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CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF MASTERS IN EDUCATION (M.Ed) STUDENTS:

A TRACER STUDY OF THE M.Ed CLASS OF 1999

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Rinel Sing

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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,

University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the Degree of Masters in Education: Policy, Planning and Management

Supervisor: Professor M Cross

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Education, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, at any other University.

_____

Rinel Sing
Johannesburg
February 2010

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my beloved parents, Mr and Mrs W M Sing, for consistently inspiring, motivating and believing in me.

In loving memory of my uncle, the late Mr D Singh who accomplished so much in his short time with us.

To my sweet wife Chandika Sing, my pillar of strength and support, for always igniting the best in me.

My adorable daughters, Aksara, Vyasti and Isha Sing, who make each day a fun-filled and memorable one.

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I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and support provided by my supervisor, Professor M Cross. I am deeply indebted to him for providing me with the guidance, motivation and inspiration that has helped me to accomplish this research report successfully.

I wish to acknowledge and express my gratitude to:

Judith Inglis, my co-supervisor, for her kindness, time and friendship.

My family, for their love, support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

The expansion of higher education and changes in the labour markets seem to have reached a point where training for an M.Ed is affected by a number of issues traditionally raised in the context of graduate employment and work. Growing emphasis is placed on general skills and flexibility, which is briefly mentioned in this report. Labour market theory, human capital development, social capital and career development are explored in detail. Management is no longer perceived in terms of maintaining the business machine but is evolving into a motivator and leader of staff, an inspirational entity that is quintessential to the retention of highly qualified staff . This has resulted in the language of business changing, thus the 'efficient company' has become a 'learning organisation' (Germishuys, 2006). Therefore it is of great interest to actually conduct a case study of 11 M.Ed. graduates to track their career trajectories to see where this prestigious qualification has taken them. The researcher traces a general group of M.Ed graduates from the class of 1999 from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The main idea of this study is to ascertain exactly what it is that the sample M.Ed graduates have accomplished in their professional lives. It was found that the colour of one's skin, background, contextual factors, opportunities, social networking and career aspirations have played a pivotal role in the career progression of the M.Ed. graduates.

Key words:

Globalisation, internationalisation, human capital, social capital, labour market, career development, employment policy, career trajectories.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Despite recent debates, possessing a Masters degree is still a highly sought-after qualification on the labour market, notwithstanding the growing emphasis of problem-solving approaches. South Africa's labour supply problems have been exacerbated in recent years by the shortage of qualified post graduate students. This is set to have a significantly unfavourable impact on the supply of skilled and experienced workers and as a result, also on the productive capacity of the South African economy. There are too few Masters graduates available in the labour market. One of the greatest challenges facing South Africa today is to increase the supply of skilled labour and educated labour. How can this be achieved? The answer lies in education, training and human development, which is where an M.Ed. graduate has a significant advantage.

The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 aims to develop the skills of the labour force, of which the M.Ed graduates are an important part, by increasing the investment in education and training in the labour market. More specifically, the aim is to improve productivity and competitiveness, to improve the work prospects and occupational mobility of workers, to promote self-employment and to improve social services. However important this is for the people in this country, the researcher argues that it is equally important to upgrade one's qualifications for the reason that a Masters degree can be the foundation on which to build skills, that can be taught and assimilated while on the job. Germishuys (2006) contends that in today's economy, knowledge-based work is relentlessly replacing manual work. We are thus witness to the dawn of perhaps the most dynamic workplace environment in history.

Against this background, the study investigates the career trajectories of a sample of Wits M.Ed graduates from different backgrounds, with a focus on how the M Ed degree might have influenced their professional development and careers, or in other words, the effect of the achievement of the post-graduate Masters degree on their professional lives.

1.2 Aim of the research

The study aims to trace the employment status of Masters graduates who graduated in 1999, with the intension of focus on the 1999 M.Ed course in Policy and Management. It is a tracer study examining a sample of 11 graduates who have completed their post-graduate degree with reference to the following key question: -

Has their Masters degree provided windows of opportunity for them in the labour market?

Methodological and pedagogical aspects of the 1999 curriculum have been analysed to determine which facets were successful in helping the graduates of that year achieve their career goals.

The acquisition of a Masters Degree in Education is indeed a noteworthy accomplishment. It is a post-graduate degree and is pursued by students for a variety of reasons, perhaps some with an underlying intrinsic commitment to life-long learning or an interest in further career advancement. The subsequent academic and professional well-being of their past students are sure to arise in the minds of many a lecturer and professor. What have my students done with their degrees? Into what have they ventured after completing their courses? Were the sacrifices they made worthwhile? Did their courses provide them with adequate knowledge, skills and experience necessary to achieve their professional goals or expectations within the world of work?

A key issue addressed is the impact that a Masters degree has on an individual's opportunity for employment, promotion, managerial skill development and possible career changes. The research explores whether the programme has equipped graduates to attain a managerial role or any other form of career progression within or outside the field of education. It is of importance to this research report to find out whether an individual's qualifications have a bearing on professional advancement.

The following key questions will help to realise the answers to the main question of the study:

- What were the graduates' intrinsic reasons, in terms of career trajectories, for pursuing higher education goals and what was the transpired outcome upon completion of the Masters programme?
- What are the beneficial factors that contribute to the pursuits of an M.Ed degree?
- Is there a reciprocal relationship between essential interpersonal values of a student pursuing an M.Ed degree and white-collar employment market expectations?
- Does the attainment of an M.Ed degree impact on one's upward career progression?
- Can an M.Ed degree be linked to an improvement in job performance?
- How does the graduate's background impact upon his/her market mobility?

1.3 The main argument

Individuals aspire towards obtaining an M.Ed degree for various reasons, the most common being advanced pursuit of knowledge or financial, in that career progression can warrant an improved salary package to ensure financial security in a volatile economic market. While the

degree may facilitate upward mobility, higher salaries and greater status, there are other underlying factors as well. Factors like networking, social background and qualifications contribute towards attaining these aspirations of upward mobility at the workplace. This study argues that by obtaining the M.Ed degree, together with personal ambition and social background, individuals are able to apply themselves towards achieving greater career mobility and to get ahead in the workplace at a professional and intrinsic level. In tracing the 12 graduates (one of whom sadly passed away before the study and was thus not included) from the class of 1999 from the Wits M.Ed degree, this study shows that higher degrees play a vital (but not sole) role in fulfilling aspirations of upward mobility at the workplace.

1.4 Rationale

The knowledge base regarding the progression of post-graduate Masters students in South African universities is limited. The purpose of this study is to add insightful information from previous Wits Masters graduates to the knowledge base. The latter justifies the need to conduct a tracer study that explores and reveals the educational aspirations and career goals of M.Ed students and their resultant career progression.

The research lends itself to evaluating increased options of graduates in life after graduation. Universities need to know what career trajectories graduates can expect and what sort of career guidance and development will best equip them to deal with life beyond the university. By conducting this tracer study, the researcher aims to find if and how an M.Ed degree has assisted the graduate in life after university, focussing on their career trajectories and career mobility.

1.5 Overview of the study

The research consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1: This chapter provides an introduction, aim and rationale for the research report. It clarifies the need for enquiring into the career trajectories of M.Ed graduates through a tracer study. Chapter 1 also provides an overview of each of the subsequent chapters of the research report.

Chapter 2: This chapter explains the literature review and conceptual framework upon which this study is based. The researcher argues that critical and fundamental literature on labour market theories are the major force that dictates what employment opportunities are available. Human capital development, which asserts a positive relationship between investments in the development of human beings, and economic growth, and social capital, which asserts that the individual has access through his or her personal networks by virtue of belonging to or associating with a particular organisation e.g. alumni associations, business firms and government agencies. In other words, people equip themselves to promote their careers by obtaining a proper tertiary education. Finally, the four concepts of labour market theories, human capital, social capital theory and career development, are linked in order to highlight their importance in attaining career mobility. This chapter conveys in the conceptual framework six key assumptions that are pertinent to the research report.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 shows processes and methods used for data gathering and analysis. The aim of this chapter is to concentrate on key aspects related to the research design, the type of research chosen and its limitations, tracer studies, case studies, the interview design,

interview methods, validity and reliability of the research, the population researched, the sample size as well as the limitations of the research.

Chapter 4: This chapter provides a contextual map of the study and explores the policies and course outlines that were offered for a Masters degree at Wits in 1999. The aim of this chapter is to examine whether the courses met with the expectations of the graduates and their responses. The expectations, experiences and challenges faced by the M.Ed graduates are discussed and the enabling and constraining factors of current employment policy is investigated.

Chapter 5: The main point of this chapter is to see what the sample of graduates have since done with their lives. In relation to the research this chapter provides recommendations and suggestions for aspiring students wishing to enrol for a Masters degree at Wits. This chapter highlights the debate of the quintessence of a post-graduate degree such as a Masters in Education degree from Wits.

Chapter 6: The aim of this chapter is to conclude this research report. The researcher argues that an M.Ed. degree positively influences the career trajectories of post graduates, but there are other factors that make a difference as well. The main point of this chapter is to highlight the importance of developing human capital, the establishment of networks via the medium of social capital, in order to promote career development, which in turn helps one to gain momentum in the labour market.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a literature review of key theoretical perspectives regarding career aspirations, which determines the points explored in the conceptual framework regarding the issues for conducting this particular research report. The review scrutinizes the main debates on career progression within the context of earning a post-graduate degree. In this chapter the researcher argues that there are four key concepts interlinked with post-graduate studies which allow individuals opportunities for upwards and outwards career mobility.

The chapter begins by clarifying key terms and concentrates on the four key concepts. The first concept focuses on *labour market theories*, which examine the employability of the individual. The second part examines the significance of *human capital development*, i.e. developing one's cognitive ability and skills through the acquisition of authentic educational qualifications. The third concept focuses on *social capital*, revolving around an individual's ability to establish social networks with influential others. The fourth part explores *career development* and how this contributes towards an enhanced lifestyle.

The conceptual framework draws from the literature review the following main points, arguing that career mobility is accompanied by other important factors besides education:

- Labour markets dictate career choice.
- Factors enhance competition for access and retention of professional labour.
- Post-graduate degrees provide job/salary opportunities.
- Push and pull factors linked to 'brain drain'/'brain gain' of academics.

2.2 Labour market theories

The labour market is an extremely powerful force that dictates what employment opportunities are available. Lindley (1996) states that some educational and training measures aim to make the labour market work better by presenting better information about courses, qualifications and people's achievements. This is done by rationalising what information is available and making it easier for the different actors in the system to understand the relationship between the different staging posts and paths taken. Hence measures were taken to raise the quality and accessibility of information about an individual's performance and transitional activity in moving from school to work. However, students can make their own choices. Research in Britain suggests that young people are extremely resourceful, capable of adjustment to abrupt changes in status and manage to reconcile themselves to the reality of the labour market (Lindley, 1996).

In order to produce a highly skilled and competent workforce, higher education has had to prepare its course curriculum to meet that need. Lindley (1996) substantiates this point as he contends that since the 1990's the labour market demanded, and expected, university courses offered to be of a consistently high standard. Consequently, the National Records of Achievement was introduced to create transparency of the achievement of graduates in the British Qualification System. Considerable change was undertaken. Action plans were adopted to aid the planning of, and reflection upon, progression. Clearly, in the South African Qualification System, similar measures have to be taken to adapt courses and qualifications structures in order to change the nature and extent of course delivery through greater access and increased participation through offering better course packages. In other words, tertiary institutions have to 'up the scale' in order to meet the increasing demands of the workplace.

Many 'pull' (beneficial) factors drive graduates to further themselves. Barth (2001) contends that those who favour certification approaches to learning believe that it is useful to have a qualification because qualifications take learning to recognisable levels. A university degree is a pull factor that certainly boosts the status of the individual and hopefully opens many avenues to pursue better employment, which is attainable through building up one's human and social capital. In order to better market oneself in a highly competitive arena, a student is driven to attain a unique edge over the next candidate applying for the same job. It is recognised that the status attached to university degrees ensures that those who underwent training and have certificates as proof of their degrees get prestigious jobs coupled with higher salaries – as opposed to those who do not have degrees. This is a perception held by many a student embarking on further studies.

Building and strengthening human capital is becoming a prominent trend in the corporate world today. It is considered to be important because in actual working situations individuals are faced with challenging experiences which they have to strive to overcome in order to survive. Education provides one with tools to cope with a multitude of situations in the best way possible and assists in aligning professional, academic and general knowledge. Universities are meant to teach one how to best utilise one's cognitive ability. Highly educated people entering the labour market are almost certain to find success versus those of lesser education. Despite constant complaints that schooling and higher education do not prepare learners for the world of work, the researcher feels that an educated person can increase production in the workplace. Hence those lucky enough to achieve higher education qualifications already have an advantage in the labour market as well as in the international world.

Chisholm (2004) maintains that the survival of the fittest, most competent or best qualified, is the norm of the labour market. Through skills and qualifications graduates gain mobility, flexibility and autonomy. People with higher education are generally more mobile than those with a lesser education. Labour flows across international labour markets are central to the understanding of demand and supply of labour. As a result of greater autonomy, graduates are in a position to dictate their terms of employment. Due to further education and skills, graduates enjoy greater flexibility as the labour market is more open and market-driven. A graduate can go anywhere in the world because of added qualifications and thus possess the freedom to choose positions of employment.

Globalisation has changed the labour market to such an extent that employee loyalty has diminished. Rather loyalty to oneself is all encompassing. Globalisation may be regarded as a catalyst to the increased movement of goods and services, including that of people, in the form of migration. This makes the distance between countries, regions, villages and towns and even workplaces themselves, easily attainable. The networking of countries as a result of globalisation has changed the labour market forever. Those possessing high knowledge and skills will prosper and survive. Lindley (1996) claims that governments grappling with major socio-economic problems have applied successive market-orientated solutions by introducing market mechanisms into the education system with increasing diversity, as well as attempting to strengthen those mechanisms already introduced into the training system. Hence almost all of the policy effort usually generated is devoted to human capital development.

2.3 Human capital development

In today's global village people have to persevere and survive in a technologically advanced and highly competitive labour market. Change is the one characteristic common to all periods

of time and those who best adapt to change are those that emerge the most successful. Human capital theory asserts a positive relationship between investments in the development of human beings and economic growth. The idea of investment in skills and knowledge is paramount. Weber (2002) contends that there is strong empirical evidence that unemployment rates decrease as the educational level rises. Weber (2002) also found that literature evaluating the incidence and duration of unemployment has always found education to be a key factor because labour markets are not perfectly flexible. This may result in a reduced demand for unskilled labour and thus unemployment. A need for human investment in higher education is therefore necessary for the advancement of the labour market. The human capital theory views skills as commodities and operates around the notion that an individual will choose to invest in his/her own education on the basis that such an investment will result in enhanced marketable skills. These skills will be recognised by a demand in the labour market as technological advances require a better-educated workforce for the productive system to operate effectively. Research using the human capital model has provided some evidence of the effect of education on wages and productivity, as well as the positive impact of education on economic growth. Vandenberghe (1999) however, states that the human capital theory should not take for granted that an individual's demand for education will automatically be transformed into real human capital. Despite extensive research work that has been conducted to demonstrate the human capital model, there is still not adequate evidence to draw firm conclusions about the link between education and training and economic growth. However, despite these issues, there is still a large body of empirical data that suggests that vocational training does have a positive impact on earnings and employment opportunities for the individual with more educational experience.

South Africa has a fairly large population which is growing rapidly. The natural growth is supplemented by a large influx of migrant workers from neighbouring countries. The number of workers or potential workers is therefore not problematic in itself. The main problem is lack of skills. Human capital theory is an instrumental learning process in which students master the skills required by the labour market. The primary purpose of universities becomes that of preparing graduates for their occupational lives by equipping them with the necessary skills. However, Davenport (1999) states that both industry owners and students are considered self-interested individuals who seek to maximise returns on their respective financial investments by making themselves more marketable through higher education. He further contends that students are future workers who believe that the acquisition of work-related knowledge and skill translates into enhanced economic return. People are, as a result, more productive once they have received training. The latter translates into higher wages and in general should create a more productive graduate who can find his/her niche in society.

Cohn (2000) compares the effect of training to the effect of providing a worker with equipment. For example, a worker with a bulldozer is more productive than one trying to remove dirt with his bare hands. The productive enhancing power of acquired skills propels an individual to greater heights as human capital. Investment in workers represents the shift from a homogenous perspective of the role of labour, and productivity and growth, is viewed as driven by a focus on quality and the upgrading of skills, in line with post-industrial society. Such investments are required to meet the burgeoning numbers of technical, professional and managerial workers required in this society . Human capital theory assumes that there will be greater internal mobility as a result of employer investment in education and training. With globalisation and increased pressure on the labour markets of the world, the question arises whether the latter will actually lead to greater employee retention.

Robertson (1998) offers the view that human capital education, with its focus on labour market preparation, potentially undercuts the traditional social, ethical and democratic objectives of education by viewing graduates as passive learners who are prepared for globalisation. In reality, only larger organisations are likely to invest in general training as there is little or no financial benefit to them as they will have to pay a market-related wage to recruit and retain such employees. Buck and Barrick (1992) state that contemporary human capital education emphasises generic employability skills, rather than specific technical abilities, rather than specific technical abilities, to address current labour market needs. In other words, employability skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and a positive attitude towards occupational change are not job specific but transferable among a range of occupational contexts. This translated means that a person should possess a range of skills that can be applied to a variety of jobs because society is now faced with technological, economic and social influences which cause significant change in vocational roles. The graduate has to adapt to and capitalise on these changes by demonstrating the value that their work can add to an organisation. This is imperative to the fulfilment of a satisfying and productive life.

Vandenberghe (1999) avers that the human capital theory is very optimistic as it promotes the idea that education is a very powerful individual and social lever. This translates into better-educated people and nations earning more and prospering at a faster rate. Thus public investment in education should be able to reduce income inequality and eradicate poverty. But the human capital theory takes for granted that an individual's demand for education will automatically be transformed into real human capital based on the assumption that this theory essentially develops a 'black box' to the production of education issues. This model assumes

that educational systems mechanically respond to their private or public clients, or in other words, the labour market. However, individuals or governments investing in the educational system will not automatically get 'the best value for money' because the production of education services is exposed to information problems, quality control challenges and co-ordination constraints. Human capital accumulation is more than individual effort accomplished by students who expect some financial return on their investment since both the demand and supply side can pose regulatory difficulties (Vandenberghe, 1999). The implication is that if there are no new jobs in the labour market, a graduate cannot progress up the corporate ladder.

Sugrue (2004) argues, however, that recognising learning as the primary vehicle for building human capital is the logical argument for the value of learning. In the new economy, work is primarily intellectual and human capital is a competitive advantage for both organisations and nations because it represents the knowledge and skills of the workforce. Learning is the vehicle through which knowledge and skills are developed and maintained. Universities and other tertiary institutions that can provide the right learning opportunities for their students will be most successful in terms of productivity, growth and innovation, thereby boosting human capital.

Organisational leaders, who address all the variables that contribute to performance such as incentives, work processes and talent management, maximise the value of learning and take advantage of growth in human capital (Sugrue, 2004). Sugrue also suggests that if one wants to restructure an organisation's learning investments and practices to mirror those of high-performing organisations which enjoy effective and efficient learning operations, then one should gather data on 'best practice' from these organisations through social networking.

Implementing these 'best practices' can strengthen investment in higher learning and other performance improvement practices, which means investing in social capital. Social capital is thus linked to human capital at another level by linking employee development and organisational performance to include learning as part of a larger set of human resource practices. Investment in learning has become easier with the growing acknowledgement of human capital as the key to economic and organisational success (Sugrue, 2004). There is a need to maximize the value of learning in all contexts. Human capital development assumes that nation states are being forced to adopt neo-liberal market policies and that the role of the state should be to create the necessary environment in which flexible market forces can operate, so that such forces can respond rapidly to any changes emerging in the global market. In other words, nation states have to create a world-class labour force in order to attract investment and a demand for services.

2.4 Social Capital

A Swahili saying, *Jima Jema hungara gizani*, translates as "A reputable name stands out even in the dark." To be recognized as the best in everything one chooses to do is an essential asset of an autonomous graduate. According to Cross (2005) social capital is about building and establishing networks with people in one's field of study. There should be some movement towards courses being mapped and adjusted, in order to be aligned more closely with the labour market. This is especially true if we wish to compete on a global level with post-graduate studies. Brundrett (1999) contends that two sets of qualifications should be regarded as complementary in the drive to achieve the ultimate goal of better leadership and management of education. In the literature on job search processes and the labour market, social capital has been used to refer to the social ties one uses to obtain job information or introductions to employers (Granovetter, 1994; Lin, Ensel and Vaughn, 1981a; Marsden and

Hurlbert, 1988). This is further elaborated by Woolcock (1998) who proposes four dimensions of social capital: firstly, horizontal associations; secondly, social ties within communities; thirdly, the relationship between civil society, and fourthly, the State and the quality of governing institutions. These are some of the resources for which to strive in order to ensure sustainable futures in a changing socio-economic environment.

A question to be posed is what is the value of focusing on human capital without including a focus on social capital? Brinton (2000) refers to two types of social capital: *private social capital and institutional social capital.*

In private social capital, the individual has access through his or her personal networks whereas in institutional social capital the individual has access by virtue of belonging to a particular organisation, e.g. alumni associations, business firms and government agencies. However, in order to minimise institutional social capital, charges of systematic bias and unfairness against some groups of individuals gradually led to the development of legal provisions that require broad advertisement and an open application process for academic and most other types of jobs (Brinton, 2000). It is hoped that the latter will maximise the variety and depth of the applicant pool by openly soliciting applications. Despite efforts to curb institutional social capital, it is still prevalent in most avenues of employment.

According to Hosen, Solovey-Hosen and Stern (2003) a more comprehensive and universal result of human activity is the quest for psychological well-being, happiness and career advancement. In general, people differ in the degree to which they utilize social capital but still have a common objective of enhancing human happiness. There is a wealth of information to be gained from the interaction with top executives. Granovetter (1994) found

that many studies have demonstrated that the overriding mechanism through which individuals find jobs in the U.S. is through their own social capital, or 'connection'. They argue that this reliance on social networks means that institutions play an insignificant role in matching workers to jobs. Instead what matters is the individual's own stock of social capital. Both positive and negative points of contention emerge from this argument as a result. If a graduate is outgoing and open, then he/she may be able to establish social 'contacts' whereas others who are reserved and unable to easily communicate possibly due to their own inhibitions, may find it difficult to build up their own social capital. Unfortunately, the reserved graduate may be a highly competent individual who has just not been noticed. This reliance on social networks suggests that institutions play an insignificant role in matching graduates to jobs. Thus Holzer (1987) calls for a more open society. A number of western democracies have highly institutionalised systems of moving youth out of school and into the labour market through apprenticeship programmes or other types of school industry partnerships (OECD, 1998). This type of initiative addresses the changing demands of employers and industry. However in an open market, global economy, this type of initiative would be difficult to propagate at a tertiary level.

Another interesting argument is postulated by Holzer (1987), who claims that people's own social networks will often be closely tied to their social class and ethnic origin rather than extending outward into other social groupings. These are constraining factors that span from social, human, fiscal, ethnic and possibly even racial factors, which may prevent educated people from moving into better jobs. This chapter argues that with our new democracy and transformation, it is now easier for people of different nationalities and backgrounds to interact in a positive manner, consequently being able to build stock of social capital. Social

capital in these times is essential for both professional success as well as organisational advancement.

Falk and Harrison (1998) outline four key benefits of social capital in the national context:

a) Social benefit, relating to such learning progresses overcoming dissatisfaction with narrow economic views of the achievement of a civil society.
b) Economic benefit, adding value to economic outcomes through enhanced efficiency and sustainability as a result of effective learning processes.
c) Technological benefit, with regard to the role of electronic networking and communication and their possible contribution to learning.
d) Cultural benefit, especially with regard to issues of social and cultural diversity.

Falk and Harrison (1998) viewed social capital as the outcome of the quality and the quantity of the learning processes between individuals and groups in the community. For social capital to become integrated into policy debates, the mechanisms for creating social capital need to be better understood and be brought into mainstream economics research.

2.5 Career development

Three perspectives are enunciated on the role of tertiary education. According to Nasson and Samuel (1990) education is particularly equipped both to maintain the existing social order and also to promote varying kinds of change or mobility. The question that arises is whether a further education qualification enhances the graduate's life in any way.

The second perspective is that tertiary education is not producing adequately skilled personnel who are expected to boost productivity by virtue of their newly acquired skills

(Weber, 2002). This prompts the argument on eliciting reasons for the possible failure to deliver adequately skilled personnel through the stream of tertiary education. The researcher argues that if personnel are unable to increase productivity, then the result would be a decline in the standard of living in society. Hence the social order will experience a resultant decline and the workforce will stagnate with a lack of mobility, possibly as a result of tertiary institutions not being able to produce adequately skilled graduates.

The third perspective that has arisen is whether Masters graduates have been able to identify and convert their knowledge into successful professional opportunities, either within the field of knowledge or related fields. Has the tertiary institution promoted and accelerated quality training for students studying at a Masters level?

Another perspective of education leads to an analysis of the history of education patterns in South Africa. The ideology and practice of the Apartheid government influenced higher education in South Africa. South Africa's labour position has been adversely affected by racial discrimination in the provision of education and training and by job reservation during the Apartheid era. The political, economic and social conditions of South Africa have changed since the inception of Democracy. As a result of changes in market trends over the past several years, institutions have had to adapt to new challenges. Things have changed but unfortunately it takes time to improve the situation through education and training. In the meantime, South Africa is still faced with a surplus of unskilled labour and a shortage of skilled labour.

The most important resource of any country is its people. Many post-graduates reach a stage in their careers when they are not sure what choices are available to them, or what is

appropriate for them. Exploration becomes an interesting option for them. The latter involves levels of introspection and discovery. An essential facet of career development is to gather information in order to decide how best to build a career at any given time. Through exploration via the acquisition of knowledge, an individual can identify other avenues that require their skills, interests and values. Career aspirations must be optimistic but realistic as well. Engaging in further education is one sure way of validating the growth potential of an employee's current job.

In order to develop human capital reserves, students need to have the verve and gusto to develop themselves in their prospective careers. Brundett (1999) states that a series of inherent tensions exist between the emerging traditions of education management training because there has always been some tension in higher education between reflective courses and those which emphasise competencies as they were seen as low order concepts by some universities. The latter called for institutions in Great Britain to re-design Masters degree courses to articulate with the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) by offering exemption from elements of the degree programme. The NPQH offered a well-rounded and relevant, professional and practical approach. This meant that change was and is necessary to improve standards at post-graduate level as both the labour market and human capital are important variables.

Cohn (2000) contends that the effects of training are very similar to the effect of providing a worker with equipment, just as a worker with a bulldozer is more productive than a worker trying to excavate with his or her bare hands. A skilled worker is more productive than one without skills. Robertson (1998) states that human capital, with its focus on labour market

preparation, potentially undercuts the traditional, social, ethical and democratic objectives of education by viewing graduates as passive learners being prepared for globalisation.

Buck and Barrick (1992) maintain that contemporary human capital education emphasizes generic employability skills rather than specific technical abilities to address current labour market needs. In other words, employability skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and a positive attitude towards occupational change are not job-specific but are transferable among a range of occupational contexts. This implies that a wide variety of jobs can be accessed through a range of skills. Nevertheless, one still needs academic training to complement one's employability through boosting one's inherent valuable personal characteristics such as attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as the ability to adapt to changing situations in a work environment. Society is faced with technological, economic and social influences that are causing significant changes in vocational roles. The ability of the individual to adapt to change is imperative in the fulfilment of a satisfying and productive life.

Career development promotes life-long learning. However, Ecclestone (2000) argues that education policy continues to focus almost exclusively on learning for economic competitiveness. Dewey (1938) asserts that education creates the opportunity for learning conditions, not only to stimulate vocational development in the form of evolving technical skills, but also to foster enduring personal, intellectual and social growth, which cannot be merely achieved by teaching technical skills to students. The question arises as to whether South Africa's education process is equipping students morally and intellectually to be part of the existing pattern of corporate domination, or are students sufficiently empowered to reshape patterns for greater flexibility and sustainability. Kaye and Farren (1996) propound

that careers are less like climbing a ladder and more like crossing a turbulent river by leaping from one tumbling log to another. Hyslop-Margison, Emery and Graham (2001) state that career development should present personal values and attitudes to students, not as abstract employability skills, but as qualities to critically evaluate on the basis of their personal, workplace and social implications.

Kaye and Farren (1996) suggest three simple steps towards career development:

a) Identify an organisational need or opportunity consistent with one's own career development
b) Prepare a plan to address the need by changing the nature of one's work
c) Start lobbying and building the necessary alliances for gaining support for one's ideas and new role in the organisation

It is hoped that implementation of these steps may help a person's advancement in terms of career development. However, one can no longer assume that moving upward is the natural direction of career growth as opportunities for upward mobility are scarce. Horizontal career development is also to be considered as an option if the new position provides the employee with new goals and experience.

2.6 Conclusion

Many people still find post-graduate studies of great value despite overwhelming odds in a competitive labour market. Advancement is most likely to occur when an employee's abilities match the needs of an organisation. Employees committed to moving up should study their organisation's strategic goals. Kaye and Farren (1996) believe that everything an employee does should contribute to his/her reputation for reliability, results and innovation.

This chapter creates an awareness of the dominant forces within the Labour Market and how to better perceive it. Secondly, the literature highlights the power of investment in Human Capital and how it can mutually benefit the employer and the employee in a symbiotic way. Germishuys (2006: 28) contends that in an age where intellectual property is a major commodity most organisations believe that retaining their best human capital ensures customer satisfaction, increased product sales, satisfied co-workers, stable middle-management and reporting staff, effective succession planning and most vital – the retention of deeply embedded organisational knowledge and learning.

Thirdly, the literature discloses the importance of social capital. There is urgency for an employee to establish a reputable name in the greater work environment which is essentially an important facet of social capital. In order to be marketable one has to start networking within relevant arenas, exposing one's credentials, skills, abilities and talents. This will assist advancement up the corporate ladder and afford one acknowledgment as an asset in an increasingly challenging labour market. A commitment to life-long learning would ensure a better opportunity for further career development.

This study indicates that an academic can encourage wide spread acceptance, acknowledgement and recognition in terms of employability through understanding the essence of the labour market theories, i.e. human capital development, social capital and career development. In other words investing in human capital, making oneself more marketable through higher education, investing on a social level through networking with people who are in a position to help one to progress in the workplace and lastly, by using one's acquired qualifications, skill, work experience and social networks to advance career

development through acquiring the critical competencies and experiences for redirecting the long-term direction of one's career.

2.7 Conceptual framework

Highlighted here are pertinent issues facing a graduate when attempting to enter or when already in the labour market. This section elaborates on six key assumptions in an effort to add clarity to the argument of why so many post-graduates can literally 'play' the market, being able to choose where they want to seek employment. This section also looks at some forces within the market, adding clarity and insight to some reasons why post-graduates have access to opportunities that are unavailable to others without post-graduate degrees.
A study of career trajectories cannot be separated from the role of markets, the impact of globalisation and an increase in labour autonomy. These factors influence how institutions/organisations make choices on employee recruitment and retention.

2.7.1 Post-graduate degrees and salary/job opportunities

Most students further their studies with the expectation that a higher education qualification will help them get a better job. Moleke (2003) suggests that this is a reasonable expectation, particularly in the South African context, where labour demand is shifting to higher skill workers and professionals.

In many instances the acquisition of a post-graduate degree such as a Masters degree does eventually lead to a better job with a higher salary. Hansen (1970) states that between any two groups of individuals of the same age and sex, the one with higher education will have higher average earnings than the one with less, even if the two groups are employed in the same occupational category in the same industry. Blaug (1970) supports this statement by

claiming that the universality of this positive association between education and earnings is indeed one of the few safe generalisations that one can make about labour markets in all countries. It must be borne in mind that employers seek to maximise their profits and therefore hire more educated people.

Blaug (1970) further deduces that employers pay educated people more, even when their education has taught them no specific skill, but because they are more driven than others. The employees that are achievement-motivated, self-reliant, who act with greater initiative in problem-solving situations, who adapt themselves more easily to changing circumstances, who assume supervisory responsibilities more quickly and those that benefit more from work experience and on-the-job training, are considered to be an asset to the employer. Accordingly, higher-educated people are not only paid more when hired but are valued and rewarded throughout their working life because they are assumed to be more productive than less-educated people. Unfortunately, the perception exists that the private sector offers higher remuneration to higher-qualified manpower above the salary scales for the same manpower if employed in the public sector.

2.7.2 Post-graduate degrees with thought and perception.

Advancing oneself academically has to be seen as an effort to aspire for higher thought processing, coupled with greater knowledge and skill acquisition. Blaug (1970) affirms that professional and vocational training does impart specific skills that cannot be acquired except by formal preparation. The researcher found that the interviewees in general, when responding to the open-ended questions, displayed definite signs of higher cognitive reasoning and ability. The intellectual capacity, wisdom and clarity of thought of several of the interviewees were appreciated by the researcher. Hosen, Solovey-Hosen and Stern (2003)

propound that education is the wild card in society's arsenal of tools for positively influencing the quest for happiness by its members. This thought-provoking claim does hold true upon reflection by the researcher.

2.7.3 The labour market dictates career choice.

People are often enticed to enter into occupations that may not necessarily be their forte. Numerous pull factors can contribute to these choices made by both the novice and the professional. Generally, these choices are bolstered by the lure of financial gain, better working conditions, access to better opportunities and greater scope for upward mobility. Individual happiness is substantially determined by the effects of psychological, social, economic and political capital on the ability of an individual to sustain a predominance of positive learning experiences (Hosen, Solovey-Hosen and Stern, 2003). However, on the other hand, Moleke (2003) argues that those involved in career change will choose an area of study based on their perception of the labour market, their prior education and access to an institution or course of study, as these factors do to a large extent influence employment experiences of graduates.

Specialised fields of study, such as engineering, do impart certain job-specific skills that are clearly sought after in the labour market and as a result these graduates are perceived to possess capabilities that are essential to enhancing productivity at work. In the recruitment process, a person in possession of a post-graduate qualification indicates to prospective employers that he/she is a worker who has acquired the character traits and skills necessary for success. Thus it seems that the labour market encourages employers to identify qualifications and characteristics that correlate with job performance. Individuals and organisations, as prospective clients, are inclined to place greater trust in companies that

employ committed graduates skilled with the necessary expertise to get the job done efficiently. The assumption holds true – graduates generally have an advantage in the labour market, possessing qualities sought after in the labour market.

When comparing earnings of any two groups of individuals, Blaug (1970) maintains that the more educated will definitely earn higher salaries than the less educated. He also expounds that investment in education is generally correlated with the growth and development of the economy. In other words, the educated individual has an advantage with higher education as it can affect his/her income positively, while at the same time the economy will benefit in terms of increased productivity.

Blaug (1970) explains the correlation between earnings and levels of education by elaborating that employers pay educated people more, even when their education has taught them no specific skills, because they are more achievement-motivated, more self reliant, act with greater initiative in problem-solving situations, adapt themselves more easily to changing circumstances, assume supervisory responsibility more quickly and benefit more from work experience and on-the-job training.

2.7.4 Increased mobility of skilled labour

Professional people are increasingly less dependent and less bound by loyalty to their employers in deciding on employment issues. They have more autonomy in deciding where and for whom to work. This leads to increased mobility of skilled labour. Kaye and Farren (1996) are of the opinion that in the new workplace, employees look for employment partnerships that will help them to develop portable skills. Expertise and versatility are developing into bankable currencies. Mastering a profession is more important than vying for

a fancy title and corner office. When the trappings of advancement are stripped away in the next organisational realignment, a worker's proven competencies are all that will be valued, coupled with a larger salary. Current trends seem to advocate this type of mobility, as it is seen as broadening the employee's base of knowledge and skills and helping to develop new competencies. A popular shift is from a slow-growing organisation to one that is poised for expansion as such movement can increase a graduate's marketable skills and network of personal contacts, simultaneously building social capital.

With the exception of an ever-decreasing number of hard-working, educated and loyal employees who are content to see out their days within a fixed and predictable job description, more and more graduates are constantly seeking greener pastures. It appears that the well-educated graduate views the labour market as his oyster. An educated graduate's perception is that all he/she needs to do is sell his/her skills to the labour market. This frame of thinking encourages multi-directional mobility. Blaug (1970) suggests that employers expect the highly educated to be more productive than less educated people, which translates into greater mobility and marketability for the post-graduate.

However, Varghese (1982) warns that education can then become an employment barrier because of greater emphasis being placed on only the highly educated entering the labour market. This affects those who do not have the required qualifications as they become marginalized. Those who are highly certified are generally considered for employment. As a result, the post-graduate is granted vastly more autonomy because employers believe that by recruiting graduates they are reducing training costs as graduates are better equipped to pick up skills while on-the-job. The post-graduate recognises this niche and will more often than not render their services to the highest bidder and graduates feel they have earned this right,

due to the fact that they have invested time, effort and money into their education and therefore deserve to be appropriately compensated for their sacrifices. In the future, when a better offer comes along from another company or institution, the post-graduate will regard this as upward mobility and will proceed to the next level.

Kaye and Farren, (1996) agree that the traditional trade-off of guaranteed employment in exchange for employee loyalty was once a given in America's workplaces. Now the idea of *quid pro quo* is on the endangered list. Few people expect to collect a gold watch for thirty years of faithful service. As traditional career expectations unravel, workers find themselves in the unfamiliar role of independent artisan seeking the highest bidder for their skills on a short-term basis.

2.7.5 Competition for access and retention of professional labour

Institutions under the pressure of globalisation and increased labour autonomy now have to compete for access to and retention of professional labour. The word globalisation has become fully ensconced in our everyday vocabulary. Globalisation can be understood as being the intensified and accelerated movement of people, images, ideas, technologies, and economic and cultural capital across national boundaries. We are living in a time of unparalleled interconnectivity, driven forward by the engines of modern capital reorganisation and the correspondingly changed interests, needs and desires of ordinary people everywhere. Globalising processes are sweeping all corners of the contemporary world and, as a result, rapidly shrinking the distance between hitherto far-flung parts of the world (Castells and Carnoy, 2001).

Due to the effects of globalisation, most corporations are faced with the challenge to constantly boost their image, both in the international free market as well as internally to their employees who need to know that they are in the 'right' company. Likewise, corporations aim to attract highly educated people to employ because of the perceived prospect of greater productivity through their recruitment. Increased productivity results in increased profits and hence greater recognition in the global market. This also encourages competition amongst the individuals vying for recruitment, who are coerced into upgrading their qualifications.

Globalisation may be viewed as a catalyst to the increased movement of goods and services, including that of people, in the form of migration. Corporations have to make many sacrifices to retain their professional labour force since persons with higher education qualifications are able to change jobs far more easily now than in the past. This phenomenon has emerged because globalisation has made accessibility to various countries, regions and continents easy. Companies have dangled a carrot in the form of performance bonuses, larger home and motor vehicle allowances, bi-annual salary increments, free access to company leisure retreats, time-share and so on, in an effort to retain individuals they consider valuable assets. Due to the effects of globalisation and labour autonomy, corporations have found investing money to train somebody new not a financially viable option. An individual in possession of post-graduate qualifications is most certainly a sort-after commodity in the global labour market, especially if they have gained expertise and experience from a host of reputable companies. The post-graduate is thus now in a position to dictate terms and choice of employment. Blaug (1970) found that employers who tend to still "hoard" their professional workers and treat their salaries as overhead costs, follow a trend of the past. In summary, corporations lean heavily on educational qualifications as an indicator of certain personal characteristics.

2.7.6 The 'push and pull' factors linked to the 'brain drain'/'brain gain' of academics

The 'push and pull' factors in the employment of graduates in South Africa are directly linked to the 'brain drain'/'brain gain' of academics. South African graduates are marketable all over the world, especially if they have studied at an institution that is internationally recognised. Prior to globalisation, highly qualified persons were obliged to remain in their current jobs because the chances of changing jobs were minimal or non-existent. Post-globalisation has influenced a restructuring of the labour market. The highly educated and skilled person is increasingly in demand, with greater mobility facilitated by globalisation and flexibility in employment that is more accessible and market-driven.

Push factors are those factors that contribute to the exodus of academics from South Africa into a global market. The reasons are generally context-related and debatable. Many would choose to be located on continents that they perceive to be 'safer'. Crime levels are a definite push factor, especially when one becomes a statistic of crime. Some respondents have cited employment policies as other push factors because their chances of job progression have been drastically reduced. They would rather emigrate to a place where their qualifications are recognised and employment opportunities exist. Others want to leave because they are offered substantially higher salaries than they would earn in South Africa. Some of these push factors result in the 'brain drain' phenomenon that South Africa is currently experiencing.

The phenomena of 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' is temporary, due to the steady increase in international terrorism. Countries have tightened up on the issuing of visas and granting of work permits and have substantially increased the minimum requirements for citizenship. A

concerted drive to retain highly qualified academics and an allegiance to South Africa is needed for revival of the economy of our country. On the other hand, although South Africa is currently experiencing 'brain drain', simultaneously there is also a 'brain gain' because educated persons from abroad recognise the possibilities for employment here and are making full use of this opportunity.

2.7.7 Conclusion

Post-graduates are constantly seeking better employment opportunities because of better working conditions, job satisfaction, recognition of effort and most importantly, for greater remuneration packages. Remuneration packages could mean larger salaries, better car and travel allowances and corporate privileges such as time-share and other perks. This means that the pursuit of money is the ultimate decision-making factor when it comes to career development. From the key assumptions highlighted in this section, the reasons are clear why many post-graduates try to constantly upgrade and further their careers. The labour markets have created conditions that are favourable for career development.

3 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of Chapter Three is to identify and discuss the tools used to compile this research report, by examining both the positive aspects as well as the limitations of such a study. The researcher deals with the methodology that was used to investigate the research questions identified in the previous sections. For the purpose of this study, the research design was drawn from diverse sources using the qualitative research approach. The quantitative research method was not used because although strong on reliability, it is weak on validity. Once the case study had been identified, data collection took the form of focussed but open-ended interviews with graduates whose experiences were of paramount importance to this study.

3.2 Research approach

The research adopted a case study approach. Described by Leedy (1997), the case study approach is descriptive research in which data are gathered directly from individuals or groups in their natural environments for the purposes of studying interactions, attitudes, or characteristics of individuals or groups.

The following data-gathering strategies were used:

a) Extensive literature review

b) In-depth interviews

c) Document analysis.

3.3 Qualitative methods

Qualitative research concentrates on knowledge building rather than knowledge discovery. The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of people "from the inside" through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding and of suspending or "bracketing" preconceptions about the topics under discussion. The qualitative researcher should be able to recognise and avoid bias in order to obtain valid and reliable data. This can be achieved through the ability to maintain analytical distance, while at the same time drawing upon past experience and theoretical knowledge to interpret what is seen, astute powers of observation and good interaction skills. Qualitative research enables the researcher to tell a story from the eyes of the respondent. Some qualitative researchers offer an in-depth depiction that is true to an informant's worldview (Neuman, 1997).

Frankel and Wallen (1993) illustrated the major characteristics of qualitative research as being its ability to generate detailed data with rich descriptions of what is being studied. People's personal perspectives and experiences are reflected in the direct quotations, which makes the research authentic. The value of qualitative research is that it enables the researcher to relay the story from the eyes of the respondent. A qualitative researcher has to ensure that their research accurately reflects the evidence collected, thereby providing the reader with a sense of immediacy, direct contact and intimate knowledge without violating confidentiality (Neuman, 1997).

This study required a small but in-depth sample to provide an intimate knowledge base to argue the main assumption, that is the link between career trajectories and acquiring the M.Ed degree.

3.3.1 Limitations of qualitative research

While there are a number of arguments both for and against the use of qualitative research methods, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to this type of research, the most common being:

- the possibility of bias entering the study
- the perceptions and views of the stakeholders may not be as accurate as the researcher would like
- issues of establishing trust and thus honesty in answers may become problematic, thereby impacting on the study findings.

According to Neuman (1997), qualitative researchers assume that it is impossible to eliminate the effect of the researcher completely. Recognising the human factor does not mean that a qualitative researcher arbitrarily interjects personal opinions or selective evidence to support personal prejudices. A qualitative researcher takes advantage of personal insight, feelings and perspective as a human being to understand the social life under study, but is aware of his or her values or assumptions. Hence the qualitative researcher takes measures to guard against the influence of prior beliefs or assumptions when doing research. Neuman (1997) further states that rather than hiding behind "objective" techniques, the qualitative researcher is forthright and makes his or her values explicit in a report. Qualitative researchers tell readers how they gathered data and how they see the evidence.

The research area of focus is on graduates who have majored in Educational Management, which was only offered as a course in education at a Masters level from 1999, and to ascertain how this course has affected their professional lives. Unfortunately however, due to a lack of respondents who have majored in educational management, this study has been

broadened to accommodate graduates from the broader spectrum of courses offered at Masters in Education (M.Ed) level at Wits.

3.4 Design of the research

The research design encompassed the use of literature review, document analysis, case studies, tracer studies and open-ended questionnaires and interviews within a qualitative framework.

3.4.1 Extensive literature review

The literature review involved an account of the theoretical and contextual framework of the links between education and the labour market. Books, articles, academic journals and electronic resources provided the knowledge-base for identifying the core issues within the research focus.

3.4.2 Document analysis

The relation of education to development may be investigated through document analysis of relevant educational policies. For the purpose of this study, document analysis explores the policies and course outlines that were offered for a Masters degree at Wits in 1999. The course outlines examined were from the Faculty of Education. Document analysis together with analysis of the answers obtained in the "standardised open-ended" type of interview was used for obtaining data relating to career and life choices made by the sample graduates.

3.4.3 Case studies

The qualitative researcher has made use of the case study approach in order to gather a large amount of information on one or a few cases, to go into greater depth, to get more details on

the cases being examined. Immersion in the data has given the researcher an intimate familiarity with people's lives and culture in the context of the complete case as a whole as to what have the graduates accomplished in their professional lives. In addition, more than one subject has been analysed so as to provide a realistic and lateral account from the cross spectrum of M.Ed graduates of 1999. It must be borne in mind that generalisation is a key issue in the case study approach. At a basic level, this means that people make broad and general statements and avoid specific or detailed statements. From an ethical perspective the researcher has to wholly accept what the graduates have said as being truthful.

3.4.4 Tracer studies

Tracer studies serve as important tools within tertiary institutions, providing information for reflection to enhance future institutional development. The synergy between course structures and the working world is undergoing change at a rapid pace. To keep up to date with the demands of the work environment, course providers require the essential feedback from their previous students in order to encourage reflection and analysis of relevant course material and/or the adaptation of courses on offer to make them more current, meaningful and worthwhile. The new paradigm for higher education stresses, among other things, the need for institutional autonomy with accountability. Higher education institutions need to be concerned with the ultimate disposition and success of their graduates in order to ensure that their educational products are consistent with both student and ultimately employer needs (National Higher Educational Institution, 2001).

According to Schomburg (2001), tracer studies of graduates of African Universities have been conducted in order to address the issue of work skills and high unemployment. From 1996-2000, a total of 15 tracer studies have been carried out in 7 African countries of

approximately 8000 graduates, sponsored mainly by the Association of African Universities (AAU) study programme on Higher Education Management. Topics covered include: transition from higher education to work, job search, employment conditions, use of knowledge and skills, appropriate position and job satisfaction and retrospective assessment of study conditions. This tracer study identified the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approaches used to trace the graduates and found that the transition from study to work is a process often marked by uncertainties and anxieties in different parts of the world, especially in the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Another tracer study was conducted across 9 European countries from 1998-2000 with a sample of 3000 graduates. This study explored the relationship between higher education and employment four years after graduation. The comparison provided a good opportunity to examine the extent to which higher education and the world of work are similar or different among European and African countries.

Muhammad (2000, in Gewer, 2003) suggests that general education which prepares graduates broadly to respond to all kinds of situations, should not be discarded. He also stresses that elaborate professionalisation and vocationalisation should be reserved for the post-graduate's training which should be expanded to adequately prepare graduate students to cope in any situation, be it professional or vocational.

This study initially was to be a tracer study of 12 M.Ed. graduates but sadly one passed away before being interviewed, reducing the number to 11 M.Ed graduates who graduated in 1999 from Wits. The research design highlights why tracer study theory will help in reaching the answers to the critical questions mentioned in the rationale. Tracer studies are usually carried

out for the purpose of measuring and tracking graduate performance and hence infer institutional performance. Tracer studies are often seen as important tools of institutional development, especially when the world of work is changing rapidly (Schomburg, 2001). Higher education institutions require systematic feedback regularly to assess and renew their curriculum policies. However, such studies are rare; none have been done at Wits on M.Ed students. Schomburg (2001) maintains that to know the whereabouts of graduates, their working conditions and their retrospective assessment of their course of study might stimulate the curricular debate and could also be very interesting for the current or later students.

Traditionally tracer studies are used for determining the attrition of a particular set of people over a particular time frame for the purpose of acquiring interesting and useful information. Usually tracer studies are conducted in the form of surveys. Graduate Destination Surveys or Tracer Studies are conducted by many tertiary institutions throughout the world for planning purposes and as an integral component of quality assurance systems. For this particular study, utilising surveys will not be truly beneficial. A survey comprises a set of questions, usually with closed-ended questions, handed out to a large population sample. The surveys in tracer studies are commonly used for tracking or tracing the specific sample for distinctive reasons and it is understood that tracer studies can be used to measure and track graduate performance and hence infer institutional performance. This research report can be classified as a tracer study because Wits School of Education has no information at all about what the M.Ed graduates of 1999 are doing in their professional lives since graduation. As the only available graduate information the university has is postal addresses, the researcher had to track down and establish contact with the graduates. This merits and justifies the need for a tracer study to be conducted. For this particular study, being a qualitative study, it drifts away

from the usual tracer studies and delves deeper to acquire more personalised information. Once the graduates were tracked down and interviewed, the data gathered was analysed and presented in tabular and written form.

3.5 Sample and population size

The population researched comprised Masters of Education graduates of the year 1999 from Wits. 11 graduates were selected. All graduates were required to have Policy and Management as the main courses for their degree, however, due to non-availability of respondents, this was not possible. Graduates who specialised in other educational packages were also interviewed. Graduates included those individuals who had successfully passed all the requirements for a Masters in Education degree and had attended the graduation ceremony or obtained their certificates as proof of graduating.

The small sample of 11 respondents allows for in-depth interviewing and analysis of data. As this is a qualitative case study and tracer study, the sample need not be too large as this will detract from the main purpose of the study.

3.6 Interviews

According to Kerlinger (1973) “the best instrument available for sounding people’s behaviour would seem to be the interview with a schedule that includes open-ended, closed and scale items.” Interviews allow the interviewer to clarify answers and follow up on interesting answers. The way the researcher phrases the questions or the tone of voice may result in incorrect or inappropriate responses.

The "standardised open-ended" type of interview was selected. The wording and sequence of questions are predetermined and the questions are completely open-ended. Qualitative in-depth interviews are noted for their probes and pauses rather than for their particular question formats (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001). Interview questions can focus on experience or behaviour, opinions or values, knowledge, feelings, sensory perceptions, and the individual's background or demographic information. These question topics can be phrased in present, past or future time frame.

Interviews were only possible once graduates chose to establish contact with the researcher. Interviews had to be arranged in advance at the convenience of the interviewees. The researcher preferred that the location of the interview was selected by the interviewee in an environment in which he or she felt safe and relaxed. It was not possible to meet two interviewees due to contextual factors, hence telephonic communication transpired. The rest of the interviews occurred on a one on one basis, which was preferred by the researcher. The length of the actual interviews lasted from one and a half to two and a half hours, with any clarification being done telephonically after the interviews.

3.7 Data analysis technique

For the purposes of this study qualitative data analysis was applied to the answers obtained in the "standardised open-ended" type of interview. Responses were carefully analysed, with the researcher disallowing the influence of personal values, beliefs and assumptions to colour the findings.

3.8 Validity and reliability of the research

The issues of reliability and validity are inherent methodological problems in qualitative research. Rudestam and Newton (1992) maintain that "one cannot separate the investigator from the object of inquiry". Reliability refers to the repetition of similar situations, same studies, so that related conclusions can be developed. In this research the issue of reliability was addressed by careful analysis of the answers provided by respondents.

The reliability problems of this study will be dealt with in a similar manner to the validity problem – that is to analyse the responses carefully. The researcher should spend as much time as necessary to adapt the interview questionnaire to ensure truthful and accurate responses from the interviewees. The validity and reliability of the data collected and the response rate achieved depends largely on the design of questions, the structure of the questionnaire and the rigour of pilot testing.

3.9 Limitations of the research

Availability of respondents was the first limitation. To solve this constraint, comprehensive and self-explanatory interview questions were designed. The respondents were given adequate time to complete and return the questionnaires, either by hand or via e-mail. This tracer study was initially aimed at tracking down Masters graduates who had majored in Policy and Management, as these are the majors of the researcher. The researcher had to access past graduate information from the Wits University Office of Alumni Affairs. Only the graduates names and postal addresses were given. The researcher then proceeded to draw up a letter that explained that a tracer study was being undertaken to make contact with and to follow up on the career paths of the Masters graduates of the year 1999. These letters were sent out thrice to the Wits students in an attempt to establish contact with them.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of respondents, the researcher was forced to widen the tracer study to include Masters graduates of Education who had chosen courses other than Education Policy, Planning and Management. The majority of respondents had opted for other packages which included: Adult Education, Psychology in Education and Curriculum Studies.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual map, to look at the courses set for Wits students of 1999 and endeavour to assess whether the packages as well as the lecturers met the expectations of the Masters graduates of 1999. The researcher argues that there is pressure on universities from both the public and private sector to adapt their curriculum and programmes to better suit the expectations of the labour market. The history of Wits, together with a brief outline of the researcher's chosen area of specialisation – education policy planning and management package – is included in this chapter, attempting to shed some light on what the graduates actually experienced in terms of course or subject choice. The conclusion of this chapter provides the graduates' expectations, experiences and challenges, offering evidence to support the argument stated above.

Carnoy (1999) states that the main ingredient in new services is the restructuring of knowledge that leads to an increase in productivity and a closer fit between a client's specific needs and the services delivered. There is now pressure, more than ever, for students to work across faculties, disciplines and across subjects in an effort to ensure that students do not have to specialise in one discipline, but should be knowledgeable in other disciplines as well. The downside of this is that students may take on more than they can handle at one time and possibly end up 'burnt-out' and without any qualifications. The upside is that a graduate may decide to enrol for a post-graduate degree in order to upgrade his/her skills and widen his/her appeal in the labour market. In any case, it is imperative to recognise the importance of both the current and potential contribution that the post-graduate can add to an organisation terms of economic growth. The critical changes facing the implementation of policies for education

and training that will result in optimal return on investment with respect to economic growth, is to put in place the necessary resources, institutions and build capacity in order to adapt to an ever-changing market.

4.2 Aims of acquiring a Masters in Education degree

A Masters Degree in Education is a post-graduate degree and is pursued by students for various reasons, some being self-betterment, pursuit of knowledge or an interest in increasing career advancement opportunities. Most students have an expectation that a higher education qualification will assist them in getting a better job. This is a reasonable expectation, particularly in the South African context, where highly educated individuals are increasingly being sought by the labour market. Hence the level of employability of one who has a Masters degree is greatly heightened.

4.3 University of the Witwatersrand – a brief background

As this tracer study consists of students solely from Wits, a brief background on the university is imperative in order to inform others about the reasons why students regard Wits as the university of choice to conduct their post-graduate studies. Wits is a world-class university, offering its students an education of the highest quality. For over 80 years, Wits has been internationally recognised for academic excellence and extensive research activities and has built up an enviable national and international reputation. It has a long tradition of academic excellence even prior to its inauguration as a university in 1922. It has programmes in place to serve the needs of the developing African continent and welcomes the interests of able students and academics from the international community. Wits has long been established in the industrial and commercial heart of South Africa as a centre for education and research of the highest quality. The mission of Wits is to maintain and enhance its

position as a leading university in South Africa, Africa and in the world, by sustaining globally competitive standards of excellence in learning, teaching and research. The Wits School of Education upholds the very same principles as a crucial and integral facet of the university.

4.4 Policy and course outline commentary

Usually students doing an M.Ed by coursework and research report have to complete three carefully selected courses, and research design and a research report. Due to specialisation, listed in Table 1 below, the following course combinations were offered in 1999.

Table 1: Course selection

Course Code	Course Name
ADED 509	Adult Education
ADED 542	Research and Evaluation in Adult Education
ADED 545	Management in Adult Education
EDUC 505	Society, State and Schooling
EDUC 508	Science Education
EDUC 514	Psychology and Pedagogy
EDUC 515	Development Psychology
EDUC 516	Curriculum Development
EDUC 517	Curriculum Evaluation and research
EDUC 520	Issues in History of Education
EDUC 521	Issues in Curriculum
EDUC 526	Education in Developing Countries
EDUC 527	Cultural Psychology in Education
EDUC 528	Primary Sources
EDUC 536	Aims and Conceptions of Education
EDUC 537	Education and Epistemology
EDUC 538	Education and the Social Order
EDUC 540	Mathematics Education
EDUC 545	Issues in Educational policy
EDUC 547	Studies in Pedagogy
EDUC 550	Issues in Educational Management
EDUC 551	Studies in History of Education
EDUC 552	Studies in Educational Policy
EDUC 553	Studies in Educational Management
EDUC 554	Managing Educational Change
EDUC 555	Role of Public History and Heritage in Education
EDUC 556	Heritage Education in Practice

(School of Education Guide, 1999)

Most of the courses that were offered in 1999 are still available today. However, some of them are not being offered, as it depends on the demand for the courses and minimum student numbers.

In order to provide some insight into the type of packages chosen by the Masters graduates of the year 1999, an account of the researcher's area of specialisation which is the education policy planning and management package was provided. The reason for this is to gauge whether the packages offered to the Masters graduates of 1999 actually met with their expectations or not.

4.4.1 Education Policy, Planning and Management

According to the Educational Policy, Planning and Management (PPM) "Package" Portfolio (Cross, 2005): The PPM M.Ed package, started in 1994 with two courses on educational policy and educational management. It was inspired by the policy initiatives of the early 1990's such as the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), the activities of the Centre of Education Policy Development (CEPD) and wider pressing needs for education policy development and policy analysts at both systemic and institutional levels. In 1995, following an internal programme review, an education policy, planning and management package was formally developed and offered in two streams:

Educational Policy, Planning and Management comprising:

EDUC 546 Education Administration, EDUC 545 Education Policy and EDUC 516 Curriculum Development

Education Policy Research comprising:

EDUC 546 Education Administration, EDUC 545 Education Policy and EDUC 502 Policy Research Seminar.

As schools changed to meet new education goals, there was a need to equip school and system leaders to improve their management and leadership roles. Consequently education departments were restructured. The School of Education undertook a major review of the package in 1996 and introduced the present PPM package which brought about much-needed change.

Managing educational change requires an understanding of change on several dimensions, including international, national, local, institutional and individual. This course provides a number of models of educational management to enable students to analyse their own management roles, which include school leadership and management, effective school management in a context of rapid educational change and reform, and decentralisation of power at school level. The policy focus aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to interrogate and evaluate educational policies, with specific reference to governance and policies around curriculum change (School of Education Guide, 2000, 2002). In 1999, the Faculty of Education led a major peer evaluation of PPM modules, which resulted in adjustments to ensure more coherence and developmental sequencing of competences and content (National Review of M.Ed programmes, 2005). All students were obliged to complete Research Design: EDUC 502 and Research Report: EDUC 503. Students had to then choose any three of the following courses:

a) Issues in Educational Management: EDUC 550
b) Issues in Educational Policy: EDUC 545
c) Managing Educational Change: EDUC 554

d) Education in Developing Countries: EDUC 526

e) Studies in Educational Policy: EDUC 552

f) Issues in Applied Education Economics and Planning: EDUC 557

Note that not all the courses are on offer every year as they are subject to demand and change, as well as depending on the availability of staff. Perceptions about the demanding nature of the M.Ed programme militate against recruitment of large numbers of students (National Review of M.Ed Programmes, 2005).

4.4.2 Compulsory Research Design and Research Report courses

Students are obliged to complete both EDUC 502 and EDUC 503 if they are to graduate with a Masters degree at Wits. The overall purpose of the Research Design course (EDUC 502) is to introduce basic vocabulary, concepts and the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for conducting quality educational research for policy. Students learn:

> The language of educational research
>
> Various methods for conducting research
>
> How to identify and state a research problem
>
> How to review literature
>
> How to plan a research study relevant to educational policy and practice
>
> How to formally report research findings.
>
> (Course Outline, 2005)

Once these skills are mastered, students then learn how to develop a research proposal, which will then form the basis for the preparation of the M.Ed Research Report: EDUC 503. Students are encouraged to address important and current educational issues. In preparing their research proposals, students should:

- Formulate research questions adequately
- Make use of empirical evidence in their argumentation
- Express ideas clearly
- Make effective use of library and on-line resources
- Present an argument clearly, logically and persuasively
- Use an appropriate structure and format in presentation
- Integrate theory and evidence effectively
- Engage critically with the literature
- Use conventional style and referencing rules effectively.

(Cross, 2005)

The Masters student has to comply with all the criteria stated. The student can then proceed to develop his/her M.Ed research report provided that the research proposal has been accepted. A research report is a small scale research project in the sphere of education. Its major goal is the production of a report of approximately 20 000 words (maximum) on a topic firmly located in the area of concentration of the course package (School of Education Guide, 2000).

4.5 Conclusion: Graduate expectations, experiences and challenges

4.5.1 Graduate expectations

The policies and course outlines that were offered for a Masters degree at Wits in 1999 were very detailed. The course outlines examined were from the Faculty of Education. The details of this faculty contain clear and concise aims and objectives. Hence students knew exactly what was required of them at Masters of Education level as is evident in the following guidelines set out by Wits.

An M.Ed opens up opportunities for career development, for professional renewal and for research in a range of related fields. The latter argument/statement also depends largely on the intrinsic drive of the Masters graduate and the level of motivation they possess, to aspire for greater ambition and to create or identify opportunities when others cannot. However, an individual may also study further purely for the purpose of personal enrichment and not for monetary gain. In today's economy, knowledge-based work is relentlessly replacing manual work. We are witness to the "dawn of perhaps the most dynamic workplace environment in history" (Germishuys, 2006: 28). This implies that 'knowledge is power'. It is important now more than ever to equip oneself with adequate qualifications because without career aspiration, it would possibly be quite difficult to persevere in the 21st century. This sentiment is shared by the M.Ed graduates.

4.5.2 Graduate experiences and challenges

It was not surprising to find that all graduates interviewed were very content with the manner in which their courses were executed by their lecturers. The majority of graduates said, "I would not change a thing about my M.Ed courses" irrespective of which package they had chosen. In fact, all interviewees expressed gratitude towards their lecturers for the high degree of professionalism and understanding, as well as the vast amount of time that they were prepared to spend with students. They were appreciative of the fact that their lecturers spent so much time to actually read, edit and offer suggestions to enhance their research reports. One respondent stated "I had brilliant lecturers for every component and felt that this was so motivating because my lecturers could comfortably talk about curriculum and any other 'off the wall' topics". By the end of the course, he came to the realisation that his

lecturers had completely shifted his thought processes. He said "my lecturers helped me to think out of the box".

These statements make a strong argument in the favour of Wits and its dedication in endeavouring to maintain high standards. Wits is constantly trying to update their courses, making them more relevant and beneficial to students so that they can cope at a highly competitive level in the labour market. According to Professor Munro, director of WitsPlus, "Wits needs to be engaged with its own broader community – we are committed to life-long learning, we are passionate about developing each interested person to the maximum of his or her potential, we are far more flexible and market-responsive than ever before." This statement gives the reader an idea of the level of commitment that the university has to offer its students.

One part of the courses that graduates found difficult to grapple with was the research design and research methods components. Some respondents felt that it could have been done a lot better. One new graduate stated that "when I started working as a researcher, I realised that the research course was so basic that it actually did not help me with 'real research work.' However, what I was taught in research design was enough to get me through my own research for course completion. I was grateful though, to have had such an amazing research supervisor as she helped me to produce a quality piece of work."

The expectations of the graduates interviewed were extremely high. It is not surprising that all graduates expected to achieve much with the acquisition of a Masters degree from Wits. However, two interviewees expressed that they were not actually interested in monetary gain or the associated status that accompanies a Masters degree. They felt that the reason for

pursuing post-graduate studies was the pursuit of knowledge. They felt that it would help them to gain a better understanding of their current jobs about which they were very passionate. By acquiring their Masters degree they would be in an advantageous position by being more proficient in their careers.

Some of the respondents felt that a higher salary at the end of the month was not the underlying reason for the pursuit of academic progression. Some regarded the pursuit of a post-graduate degree as a means to professional development that will enhance their personal efficiency in the workplace. Accordingly, some of the interviewees are currently employed in the same jobs they were in prior to pursuing their Masters degree and are content to be there. They concurred that the changes that did occur took place at a cognitive level. Other respondents felt that career progression was their underlying incentive for their hard work in pursuing a further qualification.

One respondent expressed the view that an individual may obtain any degree they wished to in order to add to their credentials, but it is entirely up to that individual to decide on exactly what it is that he/she hoped to do by fully utilising the earned degree. The said respondent firmly believed that greater effort is required to actually animate the goals envisioned.

The rest of the graduates were ambitious individuals who welcomed a new challenge. They were prepared to make the sacrifice to further their education as they viewed this as a means to boost their careers. Those graduates who were in the field of education cited dissatisfaction with their salaries. One graduate mentioned, “My salary is insufficient to sustain myself and my family.” One interviewee said, “I feel that I am living on a hand-to-mouth basis for far too long.” The feeling of a poor salary was far greater, especially when the interviewee was

the main breadwinner or the sole supporter of his or her family. It is apparent from the interviews that some graduates chose to complete a Masters degree in order to boost their careers, not because of a lack of commitment to their jobs, but purely because of lack of a viable salary. One graduate mentioned that "as a teacher, the only way to get a better salary is through a promotion. Even if you have very little interest in managing other people or in telling them what to do and what not to do, you will do it only because a promotion guarantees more money at the end of the month. The rewards of job satisfaction will come, but it will come later."

Table 2 depicts challenges faced by 1999 M.Ed graduates while studying.

Table 2: Challenges faced by M.Ed graduates

Challenges encountered by M.Ed graduates	Number affected
* Work suffered as a result of studies	7
* Felt they had neglected their family	7
* Felt like strangers in their homes	7
* Managed to maintain a fine balance	3
* Studies not accommodated at workplace	6
* Regarded as the opposition/competition at workplace	4

The significance of the challenges faced by the graduates highlights the struggle that they had to endure during the completion of their M.Ed degree, which is a big undertaking.

A predominant challenge faced by all the respondents was the ability to 'try to fit it all in'. The respondents battled to keep abreast with a hectic work schedule, family responsibilities as well as their post-graduate studies. 70% of the respondents felt that they had neglected their work as a result of the greater demands of studying part time. They also felt that they were not 100% committed to their work anymore because of increased pressure of post-graduate studies. 70% of the respondents felt that they had neglected their families and felt like strangers in their own homes. 30% of the respondents claimed they were on track with

their current jobs as well as with their studies and their domestic responsibilities. 60% of the respondents stated that their employers were not in any way supportive of their studies at work and even found it difficult to grant them study leave during the duration of their course work. One respondent mentioned that her superiors would ignore her for days after she returned from her examinations. This respondent had reached a stage of feeling extremely guilty when it came to asking for study leave.

Another respondent mentioned that she was refused permission to attend compulsory lectures for course work if it clashed with her work schedule. She was even told that Wits does not pay her salary at the end of the month – meaning that her having a job is more important than studying. The remaining 40% said that their employers were supportive of their choice to study further, while one respondent mentioned that he was just tolerated. One respondent mentioned that his principal remarked that the school as an organisation could only benefit from his studying and encouraged everybody to study further.

While most respondents felt they were not treated any differently by colleagues in the workplace because they were pursuing a Masters degree, 40% mentioned that they had noted a change in the way some of their colleagues reacted towards them. One respondent mentioned that a particular colleague with whom she was familiar, completely distanced herself from her when she found out about her studies. Another respondent mentioned that she was totally shocked when she was told by a certain individual in management that she should not apply for a promotion post at her place of work because she was studying further and would have an unfair advantage over their preferred candidate because she was an educated black and he was white. Unfortunately she did not apply for the post and did not launch an objection due to intimidation and fear of losing her job. She is still in this job and

has not advanced career-wise. She is grateful for the knowledge that she has acquired and argues that nobody can take that away from her. This emphasises a point that an M.Ed. graduate is seen as a person with a big advantage in the workplace, to the extent that the graduate may be regarded as a threat by peers. The latter is especially relevant in issues where upward mobility or career progression is concerned.

Another candidate who progressed to a middle management role mentioned that he was told on more than one occasion by upper management: "Please get out of your ivory tower; we know that you academics think that way, but here in the real world it is different." These types of comments started sounding warning bells for the candidate and he knew that he had to do something about his situation. The respondent felt that he had become a badge-wearer. The only way to remove this badge was to resign. The candidate set up an entire computer centre before he resigned from his post. The respondent did learn that he had to temper his approach if he wanted to get anywhere professionally because nobody likes to listen to a person who displays a high level of confidence.

In concluding this chapter it is necessary to be cognisant of the trials and tribulations experienced by the Wits M.Ed graduates of 1999. The researcher discovered during fieldwork that there was a high level of allegiance and a high degree of respect that the sample M.Ed graduates have for Wits and its lecturers. The graduates recall their enrolment at Wits as being an extremely challenging yet enriching and rewarding experience that was worth all the effort required in obtaining an M.Ed degree.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: EFFECTS OF THE M.ED DEGREE
Professional background of the M.Ed graduates

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reveal how the M.Ed graduates have fared in their careers. Tables guide the reader to an understanding of the research results. Also herein is the argument that intends to reveal how the acquisition of a Masters degree has changed graduates' perceptions on a cognitive and material level and what their future career plans are. This chapter will investigate the sample graduates' viewpoints and the manner in which an M.Ed degree has affected their lives. Some important themes emerged from the interviews with the respondents. These themes are displayed in a series of tables accompanied by explanations that illustrate the findings from respondents. The researcher has opted to present some of these findings in table format to enable the reader to understand more easily and readily what has transpired. The elaborations will add meaning and help to place issues in perspective.

5.2 Summary of sample graduates' responses

The graduates interviewed spontaneously declared that completing a Masters degree at Wits significantly changed the way in which they perceived and interacted with the world on a daily basis. Four interviewees stated that they handle work-related issues with a sure sense of ease, by being able to critically view these issues and examining them from multiple angles. One respondent was even referred to as 'The Guru' at his place of work. He felt that his M.Ed had better prepared him for his job by fine-tuning his reasoning abilities. However, one respondent mentioned that the only problem he/she experienced with studying at this level was that one tends to sometimes "…over-analyse day-to-day occurrences which can result in heightened levels of thought and sometimes frustration. This occurs especially if things are

not executed in the preferred efficient manner of getting the job done correctly." One interviewee maintained that "with wisdom, comes patience, tolerance and respect." This view is supported by Hosen, Solovey-Hosen and Stern (2003), who express that the durable and relatively fixed elements of an individual's psychological infrastructure, combined with learning, produces individual investment in psychological capital, which in turn contributes to the development and maintenance of social co-operation, the durable elements of which constitutes social capital.

Table 3: Career chart – previous/current occupations of sample M.Ed graduates

Graduate #	Previous Occupation	Current Occupation
1	Head of Department	CEO – Netday
2	Head of Department	Educator
3	Head of Department	Head of Department
4	Acting assistant Director	Chief Liaison Officer
5	Educator	Psychologist
6	District Manager	Director - Municipality
7	Deputy Principal	Principal
8	Educator	Lecturer – Wits
9	Deputy Director	Director – MGSL
10	Deputy Principal	Principal
11	Acting Principal	Deputy Principal

Approximately 70% of the Masters graduates are or were educators before being promoted. As evidenced in the results of the career chart (Table 3), some educators have progressed to become principals or Chief Executive Officers, to lecturers and to psychologists.

Graduate 1 became a Head of department at a prestigious school for boys while completing his Masters degree at Wits. Due to engaging in discourse at Wits, he learned how to analyse issues and decisions taken at school level. He mentioned that "while progressing through your dissertation, you realise that studying at such an advanced level changes the way you think and changes your approach to education, people and learning." He felt constrained and

frustrated in teaching, so he resigned after building a computer centre for the school and accepted a position at a research centre at a branch in South Africa. The research centre was part of the Canadian Crown Organisation. He mentioned that research at this level was totally different to that at Masters level. He found research to be quite constraining because one could not intervene at any level due to strict parameters. "All that I could do was to observe and report, nothing else!" When the research centre left South Africa, he decided not to stay on despite working with a dynamic team. He came into contact with a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) while working as a researcher. When they wanted to close it down, the graduate and some associates decided to take it over and manage it with business principles in order to survive. Today this non-profit NGO supplies and installs computer centres to the poorest of poor schools, offering sustainable models of computing. Contracts are awarded by tapping into corporate social responsibility programmes.

Graduate 2 was previously a head of department at a now defunct college of education. She became a teacher because of constraining factors such as lack of employment as a lecturer. She currently teaches at a school to which she is loyal. She has cited some racial constraints in terms of favouritism at work but feels they are slowly changing. She still enjoys teaching which she describes as a thrilling experience. She would have liked to have remained in her field of study but cited lack of funding as a problem because it is not easily filtered through to students as it depends on the nature of the study.

Graduate 3 was involved in the mining industry, the Army and the Catholic church before choosing to become an educator. He then worked as an acting-principal but has not applied for this post because he felt that "with knowledge acquisition, one realises that there is more

to life than the pursuit of money and power." He also felt that principals are subject to high stress levels and pressure, to which he chooses not to subject himself.

Graduate 4 has worked in the health services sector for close to two decades. She said: "I started at the very bottom and worked my way up to where I am today." She was fortunate to work as acting-assistant director and her current position is Chief Liaison Officer. She stated: "I am passionate about my career and I give it 100% every day."

Graduate 5 started off her career as an educator and progressed through a five-year stint in teaching. However, she discovered that she had a flair for child psychology. She started counselling children while completing her post-graduate qualifications. She currently works for a prestigious private school, as part of a larger team of four psychologists. However, she also runs a counselling and therapy practice from her home, which she shares with her husband who runs a part-time medical practice from home and works for a general hospital. The graduate remarked: "I really enjoy working as a psychologist and I feel that my lecturers at Wits fully prepared me for my career advancement."

Graduate 6 resides outside the Gauteng province and has been working in a district municipality. His previous job was as a district manager for sport, arts and culture in the municipality. He currently works as a director responsible for planning and development. He describes his career as "very demanding, yet exciting and challenging, as it also includes tourism, town and regional planning and economic development." He facilitates many workshops which corresponds with the teachings of his Honours degree where he majored in Adult Education.

Graduate 7 Is currently working at a special education school where she has been for more than 20 years. She said: "I am happy at this school as I have been working here since 1979, which translates to 27 years of continuous service." Her previous job was as an educator at a senior secondary school, where she taught for seven years until 1978. The graduate is currently the principal at this special education school. She manages the school in a very strict manner and feels that "Educators should not be sitting at all, when they are supposed to be teaching in their classes". She feels that the Masters degree with the Policy and Management package had adequately prepared her for her career as a principal, by helping her to think critically.

Graduate 8 was initially an educator for a few years. She is now a lecturer at a very prominent university. She stated: "I thoroughly enjoyed my Masters degree at Wits and feel that it has prepared me sufficiently for my position as a lecturer." She is furthering her studies.

Graduate 9 was initially an educator but has had the experience of a number of avenues in education. He then proceeded to work at the Department of Education. He left there because he was successful in being appointed to a prominent position of director at a leadership school that specialises in training educators in management and leadership.

Graduate 10 was a head of department before being promoted to principal. He is currently still a principal at a school in the township of Thokoza. He mentioned that "Being in a previously disadvantaged area that is not adequately resourced, leads to the school encountering many problems. There is no capital for the purchase of sporting equipment and

other equipment. Learner/teacher support materials are very scarce. Hence, educators do not have a wide variety of resources to work with."

Graduate 11 was initially an Educator before moving up the career ladder. Her previous position was as acting-principal at a government school. She left that acting position to take up a position as deputy-principal at an exclusive private non-subsidised school in the south of Johannesburg. She has been in her current position as deputy-principal for the past four years. She said: "I find my job far less stressful as compared to government schooling." At the private school, there is no school governing body. Instead, what they do have is a Board of Directors to whom they are accountable. She states that "The learners enrolled at this school are wonderful, serious about their schoolwork. The only real problems we encounter are from learners who were previously in government schools." The researcher noted that the deputy-principal prefers to have fewer learners from government schools as they are perceived to cause trouble, ranging from general misbehaviour to much more serious offences. In government schools learners can commit numerous offences before punitive measures are meted out. Table 4 illustrates the leanings of the sample graduates towards pursuing a Ph.D or contemplating a different field of study.

Table 4: The pursuit of a Ph.D or possible change in field of study

Graduate #	Yes	No	Maybe	Considering a change
1			*	Yes
2	*			
3	*			
4		*		
5			*	
6	*			Yes
7		*		
8	*			
9			*	
10		*		
11	*			

Graduate 1 stated that "Having a Masters degree carries a lot of weight and can open many doors in the labour market." However, he would like to pursue a doctorate through Wits University when he can free up time from his hectic schedule. The focus area of his Ph.D would be based on free and open sourced software, or the development of sustainable technology solutions for schools. He has been thinking about starting his doctorate for over a year because he enjoys academic study. He also believes that he has a contribution to make to his country (South Africa) by enrolling for a doctorate because he feels that a PHD could be an extremely useful tool.

Graduate 2 is also keen on pursuing a doctorate because she feels that it would enable her to work at a tertiary institution as a lecturer, in order to work with older minds. However, she mentioned: "I would not pursue a doctorate solely for the purpose of employability. I would do it in order to refine my skills and to improve my profile as I am also very keen on motivational speaking, where an academic background would help".

Graduate 3 would consider pursuing a doctorate in the same line of study as his Masters where he majored in the Philosophy of Education. Another reason would be because he would like to get into consulting as the demand is very high for outsourced consultants. He believes that "starting a consultancy would be a profitable venture."

Graduate 4 would not consider pursuing a doctorate because she feels "there are very few job opportunities for somebody with a doctorate in South Africa, as it would also mean that the person would have to be paid more". She also feels that current employment policies, like affirmative action, do not favour her.

Graduate 5 has thought about pursuing a doctorate in her field of study and has looked into it. However, she stated "A doctorate takes up an enormous amount of time and it would be difficult to keep up with my work requirements as well as maintain a home life." She feels it would be unfair to her husband and child if she had to pursue this now. She would seriously consider a doctorate in ten year's time, when her children are older and when she would have more time to concentrate on her studies.

Graduate 6 would consider pursuing a doctorate but he would like to pursue it in a different line of study.

Graduate 7 would not consider pursuing doctorate studies. She feels that she has accomplished one of her goals and that was to become a principal. She feels that luck is very important when applying for a job. One has to be at the right place at the right time to get a fantastic job, even without using one's qualifications. She also feels that at her age, she is too old to apply for other posts, although she has tried.

Graduate 8 is currently very committed to completing her doctorate in Adult Education at a prominent university. She feels "my Masters degree was like an initiation to actually whet my appetite to pursue a doctorate." She firmly believes in life-long learning.

Graduate 9 is actually a double-Masters graduate. He holds a Masters degree from Wits School of Education and thereafter completed a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at Wits Business School. He said: "I have been asked a number of times to pursue a doctorate

but I do not foresee myself completing a doctorate in the near future – but it could be a possibility."

Graduate 10 said: "I am heavily committed to my career as a principal and would find it difficult to commit to a doctorate study at this stage".

Graduate 11 is enrolled at a university to pursue her doctorate studies. She is currently trying to complete a proposal for her doctorate. She feels that a Masters degree is not enough due to competitive market forces. She said "with only my M.Ed, I personally feel that my choices are limited."

From the findings it is evident that two M.Ed graduates are currently engaged in their doctorate studies, one of which should have already graduated with her doctorate by this stage. Three other graduates have indicated that they would pursue a doctorate at some stage in time. Three other graduates may consider pursuing a doctorate, however, judging from some of their reactions and hectic work schedules, the chances of them pursuing a doctorate are minimal, though the possibility is there. Three other graduates clearly indicated that they would not consider doctorate study. One respondent indicated: "I am content with my qualification and I am fully aware of the high level of commitment that a doctoral study requires." He was also not prepared to resign from his current career path, which he had worked hard to attain. It is inspiring to know that so many Masters graduates from the year 1999 would still consider completing a doctorate.

From Table 5 below we see that five out of the 11 graduates stated that there is a link between a Masters degree and the enhancement of management skills because studying at

this level jump-starts one's mind to gain a wider perception and worldview. Five graduates could not see a link between their M.Ed and management skills because they were enrolled for other M.Ed packages that may have had no correlation with management issues. However, they did state they had acquired other skills that emerged during the process of completing their M.Ed degrees. Common skills identified by the graduates were the ability to work independently, wisdom, debating skills, improved management style, speaking with confidence, ability to deal with a diverse range of topics, critical engagement with resource material, refining of skills, professional interaction at higher levels, creativity, improved expertise in the field of study, keener perceptiveness and progressive thinking and expanded vision.

Table 5: Correlation between Masters degree/enhancement of management skills/other abilities

Graduate #	Yes, there is correlation	No correlation	Other abilities
1	*		*
2	*		
3	*		*
4		*	
5			*
6	*		*
7		*	*
8		*	*
9	*		*
10		*	
11		*	

Interest is raised in Table 6 below since it revolves around Masters graduates and the effect, if any, that current employment policies, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and Black Economic Empowerment have on their lives. The opinions mentioned with regard to this particular topic are not the viewpoint of the researcher. Neither was this done to stir conflict. The aim in this section is to gather data on how the graduates are coping with change and to examine their experiences in the labour market.

Table 6: The effects of employment policies on graduates

Graduate #	Yes	No
Graduate 1	*	
Graduate 2	*	
Graduate 3	*	
Graduate 4	*	
Graduate 5		*
Graduate 6	*	
Graduate 7		*
Graduate 8		*
Graduate 9		*
Graduate 10		*
Graduate 11	*	

One graduate mentioned "Being white and middle-aged, I do not see any opportunities, unless I create opportunities for myself." He credits his Wits education for empowering him. However, having an M.Ed will not make much difference in offsetting the political paradigm. He can no longer get a government job because of his race. When he consulted with employment agencies, he was told "before we waste time, we rather let you know that this job is for a person of colour." He could have reacted in many ways to this harsh reality but he chose to persevere. He said "my studies have enabled me to think in a way that has helped put me in a position to create, maintain and run an organisation that employs a range of previously disadvantaged people who would have otherwise not had a job." Within the first six months, his employees already have a set of basic computer skills that they can easily take to any organisation. He believes that current employment trends are temporary but essential in order to address the racial imbalances created by the past. He chooses not to see himself as a victim of anything and does what he needs to do in order to get on with life. He states: "Once you adopt a 'victim' mentality, you are finished before even starting. Even if you get a job, you will still see yourself as a victim."

One graduate experienced a racial incident in her work environment that occurred as a result of conflict between herself and another party of different ethnicity, the details of which the researcher cannot disclose. Being a more open-minded person, and in the interests of self-preservation in the workplace, she decided to opt out of this situation and backed down. She has not acquired a promotion since then. She stated that the previous government suppressed the majority, but she swam against the current until she got through. However, she felt that bureaucracy was not as flexible as anticipated.

Another graduate was not affected by the political paradigm because he stated that he always believes in being proactive, despite coming from an underprivileged background. He claimed: "I experienced more work-related problems from people of my own culture who felt threatened by my ability to interpret and interact with policy." This is one reason why he tries not to let his qualification as an M.Ed graduate feature in his interactions with people. He believes in equality for all people irrespective of their origins and credentials.

Another graduate feels that she has been affected by current employment policies, especially affirmative action. The latter policy is one of the reasons, amongst others, for her pursuit of a higher qualification. She had hoped that her years of experience and her qualifications would offset this perceived hurdle but it did not. She said: "Despite being a proactive and motivated person, I am now less ambitious and through experience I have learned to let go of some of my ideas and dreams." She stated: "My M.Ed qualifications were totally disregarded when I applied for posts at their head office". On more than one occasion she has witnessed positions that she has applied for, been given to "far less qualified and experienced people". People from admin have been placed at her level and higher. The one promotion that was unquestionably going to be hers was declared as redundant and unnecessary, so she is at her

highest level ever. However, she states: "Despite this situation, I still execute my duties and responsibilities to the best of my ability because I know how crucial my job is and I harbour no ill-feelings." She also feels that she is doing her tiny bit to promote reconciliation in a country that was once torn apart along racial lines.

Another graduate states that she has not been affected by employment policies or political paradigms at all because she works as an individual person who manages her own private practice. She works in her own "private little world". She now does a lot of work with the previously disadvantaged and considers herself lucky to be able to help so many far less fortunate. She claims that with knowledge, the changes one can make are exceptionally powerful.

One graduate mentioned: "With the implementation of new employment policies there are new windows of opportunities for non-white people, where previously there were none." He states: "My M.Ed degree from Wits really helped make a difference in my life as well because the labour markets were looking for qualified people of colour. In the past, I would have stood no chance of working at such a high level in a district municipality." He does not feel that he has accomplished so much as a result of his skin colour, he knows that his hard work, Wits qualification and perseverance has paid off. The proof is that he has already received another promotion and continues to give of his best.

Another graduate feels that there are lots of opportunities for younger graduates. She has no real opinion on current employment policies. Her opinion is "let the best person get the job". She says that whatever she does is done to the best of her abilities and as effectively as possible – there are no second measures. However, she was disturbed because she has applied

more than eighteen times for numerous district positions, but she has not been called for a single interview. All she receives is a letter acknowledging receipt of her application for the various positions. She feels that she has a lot to offer in terms of policy and planning and would have liked to get into that department.

Another graduate who fell under the previously advantaged category stated that she feels that she has not been sidelined at all or disadvantaged in any way whatsoever. In fact, she feels that she has been advantaged instead of disadvantaged. She stated: "As a result of the past, and being white, made the road much smoother because I had a very good primary and high school education without having to struggle for fees, as compared to the disadvantaged who did not have the resources and the access to opportunities that whites had." Hence, she has done a lot of work in the rural areas. She has tried to use her M.Ed degree advantageously to shape her career. She stated that current employment policies favour women in the work environment and is glad that women do not have to be sidelined anymore.

Another graduate who originated from abroad did not support the previous government's regime of Apartheid and developed quite a reputation for fighting for the rights of the previously disadvantaged. He feels that everybody has in some way been affected by employment policies. He stated: "Generally, the benefits have outweighed the negatives because more people are getting recognition for their expertise, whereas this did not occur in the past." He feels fortunate to have climbed the ladder to the upper echelons of management and governance and is grateful for acquiring his M.Ed

One graduate came from an under-privileged background and had to really struggle to reach the point in his career where he is today. He feels that current employment policies did not

help him reach his career peak, though he does credit his M.Ed and lots of hard work coupled with the determination to succeed.

Another graduate gives credit to her qualifications and experience in the field of policy and management. She had pursued her M.Ed in order to attain a leadership position, which she did. She feels that current employment policies have helped her to infiltrate a sector that was previously dominated by a minority. If employment policies had changed earlier, she would have achieved much more in her career.

From these findings it is evident that the results are roughly 50% either way in favour of or not totally in favour of current employment policy. None of the graduates interviewed expressed any heightened feelings of negativity with regards to employment policies. In fact, there seemed to be a clear understanding amongst the graduates of the urgency and need to revise employment policies of the previous government. All graduates have expressed that their M.Ed degree has played a major role in where they are currently.

Table 7 reflects the responses from the 11 sample graduates when asked whether it was felt there was a relationship between the prospect of relocating abroad and having an M.Ed degree.

Table 7: The relationship between having an M.Ed degree and relocating abroad

Graduate #	Yes, there is a relationship	No relationship	Moving abroad
1	*		
2	*		
3	*		
4	*		
5	*		
6	*		
7	*		
8	*		
9		*	
10		*	
11	*		

Graduate 1 mentioned that he had the opportunity of consulting with governments abroad and within Africa. He has worked with the British government, Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and even Kwazulu Natal. He has recently been to America to gather more information about open-sourced software and a lot of similar technology that is used and developed in the U.S. for sustainable development in schools. He claimed that visits to U.S. schools with extensive budgets showed that these schools choose to use free and open sourced software because of its user-friendly functionality, as opposed to the popular global monopolies. He gives a lot of credit to his Wits education which has empowered him to cope effectively in any environment.

Graduate 2 stated "Everything depends on the area of specialisation and/or research a Masters graduate chooses to pursue, and what he or she intends to do with it. Networking in the labour market and gaining experience is important." She also felt that implementation and capacity-building is a problem in South Africa, given that a shortage of skills is a problem here and that there is a need to exchange ideas and skills with other countries. If there were

opportunities to emigrate as an M.Ed graduate, she would have gone through those doors already.

Graduate 3 maintains that his M.Ed has enabled him to look at global issues in a critical and objective manner. He was proud to say that his M.Ed has opened doors for him as his research was co-supervised by lecturers outside South Africa.

Graduate 4 would have liked to been involved with her career at a greater global level but is hesitant because she is aware that there is tough and fierce opposition out in the labour markets of the world.

Graduate 5 finished her internship training in New York at the Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital in a lock-down facility. She worked with extremely dysfunctional children. She realised that her training at Wits was excellent because it helped her to cope with her extremely challenging job in New York. She credits her lecturers for the excellent courses offered.

Graduate 6 has been fortunate in that he has had the opportunity to visit other countries in order to see what works in their municipalities and to learn from them. He states that his current career in development planning also includes tourism, town and regional planning and economic development. Doing a lot of facilitation of workshops corresponds with his M.Ed degree from Wits. He feels that with his portfolio of training and expertise, he can easily cope anywhere in the world.

Graduate 7 believes that at her age there are more opportunities for younger graduates. However, with her M.Ed and her experience, she feels that she could cope any where in the world but chooses not to.

Graduate 8 has spent eight months in England but it was not work-related. She would consider going to Indonesia to work but is very dedicated to her current job. She is fortunate to have interacted with lecturers from other universities in the world via the electronic media.

Graduate 9, who originally came from another country close to two decades ago, has not thought at all about going to any country overseas, yet he has the academic qualifications to be successful in anywhere in the world. He states: "In my field of study there might not be much opportunity for an M.Ed graduate in another country as the said country would rather hire one of its own citizen graduates because they would be better at understanding issues that are unique to their local context." He feels that it would be even harder to get in as a foreigner.

Graduate 10 does not think that it would be advisable to go to another country because "each country has its own unique problems, even first world countries". He feels that his Masters in education has helped and trained him to cope best with issues within South Africa, although a lot of international literature was available to students. He feels that he has a lot to offer to his own country and remains proudly South African.

Graduate 11 stated: "My M.Ed enabled me to cope with changes easily and I was thus better equipped to lead staff through curriculum implementation and all the complications that came with change." She reached a stage where she felt that she had to resign from the Gauteng

Department of Education, which she did. After that, she went into the private schooling sector. She felt that her M.Ed would not help to open many new doors for her into the rest of the world. Her circumstances were such that she was not looking any further in the way of career paths – the circumstances of which the researcher cannot disclose.

From the research, it is evident that the graduates viewed having an M.Ed as a positive factor in creating an opportunity for moving abroad, due to demand for highly qualified people around the world. Five out of the 11 graduates have worked internationally in their current jobs. They view this type of interaction and communication as essential. The Internet has also helped bridge the great divide across all borders. The researcher found that 90% of the graduates chose to remain in South Africa because of a sense of patriotism and the difference they can make by adding value to both their career and their country.

Table 8: Extent of change/ impact a Masters degree has on a graduate

Graduate #	None	Multi-tasking	Analytical	Enhanced decision-making	Calm under pressure	Perfectionist	Critical thinking	Other
1		*	*	*	*	*	*	
2			*	*	*		*	
3			*	*	*		*	
4		*		*	*		*	
5			*	*	*		*	
6			*		*		*	
7		*				*	*	
8		*	*	*	*	*	*	
9		*	*	*	*	*	*	
10		*			*		*	
11		*	*		*	*	*	

From Table 8 above we see that all the graduates from the sample agree that the completion of their Masters degree in education at Wits has really had a positive impact on their lifestyles by equipping them with a variety of skills. One graduate mentioned that people actually listen when she speaks. She stated: “I speak with a more authoritative and assertive voice and hold

more credibility because of my M.Ed degree from Wits." She also felt that "previous education, work experience, role models and mentors also play a huge role in the employability factor of a graduate." Another graduate stated: "My M.Ed was brilliant preparation for the labour market and I view the M.Ed as a highly specialised, highly focussed degree that brought out my inner strengths and talent." One graduate believed that because her M.Ed training prepared her to cope in a place as tough as New York, she could survive almost anywhere in the world. Another graduate felt that experiences gained as an M.Ed graduate were limited and realised that in order to gather new perspectives and experiences she had to pursue her doctorate. One graduate uses her skills to empower younger professionals to further their studies and to aspire for promotions. Some of her protégés have gone on to work as deputy-principals, lecturers and heads of departments. One graduate mentioned that an M.Ed in one's background does not change one's life. The way that one internalises knowledge and experiences is life-changing.

Another graduate felt that despite having a Masters degree there was tough opposition out there in the world, but if she could, she would not mind doing it all over again, but with a bigger group of students for more input and opinions. One graduate mentioned that one's self-esteem in relation to one's qualifications is important. In other words, "believe in yourself and in the way you present yourself, if you want to be successful in a highly competitive market." Yet another graduate stated that "I think I came out of my shell because of the way the courses are structured. I was compelled to become interactive and highly open-minded during discourse in my M.Ed classes." The latter in turn helped him to gain confidence, develop his critical thinking, management skills and a global view on issues.

Another graduate stated: “My interaction with Wits changed my thinking to such an extent that it brought me into open conflict with figures of authority at my previous workplace. I am grateful to Wits because Wits taught me how to operate out of the box.” He experienced a paradigm shift in his way of approaching issues in life. He experienced so many enlightening moments during his Masters studies at Wits which he will always treasure. This graduate also mentioned that some people are very impressed and overreact to a Masters degree, which is just a few letters after your name, but at other times, one needs to have the M.Ed credentials after your name because it creates a certain impression, especially when interacting with corporate bodies. People need to know that a Masters graduate knows what he is talking about. However, some people see his business card as a form of arrogance or of being boastful. Fortunately, this initial negative image (if any), vanishes after people have interacted with him.

5.3 Conclusion: Recommendations and suggestions from the interviewees

Education is dynamic and ever-changing. Due to constant fluctuations in the labour market, realignment of courses offered at Masters level in education would also mean that courses are relevant and up to date. This would make the Masters programme offered at Wits a more dynamic and sought after programme that would appeal to a wider range of people. However, the latter argument makes it difficult to ascertain the actual validity of courses offered at Wits, which is not the focus of this study. Ongoing work with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) ensures that Wits maintains high standards that are comparable to any other university in the world.

Contrary to the aforementioned statement, 70% of the graduates felt that completing a Masters degree helps one to acquire the skill of applying and flexing one's intelligence to

transcend the boundaries of the ordinary and the predictable. A Masters degree enables an individual to cope with the extreme pressure that only a post-graduate degree from a leading university such as Wits can provide. The latter can only occur once the cognitive tools are acquired, through the attendance of seminars and lectures, where students interact with others and engage in debate by using the prescribed relevant literature.

In other words, universities should help to train and structure one's mind how to think clearly and coherently under pressure. The graduate can thereafter enter the labour market where he/she can use that acquired knowledge to apply it to his/her work environment in order to gain confidence and thereafter the necessary job skills pertaining to the chosen career path.

An area in the M.Ed course that would require attention is research design and research methodology as graduates did experience some difficulty in this area. One graduate stated that the research course was so basic that it did not help much. What did help the graduates was having excellent supervisors who helped them produce quality work.

Another issue that should be addressed is to teach aspiring Masters graduates enrolled at Wits, how to cope with the workload. 80% of the graduates interviewed indicated that a point is reached when it becomes increasingly difficult to try and fit everything into their lives, both on a professional and personal level. There are high expectations from both work and university and students experience difficulty in trying to strike an even balance between the two. There is ever-increasing pressure from National Quality Assurance (NQA) on universities to assess the effectiveness and efficacy of courses offered. A reassessment of the curriculum across the different packages offered at Masters level should occur in order to restructure courses and to offer alignment with the labour market. The latter has to be

executed within guided parameters as it is impossible to structure courses to suit specific careers as skills can be learnt while on the job.

6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research report was to ascertain the relationship between career trajectories and the acquisition of an M.Ed degree. An extensive literature review was conducted as a basis to answer the research question. The researcher made use of the qualitative research method to determine the link between the literature and the interviews conducted. This chapter provides a summary of the findings of the research report. Recommendations for further research in the field of post-graduate education and career trajectories are given.

6.2 Summary of findings

The professional labour force is inundated with a plethora of nuanced descriptions and perceptions of what currently constitutes ‘best practice’ in ‘popular market trends’ regarding employment. Constant fluctuation in a competitive labour market has encouraged individuals to upgrade their skills on both a practical and academic level. This in turn ensures that life-long learning is in fact life-long and empowering.

The aim of this tracer study was to track down as many of the Masters graduates of the year 1999 as possible. This was a challenging task as the only available graduate information from Wits was postal addresses. 12 responses were received from graduates who were genuinely interested in participating in the study. One graduate’s family later contacted the researcher to advise that the graduate had sadly passed away. The limited response could be attributed to people having changed addresses or perhaps having emigrated from South Africa.

Of the graduates who responded, none could be regarded as not having taken the initiative to strive for upward mobility in their career paths. Some were more fortunate than others, contributing factors being to an extent background, contextual factors, opportunities, social networking and career aspirations. Having a Masters degree does result in a salary boost for those who are willing to make sacrifices and accept that the onus is on themselves to make things happen. Having an M.Ed may result in better management skills, provided that the graduate had enrolled for the M.Ed package that catered for management and policy issues. At least two graduates who enrolled in other M.Ed course packages claim that they have still learnt how to be more efficient and effective managers. Other graduates openly said that they had fully grasped the literature covered in the M.Ed coursework packages for which they were registered. A balance between intrinsic and extrinsic values can be attained because Wits encourages its students to give of their best by creating courses that are challenging and at the same time stimulating. It proved very difficult to acquire any negative feedback about Wits university. However, even at M.Ed level, the colour of your skin does have a noticeable effect on the career trajectories of the graduates. People are supposed to be treated as professionals who have acquired certain skills and qualifications that make them highly sought after in the labour market, irrespective of one's background. The manner in which a graduate interacts and networks with others, as well as the image he or she portrays, is very important and can also increase one's level of employability. These are the salient points the research report highlights:

a) Cognisance of the demands of the labour market need to be taken seriously and clearly need to be considered by the university so that post-graduate degrees have greater application.

b) An M.Ed degree changes the way individuals assimilate, engage and apply information and provides opportunities to interact on a more intellectual level in both their personal and professional lives.

c) Race, colour and creed have been a determining factor that has affected career trajectories of some graduates.

d) The status of having an M.Ed. degree certainly has its advantages in terms of employability in the labour market and enables an individual to think "out of the box". A disadvantage is that some people feel inadequate and insecure when interacting with a Masters graduate in the workplace.

6.3 Conclusion

The question the research posed was whether having an M.Ed degree has had any bearing upon the career trajectories of M.Ed. graduates. This question has been answered in terms of what the literature has provided and what the interviewees have stated. The research confirms that career progression is possible when one obtains an M.Ed degree. Also shown by the research is that post-graduate studies increase employability in the labour market.

According to the Business Times, Careers (2006: 1) qualifications and technical skills alone are no longer enough to secure employment as the economy moves from a manufacturing to a services base. In other words, how well a job candidate fits into the corporate culture of an organisation, may count more than skills, says recruitment firm Adcorp Talent Resourcing CEO Hilton Brown, and Wikus van Vuuren, director of quality and compliance at the Graduate Institute of Management and Technology (ibid). They also state that organisations sought to attract and retain the 'right talent' by moving away from traditional recruitment approaches where the focus was purely on skills and knowledge. This may be true to an

extent, but the highly qualified graduate with minimal skills will still be considered a better option than an individual who merely suits a company's corporate image and culture. In reality though, what may be perceived as the 'right talent' may simply come down to who is the right colour. Any organisation that places a high value on quality will always seek to recruit adequately and highly qualified graduates because it is much easier for them to train themselves to adapt to an organisation's corporate culture. There should never be a decline in the traditional value associated with an individual's academic credentials.

An intellectual is regarded as a major commodity in most organisations. Retaining their best human capital ensures the future survival of an organisation. However, one point of this study is to highlight the importance of developing human capital, the establishment of networks via the medium of social capital, in order to promote career development, which in turn helps one to gain momentum in the labour market. The latter proposals can only be realised by sheer drive and determination.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

Issues that may arise from this study for future researchers to explore:

- A larger, more in-depth study of graduates would be informative at doctoral level.
- South Africa experiences continually, as the economic climate changes, a "brain drain" and hardly any "brain gain". This highlights areas in the labour market that require investigation and research. Is it because of lack of graduate employment opportunities? Further studies in this regard are required.
- What are, if any, links between salary and gaining further post-graduate qualifications in South Africa? Are professionally qualified persons earning according to their qualifications?

- The role and impact of unions and how they have influenced the labour market.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Name, address and occupation.

_____

_____

_____

2. Age/sex/ethnicity/race.

_____

_____

_____

3. At what company are you employed? Since? Designation?

_____

_____

4. What were your aims for pursuing a Masters degree?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Have your aims or goals changed after acquiring your M.Ed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. What were the enabling/positive factors you experienced during the course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What were the impeding or negative factors you experienced during course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. What challenges did you encounter as a post-graduate student?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Are there opportunities awaiting an M.Ed graduate?

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Did Contextual factors affect your choices?
(Were these academically-related or geared for the labour market?)

_____

_____

_____

11. Were your lecturer's objectives always clear?

_____

12. Was the M.Ed effective in preparing you for the labour market?

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. 13. M.Ed versus the Global Labour Market: In what way have you been empowered by your M.Ed skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Has the political paradigm affected you in any way?
(AA , Previously disadvantaged, etc). Did the qualification make any difference in offsetting these?

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. As a graduate, are you still engaging in your field of study?

_____

_____

_____

16. Could you describe your current occupation? Draw comparisons with previous occupations if a change has occurred/consider improvements in this regard.

17. Do people treat you differently because of your M.Ed qualifications? Elaborate.

18. What was your occupation before this?

19. Does an MEd = management readiness?

20. Does an M.Ed affect or change the way you now think?

21. Do you think a realignment of the M.Ed programme is necessary? Suggestions? Strategy for change?

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22. Is there pressure from the public/private sector on universities?

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23. What do you see in the future for the M.Ed graduate:

a) personally:

_____

_____

_____

b) generally:

_____

_____

_____

24. Have you/would you consider pursuing your doctorate? (Consider pursuing same line of study or effect change in direction?)

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25. Comment on the Internationalisation boom. Has your M.Ed opened new doors for you?

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Thank you for your time and assistance in completing this questionnaire.