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# Parental Influence on College Students' Career Aspirations

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**Parental Influence on College Students' Career Aspirations**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the  
College of Education

By  
Kristen Tillman

Under the mentorship of  
Dr. Meca Williams-Johnson, Dr. Lina Soares and Dr. Yasar Bodur

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of influence parents had on the career decision making process for their children who are pre-service teachers. Participants were pre-service teachers in their final year in the teacher education program. Data were collected using both a survey and interviews. The data were then divided into two groups consisting of responses from the pre-service teachers who are children of educators and those who are children of non-educators. In comparing these two groups, this study revealed that the children of educators indicated a slightly greater parent influence on their career choices than the children of non-educators. Qualitative findings showed that some of the educator parents discouraged their children from pursuing education and therefore most of the pre-service teachers actually began college in other career fields.

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### **Introduction**

Immediately after high school graduation, students are both overwhelmed and excited with the thought of striking out on their own and starting to work towards their own career aspirations. These newly graduated students are the ones making the decisions for their futures now, and with fresh eyes, they are thrust into this whole new world. Most students have limited thoughts as to where to begin, so they start by choosing to attend college or some form of higher education. The decision of which school to attend encompasses its own set of reasons, but what is it that makes these students so sure of the particular career path that they choose? Some believe career decisions are influenced by factors that include the level of educational achievements, one's ambition, talent, and a great family influence (Miller, Wells, Springer, & Cowger, 2003). There is no argument that your upbringing has a significant impact on the person you become; therefore, it is entirely plausible to make the assumption that parents would have some level of influence over a child's post-secondary education career choices.

In their research, Tziner, Loberman, Dekel and Sharoni (2012) found that the better the parent-child relationship is, and the more support the child felt, the more willing the child was to take career choice advice from the parent. If this positive parenting impacts children's career choices, what is the outcome of parents influencing their children into their same profession? Generally, when children or students are treated as if their opinions matter, they are more receptive to their parent's ideas and that potentially opens the doors to looking into the same professions as their parents. This would indicate that even positive influences might not determine if a child will pursue the profession of his/her parents.

On the other end of the spectrum, some children are less motivated when under pressures from parents. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) reported “if adolescents perceive their parents as putting through their own wishes for the child’s future career rather than collaborating with the child in preparing for a career this may be interpreted as disinterest in the child’s plans...” (p. 116). Those who are negatively influenced by their parents are less likely to choose the same career field of their parents, which is partially what intrigues me in my own study. It is interesting to explore the possibility that an educator’s son or daughter could have become the next acclaimed teacher, given the proper guidance and encouragement. Shellenbarger (2006) supported relieving the pressures on kids to follow suit in parents’ footsteps when he commented how “...the best lesson we can tell our kids is that it’s fine to switch careers” (p. 2).

When I chose to pursue a career in education, I thankfully had no added parental pressures, but I took comfort in the fact that my great-grandmother, great-aunt, and grandmother were also elementary school teachers and all spoke very highly of their jobs. I still always wondered, however, why my mom and aunt did not continue in that field. While I clearly still carry some of the family interest in teaching, the generation before me has been clear in wanting nothing to do with teaching. I would argue that my mom and aunt had the same positive upbringing with my grandmother as I did with my mom, yet their career choices do not match up with mine. What influences affect these choices for careers, particularly for teachers?

As future teachers know, most people’s reasoning for choosing to teach includes an extremely passionate motive, often accompanied by an allegory of sorts, for why they ultimately chose the education profession. There may be those that simply followed in the

steps of a parent because they felt comfortable or had no choice. In this case, these teachers may not display the same passion for teaching kids as others who pursued their passions for teaching by personal choice. Knowing what makes college-level students choose their careers is a crucial part for knowing whether they will be the proper fit for being a classroom teacher.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to investigate the career decision-making process for existing students and young adults who follow the same career path as their parents did, and more specifically, the career trajectories of college students who choose to study education because their parents were educators. This study was conducted in two phases. First, a quantitative section explored the main influences behind pre-service teachers choosing their career field as well as the number of those who chose the same track being an educator as one or more of their parental guardians. Data were collected from participants in the form of a hardcopy survey to determine these influences and expectations for their future as an educator.

The next phase was designed to qualitatively investigate specific participants of the previous sample to determine what factors caused them to choose the same profession as their parents. Data were collected in the form of self-reflecting, formal interviews. Using this unique design can give insight to parents and teachers on what kinds of factors might be influencing children and young adults' aspirations to obtain certain career choices. In this manner, teachers specifically can better prepare and enhance children's experiences in the classroom to best prepare them for their futures. Currently, there are not many studies that examine the likelihood of students choosing the same professions

as their parents, with even less research on specifically children whose parents are educators, thus making this particular study a farther contribution to the field.

### **Research Questions**

1. What motivates decisions to pursue post-secondary careers in education?
2. How do pre-service teachers of both parent educators and non-educators describe choosing their career fields, and how have their parents influenced their decisions?

### **Review of the Literature**

For purposes of setting a foundation for the current research available, this literature review will first discuss the broader influences and motivations that entice anyone to seek a specific career, followed by a comparison to specifically the teaching profession and how exactly to define a passionate teacher. The review will then dive into the impact that influence from other teachers and guidance counselors can have on students' career choices, and will end with discoveries of how birth order can affect career aspirations. All of these factors and more can be used to determine the qualities in the best possible teacher as a result of these current studies.

### **Motivations and Inspirations**

In order to determine why college-aged students think the way they do, it would behoove one to start at the very beginning of the post-college thought process. This thought process actually begins as early as elementary school, when children are first dreaming and discovering what motivates and inspires them in their lives. Auger, Blackjurst & Wahl (2005) conducted a study to determine: First, at what point in a child's life their future aspirations became specific and realistic enough to be taken seriously, and second, if these aspirations had any correlation to their parents' career fields. While it

was predicted by most that “fantasy” and unrealistic career answers would be given by younger children, it was actually the older children who mentioned careers fitting into this category. Also, of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who were tested, half of them could not specifically define one or both of their parents’ occupations when prompted; of the ones who knew, only 6% and 10% answered that they wanted to grow up to be just like Mommy and Daddy, respectively. There was “little correspondence between parents’ jobs and the jobs children stated they wanted to have” (Auger, Blackjurst & Wahl, 2005, p.5). These numbers show that young children, who are socially accepted to be at an age that idolizes their parents, actually do not seem to pay much attention when it comes to their parents’ field of work. As a result, the question that arises is: at what age do children begin to ask about their parents’ careers, and where does the motivation and inspiration to eventually follow in their footsteps come from?

Kniveton (2004) narrowed down in his study that the top three motivating factors behind choosing a career for participants were: 1) that they enjoyed the work, 2) the amount of salary that was paid, and 3) that it was something they were “good” at. In a different study done specifically on teacher development, 79 pre-service teachers indicated that their own three key motivators influencing their decision to choose teaching were: 1) personal fulfillment, 2) enjoyment of the subject, and 3) the opportunity to work with young people (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Other less significant reasons for choosing to teach consisted of having personal aspirations to make a difference and wanting to teach in content areas they personally felt a connection to. With these motivators in mind, it makes it clearer on just what direction children are eventually led to in decision-making.



More recently, Eren (2012) conducted research in Turkey questioning 602 pre-service teachers aged 17-39 years old to determine how an individual's interest in teaching was explicitly related to their career choice satisfaction beliefs. In the study, participants were profiled as high, medium, and low interest level in teaching based on their survey responses. It was concluded that being rated with a high interest in the subject matter they were teaching directly correlated to higher satisfaction rates with their career choices in the end. These choices pave the way to promoting what motivates people to join fields of interest and what keeps them passionate once they are settled in their careers.

These things that keep teachers passionate could be the reasons for starting their degrees in the first place. Manuel and Hughes (2006) asked 79 teachers if teaching was their original choice of career, to which just over half answered 'yes.' Of those that answered 'yes,' 14% admitted to having a family history of teachers, a reason that might otherwise influence their decision. 73% of all participants stated that a significant mentor in their life had a direct impact on their decision to teach which included parents or counselors (p.15). This research suggests that family members, as well as others, have a huge influence and serve as a potential motivating factor for pre-service teachers choosing the teaching profession.

### **Passionate and “Good” Teachers**

While some of these subjects reported being influenced by a role model or parent, a teacher needs to love what they do in order to be successful, not just do something because their parents want or expect them to. Elliot and Crosswell (2001) stated that teaching is an incredibly demanding job for numerous reasons, and “those who stay

committed to their position must feel a deep and genuine love for their job” in order to be truly effective (as cited in Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008, p. 977). This choice for staying with a career because of a genuine love for the job is what we define as passion, a word that typically has the connotation of “good” attached to it. But for the purpose of the Carbonneau, et al. study, that passion was placed into two categories: harmonious, depicting the “good” connotation; and obsessive, introducing a lesser-known “bad” connotation, all to be rated on a passion scale. Nearly 500 teachers participated and the results from the survey fell directly in line with the researchers’ hypotheses, showing the strong correlation that most teachers were passionate about their jobs. They concluded that the first form of passion, the harmonious form, decreased the risks of stress-related burnouts over time while the second form of obsessive passions reduced satisfaction in their overall work efforts. However, their limitations included having a small sample size and a subjective view of the “passion scale”, but future research could be used to determine what exactly goes into harmonious passionate teaching. It is this passion that pre-service teachers might be seeing from a parent or role model who also teaches and is the very subject of what the current study will examine more in depth.

The question of what exactly makes a good teacher is always being asked, and over the years, “good teachers” have evolved from being judged by their natural, outer qualities to being held accountable to the achievements in the test scores of their students. According to Cruichshank and Haefele (2001), this seemingly “ideal teacher” was once upon a time measured simply by the attributes of a naturally good teacher (p. 26). The 20<sup>th</sup> century then brought us analytic teachers who were judged based on observations and who were held accountable for students’ level of learning solely by student

achievement and test scores. Cruickshank and Haeefele list numerous “kinds” of teachers in their article to assert that there is not simply one specific type of good teacher in existence. But because there are such a vast number of qualities, it is possible to narrow the search for the right teacher and “identify and remove teachers who are unable to meet any definition of what makes teachers [so] good” (p. 30). Knowing what qualities make a prime teacher can be helpful in selecting the best teachers out there, as well as to discover the ones who are motivated enough to push to achieve greatness in the education field.

### **School Guidance Counselors**

Along with motivations and knowledge of the qualities for a “good” teacher, there are other factors that have an important role in influencing a student’s decision to pursue a college path such as non-parental figures. One of those categories of people happens to be school guidance counselors. A study of 74 high school seniors was conducted in Canada to determine who gave them the most information about post-secondary education and what was included in their advice. Researchers Alexitch, Kobussen, and Stookey (2004) found that the advice counselors gave involved mostly the application processes and funding problems, while it was the classroom teachers that gave more academic advice. Students did explicitly express a need for guidance in making future plans, but results indicated that 9.5% of students received no information from anyone, providing the possibility that guidance counselors were unavailable at times even when sought out. The data suggests that students are asking for guidance in their career paths, but that they don’t necessarily always turn to their parents for influencing advice.

**Parental Involvement**

The level of parent involvement in a child's life, whether positive or negative, can impact how the child chooses his/her future careers. Interestingly enough, Shellenbarger (2006) wrote an article discussing this very principle where there was less parental involvement, but solely due to the parent's choice. It stated that the changing times are calling for less encouragement from parents to have kids follow in their footsteps as far as careers go. Former president-elect of the National Career Development Association, Darrell Luzzo, stated that, "going into the same field as your parent is less common than it was [in the past] (Shellenbarger, 2006, p. 1). The findings of this article claim that parents with higher-income jobs see their kids feeling more and more inadequate to compete with the family businesses. For example, a 2005 survey stated that three out of four physicians are less likely to promote their job to their children (Shellenbarger, 2006). Education, however, has never been regarded as an occupation of high-ranking income, and therefore could be a reason why the field of teaching is more appealing to some. Perhaps the parents with jobs that fall on the lower end of the salary spectrum, such as teaching, might be more likely to encourage their children to follow suit with their careers because of more humble and noble appeals.

Dietrich and Kracke (2009) conducted a study primarily to determine the value of mechanisms to test parent involvement in career development of 359 German citizens aged 15 to 18 years old. Participants were surveyed on their parent's involvement in their post-secondary education options. Conclusions showed that the majority of the students were supported by their parents in their respective career choices. It was inferred that reasons for students experiencing a lack of encouragement or too much interference could

be due to, or lead to, too much pressure being placed on the student. While what parents have to say is important and has been previously determined to be very influential and helpful, too much of any one thing might give a student cause to disengage from the career-seeking options altogether.

### **Birth Order**

While specific people may hold significant influence over someone's career choices, there is another interesting factor that is out of a child's control. According to Kniveton (2004), a child's birth order affects which parent has the most influence on their career decisions. Through a series of questionnaires and interviews for his study, 384 teenagers said that out of all other people, their mother and father were the most influential when selecting a career path. Concerning birth order, it was observed that the eldest children took advice from their fathers more often than not while the youngest took advice from their mothers. At the same time, more girls took advice from mothers, and boys from fathers. Overall, the study found that parents were shown to hold a significant influence over their children's decisions, but the majority still felt that they could make their own career choice free of pressure.

### **Summary**

In light of all of this research, the current study will address how parental influence affects students pursuing degrees in education specifically. Previous research is very limited in the area of specific career influences, with one exception. A qualitative study was conducted detailing the private stories of ten women, all of whom had significant parental influence on becoming veterinarians in the post-secondary careers. No veterinarians were among the parents, but almost half of the parents' occupations

dealt with either science or medicine. Four of the ten women also made note that their parents were unhappy with their own career choices, mainly due to not pursuing higher degrees in the subject field (Douglas & Gutman, 2000). The motivations and reasons for the women choosing their careers was surprisingly similar across the board, but each one was incredibly influenced in some way, positively or negatively, by their parents and their parents' careers. Douglas and Gutman (2000) explained that connections included "imitating father's workaholic style; rejecting imitation of parental medical practice as physician (due to awareness of parental frustration with career), yet choosing an alternate form of medical practice; and completing mother's unfinished business" (p. 5). Whether it was frustration that turned the children away from pursuing that career or admiration that made them want to follow in their parents' footsteps, this research would suggest that parents hold an enormous effect on our career choices in either direction.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research was designed as an explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods study, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from a large sample size (Creswell, 2014). This design was intended to gather data quantitatively from a large group of individuals via surveys to then be analyzed based on specific responses. Later a qualitative interview process was used to explain in more detail certain responses gathered from the surveys in order to better answer the research questions. By building on each other, each separate research data were analyzed to come to a credible conclusion.

**Sample**

The sample includes pre-service teachers at one mid-size university in the Southeastern region of the United States. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary, but all 66 individuals who were in their final year in the education program did choose to answer. After participation in the survey, four students were selected who had given consent to be individually interviewed further based on their responses. Interviews were conducted on campus at a time convenient for the participants and took between 20-30 minutes per individual.

**Data Source**

The initial survey consisted of a mix of both fill-in and multiple choice questions. The fill-in questions were listed at the beginning of the survey handout in order to get an idea on the background of the participant, such as their intended profession as well as their parents' professions. The multiple choice statements that follow asked more personal questions involving career choice and motivation in which participants were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Least Applicable to Most Applicable. The ending questions were asked in the same Likert scale format but were used to determine qualifiers and volunteers for later, detailed interviews. The interview piece consisted of basic initial questions in regard to parents and motivations for careers. Later questions stemmed from results received from the quantitative survey and natural conversation with the interviewee. All of the survey questions and the format can be viewed in the Appendix.

### **Findings**

Survey data were first analyzed as a whole to determine parental motivation factors behind students choosing their career paths. Later, the data were separated into two groups: education majors with educator parents and education majors with non-educator parents. This was used to determine the differences in which types of household motivated pre-service teachers to become teachers. From those with parents as educators, data directly determined if participants choose the same field as their parents because of a strong parental influence. From those that answered they would be willing to interview, four were selected to answer the interview questions. Their responses were compiled and analyzed based on similar answers to the same questions asked of each participant.

The quantitative survey data were also separated based upon the type of questions the participants were asked. The first seven of the fourteen total questions involved parental influences while the later seven questions related to the subject's personal influences. These questions were split into the two groups labeled "parental" and "personal" and then each divided once again by the responses from the group of educators as parents and the non-educators as parents. These subgroups are labeled "educators" and "non-educators" for short and all these data groups collected are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2 below.



Table 1

*Parental Influences Questions Frequency (Percentages)*

Question	N	LA	SA	N	VA	MA
<b>Q1</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	7.1	21.4	14.3	<b>57.1</b>
Non-educ	52	7.6	13.5	<b>40.4</b>	23.1	15.4
<b>Q2</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	<b>85.7</b>
Non-educ	52	0.0	0.0	5.8	15.4	<b>78.8</b>
<b>Q3</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	7.1	21.4	<b>42.9</b>	28.6
Non-educ	52	5.7	13.5	30.8	<b>34.6</b>	15.4
<b>Q4</b>						
Educ	14	<b>28.6</b>	21.4	7.1	<b>28.6</b>	14.3
Non-educ	52	<b>57.7</b>	19.2	7.7	7.7	7.7
<b>Q5</b>						
Educ	14	14.3	14.3	0.0	7.1	<b>64.3</b>
Non-educ	52	<b>67.3</b>	1.9	5.8	1.9	0.0
<b>Q6</b>						
Educ	14	14.3	14.3	0.0	7.1	<b>64.3</b>
Non-educ	52	<b>63.5</b>	3.8	0.0	0.0	5.8
<b>Q7</b>						
Educ	14	21.4	0.0	21.4	14.3	<b>42.9</b>
Non-educ	52	<b>38.5</b>	7.7	15.4	19.2	7.7

*Notes:* LA: Least Applicable, SA: Slightly Applicable; N: Neutral; VA: Very Applicable, MA: Most Applicable

\*Percentages on questions 5, 6, and 7 do not add up to 100% because some participants answered Not Applicable (NA).

As the table indicates, the two groups had very different opinions on some of the questions (i.e. Q5, 6, 7).

Table 2

*Personal Motivations Questions Frequency (Percentages)*

Question	N	LA	SA	N	VA	MA
<b>Q8</b>						
Educ	14	14.3	7.1	<b>42.9</b>	21.4	14.3
Non-educ	52	3.8	7.7	25.0	<b>48.1</b>	15.4
<b>Q9</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	<b>71.4</b>
Non-educ	52	0.0	1.9	1.9	19.2	<b>76.9</b>
<b>Q10</b>						
Educ	14	7.1	0.0	<b>35.7</b>	28.6	28.6
Non-educ	52	5.8	7.7	23.1	28.8	<b>34.6</b>
<b>Q11</b>						
Educ	14	21.4	7.1	7.1	28.6	<b>35.7</b>
Non-educ	52	17.3	7.7	7.7	5.8	<b>61.5</b>
<b>Q12</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	14.3	35.7	7.1	<b>42.9</b>
Non-educ	52	5.8	3.8	19.2	21.2	<b>50.0</b>
<b>Q13</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	0.0	7.1	28.6	<b>64.3</b>
Non-educ	52	0.0	3.8	9.6	19.2	<b>67.3</b>
<b>Q14</b>						
Educ	14	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	<b>85.7</b>
Non-educ	52	0.0	3.8	3.8	26.9	<b>65.4</b>

*Notes:* LA: Least Applicable, SA: Slightly Applicable; N: Neutral; VA: Very Applicable, MA: Most Applicable

Contrary to the previous table, this table features a considerably more agreement and similar opinions between children of educators and non-educators on their personal influences.

An independent samples t-test was employed to compare the perceived parental and personal influences on career choices of children of educators and non-educators. This information is displayed below in Table 3.

Table 3

*Results of T-tests for Educator and Non-Educators*

Outcome	Group						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Educator			Non-Educator					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			
Parental Influence	3.89	.55	14	3.06	.91	52	.31, 1.34	3.23*	64
Personal Influence	4.04	.57	14	4.18	.69	52	-.54, .26	-.709	64

\*p <0.05

Children of educators scored significantly higher in questions that referenced parental influences. In other words, children of educators perceived significantly more parental influence on their career choices than the children of non-educators. There were no statistical differences on questions that addressed personal influences.

### **Quantitative**

As displayed in Tables 1 and 2, the data collected were divided into two separate tables based on the types of questions that were asked. In Table 1, Q1-Q7 dealing with parental influences questions were analyzed and pre-service teachers with parents as educators' responses were compared to pre-service teachers of non-educators' responses. Q1 and Q2 stated that parents had a positive influence on the subject's career choice, and data shows that both teachers of educators and non-educators were in strong agreement with the statements. In Q4 however, the educators were split in agreement on their parents questioning their reasoning for choosing education as a career. Those of non-educators seem to have less negative parental influence in this area as over half of them

indicated a “Least Applicable” for their parents questioning their decision. The last three questions in Table 1 are definitively split with educators on the “Most Applicable” side and non-educators on the “Least Applicable” side. These questions asked students to indicate the levels of pressures from their educator parents or other family members; due to this stipulation, a majority of non-educators answered “Least Applicable” or selected not to respond (N/A) to this particular question.

Looking at the second table containing other personal motivations for choosing the education field, it can be determined that educators and non-educators gave very similar responses. With these types of questions, there was no significant difference between the two that one could compare. While the responses to Q10 about money are found on the upper end of the scale in agreement of, there were roughly 5% of educators and 13% of non-educators that answered on the lower end of the scale, stating that together the entire sample was not in complete agreement on the question. Money seems to be a personal motivation that still does drive some, while few in number, into choosing their careers; a majority however did still indicate that money was not a factor.

One of the more interesting pieces of data collected came from Q11 because it asked whether the education field was the participant’s first choice of career or not. Roughly 20% of children of educators and 20% of children of non-educators stated that education was not their first choice. However, all of those surveyed were education majors at the time the survey was administered. The data from the quantitative survey were compiled into these tables and used to further determine the four candidates for interviews. Those interviews from the educator parents group were analyzed to farther describe the patterns found from the collection of the sample survey.

### **Qualitative**

To collect the qualitative data portion of this study, four participants who indicated that their parents were educators were selected for an interview based on meeting the criteria presented through the survey as well as willingness to volunteer. All of the data from the interviews were collected, analyzed, and compared from person to person using coding in order to determine common themes. There were four common themes found that were taken from the codes for the purpose of the analysis. The codes were counted to determine how frequently they appeared amongst the data and afterwards changed into the broader category of themes (Creswell, 2013). These themes and frequencies are listed and described below according to the responses of the interviewees.

#### *Level of Parental Influence*

There was a significant level of reference to parental influence among the participants in the interviews. Three of the four indicated that there was slight negative influence from their educator parent growing up due to the fact that their parent “did not want them to settle” when choosing the same degree. The participants spoke of their parents having concerns with the demands and hardships of teaching that they had experienced first-hand. They spoke of their parents knowing how hard it was to support a family on a teacher’s salary and how much stress came with the job. One parent would even tell others in passing, “I’ve tried to talk her out of it, but she won’t listen.” While these parents were more against the participant’s choice in career at first, as time went on, they became more accepting and supportive. The fourth participant in the interview stated that she found relatively no parental influence for her situation, and instead the influence came directly from her own “soul-searching to find her purpose in life”.

*Other Influences*

While parents seemed to have the majority of influence among their children, participants gave other reasons and influences that equally encouraged and prompted them to move towards a degree in education. Half of the responses they gave described the one-on-one time that they spend in the classroom observing and assisting to be a major motivation to continue teaching. They stated that they had a passion for “wanting to make a difference” even when it seemed small and insignificant. One participant described getting to this passion through a personal anecdote about her experiences in the field. Over the course of a few months, she worked one on one with a struggling reader. By the end of her experience, she said she empowered the student to be more excited about reading and truly proud of his own hard work. Through mentoring just one student, she could see the potential impact she could have on multiple children’s lives and it was at that moment that this participant had clarification that she was meant to be a teacher.

Along with passions and interests, the participants were asked a follow-up question mirroring Q11 from the quantitative survey. The other half of the participants agreed with the majority of the total surveyed that they are not in the education field for the money, and that the kids alone are the major influence on their career decision. One of the interviewees specified that one of her high school classes confirmed her initial thought of teaching in her mind. The biggest factor of this class was that it gave a taste of the world as a teacher and a taste of the child development track. “It wasn’t anything like writing curriculum and lesson planning, but it still made me want to be a teacher,” she detailed in the interview. These participants further confirmed that pre-service teachers

have other influences that are personal influences leading them towards choosing a degree in education.

### *Major Change*

Interestingly enough, three of the four participants were originally enrolled in other degree programs before deciding at some point in their college careers to change to Early Childhood Education. These pre-service teachers started out as Psychology, Child Development, and Pharmacy majors, respectfully, all stating that they eventually came to find that those particular majors were simply not the best fit for them. The Child Development major changed her mind after one semester in college when she researched more about the details of the major and found that her best option was education because she “didn’t want to work with adults much.” The Pharmacy major was trying something different from her mother’s education track by going to career fairs to explore other options. “I really liked biology but I hate blood so I thought why not pharmacy.” She was a Pharmacy major for one semester as well, eventually changing her major officially but continuing to take science classes per her mother’s hopes of her changing her mind back to pharmacy. She describes the major she’s in now as being exactly where she is meant to be, doing what she’s meant to do.

### *Parent’s Educational Track*

Not only did the participants have major changes but half of them had parents themselves who were in other degrees and fields prior to becoming involved in education into early adulthood. These parents held degrees and positions in business and dental work, both working for a number of years before deciding to return to school to change to the education track. One mother graduated college with a business degree, worked with

Defax for a number of years before simply deciding she didn't like it. She settled on teaching middle school and even got her masters. The other mother had an original plan of going to dental school. Two years in, she quit school to raise a family and decided she wanted a job that suited the same time schedule as her kids. This mother got her teaching certificate and her master's degree as well. Ironically, these two completely separate mothers were both rewarded with swimming pools and hot tubs by their husbands upon receiving their master's degrees in education.

### **Discussion**

The second research question of this study asked, "How do pre-service teachers of both parent educators and non-educators describe choosing their career fields, and how have their parents influenced their decisions?" This question was answered briefly in the survey and later expanded and elaborated upon through the follow up interview. As Table 1 indicated, children of educators agreed on the statements involving parental influences more than the children of non-educators on the same questions. As the interviews later showed, the influence by parents could have been positive or negative, as long as some form of influence was received. This explains why the scoring of influence in general was much higher for educator children; the interviewees indicated negative influence at first with positive support coming later. For the children with educators as parents, I believe this influence can be best explained by how educators are both helpful and a hindrance since they know the field demands of education. Teachers naturally strive to help other students stay along the path of education, as is their daily job, so it would make sense that they would instill those same values in their children's career path and promote some positive influence. Also, with an educator as a parent in the home, the



parent would know the demands and requirements for their own job, so they are more than likely going to display some extra levels of influence on their children to be both practical or be passionate in choosing a teaching degree. This could be seen by some as a negative influence like some of the interviewees indicated with their parents being cautious of their career choices in the beginning stages.

One of the more interesting notes from the interviews was the similar theme of parents and their children not starting out in the field of education. Three participants in the interview stated that they started out as other majors and two of their parents as well were majors that were not elementary education to start. These parallels seem to indicate that the students were bound to follow in their parents' footsteps and eventually become teachers, even against some of their parents' better wishes for their children's lifestyle. In Q6, 28.6% of educators expressed that they did regret following in their parents' footsteps and becoming educators. This could be because they wished they had chosen the major on their own without any influence, but I believe a small percentage of participants simply did not understand the wording of the question. As the research from Shellenbarger (2006) stated, taking away the pressure on kids and making sure they know they do not have to follow in their parents footstep could be the best thing that parents can teach them. If parents of the participants in my research had taken the pressure off of their kids in the beginning, they might not have wandered into other paths and degrees of study.

While I do not believe that these students in my particular sample were feeling inadequate and compared to their parents as this article stated, I do believe that there is truth and a connection between children and following in their parents footsteps.

Shellenbarger (2006) quoted who said that, “going into the same field as your parent is less common than it [once] was (2006, p.1).” Through the responses from the interviews, I gathered that this statement could be proven true. Even though the participants all ultimately chose education, they were influenced and inclined to start out as another major in the beginning. Some were even negatively influenced by their parents and, had the scales been tipped just a tiny bit more, they might have ended up staying a non-education major forever. The interview portion of the research seems to even further validate Shellenbarger’s (2006) thoughts; however, because all participants agreed that, after their parents gave their input, they ultimately left the decisions up to their children who eventually found their own passions and paths towards education outside of what their parents chose. Each participant gave reasons beyond parental influence for why they wanted to pursue education for themselves. This is ultimately the best outcome that I wanted to find in a study; something that would validate the idea that most educators are in the field for the right reason which is, of course, the love of children.

Even though parents were ultimately a positive influence on their children’s career choices, the results from Question 4 of the survey posed an interesting point of comparison between the educators and non-educators. The answers, as seen in the table, show the children of educators’ responses split between “Least Applicable” and “Very Applicable” for “My parents often question my reasoning for choosing a career in education”, while the non-educators indicated the majority on the “Least Applicable/Somewhat Applicable” end of the scale. This split seems to show that growing up, educators had a slightly different lifestyle than those of non-educators, possibly due to the different environment of having a teacher with personal experience in

the household. These ideas were confirmed through the interviews when three of the participants who were on the “Very Applicable” end of the scale claimed their parents were not necessarily non-supportive, but were definitely more cautious when the child first expressed wanting to pursue a career in education like the parent. I believe those who indicated “Least Applicable” simply had less-concerned parents who knew their students would make a good decision based on their own beliefs.

I also found that while parents did have a heavy influence on their children, both positive and negative, there were other factors involved in motivating pre-service teachers to pursue degrees in education. This is what begins to answer the first research question: “What motivates decisions to pursue post-secondary careers in education?” As previously discussed, researchers Alexitch, Kobussen, and Stookey (2004) found that school guidance counselors had one of the greatest motivations behind college career choices in general. From the qualitative interview, this current study also found teachers at the school to be influential in the same way as a counselor. As a whole, the participants in this survey also indicated that before college they were motivated to pursue this degree (Q12) and, after taking some classes, they were even more motivated and excited to continue in the field of education (Q13). This is due in part to the fact that all of the participants in this survey are at the end of their college careers and can see the future jobs that excite them on the horizon. It is still helpful to note that their attitudes toward teaching grew positively after the influence of high school and even college classes.

The survey questions 10, 11, and 14 answered the basic factors that motivates pre-service teachers to go into education is not about the money, but about the kids, their passions to teach, and their desire to be challenged. Manuel and Hughes’ (2006) survey

of 79 pre-service teachers and determined their three key motivating factors to pursuing jobs in education were: personal fulfillment, enjoyment of the subject, and the opportunity to work with young people. While the answers in my survey were not word-for-word equivalent, the key factors from both correlate to the main idea that educators are in the field for the right reasons, and love to teach because they love what they do. Of the 79 teachers surveyed in Manuel & Hughes' (2006) research, 14% of them acknowledged having a family history of educators compared to the 21% in my own research. Because I surveyed a greater portion of educators with parents as educators, I believe that my survey can expand upon this research.

### **Conclusion**

If I were to enhance and extend this study for the future, I would want to include college education professors within my sampling and give them the same survey as the pre-service teachers. I would analyze the data by comparing the two sets to see if age makes a difference in how participants reflect on the motivations that inspire them to pursue an occupation in the education field. I would arrange the questions on my survey into two categories, personal influences and parental influences, in order to facilitate data analysis. After analyzing my data, I noticed the wording of some questions could have confused some participants; therefore, I would correct these details for a future study on the same subject.

Overall, I was looking to determine the motivations that drive students to choose particular career paths and what influence, if any, parents have on their children's career paths. I was specifically interested in the perspective of an education major due to the lack of research currently available for this degree-specific option. I wanted to utilize a

mixed methods study in order to specifically determine motivations and parental influence behind individuals that have both parents in the educational field and those who do not so that the two might be compared.

I found that educator parents did have a significant influence on their children's lives, be it positive or negative, and that personal reasons also influenced pre-service teachers to go into the field. I aim to continue my research as I progress in my own goals towards becoming a teacher.

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## APPENDIX

What are your parents' career vocations and/or degrees <i>(if applicable)</i> ?	
<i>For the following statements, please choose what best defines your experience on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the <b>least applicable</b> and 5 being the <b>most applicable</b>. Choose N/A if the question does not apply to you at all.</i>	
1. Growing up, my parents had a significant influence on my career decision.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
2. My parents encouraged me to pursue my career interests and aspirations.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
3. In recent years, my parents have had a significant influence on my college career choice.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
4. My parents often question my reasoning for choosing a career in education.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
5. One or more of my parents is an educator, and I felt some pressure to pursue a similar field in education.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
6. One or more of my parents is an educator, and I do not regret my decision to follow in their footsteps.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
7. I have other immediate family members who are also educators that have influenced me in my decision to be an educator.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
8. I chose to teach because I love working with other professionals.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
9. I am passionate about my future job as a teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
10. Money is not a great factor in my choosing my intended career.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
11. The education field was not my first choice for a career.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
12. Before choosing my major, I was very motivated to go into the field of education.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
13. After taking some college classes, I am very excited to continue in the field of education.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
14. I want to be an educator because it presents both challenging and rewarding experiences.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A