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Leaving the Profession: Exploring Experiences of Music Teachers who Depart the Profession During the First Five Years of Teaching

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Abstract

Teacher attrition is a noticeable problem in the field of music education in the United States. Many factors contribute to the decision of a music teacher deciding to adopt a new profession at the start of their career. Some of these factors are common among music teachers and some are personal factors that are unique to the individual. This qualitative research paper sought to document the lived experiences of teachers who decided to depart the profession of music education. Emphasis was placed on teacher preparedness programs such as the bachelor's degree in Music Education and what specific aspects are lacking.

Interviews were conducted with three individuals who taught music no more than 5 years and decided to leave the profession. Those same individuals participated in a roundtable-like, focus group discussion to compare their experiences and highlight specific concerns from their undergraduate music education experiences. As a primary tool, narrative inquiry was utilized to preserve and epitomize their short experiences in their music education career. Following the interviews and focus group session, the researcher utilized coding methods to itemize specific themes and concerns for both the profession and the undergraduate music education experience.

The current paper sought to highlight questions for redesigning and restructuring for undergraduate music education programs to aid music teachers. Emphasis was placed on current course structure associated with individual Bachelor of Music Education programs of the participants as well as practical applications experienced and needed in those programs. To promote primary and secondary confidentiality, as well as freedom of speech during the sessions, the participants were notified that their names as well as names of institutions, professors, colleagues, etc. will be redacted as to protect the identity of those involved. Following the individual interviews and focus group, the sessions were transcribed with names removed or given an alias. This allowed the sessions to remain honest and true to telling of their lived experiences during both their undergraduate and teaching experiences.

Based on specific concerns for teacher attrition, conclusions were drawn for suggestions for further research for undergraduate music education. These conclusions included (1) what is currently being offered in undergraduate music education that aids music teachers, (2) what is currently not being offered that should be a component of undergraduate music education, and (3) what offerings are considered irrelevant and should potentially be redesigned, restructured, or removed from undergraduate music education.