I Can See You Teaching Music, Can You?
A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Influences on Music Education Degree Attrition
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Purpose
The purpose of this case study was to examine the experiences of one successful student who voluntarily withdrew from an undergraduate music education program in the first year of study, changing his major and choice of university.

Research Question
What influenced the student’s decision to withdraw from music education study and pursue another major at another university?

Background and Method
Background: I chose to study a former student who pursued music education immediately following high school. I had spent a considerable amount of time mentoring him, and was familiar with his aptitude and attitude toward music education. I was curious about his reasons for not persisting in the program.

Method: Seidman’s (2013) Three-Interview Process:
1. Participant’s life history
2. The experience
3. The meaning of the experience

Future Research in Music Education
• Job perceptions
• Influences of student finances on degree persistence
• Examining degree persistence for first-generation college students
• Degree costs versus perceived value
• Implementing introductory music education classes as part of a standard curriculum

Sam
High School
• Felt a sense of purpose and belonging
• Excelled in choir, became a leader and student mentor
• Received scholarship for music education

""We were learning how to sight-read, and that... that was crazy to me. Like that was just next level, and I was good at it."

Music Education Major, University A
• Wasn’t supported as a first-generation college student
• Made good grades, loved his classes, but felt isolated
• Wasn’t able to fully identify as future music educator

Transferred to another University for engineering

Engineering Major, University B
• Loved the new university, but hated his classes
• Felt isolated, but in a different way
• Placed on academic probation after one semester
• Felt depressed, hopeless, had no drive, missed music

"I've got a lot of regret going through my heart... it's hard to smile."

Plans for the Future
• Lost financial aid due to low grades in engineering
• Developed a “two-year plan” to work in an industrial plant, earn enough money to pursue music education again, this time at University B
• Realized money was not the key to success

"I don’t care about making money anymore man, I just want to be happy."

Themes: Environment and Community
• Felt isolated and different
• Felt disappointed in the level of musicianship at University A
• Wanted higher caliber of musicianship from classmates
• Felt pressure from family to succeed

Curriculum Options
• Loved choir, but only had one choir class option
• Was not offered Music Education classes first semester
• Perceived different attitudes from performance and education majors

Music Education Job Perception
• Perceived as financially unstable
• Perceived stigma attached to public perception of teachers
• Worried about job security
• Perceived lack of opportunity for jobs teaching choir

Money
• Grew up in a limited income household
• Felt obligated to help provide for his family, especially his mother
• Worried about future income
• Worried about perceived value of a music education degree from University A.

"I've never really had that luxury... that really messed with my head."