Pre-Professional Ideologies and Career Trajectories of the Allied Professional Undergraduate Student

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Undergraduate students sometimes pursue degrees that are aimed at allied jobs. This research examines how students in one allied professional degree, Education Studies, conceptualise their pre-professional ideology and how these ideologies relate to their intended career trajectory. The research draws upon a year-long qualitative survey of over 70 undergraduates. Students’ professional ideology and career path were initially linked to the corresponding professional degree i.e. Teacher Education. Over the year, students’ conceptualisation of their pre-professional ideology changed but their career trajectory remained relatively constant. These findings imply students were conforming or socialising into the expectations of their allied professional discipline but did not have an expectation to follow that career path. The research findings have implications for helping students to be realistic about their career trajectory and ensuring that they are prepared for an appropriate job.

Keywords: pre-professional ideology; career trajectory; Education Studies; allied professionals

# Introduction and Background

In this paper, we investigate how undergraduate students’ career decisions are shaped by their professional ideologies which are sometimes manifested through their professional identities. This research is pertinent to helping shape the undergraduate employability agenda and policy that universities, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK), are engaging with ([Anderson and Mitchell 2006](#_ENREF_4); [Brooks *et al.* 2012](#_ENREF_9); [Cranmer 2006](#_ENREF_12)). Traditionally, universities have looked at improving student employability skills ([Jackson 2016](#_ENREF_26)). However, [Trede *et al.* (2012)](#_ENREF_49) have suggested that universities should concentrate on helping to develop students’ professional ideology, particularly that of their professional identities, whilst [Jackson (2016)](#_ENREF_26) goes further to suggest that employability should be redefined to incorporate what she terms “pre-professional identity” (PPI). [Jackson (2016)](#_ENREF_26) defines PPI as a less mature form of professional identity and it is the developing sense of being a professional. [Trede *et al.* (2012)](#_ENREF_49) in their review paper have noted limited literature relating to professional identity and employability. This paper intends to fill this gap by looking at the pre-professional ideologies of undergraduate students in the allied degree of Education Studies.

## Professional Ideologies

The term “professional ideology” has been in existence for over fifty years ([see Mills 1943](#_ENREF_36)). Ideology, itself, is often conflated with Marxist concepts (see [Bercovitch 1986](#_ENREF_6); [Schull 1992](#_ENREF_43)) and relates to a set of common beliefs held by people in the society ([Abercrombie and Turner 1978](#_ENREF_2); [Cullen and Gendreau 2001](#_ENREF_16); [Schull 1992](#_ENREF_43); [Swidler 1986](#_ENREF_45)). To minimise this value-laden terminology, in this paper, ideology, as suggested by [Schull (1992)](#_ENREF_43), is used to mean a common discourse shared by people within society. Extending this definition, we define professional ideology as the common discourse shared about a particular profession such as teaching or nursing.

Within the Marxist literature, ideology is sometimes dichotomised into dominant and recessive ideology. Dominant ideology is one that is pervasive within the society and within Marxist literature, it is often considered to be imposed on by a hegemonic group whilst the recessive ideology is the subversive or the suppressed ideology, one which is suppressed by the hegemonic group ([Abercrombie and Turner 1978](#_ENREF_2)). Unlike the Marxist literature, we align ourselves with [Bercovitch (1986)](#_ENREF_6), in that we consider the dominant ideology as one that is competing with either the residual or the emergent discourses within a society. In this sense, ideologies are not part of a dualism and neither are they imposed by a hegemonic group but instead a collection of cultural discourses within society ([Assmann 2008](#_ENREF_5)), with the most pervasive ideology being in constant competition to become the dominant ideology depending on the (re)creation of the residual or the emerging discourses. Therefore, extending this concept to professional ideologies, we will expect that for any profession there will be a dominant ideology and some residual or emerging ideologies.

Further, a person’s professional ideology may be shaped by various discourses including ones relating to values and qualities ([Cryns 1977](#_ENREF_15); [Mohr 1995](#_ENREF_37); [Woodcock and Dixon 2005](#_ENREF_52)), work behaviour ([Cullen and Gendreau 2001](#_ENREF_16); [Woodcock and Dixon 2005](#_ENREF_52)), status/monetary gain ([Abbott and Meerabeau 1998](#_ENREF_1)) and professional identity ([Deuze 2005](#_ENREF_19); [O'Donohue and Nelson 2007](#_ENREF_38)). In each of these discourses, we expect there will be a dominant and some residual/emergent ideologies, for example with values, the dominant professional ideology for doctors is to care for their patient but an emergent professional ideology may be related to caring about themselves i.e. the doctor’s own self-interest ([Timmermans and Oh 2010](#_ENREF_48)). In this paper, we focus primarily on the identity discourse and how this contributes to the pre-professional ideology of Education Studies undergraduate students. Thus, identity is seen through the lens of the professional’s role ([Hogg *et al.* 1995](#_ENREF_23)).

## Undergraduate Career Decisions

[Shulman (2005)](#_ENREF_44) suggests that professional disciplines tend to engage in specific pedagogies that prepare students for their intended professional life. For example, in the professional disciplines when a student pursues a degree such as medicine, law or education, the expected career trajectory is clear in that the student is training to become a doctor, lawyer or teacher (although many may not go into these professions). These expected career trajectories may influence society’s ideology of these professionals’ identities to be singular, for example, an educational professional is often viewed as a teacher or a lecturer whilst a medical professional is viewed as a doctor (see for example [Knight *et al.* 2006](#_ENREF_29); [Timmermans and Oh 2010](#_ENREF_48); [Waring and Currie 2009](#_ENREF_51)). Thus, the idea of an educational professional being a teacher is the dominant professional ideology.

For non-professional disciplines such as sociology, political science or physics, the career trajectory for the undergraduate student is less clear, that is, there is no singular prospective career but instead multiple careers, for example, a political science student may not become a politician but instead may embark on multiple professions such as becoming a historian, a writer or a researcher. Thus, a dominant professional ideology does not exist in these disciplines, which can predict their expected professional identity but instead there are several competing professional ideologies, which allow the student to explore multiple professional identities. Hence, students who are in a discipline with a dominant professional ideology will possibly face less career indecision than those pursuing a discipline with competing professional ideologies, as there is a singular career trajectory. These conjectures are supported by a study from [Daniels *et al.* (2011)](#_ENREF_17) who analysed data from a survey of over 800 students at a Canadian university which indicated that students in professional degrees had the least career indecision than those in other disciplines.

Recently, new degrees have emerged or developed from traditional professional degrees. These have given rise to allied professional degrees in the UK. For example, within the education discipline, the Education Studies degree has emerged in the last 20 years. In this degree, the career trajectory includes becoming a teacher and other education-allied careers such as a teaching support assistant, learning disabilities advisor, learning mentor as well as positions in educational administration, educational management and educational leadership. This represents an emerging professional ideology. Education-allied personnel will be aware of the emerging professional ideology in which they are also considered as educational professionals ([Hughes 2009](#_ENREF_25)). Therefore, the dominant professional ideology of an educational professional who has an identity of the teacher will be competing with the emerging ideology of an educational professional as a person whose identity might support learning which may include the teacher and other education-allied personnel.

## Research Aims

As these allied professional degrees overlap with the professional degrees, it is unclear whether students pursuing the allied professional degrees will mainly subscribe to the dominant professional ideology of the corresponding professional degree or whether they will be subscribing to several competing professional ideologies arising from pursuing the allied professional degree. Further, there is a possibility that exposure to the competing ideologies may shape or change students’ career decisions. Therefore, this research has the following aims:

* To explore whether students have a dominant pre-professional ideology or several competing pre-professional ideologies within the allied professional degree of Education Studies
* To analyse whether students’ career trajectory is influenced by the dominant professional ideology of the allied professional degree of Education Studies i.e. of a teacher.
* To understand the influence of exposing students, in the allied professional degree of Education Studies, to emerging pre-professional ideologies and its relationship to their career trajectories.

# Research Context – Degree and Module

To determine how students’ changing professional ideologies may shape their career decisions, a longitudinal study was conducted with a cohort of students studying the allied professional degree of Education Studies at a University in the North West of England. The students were in the second year of their undergraduate degree.

## The Education Studies Degree

In the last twenty years, within the UK, the education degree has been transformed, with the start of a new allied professional degree termed “Education Studies” ([Burton and Bartlett 2006](#_ENREF_10); [Hodkinson 2009](#_ENREF_22); [Palaiologou 2010](#_ENREF_40)) which unlike a traditional education degree does not lead to a student achieving qualified teacher status (QTS). According to the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), students completing the Education Studies degree should be able to analyse both informal and formal educational processes, policies and contexts using theoretical frameworks from sociology, psychology, history, philosophy and/ or economics ([QAA 2015](#_ENREF_42)) and hence students are not expected to be trained in pedagogical practices. Further, the degree may have specialisms for a particular age or category of a child, for example, “Early Childhood and Youth Studies”, and “Special Educational Needs”. Similar programmes also exist in Australia, North America and Spain. Students in the UK often use the Education Studies degree as a pathway to becoming a qualified primary school teacher by completing an additional postgraduate year called a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) ([see Burton and Bartlett 2006](#_ENREF_10)). This QTS route is not automatic and is highly competitive. Further, in some universities, students who are unable to secure a place onto an undergraduate QTS degree are offered a place onto the undergraduate Education Studies degree. These students may then conceive the dominant ideology of the educational professional as being a teacher and hence may only consider the teacher career pathway rather than explore others.

## The Educational Professional Module

Students in this study were taking the optional ‘Educational Professional’ module as part of their BA in Education Studies (Combined) degree during the academic year 2010/2011.The university where the study was undertaken is a post-1992 liberal arts and humanities university with a focus being on research-informed teaching ([Griffiths 2004](#_ENREF_21); [Jenkins and Healey 2005](#_ENREF_27)). The combined degree at this university requires students to acquire half of their degree (180 credits) with Education Studies modules. The Educational Professional module was worth 30 credits and ran from October to April. The module provided the opportunity of informing students of the various emergent professional ideologies relating to the educational professional by exposing them to various career paths beyond that of a teacher.

Students were exposed to the emergent professional ideologies through lectures and seminars which included topics linked to careers in the dominant professional ideology such as the role of primary/secondary schoolteachers and the emergent professional ideologies such as the role of teaching assistants and learning mentors, and the UK extended school services. There were also three question-and-answer sessions from guest lecturers who were from sectors related to careers in the emergent professional ideologies such as further education, prison education, and family and community education sectors. Students were also encouraged to independently investigate job specifications for careers they were interested in through reviewing job advertisements and by interviewing non-teacher educational personnel such as museum staff.

# Methodology

A longitudinal qualitative questionnaire was used to capture students’ changing professional ideologies and career decisions due to reading the module “The Educational Professional”. The questionnaire employed open-ended questions which sought to find out students’ perception or meaning of the term ‘educational professional’ (from which their ideologies could be deduced) as well as their intended career and their personal reasons for their chosen career. Three open-ended questions were asked

1. What job/ career/ other activities are you planning on pursuing at the end of your degree?
2. Why this job/career/activity?
3. What is your idea of an educational professional?

Similar perception questionnaires have been successfully used with large groups of university students ([Crawford *et al.* 1994](#_ENREF_13); [Crawford *et al.* 1998](#_ENREF_14)). As there were over a hundred students in the class, the use of a qualitative questionnaire for data gathering was considered most efficacious.

An in-class paper survey was given to the students on the first and last day of the module. Students’ gender and age were also collected. Students were tracked between the two surveys (Survey 1 and Survey 2) using their student identification number which they provided voluntarily. Aims 1 and 2 are answered using all responses from Surveys 1 and 2 whilst Aim 3 is answered using responses from students who answered both Surveys 1 and 2, that is, a matched sample.

## Sampling

The second year class consisted of 104 students of whom 74 were female students (71%). The Education Studies degree normally recruits more female students than male students and this gender proportion is representative of the degree. There were 78 responses from Survey 1 (75%) and 42 from Survey 2 (40%). The lower response rate for Survey 2 was possibly due to lower student attendance towards the end of the term as students may be concentrating on examinations ([see for example Jones and Hosein 2010](#_ENREF_28)). Details of the students’ profiles in Surveys 1 and 2 are presented in Table 1. A z-test and t-test respectively indicated that the gender proportion and students’ mean age were similar for Surveys 1 and 2.

Table 1: Profile of students in Surveys 1 and 2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Survey 1 (n = 78) | Survey 2 (n = 42) |
| Mean Age | 22.2 (SD = 5.4) | 21.3 (SD = 3.8) |
| Age range | 19 to 42 | 19 to 38 |
| Female Students | 63 (81%) | 36 (86%) |
| Male Students | 15 (19%) | 6 (14%) |

Compared to Survey 1, students in Survey 2 used fewer words on average for answering the open-ended question on the reason for their job career (16 vs 13 words) and a similar number of words for the idea of an educational professional (18 vs 17 words). The briefness of students’ response in Survey 2 for their job career may be due to students becoming more certain of the reasons for their future job prospects or becoming more articulate.

# Findings

## The Idea of an Educational Professional

Students’ written responses on their idea of an educational professional were open coded in NVivo using an inductive approach ([see Thomas 2006](#_ENREF_47)) for both Surveys 1 and 2. The codings were used to look at the distinctive aspects of the students’ discourse towards the educational professional ([Marton 1986](#_ENREF_34)). The students’ definitions were considered as an indication of their pre-professional ideologies and five of these were identified:

* Professional Identity
  + Teacher
  + General
* Skills and Personal Qualities
* Qualifications, Training and Knowledge
* Job Titles
* Financial Requirement

Students’ definitions sometimes incorporated a combination of these pre-professional ideologies and hence were coded in more than one category. Additionally, there was an “Other” category which contained two subset definitions: “unclear” and “module purpose”. Definitions were coded as being “unclear” when students wrote less than three words or indicated they were unsure. In Survey 1, some students wrote about the module content instead as it appeared that they were confused between the module entitled “Educational Professional” and their idea of an educational professional. These were coded as “module purpose”. A summary of the number of definition codes can be found in Table 2.

Two competing pre-professional ideologies were identified in Survey 1 both relating to professional identity whilst there were a number of emerging pre-professional ideologies such as the ones relating to job titles, qualification and training. By Survey 2, there was a clear dominant pre-professional ideology in the professional identity category. The next section will explore the main pre-professional ideologies individually.

Table 2: The number of codings for pre-professional ideologies of the Educational Professional

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Pre-Professional Ideologies** | **Survey 1 (n = 76)** | **Survey 2 (n = 41)** |
| **Professional Identity** |  |  |
| General Educational Professional | 25 | 35 |
| Teacher | 21 | 3 |
| **Skills & Personal Qualities** | 13 | 3 |
| **Qualifications & Training** | 17 | 2 |
| **Job Titles** | 10 | 4 |
| **Financial Requirement** | 1 | 1 |
| **Other** |  |  |
| Module Purpose | 5 | 0 |
| Unclear | 5 | 1 |
| **Total** | **97** | **49** |

### Professional Identity

Students’ idea of the educational professional within the professional identity category followed two paths, in the first path the students viewed the education professional as a teacher and in the second path as someone who works in a general educational setting. Students’ ideas were coded as the teacher definition (the first path) if they used a teaching metaphor such as suggesting that learning occurs in an information transmission mode or if they specifically stated that the profession was a teacher. This definition was related to the dominant professional ideology for the corresponding professional degree. An example of the teacher definition is as follows:

A teacher, lecturer or someone who specialises in education. (F, 19)

The codes in the brackets refer to the students’ gender (F = female, M = male) followed by their age.

The second path of the general educational professional coding was used when students identified persons working in a general education setting who may have multiple identities. This category was influenced by the definition used by [Hughes (2009)](#_ENREF_25) for the education professional which she indicates is any person who has a role and responsibility of working with children in schools and adults in lifelong educational settings and that these roles may be multi-professional (e.g. health officer, police officer) as well as multi-agency (e.g. health trusts, police force). This definition was considered to be the competing educational professional ideology in Survey 1 and an example of this is:

Educational Professional as seen as someone who is employed in or school-based environment or someone who works in partnership with schools. (F, 21)

### Qualifications, Training and Knowledge

Students also thought that an educational professional was determined by the qualifications they earned, their training or the knowledge they had acquired. In most instances, the qualifications related to someone who had earned a degree, for example:

An individual with a degree or certificate working in a career with educational roles e.g. Police, teacher, nurse. (F, 20)

### Job Titles

Instead of describing an educational professional, students found it more appropriate to list the job titles. If the student listed at least three educational professional positions, and at least two were different from each other in their job function, these were coded as job titles. For example, if the students listed, “lecturer, teacher and professor”, these were not coded as job titles as they were considered as similar types of jobs since they all specialised in teaching and in which the professional would have control of the learning environment, such as a classroom, unlike a teaching assistant. If the students listed “lecturer, teacher and teaching assistant”, this was coded as job titles since the role of a teaching assistant is different to a teacher or lecturer, that is, the teaching assistant does not lead the teaching or control the learning environment. Some of the definitions from students are, for example:

Teacher, TA, Ed Psyc, Admin staff, medical staff in school, social workers, school governors etc. (F, 21)

In addition, if the student gave an indication that it was anyone involved in the educational field and provided at least two job titles that were different from each other, these were also coded as job titles. Some of the definitions from students are, for example:

Someone who is connected to education from learning support staff to the minister for education. (F, 24)

### Skills and Personal Qualities

In the skills and personal qualities definition, students’ idea of the educational professional was based on the identifying the type of skills and personal qualities that an educational professional should have. The skills were related to understanding and having the knowledge to work within an educational system or being able to work with children/people but without the specific need for qualifications and training. In terms of personal qualities, these were the traits that students thought that educational professionals should have. For example, students saw the educational professional as:

Well conducted (?) / good role model. Considerate to individual needs. Polite/ Well spoken. (M, 20)

Is to give children the best education we can in schools. To help them develop social skills and encourage them the skills they will need in their adult life. (F, 37)

### Financial Requirement

In the final category, a small number of students gave definitions that defined an educational professional as a person who received a monetary payment within the educational setting, for example:

Someone who earns their living through education. (M, 42)

This definition is perhaps being used to differentiate from people who are volunteering within a school and hence these students consider a professional as someone who is paid for the job they are doing.

## Shaping Ideologies

To examine whether students were changing their pre-professional ideologies during the module, the definitions of the thirty-eight students who answered both surveys were investigated (see Table 3). We found that whilst initially in Survey 1, the students mainly had three pre-professional ideologies, two of which were related to identity: the general educational professional (13) and teacher (14), and the third related to qualifications and training (10); the students’ view of the educational professional changed by Survey 2, with 34 students indicated a general educational professional definition and only one student wrote a teacher definition. An example of this definition change is as follows:

Survey 1: Everyone from teacher, tutor, admin staff, who has contact with a student or a students' work day.

Survey 2: Someone that works with an individual, family or school to help improve the quality of education, to improve their ideas of education. To improve attainment of not only children but parents and other adults too. To cross barriers that people may face. (F, 28) (Job Titles to General Educational Professional definition)

Table 3: The number of codings for the matched surveys on the pre-professional ideologies of the Educational Professional

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Pre-Professional Ideologies** | **Survey 1 (n=38)** | **Survey 2 (n=38)** |
| **Professional Identity** |  |  |
| General Educational Professional | 13 | 34 |
| Teacher | 14 | 1 |
| **Skills & Personal Qualities** | 6 | 3 |
| **Qualifications & Training** | 9 | 2 |
| **Job Titles** | 3 | 4 |
| **Financial Requirement** | 0 | 1 |
| **Other** |  |  |
| Module Purpose | 2 | 0 |
| Unclear | 0 | 1 |
| **Total** | **47** | **45** |

These results indicate that through the exposure to competing ideologies during the academic year (such as the question and answer sessions with various educational personnel), students were perhaps able to articulate a different definition for an educational professional and this demonstrates a changing perception of the educational professional. However, we need to further investigate whether this changing idea of an educational professional transforms what students were thinking about in terms of their prospective careers.

## Career Directions

The results for the question on intended job/career/activity were coded into whether the student was considering becoming a teacher or another professional. In some cases, students provided two answers and therefore a student was career direction had two codings. In Survey 1, 69 (88%) of the students were considering a teaching career whilst only 9 (12%) of the students were not. Fourteen of the 69 students (18%) were also considering a profession besides teaching. From Survey 1 to Survey 2, the percentage of students considering a career in teaching had dropped to 64% (27 students) and 36% of the students were no longer considering a teaching career. Furthermore, 8 out of the 27 students (18%) who had originally wanted to be teachers were now considering another profession related to education. Students who wanted an alternative career were looking at working with children but not as teachers or continuing onto postgraduate studies. Only one student did not indicate any possible career path.

Although these results show a change in career paths they rely on a comparison of proportions in Surveys 1 and 2 which may not be representative of change as Survey 2 had a lower number of responses. To counteract any error arising from using proportions, the matched sample was also examined, that is, students who answered the job question in both Surveys 1 and 2; 39 students answered the job question.

In Survey 1, 36 students (92%) were considering a teaching career whilst in Survey 2 only 26 students (67%) were looking for a career in teaching. These 26 students in Survey 2 were also considering a teaching career in Survey 1. Students in both surveys mainly wanted to work as a primary school teacher (32 students in Survey 1 and 11 in Survey 2) rather than a secondary school teacher.

Through coding the data, three main reasons were identified why students were changing their career choice from that of a teacher:

* Understanding the job description
* Mixing interests
* Non-direct educational setting

One possible interpretation of these findings is that students before the second year are possibly unaware of the career paths they can take within the Education Studies degree and have previously related their career path to the dominant professional ideology of the corresponding professional degree, that is, the teacher. Through the module, the students are exposed to competing professional ideologies and they have possibly become more aware of the career opportunities based on the job descriptions and view the educational professional identity as beyond that of the teacher, for example:

After learning the job description I realised I wanted to go into this profession. (F, 19, Learning Mentor)

Other students also became aware that the educational professional career is not uni-dimensional and they can mix several of their interests for their career path, for example:

I have always wanted to teach but since leaving school, I wanted to join the police and this is my way of combining them. I am serious about this as a career. (F, 20, Prison Education)

The final reason for change was that some of the students realised they did not want to be in a classroom as a teacher, however, they wanted to pursue a career in an educational setting, for example:

Because I am interested in working with children but in a non-educational capacity. (F, 20, Play Therapist)

As would be anticipated broadening students’ pre-professional ideologies within allied professional degrees have allowed students to think of a career path beyond that what is expected of the professional degree. The theoretical explanations of the pre-professional ideologies as proposed here may help to further understand the mechanisms in students’ career choice, which might be instrumental in bringing about this change.

# Discussion

We set out to investigate through a longitudinal qualitative survey of second-year students at the start and end of a module on students’ pre-professional ideologies, their effect on students’ career decisions in the allied professional degree of Education Studies and the extent these career decisions are shaped by presenting competing ideologies. The three research aims will now be discussed in turn.

## A Dominant or Competing Pre-Professional Ideology(ies)?

The educational professional definitions put forward by the students in this research suggest that initially (beginning of the year) there is not a dominant pre-professional ideology but rather two competing ideologies relating to professional identity, one in which the educational professional is a teacher and the other where they are seen as a person supporting learning. Our research findings suggest that there is a still a large proportion of students (28%) whose pre-professional ideology is shaped by the professional identity of the corresponding professional degree. There were, however, additional professional ideologies found that related to values and qualities, status/finance and job titles.

The findings of our study also indicate that professional ideologies of students can be shaped or changed within an allied professional degree towards professional ideologies that have multiple identities than a singular identity if the students are exposed to competing ideologies. A more political or ethical question arises as to whether such a process is an indoctrination ([Mariani and Gordon 2008](#_ENREF_32)) or socialisation ([Levine and Moreland 1994](#_ENREF_31)) of the students to the ‘authorised’ conception ([Marton 1981](#_ENREF_33)) of the allied professional or whether it allows an independent development of their professional ideologies. However, professional ideologies are based on what the discipline values ([Cullen and Gendreau 2001](#_ENREF_16)) and the changing pre-professional ideologies that students have written on are then likely the ideological view of the discipline or Faculty.

## Corresponding Professional Degree and Students’ Career Trajectories

The study found that students’ career trajectory mainly matched that of the corresponding professional degree (Surveys 1 and 2). There were a high proportion of students whose career choice was that of becoming a teacher both at the beginning and end of the module, this, aligned with the professional identity of the corresponding professional degree. These findings corroborate Hodkinson’s ([2009](#_ENREF_22)) cross-sectional study where he found that around 83% of the first year students within Education Studies wanted to be a teacher with this percentage decreasing to 69% for final year students. It appears that being in an allied professional degree programme such as Education Studies provided students with some certainty in their career paths; this corresponds to the findings by [Daniels *et al.* (2011)](#_ENREF_17) which indicated that students in professional degrees had more certainty in their career path than other students.

Interestingly, although students’ pre-professional ideologies were not dominated by the professional identity of a teacher, these students still focused on following the career path of the corresponding professional degree, i.e. of becoming a teacher. This is possible because students tend to be locked into a particular career trajectory based on the subjects they choose to study ([Greenbank 2014](#_ENREF_20)). Therefore, whilst students may have broadened their pre-professional ideologies of the allied professional degree, they still wanted the career path most associated with the professional degree. The reason for this is unclear, however, drawing parallels with research in the racist ideology field, which suggests that what students say or think they believe does not always represent their underlying ideology, as cultural memory of the ideology may continue to pervade the students’ way of thinking ([Anagnostopoulos *et al.* 2013](#_ENREF_3); [Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000](#_ENREF_8); [Crandall 1994](#_ENREF_11)). Students in our study may be saying what they believed to be the approved answer for the educational professional based on the module they were on ([Crandall 1994](#_ENREF_11)). Therefore, the ‘true’ pre-professional ideology of the students may be reflected in them still wanting the career path of the professional degree even though their claimed understanding of the allied professional ideology had changed.

Students’ reasons for continuing in the corresponding professional career path may be because of prestige or financial implications. [Abbott and Meerabeau (1998)](#_ENREF_1) explain that allied professionals have struggled for many years in the Western society to be seen in their own right as a professional. This is particularly because graduates working as allied professionals are not considered as a professional, as there is no requirement to have a degree in their field (which can result in lower salaries) nor have autonomous control of their own work (see [Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2013](#_ENREF_39); [Valenciana *et al.* 2005](#_ENREF_50)). Hence, the prestige status, as well as the financial remuneration for students within most allied professional fields, whether in the UK or elsewhere, may be lower than in the professional field even when they enter the employment market with similar levels of qualifications.

## Shaping Students’ Career Trajectory through Competing Professional Ideologies

In the study, it was found that presenting competing professional ideologies can change students’ pre-professional ideology. There is, however, a smaller shift in the students’ choice of career because of exposure to the competing ideologies. There is some indication that by presenting the competing professional ideologies, the students are beginning to think about different career paths (for example the student who became interested in prison education) because of a growing understanding of how the job can match the allied professional ideologies and their personal values. These findings are similar a retrospective study in health by [Bindal *et al.* (2011)](#_ENREF_7) who found that students exposed to a paediatrics placement were more likely to consider paediatrics as a career after their placement. The exposure of students to different opportunities has also shown to help students in becoming aware of career paths and reduces career anxiety (see [Law and Watts 1977](#_ENREF_30); [McCash 2006](#_ENREF_35); [Picard 2012](#_ENREF_41)).

# Conclusion

The research set out to determine students’ pre-professional ideologies and how it shaped their career path in the allied professional degree of Education Studies. To analyse the change, the pre-professional ideology within the allied professional degree is compared with the professional ideology of its corresponding professional degree (for example Education Studies with ‘Teacher’ Education). The results found here can possibly be extended to other allied professional degree providing there is a corresponding professional degree, however, further research needs to be pursued to confirm whether allied professional ideologies follow the same pattern as Education Studies. Further, socio-demographic data such as social class, ethnicity and prior work background were not collected which possibly could influence the careers that students intend to pursue after their degree as well as their conception of an educational professional. However, the students in this study were fairly homogenous as they were mainly from the same ethnic group (White) and the university traditionally recruits students from a lower middle and working class background. Further, as students’ pre-professional ideologies were collected at the beginning and the end of the module, any influence of prior work background could have been accounted for. Hence, the results from this study may represent pre-professional ideologies of this particular socio-economic group. Therefore, future research may want to investigate to what extent sociological factors can influence students’ pre-professional ideologies.

One of the limitations of the study is that it uses primarily the concept of identity to measure pre-professional ideology rather than other measures such as values, status, finance or behaviour. Further the study uses students’ own conceptualisation of the allied professional as a way of determining the pre-professional ideology rather than attitudinal questionnaires (such as [Cryns 1977](#_ENREF_15); [Woodcock and Dixon 2005](#_ENREF_52)) as we did not want to presuppose that students’ pre-professional ideologies were based only on attitudes. Within these limitations, the study found that a dominant pre-professional ideology did not exist but two competing pre-professional ideologies related to professional identity, one of which was from the corresponding professional degree (i.e. the teacher) and had a singular career path and the other encompassed a pre-professional ideology of multiple career paths. With exposure to information through the module (such as lectures, question-and-answer sessions, interviews), the competing pre-professional ideology of the educational professional as the teacher declined and a wider professional ideology of the educational professional having multiple identities became dominant.

Further, the identified career aspirations over the year were strongly aligned with the singular expected career path of the corresponding professional degree even though the students’ pre-professional ideology was aligned with one that supported multiple professional identities. These career aspirations may reflect a latent pre-professional ideology which is not explicitly stated, that is, the students may still have a pre-professional ideology related to the corresponding professional degree but may express what they perceive as the accepted professional ideology for their allied professional degree.

These results suggest that researching pre-professional ideologies using participants’ career aspirations may provide a way of determining the latent professional ideologies. Further, these latent professional ideologies may hinder students from exploring other career paths that are suitable or possible for them. We refer to these as possible careers as students who wish to pursue the career path of the corresponding professional degree will have to go onto a competitive postgraduate professional degree where the number of places is limited. Unless the student in the allied professional degree has an alternative plan, rejection from these programmes may leave the student uncertain about their employment opportunities and cause career anxiety ([Daniels *et al.* 2011](#_ENREF_17); [Picard 2012](#_ENREF_41)).

Whilst acknowledging the limitation that the research was conducted within a single institution, these findings suggest that educators within universities may have to make a conscious effort to ensure that students are exposed to competing professional ideologies very early on in their allied professional degrees. In allied professional degrees that are already established (such as the UK Education Studies degree), this process may be slow to implement consistently at a national scale, as there may be resistance to curriculum change ([Dempster *et al.* 2012](#_ENREF_18)). However, in allied professional degrees that are still in its infancy (e.g. the Education Studies degree in Australia and in the USA), there may be more opportunities for the incorporation of competing professional ideologies, particularly on a national scale. This can be introduced during the design phase of the degree curriculum and where applicable, in the national subject benchmarks.

Moreover, through exposure to competing professional ideologies, students are provided with ample opportunities to explore other career options and this may help change their latent professional ideology. This is perhaps needed more within the UK universities as the UK graduates do not seem to endeavour to match the demands of the labour market with the skills they acquire rather they try to make themselves distinctive ([Tholen 2014](#_ENREF_46)). However, within a crowded local and global labour market, opportunities for a student to make oneself distinctive are constricted as this can be strongly dependent on the university’s rank on both national and international league tables ([Brooks *et al.* 2012](#_ENREF_9); [Tholen 2014](#_ENREF_46)). Therefore, students pursuing allied professional degrees in lower ranking universities will need to ensure that they are aware of the demands of the labour market and can align themselves with the opportunities that are realistically available. As [Hosein and Rao (2012)](#_ENREF_24) found that students are generally unaware of how the skills they learn during their degree programme can be linked to their future employability, the allied professional degree programmes should endeavour to provide job opportunities awareness in the allied professional career sphere by not only broadening their pre-professional ideologies but by also helping students to map their skills to the multiple identities they can undertake.

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