repetition across decades functions as a trustworthiness device. Each return substantiates the continuity of be(com)ing. All materials listed are stored securely in my private home.

Practical Echo

Repertoire recursion for pedagogy or intentional repeated engagements with the same works: How can this inform transformative conducting pedagogy for pre-service teachers? Music educators should use recurring works (*Appalachian Spring*, *The Planets*) as mirrors for reflexive be(com)ing; students trace how meaning shifts temporally and contextually. Conductors should design ensemble experiences in which musical return functions as an inquiry into identity rather than as repetition. Treat repertoire not as an artifact, but as a site of return, activating critical reflection on labor and history.

The be(com)ing vignette can serve as transformative conducting pedagogy for pre-service teachers. Embed reflexive journaling and repertoire revision cycles in conducting curricula to investigate how sound-memories shape leadership. Leaders should model vulnerability by tracing their own musical inheritance through sonic artifacts and cultural memory (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

In terms of ethical resonance, music educators must challenge a product-oriented rehearsal culture and surface the ethical processes of music-making. We must acknowledge the recursive nature of sound and memory as scholarly activation. What does it mean to conduct music that has conducted you?

III – Disposable Teacher

This vignette deliberately departs from the vignette template. The version here was written as I was developing the vignette structure; this writing itself is a site of methodological emergence of be(com)ing through the recursive vignette framework. I have chosen not to (retro)fit this activation to the formal structure because this vignette is part of the epistemological argument. It cannot fit the form because the event broke form.

Scene

I was sitting in the dingy, poorly lit basement hallway, reading *Evicted*, taking notes. The floor was covered in bare, dirty carpet. The principal sighed out my name while shaking their head and glancing away, towards the filthy floor, as if my presence both startled and reminded them of something unpleasant. The principal was new in their position. They were frequently absent, and when present, radiated insecurity. *Evicted* was a class assignment, a testimonial to those who struggle to belong.

I felt dismissed, a source of contempt, disposable.

I felt dismissed by the administrator I had asked for help. I was vulnerable with them even after they had worked to destabilize me. If I were a strong enough teacher for them to hire, why was I not worth their support?

I was convinced I would be non-renewed, even though my evaluations were *highly effective*. I had taken steps, with appropriate support systems, to anticipate and mitigate problems associated with me. I had asked the administrator, counselors, and deans to be present during my instruction. The pressure was real. I struggled with the class schedule, the constant distraction of cell phones, and administrative silence.

The pressure was from all sides. I was taking classes, committed to my journey as a scholar. I was a full-time doctoral fellow, working with graduate students in teacher education. I needed to write the *Evicted* methodology for an advanced research class. I knew I needed to submit something that had at least a taste of substance because the professor told me, *Just submit something*.

I sat there with the book in my hands, remembering the poverty I had seen in Kansas City, Missouri the last time I had been *evicted* from a job. I tasted the humiliation of dismissal again. It came in the form of a letter the next morning, hand-delivered by the principal's secretary.

The State of Colorado requires us to inform you pursuant to . . .

The letter did not explicitly state that I was being non-renewed, but everyone knows what it means. The letter came *after* my final formal evaluation, during which I *directly* asked if I

would be non-renewed. I had told a district-level administrator I would be leaving voluntarily before the non-renewal. They said *Won't you reconsider? [person's name] would be crushed.*

Holding that book, the solo and ensemble medals didn't mean so much anymore. The 77.55 felt centuries away.

The shift was a layer of understanding that institutions do not care. They will choose self-preservation over ethical treatment of teachers (Morfitt, 2025). Even when steps were taken to mitigate transitions and high-placed allies existed within the institution, the principal's failure to act, support, or care could not be compensated for.

The shift was from teacher. Teachers are culturally expected to be respected and valued for their role as community creators. The teacher identity I had worked to create from dismissal as a young conductor/ to central to my professional /teacher/ core was destabilized because by refusing to support me, the principal was refusing to acknowledge my teacherhood.

I am no longer bound to reproducing dysfunction to stay employed. My since-shifted teacherhood does not exist with permission from institutions.

The conductor shifted, too. The ensembles I taught made significant improvement under my instruction, as evidenced by my evaluations, peer feedback and audience commentary. I relied heavily on my previous experience as a program builder, hoping that effective instructional delivery would mitigate resistance to my presence. It did not. The following school year, students from that school attempted to contact me to 'apologize'.

The new guy teaches us the notes, but he doesn't teach us to play with passion.

As I was constructing this vignette, another former student reached out to me on a professional social media site. *Will I (re)connect with that student?* I enjoyed them in class, but could they understand I am no longer the teacher they are reaching for?

The shift was to scholar. The abuse, discomfort, pain, and rejection eased my transition from K12 to post-secondary, from practitioner/scholar to scholar/practitioner.

The Evicted methodology paper

This paper was written under pressure, and the feedback shifted me, as English teachers tend to do. I took a screenshot of the feedback and left it on my computer desktop as proof that I was capable of *something*. Writing I could be proud of came from this pressure.

My journal entries from that time period are infrequent, with gaps between dates, and some pages are undated. Some of my handwritten notes are stuck inside the *Evicted* paperback.

The 4.14.23 page mentions available orchestra positions: it is unclear whether I had been non-renewed at this point, as I had been considering other positions. These frantic notes are data.

The next page is undated, but has notes from an orchestra position at Front Range School in Colorado. I applied for the position the day I was non-renewed, and received an interview offer the same day. At that point, my sense of conductor/teacher/leader was shattered. I felt lost, completely frozen, yet everything was collapsing around me at warp speed, *again*.

My critique is institutional. Institutions choose non-renewal as self-protection. The building principal's willingness to accept a position of responsibility but refusal to ethically fill

that responsibility rippled through my career, but also suppresses/marginalizes/controls other bodies.

What would principal preparation look like if it were grounded in trauma-informed leadership? I am not sure, but I accepted the position despite deep misgivings about interactions with the principal during the interview process. Months later, the principal would confirm my suspicions that their leadership was... *off*. To be clear, I am critiquing school leadership preparation as a system, not a person's flaws. I accepted the position because, logically, it was a wise move. It was supposed to be better supported, with a higher salary, and less politics. It was none of those things. This story is centered in the wrong tonic; self-preservation, not ethical responsibility, anchors the chord.

IV – Mr. Curtis

Scene

My elementary music classroom, shoulder, shoulder, criss-cross hop! Five little pumpkins, sitting on a ledge . . .

I had given up, fled, self-evicted (again). This was a pause; could I teach elementary music for the rest of my career? No. Could I teach elementary music for a while? Yes. Absolutely yes. The pedagogy was more playful, and classroom management was lower-stakes.

I shifted from secondary performance-based ensembles to an elementary space of joyful rage.

And off we went. I bought bubble machines, and we danced every single day. I wanted my classroom to be what I imagined Deweys Chicago Lab School to be.

Don't eat the bubbles, they'll make your poop weird.

We sang loudly. We read *The Mitten*, a children's book about winter, and stuffed ourselves into the PE teacher's borrowed parachute. We exploded out of the parachute when the mouse's whisker made the bear sneeze.

We threw the dragon's egg (a series of abused dodgeballs), and I was constantly congested.

Analytic Pause

What happens when a teacher shifts grade/content because of institutional violence? What happens when the institutional dysfunction continues? This shift represents both retreat and resistance, elementary as a refuge and experiment, inspired by echoes of thought provocations from earlier graduate study.

This was a softer institution, where care could be relearned. Still, institutional violence appeared again. The administrator refused to engage with the negotiated agreement, interpreting shared governance issues through their own authoritative lens. The district was constantly in the news because of acts of unspeakable violence against children.

Emotional labor was masked as 'professionalism' or 'grit'.

Yet within this less demanding frame, the teaching reconnected embodied musicianship with presence, healing the body-as-instrument (MacLure, 2016). Teaching became an act of joyful rage and epistemic disobedience, refusing to reproduce harm through performance metrics.

Reflexive Mem()

This was a time in my career when I was safe in the classroom.

At this school, the students called me *Mr. Curtis*. A signal of familiarity and an acknowledgment of respect. A shimmer of my youth in the South.

I did not conduct. We performed only for ourselves. I refused programs.

I would like to see them performing more.

This was code for *Put on a Show. Dance for us*—a request for performative nonsense. I refused.

I would like you to participate in a coaching cycle.

No. I ignored emails. I refused to attend faculty meetings held outside my contract and flaunted directives. I loved teaching again. While it was not sustainable and had its own institutional violence, it was a refuge. A place to close a career. I metabolized grief over my failed career through play. The /teacher/ (re)emerged not to perform competence but to model resilience. This mem() witnesses the return of joy as method, my classroom became a space for (re)constructing humanity with/in the systems that had rendered it disposable.

Artifacts in Dialogue

I left K12 teaching at the end of that academic year. I struggle internally with my voluntary departure. Should I surface the leadership failures I had witnessed? Should I speak for those who were afraid because I could? I could not be retaliated against. I chose to write a letter documenting my experiences and shared it with the union director and the building union

representative. I wrestled with the decision of whether to include the administrator in the email containing the letter. The letter is stored digitally in an email account I rarely use.

The *dragon egg*, a series of balls *borrowed* from elementary PE class. Safe to throw at/with/around children. One *dragon egg* was retired due to being bitten. Another disappeared in a neighborhood yard. The dragon egg was a pedagogical tool, an attention-getter. A reminder, a stress-reliever. A source of my constant congestion. The last surviving version of the egg is stored in my personal effects.



Figure 8 A Dragon's Egg

Recording Example: Five Little Pumpkins Choreography, Elementary Groove Tracks, available at https://youtu.be/_64UHMxEbBE?si=04ltzRndp32RRaIF

Trustworthiness

Artifacts include the documented letter to the union, emails, and journals from that academic year. Nodes of refusal, embodiment, and recursion appear across vignettes and operate as internal triangulation (LaBoskey, 2004) confirming be(com)ing as method. Emotional

activations are situated as analytic material (Coia & Taylor, 2009a; Richardson, 2000), establishing validity through transparency rather than confession.

Practical Echo

To music educators, I offer joy and refusal as praxis. Teaching as an act of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) within systems that equate compliance with professionalism. Teachers should embrace joy and refusal as democratic agency, (non)violent resistance to systems that harm. This is refusal from within.

Institutions should embrace teaching (elementary music) as a restorative methodology, play reclaims care as a condition of pedagogy. Leadership structures must account for the emotional and ethical labor required to rebuild trust after harm. With/in this vignette, healing and play function as analytic acts, evidencing the recursive (re)emergence of the /teacher/ within be(com)ing.

V – Return

I inexplicably find myself back at the site of repeated memory events—a marching band contest in my previous home state, at my new university. I never intended to return to the Plains where I earned my degrees and began my career. This scene echoes earlier activations/fractures/shimmers.

Scene

I was driving, *again*. Rural Kansas, the rolling hills are crispy red with October.

I was *thrilled*, stoked to see friends. *The Band Family*. Anxious to emerge from exile. A pink energy drink in the console, *neon cherry-sugar explosion*. This was after coffee.

I was on my way to the *de facto* state marching band competition (Au, 2016). On the campus of my new university, where I am a tenure-track professor, a liminal homecoming where past and present selves coexist (Derrida, 1993). My new office across from the stadium. Sites of fracture mirroring each other.

It is not a typical fall October day, humid and warm instead of cool and crisp. Colleagues and friends from my earlier career will be converging on campus with their bands, including my former band and their director, *Former Friend*. I am afraid to confront the institution(s) that rejected/silenced me—evicted me.

I remember the taste of bile.

Come down for the day and hang with us.

A text from *Dear Friend*.

I drove to campus *early*. Excited, thrilled to be returning to campus but also the event. The activity, the bustling of young musicians, and the serenity of the college campus. *My* college campus.

Things were familiar but different. I had attended the event as a director with my group, *when the group was mine*.

I surveyed the ‘lot’. Equipment trailers and pop-up tents. Some uniforms were updated, some programs featured new trailers, and some groups appeared to be larger. Some bands were noticeably improved, at least by the competition's metrics. Directors, friends, and acquaintances not seen for five years. There was silver in the hair, lines around the eyes, and a few more

pounds. I was fully aware of the moment, the day. The day was be(com)ing, each interaction a recursion, identities clashing violently through (in)quiry.

Analytic Pause

This was the culmination of years of constructed identity knowledge, the meeting of former self as conductor/teacher/leader with the shift/ed self of musician/teacher/scholar. A (re)entry, a (re)engagement with a former self thought (hoped) lost forever. The state-level competitive event co-occurring at the site of scholarly emergence is synchronistic. The campus functions as a spectral site where prior professional selves ‘ghost’ (Gordon & Radway, 2008), the present tenure-track identity.

The marching band competition is an accountability ritual that echoes high-stakes testing. The contest’s ranking system establishes a performative meritocracy (Au, 2016). This autoethnographic self-study extends discourse on identity rupture and institutional power. What does it mean to witness one’s pedagogical line in public performance after renouncing that identity? After *eviction*? What about the emotional labor of return (Hochschild, 1983)?

Reflexive Mem()

This moment was a culmination.

This return is not closure but recursion.

An arc of professional exile.

An arc of self-imposed social exile.

A return to a place of discomfort, a place of judgment I deliberately left behind when I fled to the mountains to heal.

Yet, there I was. (In)voluntarily at a place I never intended to return—an (un)willing recursion. A confrontation with every success but also every failure, echoes of choices made.

The shadow of my alcoholism is always present.

But the day felt *good*. The comfort of old friends, shared struggles, shared bonds made in/through our own experiences as college musicians. As young teachers. As accomplished performers.

A cherished *Shared Mentor* recently announced their retirement. This event ripples through our wrinkles.

Dear Friends college-age children absorb our banter. I know them as toddler-pictures broadcast on social media by proud parents. Now they own mustaches and facial piercings. One of them is a student of *Shared Mentor*.

We walk the front sideline, *Dear Friends* band begins to take the field, preparing for their preliminary performance. *Their only performance of the day*. *Dear Friend* inhabits the role I sought/lived/rejected in real time (MacLure, 2016). I feel nostalgia and warmth in a field of teenage performance anxiety.

A hand grasps my shoulder from behind. A large hand, a friendly hand full of (be)longing.

A hug and a smile.

Kind brown eyes.

You disappeared, where did you go?

I was/am overcome, and I cannot speak. It would be a sin to speak; the moment does not deserve words. The intersection of familiar and new, a node of remarkable kindness and

welcome connection at the intersection of every identity. My chest is warm, my face is soft. Rarely is a surprise interaction this welcome.

In the distance, preparing for their own show, *Former Friend* and my former band. This (re)turn performs recursive reflexivity, folding be(com)ing back on itself.

Artifacts in Dialogue

I have a debit charge for admission to the event, as well as two hot dogs. *Dear Friend* is many people, not a single person. One of those persons was a critical friend candidate, someone who could corroborate my vignettes. He and I had informal discussions about what a critical friend role would entail, even though I ultimately chose not to use that method. The text suggesting I attend the event is stored on my phone. Follow-up texts acknowledging my presence from ‘*Dear Friend*’ are stored on my personal devices.

Former Friend is also an amalgamation, representing those who are no longer active in my field.

Trustworthiness

As mentioned earlier, one *Dear Friend* was a candidate for a critical friend as someone who could triangulate/arbitrate the vignettes. Texts and receipts are stored digitally, journals are stored physically in my private home. These artifacts function as analytic anchors, not narrative proof. Recursion, visibility, refusal, and institutional gaze operate as internal triangulation (LaBoskey, 2004). Consistency across vignettes supports methodological coherence within be(com)ing.

Embodiment is treated as analytic activation, aligning with post-qualitative frameworks (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Richardson, 2000). Emotional transparency functions as validity, inviting reader reflexivity.

Practical Echo

This return is not redemption; it is a methodological act of witnessing. To revisit the site of professional fracture is to (re)engage in recursive verification of be(com)ing. I stood in the shimmer where self/scholar/system converge. Reflexive return transforms memory from evidence of loss into activation, demonstrating that knowledge creation continues beyond the institutional boundaries of contests, repertoire lists, adjudication rubrics, and teaching evaluations tied to performance outcomes.

The contest field became metaphor for the institution (the school, the university) itself, both are stages of meritocratic performance (Au, 2016). Scholars as displaced practitioners carry the spectral residue of systems (Derrida, 1993; Gordon & Radway, 2008). Recognizing these hauntings demands ethical attention to how academia reproduces the hierarchies it critiques.

Return requires managing visibility/nostalgia/shame (Hochschild, 1983). The capacity to occupy these contradictions without resolution models an ethic of reflexivity for educators navigating post-trauma professional spaces. Emotional awareness becomes a condition of research rigor, affect is a requirement of valid (in)quiry.

Institutions hiring teachers from sites of harm must develop trauma-informed mentorship and evaluation practices (Coyle et al., 2020). Leadership preparation must include an analysis of meritocracy and its human costs, and a reframing of accountability as a relational responsibility. This recursive event confirms that be(com)ing operates as a cycle.

Synthesis Across/Around Vignettes

The vignettes collectively address Thought Provocations (TP) 1-3 and surface tensions in the conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar. Through autoethnographic self-study, these tensions become sites of transformation rather than resolution. The vignettes demonstrate recursive practice, and roles are critically evaluated through narratives that shape music education through testimony. The parallel frameworks position my be(com)ing not just as method, but as epistemology. My be(com)ing surfaced through writing in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 is both a demonstration of my be(com)ing and a theoretical framework.

The vignettes offer clarity as professional reflections on practice and transformation in music education. The intent here is not to provide solutions but to construct knowledge through recursion. Here, I elevate recurring tensions, identifying anchor binaries.

- a. Performance/pedagogy*
- b. Talent/access/meritocracy*
- c. Authority/agency*
- d. Safety/visibility*

I connect recurring tensions and Thought Provocations across/around vignettes. For clarity, the following list uses letters (*a-d*) corresponding with the binaries identified above:

- Prelude: *The Green Bubble* tensions B and C, linking TP 1 and 2
- Movement I – *The Veil of Talent* tensions A and B, linking to TP 1
- Movement II – *Ash, Stars, and Ballet* tensions A and D, linking to TP 2
- Movement III – *Disposable Teacher* tensions C and D, linking to TP 2 and 3
- Movement IV – *Mr. Curtis* tensions C, linking to TP 1 and 3
- Movement V – *Return* tension A and D, linking to TP 3

These vignettes trace tensions and recursion without closure. This is a reflexive commentary on be(com)ing, how the shift in teacher/musician/scholar identity modulates through institutional and emotional layers. What follows is not a conclusion but connective tissue.

These vignettes function as recursive entries rather than linear progressions. I notice a tendency to write about driving at night, and I often mention stars/planets. I glance to the corner of my home where a telescope, received as a Christmas present when I was 13, leans against a brick wall. A shimmer recursing while I write method.

The artifact I was reluctant to engage with may be lost, though it turned out not to be relevant to the vignettes. I am curious how my (sub)conscious avoidance of artifacts has shaped this story. The *Disposable Teacher* vignette, in particular, is meant to demonstrate trauma. These vignettes share several examples of performance frameworks informing pedagogy. There are moments where conductor/ (re)emerges inside /teacher/ and /scholar. *Veil of Talent*, *Disposable Teacher*, and *Return* are contrasts in agency and control. A few are flashes of institutional violence intertwined with micro-acts of repair (*Disposable Teacher*, *Mr. Curtis*). *Mr. Curtis* presents elementary music as (re)learning care within a gentler institutional space, elementary music as music therapy.

Moments of silencing, administrative dismissal, and forced exit exist parallel/in tandem with voice reclamation (writing/conducting/scholarship). The vignettes present rhizomatic uncertainty as method (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The vignette form itself is a methodology, each recursion performs rather than reports (in)quiry. *III – Disposable Teacher* is a vignette in its pre-fractal structure. I chose to leave the vignette in its original form as a marker of methodological emergence.

I sequence the vignettes as scene, analytic pause, mem(), artifacts, trustworthiness, and practical echos, creating a fractured framework of knowledge.

Fractures and Residue-Pursuits

This (in)quiry shifts forward, seeking new lines of narrative discovery. Next, I explore the implications of be(com)ing as method/epistemology. I wonder does/will/did this scholarship shift the /teacher/ as I teach graduate students in school leadership?

Chapter 5 Fractures

Having interrogated be(com)ing through the recursive vignette framework, this fracture turns reflexivity towards activation and how recursive methodology informs future (in)quiry. Be(com)ing functions as both epistemological stance and methodology. This chapter operates as an activation rather than a conclusion. The Thought Provocations remain open sites of recursive examination, each shaping how I teach and conduct my scholarship.

This (in)quiry aimed to interrogate, explore, and deepen my process of conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing musician/teacher/scholar through autoethnographic self-study. Examining personal experience in the context of conducting, teaching, and leadership through autoethnography legitimizes lived experience (Machost & Stains, 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024) as a site of knowledge production. I used be(com)ing (MacLure, 2016) as an epistemology, a critique of static identity, a recursive structure for writing and analysis. The fractures described here are for teachers generally and music educators specifically; this chapter asks what be(com)ing produces for teacher/music teacher identities and ensemble practice. What followed was an entanglement of methods, traditions, and epistemologies situating self-study within autoethnographic traditions (Fitzgerald et al., 2009), supported by the conceptual framings of constructivism and postmodernism. Constructivism and postmodernism trouble the singular, fixed natures of knowledge and identity, situating these within social contexts and structures of power. Constructivism legitimizes the social construction of knowledge, while postmodernism destabilizes hierarchies and authority. These conceptual and methodological orientations cultivate the exploration of my be(com)ing. Through the recursive vignette framework, I explored what has shap/ed my pedagogical identity. The vignettes function as performative sites of constructivist/postmodern be(com)ing and the empirical ground I theorize

from. The following provocations emerge from the tensions with/in the roles I cycle and the identities I interrogate.

This chapter revisits each Thought Provocation. I reorient the vignettes and theoretical framings, then articulate the methodological overlaps. Finally, I return to the fractures and their meaning for teachers and music education.

Thought Provocations

1. In what ways does recursive practice enable me to critically evaluate how the roles of various actors (humans/roles/institutions) are entrenched in the narratives, traditions, and structures that shape music education?
2. Through parallel postmodern and constructivist frameworks, how can I interrogate my evolving journey from conductor/teacher/leader, to musician/teacher/scholar?
3. How does my process of be(com)ing, explored through autoethnographic self-study, inform and contribute to constructing pedagogical knowledge, and what insights does this process offer to education?

Activation and Continuation

Extending the fractured light triangulation, this chapter signals a turn toward implication and possibility. Each fracture hints at continuation, developing what be(com)es activated through reflexivity. In this chapter, I engage with the conceptual implications (epistemological framing) and the applied implications (ensemble pedagogy and policy) of be(com)ing.

Be(com)ing is an epistemology—a way of knowing—that cements the teacher-as-researcher. The teacher is an embodied knower, a researcher of self. Be(com)ing as epistemology places the practitioner in the classroom as the site of knowledge creation, the site

of activation. Be(com)ing as method is a tool for practitioners to use publicly or privately—as a solitary or shared journey of (in)quiry. Be(com)ing as method is accessible and requires only a willingness to seek clarity. Accessibility encourages recursive autoethnographic self-study. The vignette-mem() template, guided by the analytic pause and reflexive mem(), provides the teacher-as-researcher a path to autoethnographic self-study.

Here, the ethics of leadership exist in witnessing and listening. Institutions could enact reflexive be(com)ing: policy should be informed by story and shimmer. An autoethnographic self-study serves as an institutional self-audit and a framework for designing care structures within schools.

Revisiting Thought Provocations

This section (re)engages the Thought Provocations, positioning them as ongoing sites of inquiry rather than resolved questions. Grounded in constructivist and postmodern commitments to instability, these provocations remain deliberately unresolved. They operate as fractures within be(com)ing, rather than as questions to be ‘answered’. In the sections that follow, I revisit each Thought Provocation, tracing how the vignettes respond and layering postmodern/constructivist framings. Finally, I trace fractures and echoes for teacher and music teacher identity.

Provocation I: Recursive practice and institutional entrenchment

This (in)quiry examines how recursive engagement revealed institutional practices that shape teacher identity (Kelchtermans, 2005; Santoro, 2011). Institutions reproduce themselves through performance and compliance; recursive reflexivity challenges those lineages (Proudfoot, 2021). While writing *Disposable Teacher* and *Return*, institutional limitations became visible, and reflexivity produced fractures, shimmers in the space between institutional systems

(MacLure, 2016). As a response, recursion functions both as a method and as a form of resistance. Be(com)ing through autoethnographic self-study then becomes counter-method (Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Richardson, 2000; St. Pierre, 2013). This positions the teacher as both a participant and a disruptor of systems. As a response to this provocation, be(com)ing functions as an institutional audit (Coyle et al., 2020; Morfitt, 2025; Proudfoot, 2021).

Disposable Teacher and *Return* reveal institutional entrenchment logics: the non-renewal letter language, the contest field, and the adjudication rubrics are institutional entrenchment canon. Recursive autoethnographic writing allowed me to see my entanglement with *good teacher* performance metrics, adjudication rubrics, and the non-renewal process. If be(com)ing is an institutional audit, what can school leaders do with teacher narratives like mine? How can trauma-informed leadership and school leadership preparation programs use recursive work? Provocation I clarifies be(com)ing as countermethod, a way to refuse clean resolutions and embrace fracture instead.

Provocation II: Postmodern/constructivist interrogation of role shift

The focus is on the instability between the conductor/teacher/leader and the musician/teacher/scholar (Kelchtermans, 2005; Santoro, 2011). In *Veil of Talent* and *Return*, identity transitions and slash syntax are used. These demonstrate how shifting roles generate both loss and compaction. Self-care, artistry, and musician-self were lost in the pursuit of markers. The role of /leader was compressed into that of bureaucrat and disciplinarian. These vignettes allow the slash syntax to become a tool for mapping identity recursion. Constructivist and postmodern frames reveal that identity cannot stabilize; each role transition generates (in)quiry.

Veil of Talent and *Return* show the instability of roles. *Veil of Talent* shows what appears to be a stable/capable/successful teacher, but one who, in reality, is being humiliated and suffers. *Return* is a mirror of the /teacher/leader depicted in *Veil of Talent*, but my fears about attending the competition in *Return* were mainly internal. The slashes and troubled language tend to appear most densely in *Return*. The appearance of be(long)ing in *Return* was heartfelt and the first time I recall using be(long)ing in that manner.

Veil of Talent and *Return* share the football field as a rhizomatic be(com)ing scene. The embodied roles of conductor/teacher/leader collide in this liminal space repeatedly over time. Constructivism is threaded through these vignette-provocations in how I build my identity in relation to students, contests, and evaluation (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Postmodernism reinforces the refusal of a stable teacher-hood, the use of fragmentation, irony, and slash/play (MacLure, 2016; St. Pierre, 2013). Be(com)ing as method allows me to hold these unstable roles without forcing coherence; the mem() and analytic pause perform that non-coherence. This role instability raises questions about music teacher identity, especially for band and orchestra directors who are expected to play all roles. School leadership preparation must consider how teacher identity is read/produced through evaluation scores.

Provocation III: Autoethnographic be(com)ing as pedagogical knowledge construction

Autoethnographic self-study has be(com)e a generative mode of pedagogical knowing (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Richardson, 2000). The *Ash/Stars/Ballet* and *Green Bubble* vignettes surface artistry and embodied learning. They illustrate that knowledge emerges through practice, reflection, and writing (St. Pierre, 2013). The vignette-mem() structure serves as a recursive pedagogical design and a model for teacher education.

Autoethnographic be(com)ing shifts self-study from introspection to activation, framing pedagogy as a recursive process of knowledge construction.

Ash, Stars, and Ballet illustrates a moment of embodied mourning: the flick of ash out of the window, often into the back seat, the *knowing* of class consciousness. My naive understanding of class structures and my juvenile commitment to the social contract become pedagogical knowledge through the analytic pause and the reflexive mem(), shifting my understanding of rehearsal/classroom practice through that embodied memory. *The Green Bubble* resonates in a different register of knowledge construction, a movement of early artistry and wonder, while *Ash, Stars, and Ballet* is a later nostalgic, grief-tinged shimmer.

The recursive vignette template is not just a writing device; it is a method for constructing pedagogical knowledge. Autoethnographic be(com)ing uses the scene, analytic pause, mem() framework to move from lived experience to insight about teaching and rehearsal. I use a condensed version of the recursive vignette in my own graduate courses in school leadership. I repackaged this framework to invite teachers to treat memory, grief, and joy as data (Coia & Taylor, 2009).

Be(com)ing is a way to build ensemble pedagogy, not just tell stories. This disrupts traditional research on teaching by rejecting surveys and observations as the only legitimate data sources. I invite conductors to write recursive vignettes about contest preparation and repertoire selection, surfacing a replicable framework, the recursive vignette, for others to use.

Applied Implications (Ensemble Pedagogy and Policy)

In the context of ensemble pedagogy, music educators should examine how contest structures shape performance. My own practice has been shap/ed by the American band canon, contest, and prescribed repertoire lists that privilege Eurocentric ‘serious’ music. Solo and

ensemble medals, festival ratings, and all-state participation functioned as mechanisms that both rewarded and bound my conductor/teacher/leader be(com)ing; I was formed inside the system I interrogate. Be(com)ing treats these canon-motivated structures as sites of joyful rage and (re)composition rather than neutral backdrops. Directors should be more critical of who decides what ‘counts’.

In terms of teacher evaluation and meritocracy, be(com)ing is a tool for (in)quiry. It is an opportunity for those practitioners who occupy the space of teacher-as-researcher to assume the responsibility and ethics of teacher-as-scholar. Evaluation and improvement be(com)e generated by the practitioner. Teacher evaluation becomes a site of knowledge generation and repair rather than control and compliance. These applied implications extend be(com)ing as epistemology into systems-level conversations.

Evaluators must accept the teacher as the source of clarity. This situates teacher evaluation as a dialogic process grounded in reflective professionalism. This positioning leads to trauma-informed leadership preparation, where refusal, care, and joy become leadership ethics even with(in) canon-driven, contest-oriented cultures.

Methodological contributions

In this (in)quiry, slash-role syntax is a tool for identity mapping. It serves as a visual aid for connecting identity (inter)sections. Knowledge activations are offered instead of findings in this self-study scholarship. Be(com)ing orients knowledge as emergence rather than discovery. The vignette-mem() operates as an embodied audit-trail artifact that validates emotional trustworthiness, extending it through fractured light triangulation. This is multiple refractions of one event, establishing trustworthiness through complexity.

Future Lines of Fracture

Each line of fracture represents a possibility, a site where teachers, leaders, and scholars can continue (in)quiry through new collaborations and contexts. Possible future products include a longitudinal study of returned-to-academy K-12 educators and a collaborative autoethnographic self-study. This would be an examination of educators who transition from K-12 to higher education and then return reflexively to study their professional be(com)ing, tracing identity and institutional navigation over time. This extends the recursive methodology across multiple actors and identities, testing the transferability of the vignette-mem() and fractured-light frameworks.

Another possibility is the rhizomatic mapping of repertoire recursion across career stages. The focus would be on tracking how musical and pedagogical repertoires recur or (re)emerge across career phases. I retaught or recycled pieces throughout my career; a map of these (re)taught pieces could become part of a recursive vignette. Rhizomatic mapping would be used to visualize identity recursion, connecting be(com)ing methodology to arts-based research.

A final offering is a comparative analysis of contest culture and teacher well-being. The intent is to continue (in)quiry into the consequences of competitive performance culture within music education. The design could be a comparative investigation across institutions or a narrative mixed-method design integrating an autoethnographic self-study across institutions and contexts. This is an extension of the critique of meritocratic systems, perhaps contributing to repair and policy shift.

Unresolved Tensions

I acknowledge that persistent teacher/scholar binaries, the single-participant scope, and situated subjectivity limit representation and generalizability. Within this method, insight arises through depth, not breadth. The demonstration of methodological intent — some would call it

rigor — triangulation, vignette-mem(), the artifact trail — demonstrates deliberate scholarship. I invoke be(com)ing otherwise scholarship as continuous, recursive activation. This scholarship is living, not static, (in)quiry. (Un)resolved tension itself is generated by the epistemic and methodological conditions of be(com)ing. I invite readers to locate their own shimmers/ruptures/(s)tumbles/activations.

5.1 Coda

While defending this document, I was asked where my conductor identity is now. The answer is, *he's gone*; that identity was written away. I will no longer compose with/in Festival rating rubrics (Allsup & Benedict, 2008) tied to prestige and funding, nor will I compose under bell-schedule rehearsal constraints. I cannot (re)enter these systems, composing with/in those systems made fracture inevitable. What began as categorization, a sorting of self, resulted in the shedding of the categories that prompted this rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) fracture.

Chapter Two became more than a literature review or an identity sorting mechanism. It was an excavation of roles and identities that I could no longer carry, writing grounded that refusal.

This is no longer a be(com)ing. For now, I am simply be()ing. I am not chasing identity; I exist (un)comfortably. It is no longer a be(com)ing because I am seated in the structure. I resist categories; I am exhausted by the search. But if the committee insists, today I am a writer. My writing seals truth into record without flinching. My pen builds the frame that holds shimmer, it is my instrument-body. The recursive vignette now functions as daily practice and appears in my courses as a method for teaching disruption from within institutions.

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