

Education Studies and Employability: how do students and graduates define the subject and what do they perceive its vocational relevance to be?

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Abstract

The development, and expansion, of “new” Education Studies programmes within the framework of Higher Education Funding Council provision is one that has been subject to a recent and rapid expansion. Furthermore, it appears this expansion is set to continue, as there is buoyant student demand. What, though, is observable in these new Education Studies programmes is the wide variety of provision which has resulted from institutions developing their programme within their own particular historical and geographical contexts. For some writers this lack of clarity over the definition and determination of the range of study risks academic incoherence. This perceived incoherence of subject matter is brought more sharply into focus if one analyses Education Studies programmes, in England, through the lens of graduate employability. Through such an analytical lens it becomes apparent that a continuum of employability claims for Education Studies programmes exists. This paper adds to a growing research base which provides data which enable an analysis of how Education Studies is defined and what employment pathways Education Studies graduates take. The paper outlines the results of a small-scale research study which sought to determine whether it is the case that Education Studies is merely the waiting room for teacher training or is, in actuality, a programme of its own merit that offers students a wide range of future career pathways.

Keywords: Education Studies, employability, vocational

The development, and expansion, of “new” Education Studies programmes within the framework of Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) provision is one that has been subject to a recent and rapid expansion (Bartlett & Burton 2006). Furthermore, it appears this expansion is set to continue as there is a ‘buoyant student demand’ (Bartlett & Burton 2006, p. 384) for these programmes that has been subject to significant year on year increases (see HESA, 2007). What though is observable in these new Education Studies programmes is the ‘wide variety of provision’ (Ward 2005, p. 1) which has resulted from institutions ‘developing their programmes..., within their own particular historical and geographical contexts’ (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 384). Whilst this “organic” development might be observed as positive it could also be the case that this ‘rich tapestry of provision’ might be problematic to its continued expansion (Davies & Hogarth, 2004, p. 431). This is because at present Education Studies as an undergraduate subject is one where there is no ‘clear consensus’ (Davies & Hogarth, 2004, p. 431) as to the field of study and as such it has become a subject ‘that is resistant to clear definition’ (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 383). For some writers, this lack of clarity over the definition and determination of the range of study, risks ‘academic incoherence and, misunderstanding on the part of applicants to [these]

degree programmes' (Davies & Hogarth, 2004, p. 431). As Ward (2005) counsels, if a diversity of disciplines is employed a problem created is into which definition of the discipline should students be immersed and inculcated?

The perceived incoherence of subject matter, outlined above, is brought more sharply into focus if one analyses Education Studies programmes in England through the lens of graduate employability. Through such an analytical lens it becomes apparent that a continuum of employability claims for Education Studies programmes exist. This continuum emerges with programmes whose vocational aims relate closely to teacher training and therefore may be seen to be read by students who 'have not finally committed themselves to teaching' (Ward, 2005, p. 3). Further along, on this continuum, there are programmes which specifically define themselves as not preparing students for teacher training but for alternate careers outside of formal schooling. And, finally, at one extreme of the continuum, there are those Education Studies programmes who define themselves 'as a university subject independent of employment' (Ward, 2005, p. 234). In respect of graduate employment, many prospectuses make claims as to the range of careers that students of Education Studies programmes might take outside of formal teaching. Of interest to this study, then, is the suggestion that this 'breadth of vocational application helps... account for the rapid expansion of students taking Education Studies' (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 389). This interest is formulated because when one reviews the literature base these claims for the vocational relevance of Education Studies seem, because of a paucity of published research, to be based more upon individual subjectivity than empirical significance.

This paper, then, aims to add to a growing research base which seeks to provide data which enable an analysis of how Education Studies is defined and what employment pathways Education Studies graduates take. The paper, divided into three sections, firstly offers a brief overview of the development and expansion of the "new" Education Studies programmes. Second, the paper examines the range of definitions employed for Education Studies. Through this analysis the research seeks to ascertain whether the 'rich tapestry of provision' might actually be deleterious to the subject's future development. Finally, the paper outlines the results of a small-scale research study which sought to determine whether it is the case that Education Studies is merely the waiting room for teacher training or is, in actuality, a programme of its own merit that offers students a wide range of future career pathways.

The ancestry of 'new' Education Studies programmes

The ancestry of Education Studies may largely be observed to lie within the post-war development of teacher training courses founded in the reconstructivist era of the late 1940s. During this period teacher education was conceived as a non-graduate vocational affair, conducted within teacher training colleges whose very existence 'were widely thought to be a menace to academic standards' (Crook, 2002, p. 58). Throughout the 1950s a rapid expansion in this form of teacher education led to large numbers of students studying education as part of a three-year teacher training programme (Bartlett & Burton, 2006). However, as the study of education was still located within vocational programmes it was deemed to have a low academic status (Bartlett & Burton, 2006).

Whilst the early part of the twentieth century observed the embryonic beginnings of educational studies, it was the 1960s that witnessed the birth of the theoretical study of education (Ward, 2005). This birth was, in part, made possible by the publication of the Robbins Report (1963) and the subsequent Lockwood Committee (1965) which lent support to the creation of an all-graduate teaching profession. In addition, it is discernable that these

graduate programmes developed, in some part, as a reaction against the lack of a binding theory or epistemology of education (Crook, 2002) and were an attempt to end the 'undifferentiated mush' (Peters, 1963, p. 270) of vocational teacher training that was seen as so damaging to the academic study of education. It may be observed, then, that the birth of educational studies, brought about by the introduction of the Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed), sought to end the formal separation of the professional and theoretical elements of trainee teacher courses.

Within the new B.Ed degrees, educational studies was founded upon, and significantly drew from, a 'collection of related disciplines'; namely those of psychology, sociology, philosophy and the history of education (Ward, 2005, p. 87). As the 1960s progressed the employment of these four parent disciplines facilitated the movement of teacher education into universities and 'courses in educational theory began to proliferate' (Carr, 2006, p. 135). In what Carr (1997, p. 54) has entitled the 'academic era of teacher education,' university departments of education were developed, new journals and learned societies created and new professional identities established (Bartlett & Burton, 2006). By the end of the 1960s, then, the academic study of education had grown to become a major element in the training of teachers (Bartlett & Burton, 2006).

Educational Studies: a difficult childhood

By the start of the 1970s the teaching of educational studies, through the four parent disciplines, was well established (McCulloch, 2002, Ward, 2005). However, as early as 1972 the study of education within publicly funded teacher education programmes began to be the subject of increasing governmental and public criticism (Bartlett & Burton, 2001). The criticism levelled was that educational study, in this form, was placing 'too much emphasis on ... theory at the expense of adequate preparation for student's responsibilities in their professional assignments' (DES, 1972, p. 3.6 & 3.7). As concerns about curriculum content and teaching methods in schools grew, James Callaghan, the incumbent Labour Prime Minister, delivered a speech at Ruskin College that began a "Great Debate" on the form and function that education should take. This speech, and the ensuing discussion, further intensified the pressure that was brought to bear upon the teaching profession to reform and so become more accountable to politicians, parents and industry. It would seem acceptable to argue that it was these events that were the beginning of the end for the emergent academic study of education within teacher training programmes.

The 1980s observed the 'initial enthusiasm' (Carr, 2006, p. 140) and 'assuredness [of] the centrality' (Ward, 2005, p. 89) of the parent disciplines falter as concerns grew about their relevance to teacher education programmes and educational practice (Carr, 2006). As the decade progressed the theoretical study of education within teacher training programmes began to fall into disrepute as the parent disciplines became to be seen as either too subversive or, indeed, irrelevant to classroom practice (Bartlett & Burton, 2001; 2003). As Crook (2002, p. 68) relates, this was a decade when 'on the job training was championed by many as a means of training teachers in an environment free from spurious forms of academicism'. As the 1980s drew to a close and the 1990s began, successive Conservative governments and right wing academic and political groups began a concerted and sustained attack on university teacher training programmes (Ward, 2005). In 1993, the Conservative Prime Minister John Major announced his intention to rid teacher training of irrelevant theory (Ward, 2005). It was now clear that the barrage of criticism in relation to the employment of educational theory had strengthened the government's ability to move against university teacher education programmes. The late 1990s, then, was to witness the death throes of educational studies as state pressure, from the New Labour government, finally succeeded

in driving 'intellectual debate' (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 386) and the 'mention of [the] disciplines' (Ward, 2005, p. 89) out of teacher education programmes in England.

The death of educational studies and the birth of 'new' Education Studies

The New Labour Government, upon taking office, acted swiftly and, through the Teacher Training Agency, took the control of teacher education away from the universities (Ward, 2005). In 1998 a national curriculum for initial teacher training was introduced and teacher "education" became specified by a set of rigidly controlled government standards (Crook, 2002). This new model of teacher "education" had a tightly designated curriculum which focussed upon the teaching of subject knowledge within the applied educational setting (Ward, 2005). These standards ensured teacher "education" became a government business and that the theory-practice debate, that had so dominated the 1980s, was "solved" as academic theory was finally expunged from the training programmes. As all traces of academic discourse were removed, from governmental documentation, teacher "education" became designated as 'teacher training, students were to be know as trainees, universities as providers... and successful teaching as compliance...' (Ward, 2005, p. 92). By the end of the 1990s this 'training element had become ascendant over the academic element' (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 387) and teacher 'education' became constituted within a 'narrowly defined impoverished curriculum' which focussed upon 'a professional utility rather than as the enhancement of analytical and philosophical thinking' (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 390).

By the end of the 1990s, then, the imposition of a state defined and controlled teacher training curriculum meant that university institutions finally lost the control of teacher education that they had, had since the 1960s. This loss of control over educational studies, however, was not taken lightly and there was considerable objection and resistance from an academic community which felt threatened both in terms of its knowledge base and in its status (Ward, 2005). Ward (2005, p. 99) cogently argues that the birth of "new" Education Studies programmes was 'to some extent an effect of resistance to compliance with government policy'. Whilst it is true to say that Education Studies had existed outside teacher training in a small number of institutions since the 1960s, it was the beginning of the 21st century that witnessed a phenomenal growth in Education Studies programmes (Ward, 2005). Throughout the first part of the century, then, the academic study of education, outside teacher training courses, has grown into a subject in its own right (Bartlett & Burton, 2006). However, as the next section will detail, the troubled past and the tension surrounding the theory-practice debate in education had not diminished. Indeed, it would conspire to produce an underlying difficulty for the construction and development of these new programmes. The question that continues to remain is what exactly are these "new" Education Studies programmes, what is their overarching theory and, of most importance to some, of what relevance are they in the modern employment market place?

Education studies: a coming of age?

From one perspective, defining Education Studies might be observed to be singularly unproblematic. This is because the Quality Assurance Agency specifically outlined what the nature of the subject should be. They stated that it was

'Concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives. It facilitates the study of the nature of knowledge, and a critical engagement with a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing and understanding drawn from a range of appropriate disciplines...courses all

include the intellectually rigorous study of educational processes, systems, approaches and the cultural, societal, political and historical contexts within which they are embedded.'
(QAA, 2000, p. 14).

For the QAA, then, Education Studies, at this time, could be defined by its intellectually rigorous study of, and critical engagement with, a range of appropriate disciplines. What, though, seemed remarkable about this benchmark statement was that it did not explicitly define what areas students should actually study (Matheson 2004). As a defining matrix, then, one could argue that the QAA benchmark statement was problematic for the development of Education Studies. It was problematic in that it failed to delineate a field of study because it represented 'a compromise between those who argue[d] that Education Studies [was] a discipline in its own right and those who [saw] it as an offshoot of teacher training' (Matheson, 2004, p. 14). To some, the failure to break the umbilical cord of teacher training represented a missed opportunity for the development of this fledgling subject. Teacher Training, as outlined earlier, was, at this time, rigidly defined by governmental standards and as such was seen, by some, to be solely concerned with vocational competencies rather than with an intellectually rigorous and critical study of education. Therefore, it appeared somewhat strange at the beginning of the 21st century, firstly, that the QAA benchmark statement was still infected with the notions of teacher training and, second, that it failed to 'provide an academic theoretical framework' for the subject (Ward, 2005, p. 118). However, this criticism is perhaps too harsh especially when one considers that the QAA statement was very much a product of its time. As Bartlett & Burton (2006) remind us, one should not place too much importance on the QAA statement as it was not definitive, but merely was one viewpoint, amongst many, as to what form this emerging subject should take. The real importance of this benchmark statement, they remind us, was not in the definition *per se*, but that this legitimisation by a national body represented the coming of age for Education Studies.

In 2007 the QAA, as part of its on-going review of higher education, put forward a consultation document containing a revised benchmark statement for Education Studies (QAA, 2007). An examination of this statement demonstrates how, in but a few short years, the proposal of a more confident and assured definition was possible. Within this new statement Education Studies, whilst still being conceptualised as an intellectually rigorous and critical study of education, is also defined as 'a subject in its own right with an identity distinct from National Standards for Teacher Training' (QAA, 2007, 2.1). Furthermore, this benchmark statement, unlike its predecessor, seemingly begins a process of providing boundaries to the field of study by stating that 'many courses include the study of broader perspectives such as international education, economic relationships, the effects of the role of education in human rights and ecological issues' (QAA, 2000, 2.1). Moreover, and of specific interest, is that the current statement attempts to rectify one of the shortcomings of its predecessor. This is because it forwards a theoretical framework by proposing that Education Studies is a 'subject defined by its curriculum content and [draws] selectively upon the methods of the contributory disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy, history and economics' (QAA, 2000, 2.3). Therefore, some forty years after the initial attempts to define educational studies it appears that the academic study of Education has, by re-stating the importance of the parent disciplines, returned to its place of birth.

At first reference, then, the difficulties of defining Education Studies would, by the introduction of the new QAA benchmark statement, seem to have been surmounted. Upon closer examination, though, one might contend that while this new statement has begun to delineate a field of study, and thus provided more opportunities for 'a degree of commonality'

of provision to commence (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 386). It, like its predecessor, does not explicitly state the content of study but rather abrogates this responsibility, passing it back to individual programme designers. Therefore, it appears legitimate to suggest that the QAA benchmark statement may only make the provision of Education Studies a 'hostage to fortune' by continuing to embed the creation of subject matter within the locale of staffing expertise and the historical background of individual faculties of education. Whilst this legitimisation of the notion of 'choice' may be observed as a strength of the benchmark statement in reality it might also be the case that the 'degree of commonality' provided could lead to subject provision becoming extremely diverse.

Towards a definition of Education Studies

Recent studies have attempted to define Education Studies by examining the 'degrees of commonality' that exist within the 'footprint' of extant modules and by interviewing programme leaders and course designers (Davies & Hogarth, 2004; 2005). For example, Ward's (2005) wide ranging and comprehensive research denoted ten distinct themes that new programmes were based upon. These themes ranged from conceptualising Education Studies as an academic study in its own right, formulated upon the parent disciplines, through to those programmes which ground themselves within the notion that the subject was a preparation for a career in teaching. Finally, there were those programmes which defined Education Studies as anything but teacher training.

In terms of modular content, Ward (2005, p. 3) describes a 'random quality to curriculum provision' with 40% of programmes delivering modules which include psychology or psychological approaches, 43 per cent which mention sociological approaches, 21 per cent philosophy and 17 per cent which consider historical perspectives. Of further interest, is that 69 per cent of programmes analysed contained modules on learning and development, 55 per cent examined research methods and 40 per cent included international and global elements. In terms of the subject's relationship to teacher training, 36 per cent of programmes address the formal school curriculum, 12 per cent examine education management and 31 per cent had professional placement modules. As Ward (2005, p. 10) comments, the overall picture is one of a 'wide variation in the form and content of Education Studies curriculum, an embarrassment of riches for potential students'. Interestingly, if one is to find any 'degree of commonality' between the programmes it would appear that this would lie in the extent to which Education Studies is defined as a study which engages in the critical analysis of education. Ward's study revealed that 79 per cent of programmes examined had this theme as a common foundation.

Davies and Hogarth's research (2004, p. 430) supports Ward's findings, noting that at the localised level of the individual university there was an unwillingness to 'specify very precisely what [was] meant by Education Studies'. As a result of their analysis Davies and Hogarth conclude that they were 'unable to identify a clear consensus about the nature of Education Studies' (Davies & Hogarth, 2004, p. 431). The question these findings highlight is, is this lack of specificity a cause for concern or should the rich tapestry of provision detailed be observed as a cause for celebration? From a personal perspective, one might suggest the danger Education Studies faces, in this current format, is that there is a distinct possibility it might be reduced to a wide ranging shallow exploration of educational issues through the mantle of a 'journalistic chat' (Ward, 2005, p. 14) rather than a subject where a critical academic examination of the 'ideological perspectives underpinning and informing' the 'contested concepts' and processes of education is countenanced (Bartlett & Burton, 2006, p. 389-90). Furthermore, what also appears somewhat problematic is that research defines Education Studies, for some, as anything but teacher training, whereas it is apparent

that a significant minority of other programmes have very close links to the vocational competencies, indeed, they observe them to be a bedrock of their programmes. It would seem, then, that, despite the new QAA benchmark statement, the theory-practice debate, which has so influenced this area of study, would seem set to continue its dominance of current and future thought.

The research

The overall aim of this research was to ascertain how students of Education Studies programmes defined the subject and what they thought were its vocational attributes. An overview of the literature base, detailed above, suggests that Education Studies lacks a clear definition and that claims for its vocational relevance seem to be based more on individual subjectivity than empirical significance. With these aspects in mind, the research addresses three main questions. These being:

- how do students define Education Studies?
- what is the link between Education Studies and Teacher Training?
- what employment routes do Education Studies graduates take?

Methodology

This small-scale exploratory research examined the views of 40 students in relation to the aforementioned research questions. The sample of students was chosen from those who were completing, or who had completed, a combined honours Bachelor of Arts in Education Studies at one University in the north-west of England. The sample, therefore, consisted of 16 former students who had graduated since 2004, 12 first year students and 12 final year students. Of this sample, 75.6 per cent were females and 24.2 per cent were males whose ages ranged between 19 and 46, with the vast majority of students being aged 20 to 24. Of these students, 19.4 per cent completed, or expected to complete, Education Studies as a major, 47.2 per cent as a joint and 33.4 per cent as a minor element of their studies.

The students' perceptions of the nature of Education Studies were examined through the employment of a questionnaire delivered towards the end of the academic year 2006/7. The employment of questionnaire, while economical in terms of time and resources, introduced a number of potential limitations into the study. For example, it is suggested that questionnaires that rely solely on closed questions may fail to reflect the complexity of people's feelings (Cohen et al., 2000; Bartlett & Burton, 2005). Conversely, however, questionnaires employing only open questions may lead to respondents providing incomplete answers (Cohen et al., 2000). Additionally, it is suggested that coding of open responses may be biased by the subjectivity of the researcher (Bartlett & Burton, 2005). However, it is also contended that questionnaires, if carefully constructed, can provide valuable data (Cohen et al., 2000). To attempt to surmount this diversity of imperfections, the study's questionnaire was constructed and delivered with regard to Hudson and Miller's (1997) principles of maximising reliability in postal surveys.

The questionnaire contained 19 items that employed open and closed questions to collect data in relation to:

- personal details
- definitions of the nature of Education Studies programmes
- reasons for choosing an Education Studies Programme
- links to Teacher Training and Education Studies

- future/present employment aspirations

The quantitative data produced by the study's questionnaire were analysed by the employment of simple statistical methods. In addition, the qualitative data were analysed by the use of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Results & discussion

Students' perceptions of the nature of Education Studies

The data contained in table 1 (all tables on pp. 29-30) denote that this group of students observe that Education Studies is not solely routed in the four parent disciplines, but is also defined in relation to its specific content. As this first year student states

'The programme looks at different theorist and analyses the history of education and the state schooling system that we have as well as questions the politics behind how the framework was formed. The programme not only looks at just education and learning but also the historical, cultural and social aspects that affect it. Education studies analyses the sociological and psychological theory to explain the ways, in which people learn, as well as addressing the expectations of our current state schooling system and the national curriculum... I think!'

It is interesting to note that the participants in the study mainly conceptualise the subject in terms of the history and politics of education rather than by its psychological aspects. This former student offers a common view, relating that

'...Education Studies provides the student with a knowledge in the history and politics of education showing them how and why it has changed over the years...'

This form of definition is somewhat surprising because, within the programme experienced by these students, psychology has a significant place in each year of study. What is also noteworthy in the students' responses is the relative prominence the students give to the philosophy of education which, in this programme, has a specific focus in one module.

The results of the study, though, do confirm those of Ward (2005) and Davies & Hogarth (2004) in that, for these students, Education Studies is defined through the rich tapestry of provision that they have experienced. The data detail that the students define the subject in terms of 21 separate areas (see table 1). The data also suggest that, for a significant number of Education Studies students, the most important content, in terms of their perception of the subject, relates to the politics of education and social inclusion. In addition, despite the programme not consciously promoting teacher training or National Curriculum subject knowledge, it is of note that a significant number of the final year students defined Education Studies in terms of this area. Whilst this specific conceptualisation was not, to any significant degree, forwarded by former or first year students it does lead one to question whether, as the end of the programme approaches, the issue of teacher training becomes more important for the students. Of most concern is that the data indicate that, despite the programme team priding itself on how the subject develops, students' critical and analytical thinking about educational issues only 4.9% of the respondents felt this was an important defining characteristic. This finding leads one to question whether the 79% of the programmes, analysed by Ward's study, that located criticality as a foundation block actually

imbue the importance of this element within their students. This finding suggests that if criticality is to become more than just academic rhetoric careful thought and consideration must be given to how we develop this skill within the students that study our programmes.

Of further interest, is that the findings of the study suggest that a degree of commonality does exist between the students' perceptions of the nature of Education Studies and those proffered by the QAA (2007). However, while degrees of commonality are in evidence it is also apparent that there are wide-ranging differences and some glaring omissions. For example, the data reveal that in terms of developing an academic theoretical framework, based on the parent disciplines, this programme has a modicum of commonality with the QAA benchmark statement. This is because the data in table 1 reveal that all of the four disciplines are accounted for. However, a notable absence is the examination of education through the lens of economics. This is a discipline that has not had a prominence since it was largely dropped from educational studies in the 1960s (Richardson, 2002). Within this programme the discipline has but cursory coverage during the three years of study. Another significant difference between these students' perceptions of the subject and those of the QAA, is the priority given to global education. Although the QAA suggest this is an element that should provide a boundary for the subject, it is clear that the students of this programme do not give this form of study a high priority. More positive, though, is that these students agree with the QAA that Education Studies should be conceptualised in terms of social justice and equality.

The findings of the study, outlined above, are thought provoking because they raise some important questions. For example, how should programme designers and leaders employ the new subject benchmark? In relation to this specific programme, a case can be made that it is one that fits well with the general themes promoted within the benchmark statement. However, an important question, in terms of developing a degree programme based upon a commonality of provision, is, can it be acceptable for a programme to just follow general themes of the benchmark? This question has real importance because extant research has celebrated the diversity of provision as a strength of the subject, whilst others caution that this rich tapestry actually might be deleterious. It seems there is a clear message contained within the new statement that the role of the parent disciplines, including economics, should have prominence so that the subject might develop a robust theoretical foundation. Whilst this University's programme has always had the disciplines running as themes throughout the three years of study, is it now the case that, to truly subscribe to spirit of the QAA statement, the parent disciplines, including economics, should be afforded a greater priority?

Education Studies and Teacher Training

The literature review outlined earlier details that many claims have been forwarded about the relationship between Education Studies and teacher training. These claims range from those advocating that the subject is related closely to teacher training to those which contend that Education Studies should have nothing to do with Government-controlled teacher education. Whilst academics may argue the particular relevance of Education Studies, it seems apparent that the data in tables two and three indicate that these students clearly articulate what they believe the link to teacher training should be. It is observable that 75 per cent of the students questioned applied to the Education Studies programme because they either were totally, or probably, committed to a career in teaching. Furthermore, table four details that at the end of their first year of study the students' commitment to teaching rose from 50 per cent to 100 per cent. In addition, the data reveal that both the final year and the former students' commitment to teaching was also subject to increase. This data, then, would seem to suggest that many students believe that Education

Studies has a close link to teacher training. The obvious question that arises from this finding is, if so many students are committed to teacher training, why then do they not enrol on a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme, or its equivalent? The data contained in table three provides information that both helps to answer this question and also suggests why Education Studies might be growing in popularity.

The data indicate that there are three major reasons why these students did not chose a B.Ed degree. First, a significant number of students enrolled on an Education Studies programme because they definitely wanted to be teachers but felt that this subject would enable a greater choice in terms of career should they decide, in the future, that teaching was not for them. As this third year student accounts

'I wanted to go into Primary teaching, but wanted to leave my options open so didn't want to do the B Ed. Before coming to uni, had also considered Educational Psychology. By the time I entered the 2nd year I had decided I definitely wanted to teach.'

This type of thinking seems to offer an explanation as to why the data in table one denote that students' commitment to teaching rises at the end of the first year of the programme. For other students, choice in career options was important but for differing reasons to those outlined above. For these students the flexibility provided by Education Studies was rationalised in terms of their indecision, before entering the programme, as to whether teaching would actually be the career for them. This third year student clearly articulates this viewpoint

'I wanted to complete a programme which would give me an insight into education in order to help me decide if teaching, or working within the educational profession, was for me. I was interested in the theory behind education not just the how to teach but why.'

Second, the data contained in table three indicate that students avoided applying to the B.Ed programme because they still wanted to study another subject at degree level. Some students saw the study of a second subject in terms of facilitating entry onto a secondary Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Others, though, took a second subject because of future career aspirations. For example, taking art so they could be an art therapist or applying for psychology so that they might work with children with special educational needs. However, for a significant minority of students the choice of a second subject was purely because they found enjoyment in studying another subject. As this student accounts

'I did not want to do a B.Ed because I felt that it would narrow down my future career choices if I decided that I did not want to be a teacher. I spent a lot of time looking at psychological and sociological issues relating to education during by A level Sociology course which I found very interesting. This was something which I wanted to study further and education studies provided this opportunity.'

The third major reason that some students did not what to enrol on a B.Ed degree was expressed in terms of the content and structure of this degree. Many students had taken the time to investigate the content of the B.Ed course and had discussed the programme with current and former students. From the information they had gathered some students had

decided that the programme was not for them as it was too restrictive or was simply unappealing. As these two first year students account

'Because the programmes as they were outlined to me were in no way appealing to what I wanted to study.'

'The bachelor of education degree did not sound like my kind of thing, far too structured.'

There were students, though, who articulated strong opposition to the B.Ed degree because of the form of teaching methodology it adopts. These two students clearly encapsulate this form of response

'I did not chose a teacher training program because I wanted to learn why we have the system that we have today and to question whether or not we should have it rather than just learning to and thinking that the national curriculum is great. From my personal schooling experience I did not like how and what I was taught. By taking the education studies I am able to better understand the system, I am able to question it and learn how it may be changed in the future ' (1st year Student)

'[Education Studies...] is a course that gives you a good knowledge of education as a subject. Rather than just partaking in education such as through teaching practice etc, it gives you a theoretical basis on which you can see education as a subject to stand alone and to investigate rather than being connected to other training etc. it gives a broad view of education, looking at the opinions of others and encourages you to form your own independent view of education.' (3rd Year Student)

In summary, then, the data suggest that students chose to enrol on an Education Studies programme because, in the main, they wanted to become a teacher or they had not finally committed themselves totally to this employment route. In this respect the findings of the study offer support for those of (2005). The findings would also seem, in part, to discount Davies and Hogarth (2004) statement that students misunderstand the relevance of Education Studies. In reality, it appears that applicants to Education Studies have a clear understanding of the reason for enrolment on these programmes. The reason is that the vast majority of the applicants have a strong commitment to a career in teaching, but at the same time wanted a flexible degree in case they changed their minds. For others, they apply to these programmes because they have not finally decided whether they will be suitable for a career in teaching. For these students, it would appear that Education Studies, formulated through a rich tapestry of provision, should be observed as a positive as it is more liable to meet their needs in terms of future employment.

A further question highlighted within the literature base is how closely should Education Studies be linked to teacher training? The data provided by the study would suggest that a proportion of these students have either chosen Education Studies to avoid the vocational straitjacket of the B.Ed or because they want to keep their employment options open should their commitment to teaching dissipate. The results of the study, then, would suggest that Education Studies programmes should be mindful of supporting students who want to progress a career in teaching. However, its real draw, in terms of many applicants, is that it is different to the formalised rigid structure of teacher education programmes.

Education Studies and future employment

The data contained in table five demonstrate that a significant majority of Education Studies graduates progress through teacher training programmes into a career in teaching. It is evident that for the former students that some 64 per cent progressed onto complete a PGCE or its equivalent. Interestingly, a further 13.6 per cent took up a career as a teaching or learning support assistant. The data also reveal that whilst 81 per cent of former students and 70 per cent of final year students wanted to undertake a programme of teacher training, approximately 10 per cent of them did not achieve this ambition. For these, and the other students, the data in table five denote that there is no single career area, outside of teaching, that graduates progress into. What the data tentatively suggest, however, is that there is a very small developing trend of graduates engaging in social work, especially where it relates to children.

How does Education Studies help students to achieve employment?

The graduates of this particular programme indicate that Education Studies has, overall, been of use in achieving gainful employment. For the students who went onto teacher training and then progressed into teaching the programme was useful in three distinct ways. First, the respondents commented that the contemporary knowledge and understanding they gained through the programme had been useful when applying for a PGCE. As these former students relate

'Topics on inclusion and on other recent issues gave me something to talk about at interview.'

'It is a subject that had a strong basis for my PGCE application as it was extremely relevant to a career in teaching as my knowledge of current issues helped me answer questions raised at interview.'

Second, a commonly held view by the final year students was that as the Education Studies programme had developed within them a deep knowledge and understanding of education and, therefore, had provided them with a head start in their PGCE. This student succinctly expresses this view

'I have a much greater awareness of education policies, current educational issues and also how education has evolved through the decades. I think I will begin the PGCE course with a better understanding of education as a whole compared to other individuals who have not studied Education Studies.'

Finally, a number of the graduates felt that the Education Studies programme had, had a much deeper and longer lasting effect. For these graduates their perception was that the completion of an Education Studies programme had simply made them better teachers. The following graduates' comments are representative of this belief,

'[Education Studies] has given me an insight into educational policy and learning styles which will help me to teach to needs. It has also developed my interests in the special education field which has encouraged my future ambition.' (Final year student)

'I believe that this subject has allowed me to gain knowledge on all outside factors upon the areas that could affect a child's education which I believe will

open up my mind when carrying out my PGCE and when, I eventually have a job in school.’ (Final year student)

‘I have a good knowledge of educational issues such as social inclusion which has helped my work in an ESD school.’ (Former student)

For those students who did not want to progress a career in teaching, the Education Studies Programme had relevance both in terms of the content it covered but also in terms of the development of specific skills. For example, this student felt the range of modular provision was useful because

‘... it was practical in many areas, not just curriculum orientated, which impressed my employer during interview.’

For other graduates it was the personal skills developed during the programme that had most importance. As these former students relate

‘...qualities such as time management, working with others have contributed in gaining employment.’

‘The Ed Studies was a bit of a reality check - what goes on in the real world so I think students would be a bit more prepared for the world of work.’

Of further interest, in the respect of securing gainful employment, is this comment made by a graduate of a combined honours degree in Education Studies and History

‘an employer will not give me a job because I can interpret 17th Century historical scripts; an employer might give me a job because I’m politically aware, organised and self-regulated person.’

In summary, then, the findings of this study indicate that whilst Education Studies has direct relevance to those graduates who wish to progress a career in teaching it also, but to a lesser degree, has relevance for other forms of employment.

Conclusions

This study is not definitive and because of the restricted nature of the sample the generalisability of its findings must be subject to question. However, despite this the findings detailed above should be observed to have importance because they add to the growing evidence base which both defines the nature of Education Studies as well as quantifying its relevance to graduate employability. The findings of the research, then, suggest that students, like academics, find difficulty in specifying the exact nature and range of this subject. Although, it may be observed that the parent disciplines have relevance, especially history, it is also apparent that contemporary issues such as inclusion and politics also form the core of the subject for these students. Unlike previous research, the study does not provide evidence corroborating the premise that the rich tapestry of provision, on offer to students, is problematic to their understanding of the nature of the subject. Indeed, it would appear that the flexibility of subject matter is observed to be a reason for applying to Education Studies programmes. In terms of graduate employability the findings of the research clearly detail a close link between Education Studies and teacher training. However, this link is seemingly maintained because Education studies is formulated in a flexible manner which ensures students keep their career options open and allows for the

study of a second subject to degree level. It would appear that a key feature of Education Studies is that it should avoid allying itself too closely to the vocational competencies of teacher education as this modular provision is seemingly too restrictive for students' employability aspirations.

It is clear, then, that Education Studies is a programme that has strong links to the governmental controlled teacher education courses. This is perhaps unsurprising given the content and historical development of the subject. However, to observe that Education Studies is the merely the waiting room of teacher training serves only to render the undergraduates who study it as passive and of limited outlook. The data from the research demonstrate that this group of students observe Education Studies as a degree in its own right and one which they actively chose to study because it enabled them to keep their career options open. In this respect, then, Education Studies is not a room where students passively wait for the inevitable departure of the teacher education train but is rather one where active decision making, made possible by flexible subject provision, dominates thoughts of future employment journeys.

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Table 1 - What would you consider Education Studies to be?

Nature of Response (%)	Former Students	Year 1	Final Year	Total
History of Education	15.3	20	17.8	17.7
Politics of Education	17.3	6.8	15.3	13.1
Teaching/ Learning styles	15.3	13.7	5.1	11.4
Theories of Education (philosophy)	9.6	13.7	10.3	11.2
Social Inclusion	9.6	6.7	10.3	8.9
National Curriculum/current schooling	0	4.5	15.3	6.6
Psychology	5.8	11.2	2.6	6.5
Critical Analysis	1.9	7.7	5.1	4.9
Curriculum theory	7.7	0	2.6	3.4
Education policies	1.9	6.7	2.6	3.7
Not Teacher Training	0	4.5	2.6	2.4
Employment skills	3.8	0	0	1.3
Sociology	1.9	4.5	2.6	3
Global education	3.8	0	0	1.3
Theories of Knowledge	0	0	2.6	0.9
Assessment	0	0	2.6	0.9
Behaviour Management	0	0	2.6	0.9
Lifelong Learning	1.9	0	0	0.6
Educational Ideologies	1.9	0	0	0.6
Communication skills	1.9	0	0	0.6

Table 2 – Why did you choose an Education Studies programme?

Reason (%)	Former Student	1 st Year	Final Year	Total
To become a teacher	53.2	50	30.8	44.7
To become a teacher but not sure/ wanted to keep options open	20	33.3	38.4	30.6
Career in Education (not teaching)	6.7	8.3	15.4	10.1
Friends Recommendation	6.7	0	0	2.2
Academic quality of programme	6.7	0	0	2.2
Educational Psychology	6.7	0	0	2.2
Offers wide career options	0	8.3	0	2.8
Only Course accepted on	0	0	7.7	2.6
Failed a B.Ed	0	0	7.7	2.5

Table 3 – If you wanted to be a teacher, why not chose the B.Ed programme?

Reason (%)	Former Students	1 st Year	Final Year	Total
Still wanted to study another subject	47.2	11.1	36	31.4
Choice/ flexibility/ wider career options	39.4	45.4	26	36.9
Felt B.Ed. was boring/not appealing/ to structured	7.7	16.7	15	13.1
Recommended by Careers Advisor	7.7	0	0	2.6
History of Education not offered on B.Ed	0	11.1	0	3.7
Subject offered criticality	0	11.1	5	5.4
Did not have requisite experience with children to apply for B.Ed	0	5.6	5	3.5
Did not get accepted on B.Ed	0	0	5	1.7

Table 4 – Do you still want to be a teacher?

%	Former Student	1 st Year	3 rd year	Final
Yes	81	100	70	83.7
No	19	0	20	13
Not sure	0	0	10	3.3

Table 5 - What have you done since you graduated?

	Former Students	Final Year
P.G.C.E	50	60
Teaching Assistant/ Learning Support	13.6	0
Heritage Industry	4.5	0
GTP	9	0
Work in a bank	4.5	0
Connexions	4.5	0
Further Education Lecturer	4.5	0
Own a restaurant	4.5	0
Youth Worker	4.5	0
Social Work -children	0	13.3
Actor	0	6.7
Design Learning Resource	0	6.7