LEARNING ORGANISATIONS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH EARLY
CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT NON-GOVERNMENT
ORGANISATIONS (NGO) IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE
ARE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

DIANA SCOT HORNBY

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Supervisor: Mrs. S M Maistry
DECLARATION

I, Diana Scot Hornby, hereby declare that unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this thesis is the result of my own work. Furthermore, I declare that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted to this or any other university in fulfilment or partial fulfilment of the requirements for another degree.

_______________________                     _____________________
Diana Scot Hornby                                                Date
Student number 200422235

Signed at East London
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‘We do not need a new landscape, but new eyes to see it with’ (Marcel Proust).

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‘It is the theory which decides what we can observe’ (attributed to Albert Einstein)

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“The world everyone sees is not the world but a world, which we bring forth with others”

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ABSTRACT

The first decade of democracy marks a massive transition in the life of South African children. The South African Constitution is perhaps the most assertive affirmation of the rights of children any where in the world. The new Government has highlighted the plight of young children by publishing the first white paper for children under the age of 6 years: *Education White Paper (5) on Early Childhood Development* (RSA, 2001) as well as other policies to guide an integrated developmental approach to early childhood services. Despite progress, according to Porteus (in Chisholm 2004), the gains have not been strong enough to work against the momentum of inequity facing the nation’s young.

Non Government Organisations have played a key role over the past thirty years to establish services that address the developmental needs of disadvantaged young children under the age of 6 years. Their challenge now, is to respond to the changes in a transforming state and provide services that are relevant and appropriate. There has been a ‘realignment’ occurring in the ECD sector where activities have shifted beyond the formal classroom possibilities to pro-child social development. This adjustment is making huge demands on the ECD sector as they grapple with the paradigm shift.

The Learning Organisation is a strategy that allows organisations to re-invent themselves and remain relevant. The focus of this study examines five ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province, to assess the extent to which they meet the characteristics that make a learning organisation, in the current democratic context of South Africa.

The research was qualitative in nature and utilizing the case study method and through semi-structured interview schedules and document analysis, the
researcher was able to gain insight into the Organisations. The Directors in five organisations formed the core of the research sample.

The research findings suggest that although the Directors are grappling with the paradigm shift to an integrated, pro-child social development approach, the human resources within organisations are not being fully mobilised, enhanced and tapped. Practicing a Learning Organisation strategy would assist the ECD NGO’s to re-invent themselves, but the research findings suggest that these characteristics remain under-utilized.