CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the longer lasting effects of the inequalities of the apartheid government has been the unequal provision, distribution and quality of early childhood development (ECD) provision in South Africa (Porteus in Chisholm, 2004:346/7). Early childhood development facilities which have existed for many years in South Africa focused around a pre-school service which had been fee based and exclusively for white children (Porteus in Chisholm, 2004: 346). According to Porteus, the minimal state subsidized services targeted poor white children and that the National Education Policy Act of 1967 expanded provision for services to white children (2004). Padayachee in (Chisholm, 2004:346) states that as services were extended for white children in the 1970’s and 1980’s, the Department of Education and Training (DET) was forced to discontinue subsidizing pre-primary centres of education for black children, relegating the responsibility of provision to parents, communities, foreign and NGO funding and the Private sector. Porteus affirms this statement as she writes that in the context of the state neglect of ECD provisioning in black areas, the NGO sector emerged as the dominant provider.

With the increased need for early childhood services for black children, NGO’s adopted and replicated the European pre-school model that was serving middle and upper class white children. With no support from Government, NGO’s secured funds from mostly international agencies to provide these services in partnership with local communities. NGO’s not only increased access to early childhood development for disadvantaged children but also lobbied Government for support of this sector.

With a legitimate democratic Government taking over in 1994, NGO’s and communities working with young children were filled with hope and expectations of how promising
new policies would serve the neglected early childhood development sector. The South African Constitution (1996) provided in Section 29 of the Bill of Rights amongst others that everyone has the right to 'basic education' (South African Constitution, 1996). The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) prioritized the provision of social development services to children under 5 years, but especially to children younger than 3 years. It committed Government to subsidizing a range of programme options to help meet the varied ECD needs of families. A significant number of policies, laws and programmes demonstrate the Government’s commitment to making policies and allocating available resources to the development of children.

An Interim Policy for ECD was put in place in 1996 and thereafter Government commissioned research in the form of an audit of early childhood services in the country and paid for a national pilot programme where early childhood development models were considered. The results of this was that two models emerged, the first one a school based model and a second model which was a community based model with an emphasis on development of safety nets for children and parents (Department of Education Nationwide Audit for ECD, 2001).

The findings of the nationwide Audit of ECD Provision in South Africa estimated that in 2001, approximately 1 million of the 6 million children in South Africa in the 0-6 year age bracket were enrolled in some form of early childhood care. 49% of the sites were community based, with 34% being home based and only 17% being school based. The larger part of ECD education services were for children between 3 to 5 years of age. It was established that ECD NGO’s played a key role in the development of these ECD services and the training of ECD Practitioners (ECD White Paper, 2001).

Following the audit, the first Policy White Paper for ECD was launched in 2001. NGO’s working in the ECD sector expected that Government would select a community based model which would be consistent with their move towards developmental and integrated policies. However, Government decided on an institutional model and a national system of provision for the reception year children (5 years old) is being established in a school
based setting as Grade R. The policy White Paper then prescribed a more developmental and integrated approach for children between 0 to 4 years, suggesting inter-sectoral programmes as and when funding allows (White Paper for ECD, 2001:3).

The selection of the schooling option for Grade R (5 years old) presents an anomaly. Given that most of the existing sites were community based and that the South African Government is aspiring to become a developmental state, this narrow educational, institutional model does not pay attention to an integrated approach that includes the participation of families and communities in early childhood development. A developmental state requires ECD NGO’s to provide services in a developmental manner. Herein lies the tension for NGO’s who continue to play a key role in services for the 5 year old child in accordance with an institutional model, but at the same time are challenged to be developmental and deliver their services in an integrated manner. The challenge is for NGO’s is to develop innovative models for early childhood development which work within Governments policy and also meet the holistic needs of the young child located within a specific community context.

The study proposes that the changes in ECD policy and the accompanying challenges can be addressed by ECD NGOs by being open to learning and integrating early childhood services into community development, rather than providing ECD service in isolation of the community. The learning organisation is a strategy that allows organizations to re-invent themselves and remain relevant. Becoming a learning organisation is a key to NGO’s finding creative, relevant and affordable ways of addressing the intractable challenges faced by young children on their development path within a national developmental paradigm. In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge repeatedly states that becoming a learning organisation is critical to remaining relevant (Senge, 1990). The researcher believes that it is not only critical to remaining relevant but also to providing ECD services that are developmental in nature. The social development or developmental approach adopted by the democratic government in South Africa post 1994, promotes integrated developmental services to achieve social welfare objectives for all target groups and especially previously disadvantaged children.
(Midgley, 1995; White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997). The study proposes that in a state under transformation such as South Africa, which is driven by relatively new developmental policies, providers of appropriate services to young children need to work in systemic, integrated ways in order to remain relevant.

This study examines ECD organizations to assess the extent to which they meet the characteristics that make a learning organisation in the current democratic context of South Africa.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The past decade in South Africa has marked a time of rampant change and radical paradigm shifts and the NGO development sector has undergone substantive institutional change. According to Atmore (2005) of the Centre for ECD in Cape Town, 40 of the 120 non-government organizations serving children in the early childhood sector have closed down in the past two years.

Taylor (1998:1) writes that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was taken up by a very wide range of progressive organisations who engaged in greatly different core activities but found common ground in their commitment to challenging and ultimately overthrowing an illegitimate government. He further states that within this movement was a large group of organisations who not only provided services to the community but who also worked to remove an oppressive and racist regime. For these organisations, political struggle and their struggle for improved quality of life and access to resources became one. These organisations collectively form what is referred to today as the ‘development sector’. Taylor points out that this sector not only contributed to mobilising and organising people in the struggle for political liberation, but that against enormous odds, it developed vast experiences and expertise in delivering high quality services to those who needed them most.
However, Taylor (1998) concludes that the NGO sector is battling to move on and make the transition from struggle politics to developmental organisations and that there is enormous temptation to cling to the old ways. He outlines challenges faced by organisations in this period of transformation. One critical challenge relates to identity issues, purpose and relationship to the state which requires a paradigm shift from protest to development, from destructive methods to topple a regime to creative and constructive methods to reconstruct communities.

An interesting point made by Taylor is that the presence of the ‘apartheid enemy’ provided clarity of focus and purpose for organisations in the past and that strong leaders are needed now to realign themselves with a new purpose and create the same clarity and passion around the new struggle faced by NGO’s. It is common knowledge that many of the strong leaders that led NGO’s in the past were lost to the public and private sector (Taylor, 1998). He points out that if NGO’s are going to remain viable and effective they need to be sure of their new identity and purpose and the approach they will use to achieve their goal. This statement is particularly relevant to ECD NGO’s who need to be critical of their own practice and move from delivering early childhood services using a narrow institutional education approach to a more holistic, integrated approach giving consideration to all aspects of the child’s development simultaneously.

An examination of ECD through the apartheid lens could provide a degree of understanding of problems and continued challenges for this sector. In South Africa, the education of a young child has been dealt with separately and little consideration has been given to other aspects of the child’s development, for example, health and welfare. All aspects of the child’s development must be accelerated simultaneously if they are to reach his/her full potential. According to Porteus (in Chisholm, 2004) early childhood education focused on education as separate from the child’s community during apartheid. Personnel who were known as pre-school teachers were trained in child development, specifically for pre-school education. The segregated approach that was undertaken by other levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) and the institution of
education was adopted by the pre-schools. The family and respective community of the child were excluded from the “education” process. The intent, wittingly or unwittingly was the creation of a product separate from his/her environment.

This scenario, however, fitted well with the rest of apartheid policies and plans. The various pillars of apartheid and the creation of ‘Bantustans’ or ‘homelands’ served to maintain and perpetuate the separation of institutions from each other; the separation of whole communities and groups of people from each other and the separation of family members from each other (Hornby, 2006:4). Training which was mainly provided by the NGO sector for black ECD practitioners implemented policies through an apartheid, euro-centric lens and the concepts, knowledge and practice were understood and implemented in this narrow way.

Furthermore, parents and families had little part or were excluded from a service which resulted in parents being disempowered, relinquishing the role of primary educator or ‘first teacher’ of their child. It can be said that this approach not only deepened the poor education levels of the parents and caregivers but in fact a wonderful opportunity to expose the whole family to education was lost. School based models are therefore not suitable for replication in communities where there is under development, low literacy levels and poverty.

The problems faced by the ECD sector today may be seen as a consequence of past policies and inappropriate European models that were adopted to deliver an early childhood development service. For ECD NGO’s to play their role and contribute to a developmental framework or paradigm there is a critical need for them to change their approach to early childhood development. The context of the child needs to be understood and consideration of poverty and related issues that surrounds the previously disadvantaged child coming into an ECD Centre is vital. The community provides the context in which the young child develops, and therefore early childhood development, community development and issues of disadvantage and poverty are not
only closely related but inseparable. What this highlights is that the context is a critical component of the holistic approach to development.

The challenge then is a radical rethink of how organizations working in the development sector deliver ECD services. The problem is that there are few if any tried and tested South African models for successful ECD delivery in poor communities that can be used for replication. The study proposes that ECD NGO’s are well positioned to fill this need by being reflective, focused and innovative as they shape and document new models emerging that better serve young children, their families and communities. Further, it requires ECD NGO’s to be learning organizations so that they could contribute meaningfully to the developmental approach needed in addressing child welfare and well being.

A significant number of new policies, laws and programmes have demonstrated Governments commitment to children, however, the challenge for Government and NGO’s is to convert these policies into an integrated, developmental and targeted plan of action (White Paper for ECD: 2001). NGO’s working within a transforming state should become developmental by being open to learning and stay abreast of change hence remaining relevant. This is their challenge. If ECD NGO’s are to stay relevant and be effective then creating opportunities for constructing knowledge and building a body of knowledge to enhance practice and service delivery must be of paramount importance. Peter Senge (1990:3) writes that from a very early age we are taught to break apart problems to make the task more manageable and that by doing this we lose the intrinsic sense of connection to a large whole. Gilly (1997:3) agrees that our view of learning must change from being compartmentalized and linear to integrated and systemic. This mind shift will propel us from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to being connected to the world and also to understand that our actions have created our own problems.

Providing opportunities for reflection, encouraging dialogue and creating spaces for debate are all necessary practices for organisational development. Korten (1990:115-
124) believes that NGO’s must go through an evolutionary process in order to reinvent themselves and this major challenge can only happen through learning. NGOs need to be conscious of the nature of their learning and construction of knowledge. The research therefore asked the question: to what extent are ECD NGOs learning organisation in the democratic and transformative context of South Africa?

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overall aim of this research is to examine ECD NGOs and to assess whether they have been able to make the necessary paradigm shift driven by a democratic Government promoting developmental policies and proposing an integrated community development strategy to rectify the imbalances of the past. In order for organisations to transform and address the challenges of young children in post apartheid South Africa meaningfully, they need to become what is termed a “Learning Organisation”. Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

- To explore the nature of a learning organisation in the current context of democracy and transformation in South Africa.
- To explore the extent to which the ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province are learning organisations
- To explore the extent to which individual and organisational experience in the ECD NGOs have been used to guide present and future practice

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the exploratory, descriptive and developmental design and qualitative methodology. According to Babbie and Mouton (2000), an exploratory approach is appropriate when a researcher examines a new interest, or when the subject of the study itself is relatively new. The idea of the learning organisation has been around for a while but has become particularly relevant for South Africa because of its history and that it is a state in transition. According to Maxwell, one important issue when designing a qualitative study is how much to pre-structure the methods
which can lead to a lack of flexibility to respond to emerging insights (Maxwell, 1996). Being qualitative in nature added richness to the study and provided the necessary detail to determine to what extent the ECD NGOs are learning organisations. The case study method was used to obtain in-depth knowledge of the selected sample of ECD NGOs. Bassey (1999:26) describes a case study as a ‘generic term for the investigation of an individual group or phenomenon’ and this method was considered appropriate for the study.

4.1 Research Sample
The researcher used purposive sampling which according to Maxwell (1996) has the following objectives: firstly, it helps in achieving representativeness or typicality of individuals; secondly, it helps in ensuring that conclusions sufficiently represent the range of variation instead of only the typical members, and thirdly, it helps to establish comparisons to show or highlight the reasons for differences between settings and individuals. The research participants were selected on the basis of having a significant relation to the research topic (Royse, 2004: 199). The sample comprised 5 Directors who headed ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province and were from the centres of Queenstown, East London, Port Elizabeth, Zwelitsha and Grahamstown. Permission was obtained from all the above organisations to interview them for this study.

4.2 Data Collection
Empirical data was collected from the 5 directors as the primary source by using interviews as the methods for obtaining information. With the permission of the respondents, a tape recorder was used which allowed flexibility and discussion and meant that the researcher was able to ask additional questions where necessary as well as probe further into interesting responses. Relevant documents obtained from the organisations were used as a secondary source of data.

According to Maxwell, one important issue when designing a qualitative study is how much to pre-structure your methods which can lead to a lack of flexibility to respond to
emerging insights. The researcher was aware of this limiting factor and therefore used the questions as a guide line and only probing when necessary (Maxwell, 1996).

The researcher had worked closely with the individuals who comprised the sample of the study for a number of years and the good working relationship was helpful in the interviews as it created a conducive and safe environment in which the Directors felt comfortable to give honest and open answers. The individual interviews allowed the researcher to collect the necessary information from the Organisation Directors as well as allowing for full confidentiality. Good feedback was received from two Directors who felt the questions had forced them to think innovatively and to introduce some new ideas around strategies to learn.

4.3 Data Analysis
Patton’s (1990) method of content analysis was used. The researcher gave consideration to the characteristics of the learning organization as described by Senge (1990) and they were used as themes to guide the interviews. These themes provided for a rich, detailed and deep analysis of the data as questions were focused and clear. The researcher did not allow predetermined themes to limit the study and once the data was collected, further common themes and patterns emerged and were analyzed.

5. VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

It can be argued that methodologies employed by ECD NGO’s in pre-1994, have not changed much, yet the context has changed significantly. In a new democratic state change is an accepted norm. It therefore becomes incumbent upon ECD NGOs to understand, guide and manage transformation by becoming adept at learning. The new democratic Government has re-written the countries policies to reflect a developmental approach to service delivery and thus NGO’s need to reflect this in their practice.
Making this shift has been challenging and it is only through the mastery of the disciplines (characteristics) of the learning organisation that organisations will be able to reinvent themselves, hence remaining relevant.

The findings of this study will be presented to the Provincial Network of Early Childhood Training Agencies (NECTA). Workshops on the findings will be offered to individual organisations to disseminate amongst their membership and to assist them in making changes toward becoming a learning organisation. This study will highlight the need for NGO’s to adopt learning organisation strategies that will enhance organisational practice and performance, thereby remaining relevant in a developmental framework.

6. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

In carrying out the research, the one area of limitation related to the research was to focus only on early childhood organisations and not a diverse group of non-government organisations which may be considered limiting.

7. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This research has been organised into 5 chapters. This chapter is followed by chapter 2, where literature relating to early childhood development, community development, non-government organisations, and learning organisations is reviewed. Chapter 3 follows which describes the research design and methodology of the study. The presentation of data that was collected for the research and data analysis follows in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 deals with the conclusion and recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Working for an organisation that is intent on creating knowledge is a wonderful motivator, not because the organisation will be more profitable, but because our lives will feel more worthwhile” (Wheatley in Capra, 2002:101).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a state under transformation driven by relatively new developmental policies and in order to remain relevant, providing the most appropriate services to young children. Service providers need to work in systemic, integrated ways giving consideration to the context in which development is taking place. Rather than providing ECD service in isolation of the community, ECD NGO’s are presently being challenged to being open to learning and integrating early childhood services into community development. The Learning Organisation is a strategy that allows organisations to re-invent themselves and remain relevant. This study examines ECD organisations and assesses to what extent they meet the characteristics that make a learning organisation in the current democratic context of South Africa. Senge’s five disciplines which are: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; shared vision and team learning are the key themes that the study utilizes to characterise a learning organisation (Senge, 1999:14). The researcher has added transformational leadership as another theme as it is considered a critical part of learning organisations in the current South African democratic context.

This chapter presents literature reviewed that is pertinent to the research topic beginning with a conceptual framework that provides clarity and a frame of reference for the research. Many individuals and organisations working in the development sector differ in their meanings and interpretation of social concepts, hence the importance of providing clarity. In the past, the meaning of concepts was viewed through the apartheid lens. What is currently needed is a conceptual framework that fits in with the democratic worldview in South Africa. To this end, the researcher gave critical consideration to
particular key concepts namely Early Childhood Development (ECD), Non-Government Organisations (NGO), Social Development and Community Development.

Literature on Early Childhood Development has been reviewed to provide the background of the organisations and the context in which they work. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), community development is the most appropriate way of translating the social development policy into practice. Literature on social and community development have been reviewed as they are critical to the integrated and developmental approach to early childhood development service delivery in South Africa. A detailed review of learning organisations concludes this chapter.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Early Childhood Development

Consistent with the White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995) and the White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (2001), early childhood development (ECD) is defined “as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially” (2001:9). Furthermore, it is conveyed in the ECD White paper (2001) that the approach to ECD should be integrated child development and therefore signifies an appreciation of the importance of considering a child’s health, nutrition, education, psycho-social and additional environmental factors within the context of the family and the community. It is consistent with an understanding of the developmental process of children.

The current pattern of formal ECD provisioning began to be established as far back as the 1930’s and carefully reflected segregationist and apartheid policy intent (Padayachee, Atmore, Biersteker and Evans, 1994: 8-9). By 1994, the Department of Welfare provided per capita subsidies to day-care centres and provincial education departments provided subsidies to nursery schools. According to Porteus, the divide between welfare and education was polarised with welfare supporting custodial care
and education supporting educational needs. Educational support was not available to black children and only a small percentage of custodial care was available to black children (Porteus in Chisholm, 2004). Pre-primary education was expanded for white children in the 1970's and 1980's and the Department of Education was forced to discontinue subsidies to pre-primary centres for black children, relegating the responsibility of provision to parents, communities, foreign donors and NGO funding, and the private sector (Padayachee et al., 1994:9). While welfare continued to subsidise centres of childcare on a limited basis, the subsidisation model essentially eliminated support to black children (Department of Education, 2001:9). According to Porteus in (Chisholm et al., 2004) in the context of the State, neglect of ECD provision in black areas, the NGO sector emerged as the dominant provider and that while NGO's were an important site for creative and quality innovations, they remained limited and fragmented in scope.

The pattern of service provisioning for ECD that resulted from apartheid history was very fragmented. Porteus argues that the most important policy development of the democratic era post 1994 was the ratification of the Constitution where a range of child rights are articulated and guaranteed (Porteus in Chisholm et al., 2004: 352). In addition to this, the Education White Paper (5) on ECD (RSA, 2001) was released in 2001 which singles out five year old children as the focus for provisioning. Little attention is given to the under fives and the responsibility for them is shifted to the Department of Social Development.

2.2.2 Social Development

Midgley (1995) writes that the social development approach seeks to integrate economic and social policies within a dynamic development process in order to achieve social welfare objectives. The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) states that the new welfare system aims to develop a system that helps to facilitate the development of human capacity and self reliance in communities. Social development or the developmental approach attempts to address the inequalities of the past, aims to promote the social well being of people through a process of social change and
economic development (Midgley, 1995). The Social Welfare White Paper states that the developmental goal of social welfare is “a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which will uphold welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic human needs, and release people's energies”. It further seeks to “help them achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance, and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life” (1997:7). Individuals, families and communities are to be assisted in order to help themselves. Social services therefore need to be integrated with economic reconstruction and social development. The move is away from the institutional approaches (for example pre-schools) of the past towards a social development approach which aims at collective empowerment whereby communities can regain power and control their own lives.

2.2.3 Community Development

Community development is viewed as the most appropriate way of translating social development policy into practice (The White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997). Historically community development was viewed with mistrust in Government circles because of its potential to develop human capabilities and especially for political change. Community development was officially approved as an intervention method only in the 1980’s (Maistry, 2007).

The practice of what we loosely call community development probably dates back to the history of the early civilisations when mankind initiated actions from which groups or parts of groups benefited in some or other way (Midgley, 1986:13). Although the claims by Americans to origins of community development are criticized by authors such as Holdcroft (1978) and Ponsionen (1962:53), a more realistic starting point for explaining the origin of community development is perhaps the attempts by the Institute of Rural Reconstruction created in 1921 in India. According to Dasgutpa in (Brokensha and Hodge, 1969:40-41) the aim of the Institute was to bring back life in all its completeness, making the villages self reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own country and competent to make efficient use of modern resources for the fullest development of their physical, social, economic and intellectual conditions.
The definition most commonly used for community development is that of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1963) as stated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) which is:

... the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities. It involves two processes: the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their living conditions with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives, and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective (1997: 79).

An interesting definition by Faerman for community development through the eyes of an organisational development specialists and which ties in well with this dissertation is:

Those who believe in the need for shared vision have looked to groups that have this quality, and found them to be best characterised as communities. Companies redefined as communities see all employees as citizens, sharing in the decision-making and dedicated to a higher purpose (Faerman, 1996:22).

The ECD audit recognised the contribution of NGO’s in the training of ECD practitioners and the establishment of ECD services in this country (National ECD Audit: 2001). There is no question about the role ECD NGO’s have played in improving the education opportunities of a limited portion of young black children through an institutional approach influenced by western models. However, this study proposes that in order to seriously address the inequities of the past, a community development approach needs to be considered by NGO’s working in the field of early childhood development. This is critical because the child’s development does not take place in a vacuum but is located within a context of family, community and community development and hence the importance of community development.

2.2.4 Non-government Organisation

There is a great variety of non-government organisations and arriving at a definition is difficult. However, Kane in (de Beer and Swanepoel, 2003: 109) argues that the
concept can vary from "charity in the noble and/or religious sense of the term, to political associations, and ...local and popular development initiatives". Kane identifies three criteria for the definition of a non-government organisation and these are: it must be privately set up (not by Government); it should be non-profit making; and it should support development which is what ensures its public interest character (de Beer and Swanepoel 2003:109). De Beer and Swanepoel (2003:109) put it in a nutshell with this definition that “NGOs are autonomous, privately set up, non-profit making institutions that support, manage or facilitate development action”. The research adopts the de Beer and Swanepoel’s (2003) definition of NGOs for the purpose of this study.

2.2.5 Organisational Change
According to French and Bell (1995:3), change is omnipresent and will be one of the few constants in the late 1990s and in the 21st century. Change means that the new state of things is different from the old state of things (French and Bell, 1995). Alvin Toffler (1981) pointed out that the world has passed through a first great wave of change and revolution (the agricultural revolution), a second wave (the industrial revolution) and now the third wave (the information and technological revolution). French and Bell (1995:126) further state that this third wave will be rampant change in virtually all institutions of society.

Senge suggested that in the 1950s and 1960s change was incremental and people adapted to it incrementally. In the 1970s and 1980s change was more rapid and people adapted by working harder and ‘smarter’. More and better technologies were introduced to help cope with change, coming often from the outside (Senge, 1996: 2). As a result of apartheid and a new democratic governance system in 1994, the past decade in South Africa has been a time of rampant change and radical paradigm shifts which have also impacted on NGO’s in this country. The paradigm shift to the developmental approach is one area of change that NGO’s have to internalize and act on. Those that have worked with this critical change have survived, those that have not are ailing or closed down (Taylor, 1998). The importance of the learning organisation to early childhood development work is that many ECD NGO’s are not keeping up with the
pace of change and the learning organisation is a strategy that organisations can incorporate into their culture so that they may be able to continuously reinvent themselves and remain on the cutting edge in the ECD field.

The importance of learning was first put forward by the Chinese philosopher, Confucius when he said that “without learning, the wise become foolish; by learning the foolish become wise” (in Blair: nd). He said that we should approach learning as if we could never have enough of learning, as if we might miss something (www.see.ed.ac.uk). The underlying cause for the recent emphasis on organisational learning is because of the increased pace of change. Traditionally it has been thought that approaches are difficult to change and disruptive to the organisation. However, from writers such as Senge (1999), it is becoming apparent that NGOs are capable of learning and then responding innovatively, changing their practices and perform better in a constantly changing environment. Unlike Governments which are cumbersome institutions where the wheels turn slowly, NGO’s are small and are well placed to respond quickly to change.

2.2.6 ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT (OD)

Organisation development deals with participative learning and change. Organisation development (OD) therefore involves a process of enhancing and promoting the growth of an organisation. It is used all over the world in the public and private and non-profit sectors (French et al. 1994: 1). Organisational Development and Organisational Theory (OT) have their roots in behavioural science. They focused primarily on the human and social aspects of organizations. (French et al. 1994:15) The overriding goal of OD and OT according to French et al. (1994: 13) is that the client organisation members learn to diagnose and solve problems and take corrective action themselves.

Weisbord (1987) described an evolution in the practice of management consulting and OD starting in the early 1900s with Frederick Taylor’s scientific management up to the present. He characterized the first stage as experts solving problems for others. The second stage (from the 1950s to the middle 1960s) had everyone getting involved in the
problem-solving process. This stage was particularly influenced by the work of Kurt Lewin. The third stage was characterized by experts working to improve whole systems. The fourth stage, which is happening since the 1990s, entails getting everyone involved in groups, in improving whole systems (Jusela 1994: 373-374).

2.3 LEARNING ORGANISATION

Richard Karash (2002:1) defines a learning organisation as “one which people at all levels, individually and collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results they really care about“. Watkins and Marsick (in Smith 2001:14) define a learning organisation as “characterised by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collectively accountable change directed toward shared values or principles”.

Taylor (1998:3) states that the concept of the learning organisations has specific relevance to NGO’s in the development sector in South Africa, in part because they have so much in common with all organisations across all sectors, and partly because there are aspects of their need for learning that are unique. It is because of these unique aspects that make it very important that NGO’s take their own ability to learn extremely seriously. Taylor writes that the role that NGO’s play is that of bringing about social cohesion and integration for marginalised people and because they are charged with the responsibility of seeking ways of reversing destructive forces (that the state with all their resources have failed to do) they need to create spaces to learn.

In the introduction, it was mentioned that 40 ECD NGO’s across the country have closed down in the past two years and Senge (1990) in his book the Fifth Discipline focuses on the need for companies and organisations to understand the threats they are constantly faced with. He argues that learning disabilities are tragic in children, but they are fatal in organisations. He further states that it is because of these “learning disabilities” that few organisations live even half as long as a person - most die before they reach the age of forty. Senge argues that organisations need to understand
threats and recognize new opportunities and they need to learn consciously and continuously from their practice. He makes the point that they need to recognise new opportunities, and maintain a competitive edge (Senge, 1990:17).

Taylor (1998:2) states that an organisations ability to remain essentially viable over time depends on their ability to learn and adapt. Taylor defines a learning organisation as one that builds and improves its own practice by “consciously and continually devising and developing means to draw learning from its own and other’s experience” Taylor (1998:2). He mentions that the learning organisation “introduces a necessary level of conscious intent and commitment to the process of learning” (Taylor, 1998:2). Taylor states that learning is happening all the time and often at an unconscious level but therefore it is not being captured and maximally used to change and improve practice. In order to qualify as a learning organisation in terms of the definition is to achieve “improved practice” (Taylor, 1998:2). He adds that learning is an ongoing upward spiral which draws on a variety of sources for its learning. An important feature that Taylor highlights is experience as a source of learning.

Hamel and Prahaled (www.skyme.com/insights:2) say that the competitive environment is becoming more complex and variegate and the need for greater genetic variety and a broader range of managerial actions continue to grow. Therefore organisations who take the learning to a new level will reinvent their organisation and their industries. Pedler (in Smith 2001:4) affirms this thinking when he comments that a learning company continuously transforms itself. Schon (in Smith, 2001:2) agrees, and writes that institutions are in continuous processes of transformation and that individuals must learn to understand, guide and manage transformation by becoming adept at learning. He concludes that leadership must not only transform their organisations but that they must also invent and develop organisations which are ‘learning systems’ which is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation.

A learning organisation allows the organisations to re-invent itself, constantly adapting and remaining relevant. However, the above definitions of a learning organisation also
allude to the all important human factor which has in the past been sorely neglected in organisational development. Senge writes that learning organisations recognise people as the "active participants who shape and create their reality ... real learning gets to the heart of what it is to be human" (Senge, 1990:3). Karash (2002:1) talks of results people "really care about" and Watkins and Marsick in (Smith, 2001:4) refer to “total employee involvement” and “shared values and principles”.

To his definition of the learning organisation, Peter Senge (1990:3) adds that the learning organisation is a place where “new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured and where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning to see the whole together”. Senge’s (1990) definition raises another important aspect of the learning organisations which is moving away from the compartmentalised thinking that the apartheid government so effectively instilled into the minds of South Africans with separate homelands, separate departments and specifically, separate institutional style pre-schools to educate young children apart from the family and community. Seeing the ‘whole together’ for this study means working with the child in his/her context which incorporates the family and community. Senge makes the point that organisations are inclined to compartmentalise and focus on parts rather that seeing the whole, an integrated system. Historically NGO’s working in ECD in South Africa, have had a strong focus on the education of the young child, neglecting other aspects of his/her development. This narrow education view has meant little consideration has been given to the context and environmental factors of the child’s well being.

James Taylor (1998:1) includes the people dimension into a learning organisation when he states that learning organisation is “where people learn continuously and consciously and their source of learning is primarily from their own experiences. He writes that “we are all learning all the time but much of the valuable learning is lost because we do not document it and we do not consciously use it again” (Taylor, 1998:1).
There is much that is common in the above definitions but there are also some differences in the above definitions of a learning organisation. The characteristics that appear in the more popular conceptions of a learning organisation are:

- The provision of continuous learning opportunities
- The creative tension that exists and embracing it as a source of energy and growth
- Encouraging inquiry, discussion and dialogue
- A shared safe space where people can take risks
- A close link between individual and organisational performance
- The use of learning to reach outcomes or goals
- Learning from own and other peoples experiences

The differences would appear to be in some definitions (Pedler in Smith, 2006:4) where it appears that learning organisations are “something which is a little contrived from the top and which is driven by management and their vision” rather than the democratic “inside out” approach that is promoted by Taylor (1998), Senge (1999) and others. Another difference would be that writers like Watkins and Marsick in (Smith, 2006:4) appear to focus more on the outcomes of the process that is promoted by Taylor (1998) and Senge (1999).

Hughes (2000:1) feels that the concept of the learning organisation suffers from a number of conceptual flaws which are misleading. A central theme in learning organisation literature is the concept of organisational or team learning. Hughes argues that these are highly problematic as they lead one to conceive of the organisation as having a real existence (and intelligence) all of its own: of an organisation itself having the equivalent of a human ‘mind’ which is capable of ‘learning’ and existing beyond the level of human beings. He says that in reality this leads us to conceive of ‘organisational learning’ and ‘individual learning’ as two separate or distinct entities and he goes on to question what the relationship is between these two entities. Hughes believes that individual learning and organisational learning actually refer to “two sides of the same coin” and that they refer to different levels of an ongoing process involving knowledge.
sharing, building, adapting and development as part of the group. Another concern of Hughes (2000:11) at a more practical level is that senior management within organisations must have an almost boundless faith in the value of continuous development as they are given few tools with which to assess the extent to which investment in development has improved organisational competitiveness.

Taylor (1998) writes in a paper titled ‘NGO’s as learning organisations’, that the concept of the learning organisation is potentially undermining if it is interpreted as implying that organisations and individuals have not been learning in the past, and therefore require “imported” models and techniques in order to start the learning process (http://www.cdra.org.za). The concept is most effectively used as a reminder that the process of learning is inherent in everyone and in all organisations. He goes on to say that the first challenge is not to learn but rather to become conscious of the learning already taking place in order to further develop this innate ability. He says the second challenge is to try to understand why the learning that is taking place is not effectively being used to improve the practice in organisations.

Taylor (1998) raises an interesting debate when he says that the type of learning which changes practice is not necessarily valued in our society. The one that is often measured is what we “know” or what we can “remember”. This is often displayed as the ability to access information and build into convincing argument or debate. He goes on to say that while knowledge, information and the ability to think critically and analytically can play an important role in the type of learning which results in changed action, knowing or understanding does not guarantee changed practice. He says that many organisations he has worked with seem to block between the “knowing” (at the rational/understanding level) and the "doing" level. They know what the major problems and challenges are but they are unable to implement the “action” required to address them. Senge (1990) then suggests that organisations only qualify as learning organisations when they “use what they know” to improve their practice (which is a step beyond great insights and understanding).
Robbins (2007) argues that learning does not just happen, it takes reflection and thought. He states that reflection time used to be built into the world and that there was ample time to ponder and rethink decisions as the post took up to three weeks to arrive, whereas we now have overnight responses and the expectation that responding immediately is far more important than responding thoughtfully. He points out that organisations rarely build in time to do thoughtful learning, and when they do, that time is the first to go when emergencies beckon. He ends by saying that if we don’t do it deliberately then learning won’t happen. Taylor (1998) says there should be ongoing continuous learning in organisations and that organisations must strive to achieve the appropriate balance between reflection, learning and action. Senge mentions that learning is not a once off activity but rather a cumulative process which builds on itself through improved action which in turn opens new opportunities for understanding and further learning. Senge (1990) talks of learning being like an “upward spiral”.

According to Smith (http://www.infed.org) theorists of learning organisations have often drawn from ideas from Organisational learning and he goes on to say that in fact little has happened in the reverse direction. He believes that the central concerns are different and that in fact the two literatures have developed along divergent tracks. He argues that organisational learning is the activity and the process by which organisations eventually reach the ideal of a learning organisation. Senge (1999:14) states that what distinguishes a learning organisation from a traditional organisation is the mastery of five components that he calls disciplines. He further developed these components from the earlier ideas of others and applied them extensively in his professional career. Faerman (1996:2) believes that:

Those who work in a learning organisation are fully awakened people. They are engaged in their work, striving to reach their potential, by sharing the vision of a worthy goal with team colleagues. They have mental models to guide them in their pursuit of personal mastery, and their personal goals are in alignment with the mission of the organisation. Working in a learning organisation is far from being a slave to a job that is unsatisfying; rather, it is seeing one’s work as part of a whole, a system where there are interrelationships and processes that depend on each other.
2.4 SENGÉ’S FIVE DISCIPLINES

Senge’s five disciplines will be reviewed as they form the key themes or characteristics that the study addresses within the ECD non-government organisations. The values that underlie each of these themes are included. The researcher has added the concept of transformational leadership for discussion as it forms a critical part of learning organisations in the South African democratic context. Together, the six themes or characteristics are:

- Systems thinking
- Personal mastery
- Mental Models
- Building shared vision
- Team Learning and including
- Transformational Leadership

2.4.1 Systems Thinking

According to Kimbrough and Nunnery (1983) the view of complex organisations as systems began as early as the 1950s. The main argument was that it was not adequate to analyse the various organisational parts without considering how they interact. The systems approach stresses that “it is the whole, the combination and interrelationships of parts that will provide the greatest insights” (Kimbrough and Nunnery, 1983:25). This perspective emphasizes entities or systems and instead of looking for linear causality, the systems approach or model highlights the interactional patterns that are formed through the relationships between parts.

Systemic thinking is the conceptual cornerstone of Senge’s approach and is the discipline that integrates the others, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice (1990:12). He claimed that the essence of systems thinking lies in a shift of mind:
• Seeing interrelationships rather than a linear cause-effect chains (the ability to comprehend the whole and to examine the interrelationships between the parts provided)
• Seeing processes of change rather than snapshots (Senge, 1990:73).

Many organisations approach their work and challenges by dividing their labour force into departments which deal with issues in a fragmented way. In past years, ECD NGO’s were inclined to focus only on the education of the young child. Some have now realised the importance of holistic development and focus on the early development of children which involves health, education and environment of the young child but unfortunately still approach all these aspects separately which has not done justice to the task at hand. In 1994, Fortune Magazine named Senge “Mr Learning Organisations” (in Faerman, 1996:10). Faerman believes the reason for this high honour and what distinguishes Senge from other writers in the field is that he ‘injected’ into this field the powerful paradigm called ‘systems thinking’, a paradigm which is “premised upon the primacy of the whole – the antithesis of the traditional evolution of the concept of learning in western cultures” (Faerman, 1996:10).

Faerman (1996:10) writes that human kind has succeeded over time in conquering the physical world and in developing scientific knowledge by adopting an analytical method to understand problems. This method involves breaking a problem into components, studying each part in isolation, and then drawing conclusions about the whole. Senge in (Faerman, 1996:10) writes that this sort of linear and mechanistic thinking is becoming increasingly ineffective to address modern problems because today, most important issues are interrelated in ways that defy linear causation. Senge (1990:283) cautions us against compartmentalising knowledge because it creates a sense of false confidence. The researcher believes that western styles of management can be accused of being over confident about their management as they are inclined to lead in an authoritarian way which holds all the power and they compartmentalise the whole by dividing the staff into departments and the work into projects. As mentioned above, this is very evident in the ECD NGO’s in the study as many have divided their staff into
departments such as community development and ECD training, amongst others (King and Gush 2008).

However, Senge goes on to write that a circular causation – where a variable is both the cause and effect of another – has become the norm, rather than the exception. The world has become increasingly interconnected and endogenous feedback causal loops now dominate the behaviour of the important variables in our social and economic systems. He says in order to understand the source and the solutions to modern problems, linear thinking must give way to non-linear and organic thinking, more commonly referred to as systems thinking – a way of thinking where the primacy of the whole is acknowledged (Senge, 1990).

David Bohm in (Faerman, 1996:11) compares the attempt to understand the whole by putting the pieces together with trying to assemble the fragments of a shattered mirror. It is not possible. Kofman and Senge add to this by saying:

The defining characteristic of a system is that it cannot be understood as a function of its isolated components. First, the behaviour of the system doesn’t depend on what each part is doing but on how each part is interacting with the rest … Second, to understand a system we need to understand how it fits into the larger system of which it is a part … Third, and most important, what we call the parts need not be taken as primary. In fact, how we define the parts is fundamentally a matter of perspective and purpose, not intrinsic in the nature of the ‘real think’ we are looking at (Kofman and Senge, 1993:27).

Gilly (1997:3) agrees that our view of learning needs to change from one that is compartmental to one that is integrative. Cowan in (Gilly, 1997:3) takes it a step further saying this means that valuing wisdom is more important than expertise as expertise operates within a narrow scope and is only useful when one knows the context. Wisdom extends knowledge and operates in uncertain contexts (like the learning organisation). Senge, (1990:3) like Bohm states that from a very early age we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world with the thinking that it makes complex tasks more manageable. He goes on to say that by doing this we lose the
intrinsic sense of connection to a large whole. He believes that we then try to see the bigger picture by reassembling the pieces and find the task is futile.

Healy (2005:238) says bureaucratic organisations fragment thinking which partitions the administrative from the professional, technical from policy, economic from the social, empirical from the qualitative, and ‘doing’ from ‘thinking’ as opposed to the systems thinking in a learning organisation which affirms the inter-relatedness of everything.

Senge (1990:7) defines systems thinking as “a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively”. He adds that systems thinking is a discipline for “seeing wholes” and a framework for seeing “interrelationships rather than things”, for seeing “patterns of change rather than static snapshots”. Meadows in (Senge, 1990:43) states that …”a truly profound and different insight is the way you begin to see that the system causes its own behaviour”.

Senge (1990:42) says that the systems perspective tells us that we must look beyond individual mistakes or bad luck to understand important problems and that we must look beyond personalities and events. He goes on to say that we need to look “into the underlying structures which shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become more likely”. This becomes particularly relevant at the point of the sustainability of ECD NGO’s. In recent years, the number of ECD NGO’s has declined considerably and yet the number of children needing access to the service has increased. The reasons into the diminishing numbers of ECD NGO’s could well lie in the above issue. Senge (1990:53) writes that generative thinking, which is done in learning organisations cannot be sustained in an organisation where event thinking predominates and that it requires a conceptual framework of systems thinking and the ability of structural causes of behaviour. He reminds us that enthusiasm for creating our future is not enough. As NGO’s come to understand the structures that cause their behaviour, they will see more clearly their power to change that behaviour and to adopt ways that work with the bigger ‘picture’ or system.
There is a tendency to blame outside circumstances for organizations failures and the most common ones blamed are donors and government. Senge (1990:67) explains that systems thinking shows us that there is no outside; “that you and the cause of your problems are part of a single system”. The cure then must surely lie in the relationship with all those in the sector as they form part of the system, which includes Government. All stakeholders working with young children need to give serious consideration to the statement above as presently there is little collaboration between role players.

Senge believes firstly that while the basic tools of systems theory are fairly straightforward they can build into sophisticated models. He argues that one of the key problems with much that is written about and done in the name of management is that rather simplistic frameworks are applied to what are complex systems. Focus is on the parts rather than seeing the whole and we fail to see organisations as dynamic processes; therefore caution must be heeded at actions that produce improvements in a relatively short time span. In his book, Senge refers to an important management principle which (Senge, 1990:104) is to beware of the symptomatic solution where solutions only address the symptom of the problem and not the fundamental cause. He says that organisations break down despite individual brilliance and innovative products, because they are unable to pull their diverse functions and talents into a productive whole. Brown and Duguid’s (1991:1) argue that conventional descriptions of jobs mask not only the ways people work, but also significantly learning and innovation generated in the informal communities-of-practice in which they work.

Senge (1990: 78) writes that our limitation as systems thinkers lies in the fact that reality is made up of circles of influence and not straight lines. He goes on to say feedback in systems thinking is a broad concept of reciprocal flow of influence and that every influence is both cause and effect and that nothing is influenced in just one direction. By tracing the circles of influence you can see patterns that repeat themselves and that the human actor is part of the feedback circle. A linear view in NGO’s will result in them looking for someone to blame for failures as a linear view suggests a simple locus of responsibility.
Cowan in (Gilly, 1997) agrees with Taylor in that he says organisational learning is an everyday occurrence and adds that everyone takes responsibility for keeping the organisation learning. He also concurs with Senge that learning is circular and like a spiral and that we need to move away from the old linear way of thinking. Cowan adds that we need to think more about the process of learning and that re-learning, re-examining, re-thinking, play, exploration and alternative paths become very important. He raises an interesting point which is very relevant to NGO’s and other organisations in South Africa. He calls for a movement from “cross-sectional” to “longitudinal thinking” (Cowan in Gilly, 1997: 3). This position acknowledges the flows of learning where learning can occur on many levels and in different directions. For example, some employees are creative and explore new ideas while others sustain the core identity of the company by maintaining consistency. Since learning occurs in relationships, it is continually changing and organisational structures need to continually change too. He says this leads to a growing emphasis on the value of diversity because this longitudinal thinking helps groups to focus on harmony, balance, maturity and survival, rather than instant gratification.

According to Faerman (1996:12) in order for organisational learning to occur, individuals in the organisation must be willing and prepared to reveal their individual mental modes, contract them to one another, discuss the differences, and come to a unified perception of what that system really is. The alignment of mental models can be referred to as developing a shared vision. When groups of individuals who share a system also share a vision about how the components of that system interact with one another, then team learning (or organisational learning) is possible. Another interesting angle to consider for systems thinking which goes beyond the organisation is the natural connection between a persons work life and all other aspects of life. We live only one life but for a long time our organisations have operated as if this simple fact could be ignored, as if we had two separate lives. Senge (1990:307) says that the artificial boundary between work and family is anathema to systems thinking.
Other writers lay less stress on systems theory but for Senge it sharpens the model – and does provide some integration of the ‘disciplines’ he identifies. Systems thinking is critical to the learning organisation because it represents a new way of doing things. According to Senge (1990:12) it is a shift of mind “from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world” from “seeing problems caused by someone or something else outside and also to understand that our actions have created our own problems”. This is why Senge concludes by saying that a learning organisation is a place where people are continually discovering “how they create their reality and how they can change it” (Senge, 1990:12).

2.4.2 Personal Mastery

It is understood in Senge’s writings (1990:139) that an organisation “learns only through individuals who learn”. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning but that without it no organisational learning occurs. Faerman (1996:2) concurs with this, and states "organisational learning involves individual learning". French reports that the values held by (OD) practitioners include wanting to create change, to positively impact people and organisations, enhance the effectiveness and profitability of organisations, to learn and grow, and exercise power and influence (French et al 1995:77)

Organisations need to express their commitment to the growth of people, which includes fostering personal growth. O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:143) states that staff with high levels of personal mastery are more committed, take more initiative and they have a deeper sense of responsibility for their work. O’Brien adds that another reason why individuals should be encouraged in this quest is the impact which full personal development can have on individual happiness.

The study explores whether ECD organisations create opportunities for both individual learning and organisational learning. In many situations learning is taken for granted. Taylor (1998) in his paper on learning organisations says the problem is not that individuals don’t learn, they do so all the time but what they fail to do is to become
conscious of the learning taking place and then fail to apply it effectively in order to improve practice in organisations. One of the difficulties of personal mastery is that one is not able to measure it and as Senge says (1990:146) in a predominantly materialistic culture, it is difficult even to discuss some of the premises of personal mastery.

O'Brien in (Senge, 1990:140) refers to organisational models that are more congruent with human nature. He says that organisations “are not designed to provide for people’s higher order needs, self respect and self actualization” and that these features need urgent attention. He writes that managers must give up the old dogma of planning, organising and controlling and rather create enabling conditions for people to lead the most enriching lives they can. Healy (2005:238) writes that learning organisations encourage personal mastery whereas bureaucratic organisations encourage personal adaptation to a given state of affairs, an inherited way of doing things. This approach to staff management in bureaucratic organisations means that the potential of people is not valued and can never be realised. One would therefore question how a sense of ownership, belonging and commitment can be expected from a staff member.

According to Healy (2005:239) high-trust organisations bases on shared norms of co-operation and empowerment tend to breed confidence and initiative so that individuals and small teams take responsibility to achieve the desired outcomes. Senge (1990) says that people are likely to be happier and more prepared to contribute if they feel part of a community, seriously listened to and empowered to make decisions within agreed frameworks. Healy summarises by saying that “appreciation, respect and higher subjective well-being are more likely to be found in learning organisations than in bureaucratic ones” (Healy 2005:239).

Interestingly, Ford in (Senge, 1990:141) observed the untapped spiritual strength of individuals and how little they now knew or used this invisible power. Senge (1990:141) calls this power which goes beyond competence and skills, ‘Personal Mastery’. He explains personal mastery by saying “it is the creative tension in our lives which is that
which exists between our vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want)” (Senge, 1990:141). The word ‘tension’ sounds like anxiety or stress. This is not what Senge suggests; rather it is a creative tension. Gilly (1997:6) also refers to this tension when she says that “learning occurs when tension is created, and when organising and learning are combined and not ignored in the need to maintain a state of organisations”.

Senge (1990:141) says that learning in this context is not about acquiring more information but rather expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life – “it is lifelong generative learning”. The word mastery is not understood as gaining dominance over people but rather about a special level of proficiency and purpose, being part of a larger creative process (but not controlling it). People that live with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual mode of learning and never feel they have arrived because it is a process.

Hughes (2000:11) writes in his working paper that advocates are not simply proposing that learning organisations are those which are simply ‘doing lots of training’ or are ‘engaging in a lot of employee development’. It will depend on the character of that training and content and whether it will lead to real, generative learning, whether it helps both ‘organisations’ and ‘individuals’ simultaneously to move closer to realising their highest aspirations. Advocates of the learning organisation are actually keen to shift emphasis away from ‘training’ and ‘development’ towards a more direct engagement with learning itself. Hughes (2000:11) suggests that training and development in organisations may take the form of “learning conversations” and “group dialogues”.

David Skyme (http:www.skyme.com) says that the learning organisations is “not about more training but rather about the development of higher level skills of knowledge and skill” and he developed a useful 4 level model which he applies to individuals, teams and organisations:

Level 1 – this is the learning of facts, knowledge, processes and procedures and is applied to situations where changes are minor
Level 2 - this is the learning of new job skills that are transferable to other situations where existing responses need to be changed.
Level 3 – learning to adapt applies to more dynamic situations where the solutions need developing and that experimentation is the order of the day.
Level 4 – learning to learn is about innovation and creativity, designing the future rather than merely adapting to it. This is where assumptions are challenged and knowledge is reframed.

Fortune Magazine in (Faerman 1996) writes that the most successful corporation will be something called a learning organization, a consummately adaptive enterprise. But Senge (1990) argues that increasing adaptiveness is only the first stage in moving toward learning organisations. He says the impulse to learn, at its heart, is an impulse to be generative, to expand our capability. This is why leading corporations are focussing on generative learning, which is about creating, as well as adaptive learning, which is about coping. But, he says, generative learning, unlike adaptive learning, requires new ways of looking at the world. Generative learning requires seeing the systems that control events. Senge says it is when we fail to grasp the systemic source of problems, we are left to “push on” symptoms rather than eliminate underlying causes. Without systemic thinking, the best we can ever do is adaptive learning.

Senge proposes that discovering mental models begins with an “introspective analysis of how we see the world” (1990:9). This will help us to “remove obstructions in our learning” and allow us to engage with all people meaningfully (Senge, 1990:9). It is here that Senge is pointing to a process where people could recognise and accommodate differences in how they see the world, express themselves and what they value. This is very important for the diverse cultures and people in the South African context if we are to allow for a much more effective knowledge-building dialogue between people. The study attempted to explore the extent to which the ECD NGO’s are aware of mental models and how they may be working with them.
O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:143) believes that we do not pursue emotional development with the same intensity with which we pursue physical or intellectual development. He goes on to say that “only full emotional development offers the greatest degree of leverage in attaining our full potential”. Lessem and Nausbaum (1996) state that the west over values the linguistic and verbal intelligences to the detriment of other ways of knowing. This has its challenges in a country where 80% of the population are black and they don’t necessary value the same intelligences rather leaning to harmonic and interpersonal intelligences. Lessem and Nausbaum argue that humility has its strongest roots in the southern countries and that networks of community form the basis of humanity in business (Lessem and Nausbaum 1990). Genuine commitment, according to O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:171) is always something larger than ourselves. Senge (1990:171) says the sense of connectedness and compassion characteristic of individuals with high levels of personal mastery naturally leads to a broader vision. Land in (Senge 1990:154) says that “a mistake is an event, the full benefit of which has not yet been turned to your advantage”. If we are to derive full benefits from mistakes then high levels of compassion and trust need to exist in learning organisations and a safe space for honest discussion and dialogue needs to be created. Individuals should not fear sharing ‘mistakes’ or ‘challenges’ and rather begin to see them as the seed from which new growth can occur.

No individual can be forced to grow because embarking on a path of personal growth is a matter of choice. A supportive environment is necessary if individuals are to grow. Senge (1990:173) writes that many of the practices that are most conducive to developing personal mastery include “learning how to reflect on tacit assumptions, expressing one’s vision and listening to others’ visions and inquiry into different people’s views of current reality”. Senge goes on to say the most powerful way for a leader to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery is to be serious about their own – not to only talk about it but to model it as actions speak louder than words.
2.4.3 Mental Models

Faerman (1996:4) writes that “a mental model is one’s way of looking at the world and it determines how we think and act...mental models dictate ones behaviour”. Considering this discipline is particularly relevant for this study because of South Africa’s history and the indoctrination of apartheid’s education system. One of the insidious consequences of racism is that whites have many mental models associated with black people (and vice versa) and these images need to be questioned and unlearned. The ECD sector has mental models that need to be questioned such as, the value of a pre-school institutional approach to early childhood development which is a western model that has been widely replicated in South Africa; the role and relevance of ‘training’ in a developmental process; the role of leadership and how that needs to change in a multicultural society; and why is early childhood development not an integral part of the larger system of the community in order to achieve the outcome of collective empowerment whereby communities regain power and control of their lives.

Challenging mental models and facing change is not easy and Argyris in (Faerman, 1996:4) says people “act to avoid embarrassment or threat by remaining in unilateral control, they maximise winning and minimise losing, they suppress negative feeling and rationalise by setting clear objectives and evaluate their team against them”. Argyris says that most people (including professionals) “practice defensive reasoning”, and because people make up organisations, those organisations also do the same thing. So at the same time the organisation is avoiding embarrassment, feeling threatened or having their thinking exposed, it is also avoiding learning. Argyris in (Faerman, 1996:4) talks about the ladder of inference:

firstly one observes something i.e. a behaviour, and that becomes the bottom rung of a ladder. One then applies his own theories to the observation. That results in the next rung on the ladder. Subsequent rungs on the ladder are assumptions we make, conclusions we draw, beliefs we come to have about the world, and finally the action we decide to take. As we climb further up the ladder we become more abstract in our thoughts and unfortunately our flawed mental models usually cause us to make mistakes in this process of abstraction, and we end up with inappropriate actions. This becomes a loop and we generalise our
beliefs and assumptions to the next situation we encounter and use them to filter the data we are willing to consider (Argyris in Faerman, 1996:4).

Argyris believes that people can be taught to see the flaws in their mental models. Faeman (1996:5) says that as a culture we have to learn to say what we think and to take criticism without being on the defensive. People and organisations learn by recognising their mistakes and correcting them and that no progress can be made if we pretend that the mistakes never happened.

Senge (1990:174) mentions that “brilliant strategies often fail to get translated into action” because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. In the ECD field some innovative models have been piloted by certain NGO’s but widespread adoption of the approach does not occur. The NGO’s don’t say “we have a mental model that children benefit most from early childhood development that is delivered in a pre-school institution” – rather, they say “children benefit most from early childhood that is delivered in a pre-school”. Mental Models dictate ones behaviour and if unexamined, limit an organisations range of actions to what is familiar and comfortable rather than being critical. The NGO’s have to surface, test and improve their internal pictures of how the world works by challenging the ways they do things and the effectiveness of the approach. In order to do this, they have to institutionalise reflection and surface mental models in order to change the practice.

Healy (2005:238) makes comparisons between the learning organisation which he believes constantly challenges prevailing personal and corporate constructs and the bureaucratic organisation where constructs (mental models) from the past are given reverence regardless of their appropriateness. NGO’s need to work hard to expose assumptions about important issues and it is important to know if NGO’s address their mental models to accelerate institutional learning. The effectiveness of a leader is related to the continual improvement of the leader’s mental models. People are more effective when they develop their own models. What is really important is an organisations commitment to the truth.
Senge (1990:177) states “that failure to appreciate mental models has undermined many efforts to foster systems thinking”. Senge says we “compare our ‘database’ of previous experiences, theories, models, concepts or world views with what we are observing. We bias our perception and because we think we know, we don’t ask vital questions and we settle for easy answers, and we live in a world of presumption rather than a world of dynamic enquiry”. Senge (1990:181) shares an example in his book the Fifth Discipline and describes Shell Company which grew to be considered one of the top companies in the 1980’s because they articulated the manager’s mental models as part of their planning. O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:181) says that the “in the traditional organisations, the dogma was managing, organising and controlling and that it needs to change to vision, values and mental models”. He adds that “healthy organisations will be the ones who can systematize ways to bring people together to develop the best possible mental modes for facing the situation at hand” (O’Brien in Senge, 1990:181).

Senge (1990:183) suggests that openness and merit is very important and that organisations need to have open, productive discussions about critical issues. He says in traditional organisations, merit means doing what the boss wants, openness means telling the boss what he wants to hear. “Entrenched mental models will thwart changes that could come from systems thinking” (Senge, 1990:203). He goes on to say that “if managers believe their world views are facts rather than sets of assumptions, they will not be open to challenging those world views and …if they lack skills in inquiring into their and others ways of thinking, they will be limited in experimenting collaboratively with new ways of thinking” (Senge, 1990:203).

2.4.4 Building Shared Vision
According to Faerman (1996:9) a shared vision begins with the individual, and an individual vision is something that one person holds as a truth. She goes on to say that the shared vision of an organisation must be built of the individual visions of its members. What this then means for the leader of the learning organisation is that the organisational vision must not be created by the leader, rather the vision must be
created through interaction with the individuals in the organisation. Only by compromising between the individual visions, and the development of these visions in a common direction, can the shared vision be created.

Senge starts from the position that if any one idea about leadership has inspired organizations for thousands of years, it is the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future that is to be created (1990:9). When there is a genuine and shared vision as opposed to the ‘vision statement’, people excel and learn, not because they are told to but because they want to. Senge says that what has been lacking is how to translate a vision into a shared vision, a set of principles and guiding practices. Senge explores genuine commitment rather than compliance where visions are dictated. Senge writes that where organisations can transcend linear and grasp systems thinking, there is a possibility of bringing vision to fruition.

Healy (2005:238) makes comparisons between the learning organisation and the bureaucratic organisation in which he raises the issue of visioning. He says in the learning organisation, visioning is seen as ongoing, continuous developmental process of the groups purpose, whereas in bureaucratic organisations, the organisation’s mission, goals and job specifications are given, the norm against which everything else is to be evaluated. Senge (1990:206) states that a vision is not an idea, it is a force in people’s heart, a force of impressive power. He says that when people truly share a vision, they are connected and bound together by a common aspiration. He talks of personal visions deriving their power from an individual’s deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring.

A personal vision according to Senge (1990) is that which motivates people and is rooted in an individual’s own set of values, concerns and aspirations. Building a shared vision continually encourages staff to develop their personal vision. According to Senge, if staff don’t have their own personal vision, all they can do is sign up for someone else’s and the result is compliance, never commitment (1990: 211). Senge (1990:206) says that a shared vision is very important for a learning organisation
because it provides the focus and energy for learning. He says adaptive learning is possible without vision but generative learning (expanding ability to create) occurs only when people are striving to accomplish something that matters deeply to them. If a vision belongs to the director only, then such a vision demands compliance – not commitment. Senge (1990:219) speaks of compliant and committed people. The genuinely compliant people accept the vision and the committed truly want the vision. Senge (1990:209) goes on to say that you cannot have a learning organisation without a shared vision.

Senge (1990:208) adds that having a shared vision requires risk taking and experimentation. He says that visions are exhilarating and that they create a spark, the excitement that lifts an organisation out of the mundane. In traditional hierarchical organisations no-one questioned that the vision emanated from the top and the staff had to operationalise it hence there was a lack of excitement about the work. Top down approaches won’t foster energy and commitment or inspire people. Senge raises the concept of a positive and negative vision. Many organisations truly pull together only when their survival is threatened and this is not good for three reasons. Firstly, the energy that one could build something new is diverted to preventing something bad happening. Secondly, a negative vision carries a subtle yet unmistakable message of powerlessness and lastly, negative visions are short term and the organisation will be motivated for as long as the threat persists, once it leaves so does the energy and vision.

Senge (1990:231) believes that many leaders have developed vision and mission statements but visions can only become a living force when people truly believe they can shape their future. The problem is that most managers do not experience that they are contributing to creating their current reality and therefore cannot see how they can change it. They see their problems are out there and that the problems have been created by the system.
2.4.5 Team Learning / Building (Motivation)

Smith in (Faerman, 1996:6) says “a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.” Faerman defines team learning as a discipline that starts with “dialogue, the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together” (1996:23). She goes on to say that team learning is vital because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations.

Austin and Baldwin (1991) concur with this and they write that knowledge is not transmitted or poured into students and that it rather emerges from ongoing and social interaction within groups. They go on to say that learning is collaborative and inherently social in nature and as a social construct it belongs to and emerges from communities / groups. Rieber in (Lynch and Fleming, 2001) states that learning is an active, participatory process and that it is no longer viewed as merely acquiring more knowledge, but rather as a continual reconstruction of what is already known. The writer goes on to say that knowledge or meaning cannot be imposed on an individual, but rather must be constructed by the individual.

Howden and Kopiec (http://www.caslt.org) make some comparisons between memorising and constructing knowledge. They question how chunks of isolated facts which do not form a coherent picture in the mind due to lack of meaning can make meaning and be remembered. They compare this to the constructivist approach where prior learning is important and new learning of facts can “stick on to something and don’t hang on their own”. Senge (1990: 236) defines it by saying “this learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire. It builds on the discipline of developing a shared vision and personal mastery, because talented teams are made up of talented individuals.”

Lippett in (Faerman, 1996:6) defines teamwork as the way a group is able to solve its problems. He says teamwork is demonstrated in groups by the group’s ability to
Psychologist B.W. Tuckman in (Faerman, 1996:7) suggests that before a team can learn, it must become a team by learning to deal with each other, setting terms under which they will work, accept the assigned roles and then perform at optimal levels. Senge (1990:236) writes that the discipline of learning starts with ‘dialogue’ and ‘discussion’, and the capacity of a team to suspend assumptions and enter genuine thinking together. In dialogue there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep listening to one another and suspending of one’s own views. Senge goes on to explain that in dialogue, complex issues are explored and different views are presented as a means toward discovering a new view. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support. A team must reach agreement and decisions must be taken, some discussion is necessary. Senge (1990:247) goes on to write that a learning team masters the movement back and forth between dialogue and discussion and that there are ground rules and goals and leaders must be conscious of this.

As can be noted above, Senge places a lot of emphasis on dialogue in an organisation, especially with regard to the discipline of team learning. Dialogue (or conversation) as Gadamer in (Smith, 2006:6) has argued that it is a process of two people understanding each other, accepting the others point of view as worthy of consideration and gets to understand what a particular person is saying. He says it’s the person’s opinion that needs to be understood and not necessarily the individual herself. The concern he notes is not to win an argument but rather to advance understanding and human well being. Dialogue also plays a very important role in other disciplines as promoted by Senge (1990), namely building a shared vision and developing mental modes.

Senge (1990:248) writes that the skills required for productive dialogue and discussion are inquiry and reflection which originate in the mental models discussed earlier in this
work. He goes on to say that the reasons that dialogue is so important is that it offers a safe environment for honing these skills and for discovering the profound group learning that they can lead to. Senge (1990:248) distinguishes two types of consensus. The first type is built from the content of individual views – discovering what part of the view is shared by you and others – the common ground which we all agree. The second type is more that we each have a unique view and we can look through each other’s view to see something we might not have seen alone.

Healy (2005:240) states that team working, empowerment, job design and management style have a profound impact on well-being. Senge (1990:234) talks of unaligned teams which waste energy because they work extraordinarily hard but their efforts do not translate to team effort. Individuals working in unaligned teams will get little satisfaction and no empowerment. Senge claims that when a team becomes aligned, a commonality of direction emerges and individual’s energies harmonize and they complement one another’s efforts. It is interesting because he says if one empowers the individual when there is a low level of alignment it worsens the chaos and makes the team even more difficult.

Team learning requires practice (Senge, 1990:238). Yet our modern organisations don’t allow for reflection time when real learning can happen. The team has to move from practice to performance. Argyris in (Senge, 1990: 249) and his colleagues suggest from extensive work that the difference between great teams and mediocre teams lies in how they face conflict and deal with the defensiveness that invariably surrounds conflict. Defensiveness is a sort of protective shell around our deepest assumptions which defends us against pain but keeps us from learning around the real pain.

Senge (1990:257) raises the danger of defensiveness in an organisations and he writes that it is not the absence of defensiveness that characterizes learning teams but the way defensiveness is faced. A team committed to learning, he says, must be committed not only to telling the truth about what’s going on “out there”, in their business reality, but also about what’s going on “in here”, within the team itself. Teams require practice
but management teams, by and large, are bereft of it (Senge, 1990:259). MacCarthy in (Senge, 1990:261) talks about colleagues acting as colleagues and when going into a learning session to leave their position behind. He prefers not to have a hierarchy in the meeting, except for the facilitator who will keep the meeting on track. In his meetings he also asks that participants suspend their assumptions.

Senge (1990:282) writes that most of us have grown up in an authoritarian environment and we think our parents had the answers. As students, the teachers had the answers and assumed the management of the organisation had the answers. They are convinced deep down that people above them know what is going on or at least ought to know if they are competent. This mentality weakens them as individuals, and the organisation as a whole. At some level it absolves them of responsibility in the organisation's learning. Conversely, when people in an organisation come collectively to recognise that nobody has the answers; it liberates the organisation in a remarkable way.

Senge (1990:287) adds that learning organisations must be “localised” because localness means moving decisions down the organisational hierarchy. By working with teams, power is decentralised. However, it is important to note whether teams have authority to take decisions or if these are still done by the organisation directors. Smith (2001:3) criticizes Senge in saying that the learning organisation concept favours individual and collective learning processes at all levels of the organisation, but does not connect them properly to the organisations strategic objectives and this link needs to be clearly spelt out. Bruffee in (Gilly, 1997:2) is quoted as saying that knowledge is socially constructed and that there are no absolute or universal answers. When a new staff member arrives in an organisation, they are entering a new community which requires a process Bruffee calls ‘reacculturation’. In anthropology enculturation is the process of learning one’s own culture while acculturation is the assimilation of one group to another culture’s ways. Breffee goes on to say that peer groups that construct and reconstruct knowledge socially are the best environments for reacculturation (Breffee in
If applied to the ECD field, the NGO’s job would be to set up the environment for reacculturation to happen.

Healy (2005:231) writes that organisations can contribute, intentionally or otherwise to well being. He says organisations get caught between two poles, the first is the specific goal of the organisation to make profit or as in this case provide early childhood services and the second goal is to provide a context in which individuals and groups interact and support each other as they seek meaning in personal and team level effort. To get going, organisations need to meet the first goal and foster the second goal as well. He says releasing knowledge is key to the well-being of an organisation's stakeholders (staff). An interesting point in the Fifth Discipline is that team learning is not seen as team building. Senge (1990: 355) describes team building as creating courteous behaviours, improving communication, becoming better able to perform work tasks together, and building strong relationships. There are times however, when team building can turn into team learning.

An interesting observation by Sibbert and Brown in (Faerman 1996:8) is that if their meetings/workshops had too much structure, the found that people did not learn from each other. Brown stresses the importance of dialogue by saying that strategic dialogue is built on the operating principle that the stakeholders in any system already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. Valuing and trusting the opinion and answers of others is something that can be made use of more often in the development sector, especially when assumptions are made that poor people cannot think for themselves and solve their own problems. This mental model held by many people needs to be challenged.

2.4.6 Transformative Leadership

According to Battacharaya in (Maistry, 2008) literature on community development paid little or no attention to leadership in and for community development. The right leadership is essential for the success of social action inherent in social and community development. Smit and Cronje (2002:293) state transformational leaders are needed at
every level in a transforming society such as South Africa. Leaders with a special ability are required to make the necessary successful changes in the organisations vision and mission, its goals, structures and culture. Transformative leadership is that which breaks through old habits of thinking and acting in order to forge new solutions to old problems (Taylor, 1998).

Cliff (http://www.cliffsnotes.com) agrees with this and writes that leadership in learning organisations requires more than the traditional approach of setting goals, making decisions, and directing the troops. In learning organisations, managers learn to think in terms of ‘control with’ rather than ‘control over’ employees. They ‘control with’ employees by building relationships based on shared visions and shaping the cultures of their organisations so that all can help achieve the same visions. Senge points out that the learning organisation needs a new view of leadership. He sees the traditional view of leaders as special people who set the direction, make key decisions and energise the troops as deriving from a deeply individualistic and non-systemic worldview (1990:340). The new view of leadership in learning organisations centers on subtler and more important tasks (Senge, 1990). In a learning organisation, leaders are designers, stewards and teachers. They are responsible for building organisations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is they are responsible for learning.

Healy (2005:232) characterises organisations according to whether their sharing of knowledge is undertaken as in a ‘learning organisation’ or a ‘bureaucratic organisation’ and this is very important because leaders who are bureaucratic tend to leave little space for experimentation, questioning and reflection. Yet, as Healy says (2005:236) these are essential hallmarks of being human and being creative. Senge (1990:325) takes the argument a step further by saying that people are fearful of experiments and trying to do something different. Healy goes on to say that in bureaucratic organisations, authority, and with it information, flows primarily in one direction – downwards through a chain of control and command in which each member has an assigned and separate function. He says that uncertainty about the outcomes of any
process of change constitutes a point of discomfort and stress for many with a strong intellectual and emotional stake in the status quo.

Healy (2005:239) also believes that managing the ‘tension’ in organisations is the task of the leader. The tension he refers to is that which is created between the stated goal/vision of the organisation and the pervasive and complex reality of power and interpersonal relationships at its heart. He explains this by saying that the dual purpose of organisations which is to aim at a vision/goal and at the same time to provide a context of meaning, belonging and, ultimately, well-being, creates an inevitable and creative tension between its designed structure and its emergent properties. The designed structures in organisations are important and necessary because they provide a supportive environment for emerging creativity and innovation. The leadership needs courage, communication and vision to be able to manage this tension.

According to Lao-tzu in (Senge, 1990:341) “the bad leader is he who the people despise, a good leader is he who the peoples praise, the great leader is he who the people say, we did it ourselves”. Strata in (Senge, 1990:343) writes that leaders need to be designers who will be involved in the design and policies of the company. He adds that this will require seeing the company as a system in which the parts are not only internally connected, but also connected to the external environment, and clarifying how the whole system can work better. O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:347) argues that our traditional organisations are designed to provide for the first three levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs: food, shelter and belonging and that since these are now widely available to members of the industrial society, our organisations do not provide significantly unique opportunities to command the loyalty and commitment of people. The ferment in management will continue until organisations begin to address the higher order needs: self respect and self actualization. He goes on to say that as organisations are created that are more in line with human nature, learning organisations are being built. However, there is more of self centeredness, greed and nearsightedness even though human nature is to ascend to greater awareness of our place in the natural order (O’Brien in Senge, 1990:347).
Strata in (Senge, 1990:349) says he sees the rate at which organisations learn may become the only sustainable sources of competitive advantage and that accelerating organisational learning will help to integrate the broad range of concepts and methods that are improved. The relevance for the ECD NGO’s is remaining on the cutting edge by continuously and consciously improving the practice through systems of reflection. Remaining relevant and bringing about lasting and meaningful change for children will make possible continued external funding. The question that arises is how can we expect people to learn when they have little time to think and reflect, individually or collaboratively. Gilly (1997:6) writes that managers/leaders will need to see their function become one of setting up opportunities for groups to socially construct and reconstruct the organisation’s knowledge. Reflection time in organisations becomes critical if learning is to occur. Senge (1990:303) says it is easy to blame incessant activity and lack of time for reflection on organisational pressures.  

Senge (1990) points out that research has shown us that even if there is enough time to reflect, managers don’t do it. Senge (1990:353) writes that leaders can influence people to view reality at four distinct levels: events, patterns of behaviour, systemic structures, and a purpose story. Senge goes on to say that by and large, leaders of our current institutions focus their attention on events and patterns of behaviour and under their influence, their organisations do likewise. He says this is why current organisations are predominantly reactive or at best responsive – rarely generative. On the other hand leaders in learning organisations pay attention to all four levels, but focus predominantly on purpose and systemic structure. Moreover, they teach people throughout the organisation to do likewise. At this level the leader keeps helping people to see the bigger picture, how different parts of the organisation interact, a sense of purpose and a clear vision.  

Weick and Western in (Gilly, 1997) see organisations as cultures. They explain that organisational learning is an oxymoron because learning involves disorganisation and an increase in variety while organizing involves forgetting and a reduction in variety.
According to the authors, the juxtaposition of order and disorder is where learning occurs. Kofman and Senge in (Gilly, 1997:2) also believe that learning occurs when there is tension between fear of the unknown and having a need to change and between holding on and letting go of beliefs, assumptions and certainties. Gilly (1997:6) refers to this tension when she writes that managers will have to be able to handle a more chaotic environment as everyone takes responsibility for and becomes part of creating learning communities. Leaders according to Gilly (1997:6), need to examine why they believe it is important to become a learning organisation and what the repercussions will be. The need to believe that what is important is the transition to self-designing and self-diagnosing systems with everyone in the organisation involved in this process.

One of Senge’s more current areas of focus is decentralizing the role of leadership in organisations so as to enhance the capacity of all people to work productively toward common goals. Senge’s view of leadership centres on subtler and more important tasks. Goleman (2005:113) agrees with this and says we are inclined to emphasize traits such as intelligence, toughness, determination and vision as the qualities needed for leadership and neglect the softer more personal qualities found in emotional intelligence like self-awareness, self regulation, empathy and social skill. Senge (1990) points out that leaders in a learning organisation are designers, stewards and teachers and are responsible for building organisations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is they are responsible for learning. Senge’s three qualities of a leader are discussed below and these qualities have been included in the themes/characteristics in the study.

2.4.6.1 Leaders as Designers
Senge argues that no one has more sweeping influence than the designed (1990:344). The organisations policies, strategies, and systems are key area of design, but leadership goes beyond this. The start is designing the over arching ideas of the
purpose, the vision and the core values by which people should live and deal productively with critical issues they face.

Healy (2005:242) advises leaders to ‘re-set’ the mindset – to enlarge from a pre-occupation on individuals, process and technology (otherwise referred to by Cohen and Prusak as fools, rules and tools in Healy, 2005:242) in conventional management to a wider focus which includes teams, values and culture. Healy says culture is revealed in how we put goals/vision into practice and that leaders need to ‘walk the talk’ in order to create more social capital and enhance well-being where they work and live.

2.4.6.2 Leaders as Stewards
These leaders are stewards of the vision, they have a commitment and responsibility to the vision but they do not own it as it is not their possession. They manage the vision to the benefit of the others as they see the vision as a part of something larger. Block (1993) who is closely associated with the concept of leaders as stewards describes this as choosing service over self interest. He calls for a new way of thinking about the workplace and argues that notions of leadership and management need replacing by that of ‘stewardship’. Organisations should replace traditional management tools of control and consistency with partnership and choice. Individuals who see themselves as stewards will choose responsibility over entitlement and hold themselves accountable to those over whom they exercise power. There is a need to choose service over self-interest.

Healy (2005:240) has an interesting view in that he says leaders must stop trying to control knowledge and should ‘de-regulate’ it by operating open and pro-active communication and dialogue. He agrees with Senge (1990) that knowledge is not the monopoly of anyone and should include people in decision-making in a genuine co-operative and shared endeavour. Healy also believes that leaders should allow time in the organisations for face to face conversations, for example during coffee breaks as this provides space and time to build social capital. As leaders ‘serve’, they need to work with high levels of trust in their team. Healy (2005:240) says that if you distrust
employees, they will act distrustfully, but if you trust them, you may well bring out the best in them.

2.4.6.3 Leader as Teacher (Facilitator)

Max du Preez (1989) writes that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. Senge (1990) defines the concept as not about “teaching people how to achieve their vision but by fostering learning for everyone”. He goes on to say that such leaders help people throughout the organisation develop systemic understandings (Senge, 1990:356). Heifetz (1994) in his book about leadership looks to bring back ethical questions to the centre of debates around leadership and turns to the leader as educator and highlights a particular emphasis on the exploration of leadership within authority and non-authority relationships. Senge in (Faerman, 1996:3) writes that traditional managers have always thought that they had to have all the answers for their organisation. He says the managers know their staff have answers and their job is to be the teacher or coach who helps unleash the creative energy in each individual.

Healy (2005:241) says leaders must realise the potential of stories and conversations as practical tools for sharing knowledge, building trust and communicating deep rooted values. Cohen and Prusak (2001:114) comment that “stories, we believe, are essential social capital tools, preserving and transmitting the basic belief and nuances of culture”.

If the leader is to foster learning, Healy (2005:240) highlights the importance of delegating authority down as much as possible in order to build loyalty, commitment, and mutual respect and that leaders must exercise compassion, integrity, fairness, honesty and good example. Healy says that workers can become more engaged and responsible members of an organisation rather than just ‘going through the motions’. He encourages the building of relationships and the use of intrinsic motivation rather than control and instruction. Healy (2005:202) says the role of parents, teachers and other leaders is essentially that of facilitator to lead the learner to discover the truth and beauty within themselves and in others. Healy goes onto say that teaching involves a graduated and prolonged ‘letting go’ by seeking to release the sources of self organised
learning within the learner. The learner is increasingly responsible for his or her own learning in a social context defined by trusting relationships among persons who share learning roles in an on-going communication and dialogue.

Leaders are the gatekeepers and whether ECD NGO’s become learning organisations or not will depend on the quality and approach of the leadership. The NGO directors need to be designers and shape their organisations policies, systems and vision in collaboration with their teams. They then need to be stewards of their vision by facilitating the realisation of the organisations vision/purpose. Senge (1999) mentions anticipating the challenges that change brings in an organisation and how to face it. He talks of how we can build the personal and organisational capabilities needed to meet those challenges. These are not challenges that come from outside, they are the product of assumptions and practices that people take for granted, an inherent natural part of the processes of change. Organisations have complex and well developed immune systems aimed at preserving the status quo and this is clearly one reason why NGO’s do not change. Senge et al (1999:5) argues that most change initiatives fail. In the book *Dance of Change* (1999:5) Senge gives a number of examples of businesses that have tried to change and states that approximately 70 percent of them failed. He said businesses do not have a good track record in sustaining significant change and that there is little to suggest that schools, governmental and non-profit institutions have fared any better either. The failure to sustain significant change recurs again and again despite substantial resources committed to the change effort. Senge (1999:6) says the solution lies in our most basic ways of thinking. If this does not change then any new input will end up producing the same fundamentally unproductive types of actions. This further underlines the importance for NGO’s and specifically the leaders, to adopt the characteristics that make a learning organisation so that they can self design and self diagnose problems long before they collapse.

Senge (1999:6) makes a profound statement when he says “to understand why sustaining significant change is so elusive, we need to think less like managers and more like biologists”. He elaborates that all individual organisms, from humans to
beetles, likewise grow according to the same pattern, accelerating for a time, and then gradually slowing down. Biologists say this pattern recurs again and again in nature because of the way nature generates and controls growth. All growth arises out of the interplay between reinforcing growth processes and limiting processes. How far it progresses will depend on a host of limits- water nutrients in the soil, space for the roots to expand and warmth. The same process unfolds as nongovernmental organisations face change. They too face limiting forces such as a managers lack of commitment to change, no shared vision, addressing symptoms and not the deeper systemic causes of problems, unwilling to challenge mental models, lack of personal mastery in staff, poor team learning and co-operation amongst other issues. The biological world teaches that sustaining change requires understanding the reinforcing growth processes and what is needed to catalyze them, and addressing the limits that keep change from occurring. Senge (1999:9) says that we have given these limiting factors too little attention and this is why learning initiatives are failing.

Senge (1999:15) prefers the term ‘profound change’ rather than the word ‘transformation’. In his book he describes the organisational change as one that combines inner shifts in people’s values, aspirations, and behaviours with ‘outer’ shifts in processes, strategies, practices and systems.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the conceptual and theoretical base for this study. The concepts of early childhood development, community and social development have been reviewed to provide a context. An in depth examination of literature on the learning organisation has been attempted and assumptions and principles highlighted for the purpose of this study. Leadership, systems, personal mastery, mental models, team learning and building a shared vision have all been discussed as they are the underlying themes of the work.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research strategy used in the study. In a society that is transforming from apartheid to democracy and a state that is attempting to be developmental, organisations have to be open to learning and change. The overall goal of the study is to explore the extent to which early childhood development organisations in the Eastern Cape Province are learning organisations. This chapter presents the research design and methodology adopted by the study in order to achieve its objectives. The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the nature of the learning organisation in the current context of democracy and transformation in South Africa
- To explore the extent to which ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province are learning organisations
- To explore the extent to which individual and organisational experience in the ECD NGO’s have been used to guide present and future practice

It is important to note that the programmes of the five ECD NGO’s have not been assessed to determine the extent to which the organisations are learning organisations. Rather, through the case study method and guided by Senge’s characteristics of a learning organisation, the perceptions of the Directors were used as the determining criteria.
3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 The Research Design
The research design was exploratory, descriptive and developmental. According to Babbie and Mouton (2000) an exploratory approach is appropriate when a researcher examines a new interest, or when the subject of study itself is relatively new. Peter Senge popularised the concept of the learning organisation through his book *The Fifth Discipline* which he wrote in 1990. In the South African context, the concept of a learning organisation specifically in relation to ECD NGO’s where it is a relatively new concept with little research having been done on the subject. This study attempts to explore and understand to what extent directors of ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province embrace the collective way of leading their organisations to new levels of excellence and sustainability by tapping into their team’s commitment and capacity to learn at the various levels of the organisation.

The descriptive research design allowed for more intensive examination of the situation and their deeper meanings thus leading to thicker descriptions through the in-depth literature review and empirical aspect of the study (Patton, 2002.) According to Thomas and Rothman in (Maistry 2008:116) the developmental or intervention research is focused on the development of knowledge about interventions to changing conditions in the human service professions. The research design was guided by the constructivist paradigm which was considered appropriate for this study because the research is attempting to solicit directors’ perceptions of how the individuals and their organisations learn and construct knowledge under their leadership. The researcher attempted to explore the extent to which the directors use learning organisation strategies to enhance and accelerate learning and knowledge construction. Schwandt claimed that the basic assumptions guiding the constructivist paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by us as we are active in the research process, and that we should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it in (Mertens, 2005: 12).
3.2.2 The Research Methodology

Robson (1993) writes that research strategies and methods must be appropriate for the question you want to answer. The study was qualitative in nature. The qualitative methodology was chosen because according to Guba and Lincoln, “qualitative methods are more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (1989:40). The researcher was sensitive to the culture that existed in each organisation when attempting to probe the extent to which the unique patterns and systems allowed for learning and the construction of knowledge. Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) suggests that the we as researchers actually join in the events being studied and examines the phenomena from the inside. By this they mean that we view the world through the eyes of the actors themselves. Having a prior relationship with the directors meant that the researcher while attempting the research from the outside, was also able to understand and view some of the issue from the inside, as expressed by the above scholars on the qualitative methodology. This helped to get an honest and balanced view of the situation.

Meriam (2002:6) writes that in a qualitative study, the interest of the researcher lies in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. Furthermore, she accentuated this by stipulating that in a qualitative study the researcher seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these. Qualitative research looks for reasons behind various aspects of behaviour and simply put, investigates the why and how of decision making, compared to the what, where, and when of quantitative research (O'Leary, 2004:99).

What the researcher found particularly rewarding was the effect the interviews had on some of the directors. It was later reported that they had challenged themselves to create new spaces for learning and that the staff had responded very positively.
3.2.2.1 The Research Method: Case Study

The term method in educational research refers to “the approaches or techniques used to generate data needed to be used as a basis for inferences and interpretation” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:44). The case study method was used in this study. Five ECD organisations were closely studied to determine the extent to which they incorporated learning into their organisation.

Adelman et al in (Bassey, 1999:23) define a case study as “a study that recognises the complexity of the case and embeddedness of social truths”. A study within any group of people is complex in nature and the questions posed needed to be carefully constructed so as to allow the information needed to emerge from the respondents. Bassey (1999:26) sees case studies as a “generic term for the investigation of an individual, group or phenomenon”. The method is considered advantageous because it gives a detailed picture of an individual or group [or organisation] and may form a basis for new ideas and future research.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:281) identified the following six different types of case studies: individual, community, social group, studies of events, roles and relationships, studies of countries and nations as well as studies of organisations and institutions. This study is an example of studies of organisations and is looking at leadership and organisational issues, and processes of change (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Anderson and Arsenault write that instrumental case studies “help to refine theory or provide insight into an issue” (1998:158). One of the intentions of the study is to provide insight into strategies used by organisations to remain relevant, be more effective and to create spaces for staff to learn and hence contribute to constructing much needed knowledge in the development sector.

However, the case study research has a number of limitations, and according to Anderson and Arsenault (1998), another researcher doing the same study can come to a different conclusion and that one cannot generalise on the basis of a single case. While the study included five organisations and there were definite patterns that
emerged across the sample, the researcher, however, agrees with the writers and avoided sweeping generalisations of ECD NGO’s and limited the findings to the five organisations studied. It is interesting to note that Guba and Lincoln (1981) also raise the limitation of a single case study. They are concerned that “case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to distorted or erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs” in (Winegardner, 2001:12).

Another limitation identified by Bell (1993), is that researches who use the case study method find it very difficult to cross check information and there is always the danger of distortion. The researcher’s existing relationship and prior knowledge of each organisation could also have been viewed as a limitation for this study. Careful consideration was given to this matter. In order to overcome the limitations highlighted, this study comprised a sample of five organisations. Interview schedules that guided in-depth interviews and document analysis as a method were used to help obviate the limitations to some extent and served as triangulation of data.

3.3 RESEARCH SAMPLE AND LOCATION OF STUDY

Sampling involves the selection of a research site, a case or unit. Maxwell, cited in (Kajiya, 2006:27) defines sampling as “decisions about where to conduct the research and who to involve is an essential part of the research process”, and adds that sampling “usually involves people and settings as well as events and processes”.

Purposive sampling was used and according to Maxwell (1996), purposive sampling has the following objectives: firstly, it helps in achieving representativeness or typicality of individuals; secondly, it helps in ensuring that conclusions sufficiently represent the range of variation instead of only the typical members, and thirdly, it helps to establish comparisons to show or highlight the reasons for differences between settings and individuals. Mertens (2005: 317) asserted that researchers typically select samples with a goal of identifying information rich cases that will allow them to study a case in-depth when working within the interpretive paradigm.
The location of the study was the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. Five organisations were studied, all located in cities and serving children in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas around them. The sample chosen were Early Childhood Development organisations and the directors who were interviewed were known to the researcher as colleagues, having worked with them for over seven years, as part of a network for ECDs. The organisations that comprised the sample of the study were: Khululeka CECD from Queenstown; ITEC from East London; Port Elizabeth Early Learning Centre from Port Elizabeth; Centre for Social Development from Grahamstown and Khanyisa from Zwelitsha. The participants of the sample were all mature women, between the ages of 35 and 50 years old. Three of the respondents had served in the position of Director for over 10 years. The other two had served under three years.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher used semi-structured interviews as the primary data collecting method and document analysis as the secondary data collecting tool. The interview schedule was piloted with the one organisation in order to be sure that the relevant information was gathered for the study. Minor changes were made to the interview schedule after the pilot study. As the nature of the questions was sensitive in some aspects, the prior relationship of trust did assist the interview process. The method allowed for flexibility and the good relationship with the directors created a conducive environment for interviews.

According to McKernan (1998:128), “interviews allow the interviewer to probe areas of interest as they arise during the interview.” Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used for this study in order to create room for subsequent questions that may have arisen. Patton (2002:340) says that:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they
attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspectives.

According to Maxwell, one important issue when designing a qualitative study is how much to pre-structure your methods which can lead to a lack of flexibility to respond to emerging insights (Maxwell, 1996). Gillham (2000:3) argues that in a sense, structured-unstructured dimension of interviews are false because expert interviewers always have a structure, which they use flexibly according to what emerges. Hitchcock and Hughes (1997:156) state that:

“The semi structured interview is a much more flexible version of the of the structured interview … it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the respondent’s responses.”

The researcher designed the interview schedule in accordance with the characteristics of the learning organisation as identified by Peter Senge in his book The Fifth Disciple (1990). This thematic approach facilitated the collection of information and allowed the discussion to flow. Some of the questions asked in accordance with the themes described by Senge are presented. Senge writes that systems is the cornerstone discipline. In order to determine the extent to which each organisation used a systemic, integrated approach the following question was posed: “How do you go about solving a problem in your organisation”? In order to determine their understanding around the second discipline, personal mastery, the following question was posed: “How does individual learning happen to the staff and how do you support this”? The third discipline, mental models was explained and then the question put forward was whether they were aware of the ingrained ways that staff behave and need to be challenged. Further questions were posed around a shared vision, team learning and transformative leadership.

The researcher used document analysis as a secondary data generating instrument. Documents are available material or data, which is anything that may exist prior to the
research at hand (Merriam, 2001:113). Merriam states that the strength of the
documents as a data source lies with the fact that they already exist in the situation and
they do not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator
might (Merriam, 2002:13) According to Yin (1994:80), documents are stable and can be
reviewed repeatedly and they give broad coverage and a long span of time of many
events and different settings. The type of documents reviewed was mission and vision
statements and annual reports and these were useful for the purpose of triangulation.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis was used which was derived from the five disciplines as highlighted
by Senge in his book, The Fifth Discipline (1990). The five themes selected were
systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team
learning. An additional theme was added by the researcher on transformational
leadership. These six themes formed the basis of the interview questions and facilitated
the analysis of the data accordingly. Within these themes further patterns emerged
which were carefully considered and documented.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Anderson and Arsenault (1998:18) write that “the most fundamental principle for ethical
acceptability is that of informed consent: the involved participants must be informed of
the nature and purpose of the research, its risks and benefits, and must consent to
participate without coercion”. According to Cieurzo and Keitel (1999), various ethical
dilemmas may occur in different aspects of qualitative research, such as recruiting
participants, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, protection from harm,
deception, dual roles of researcher and therapist, and interpretation and ownership.

Before starting to collect the data, the researcher sought permission from the directors
of the organisations who comprised the sample and also informed them of the purpose
of the study and how the data would be gathered. The researcher promised to treat
information provided with due respect and maintain the anonymity of research participants by using pseudonyms. The participant’s names will not be mentioned in the written document. The researcher strongly believes in the statement made that “in all research the welfare of participants is crucial” (Cieurzo and Keitel, 1999: 69).

3.7 DELIMITATIONS

Despite the advantages of the semi-structured interview technique, they require careful planning of questions, and their personal nature may lead people to say things to please and impress rather than being truthful. The researcher had to be aware and cautious of not encouraging this trend. However, knowing the organisations and their work well, the researcher believes that the directors were less inclined to be tempted to give information that was not accurate. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz in (Murray, 2002) warn that “to be completely unbiased or objective is impossible”. The researcher heeded this warning by being very aware of researcher bias because of the familiarity with the organisations and their work.

Anderson and Arsenault (1998:109) contend that “since the data will be analyzed qualitatively, a limitation may exist that one may report the opposite of what the data actually means”. The fact that this is a case study means that it does not provide room for generalizations and the researcher is conscious of remaining with evidence that can be supported.

3.8 VALUE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be presented to the Provincial Network of Early Childhood Training Agencies (NECTA). Workshops on the findings will be offered to individual NGO’s and their staff. It will raise awareness about learning organisations and what they are. This study will highlight the need for NGO’s to adopt learning organisation strategies that will enhance organisational practice and performance. The researcher would be willing to guide and mentor NGO’s who showed further interest.
3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher provided a description of the methodological approaches followed to conduct the research such as the research paradigm, research method and the data gathering instruments used. This chapter includes the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. In the next chapter, the data collected are presented and analyzed.
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

“Learning is not something that requires time out from being engaged in productive activity, learning is the heart of productive activity” Shoshana Zuboff (1988)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents data collected for the study from the interviews of the five directors of registered ECD Non-Government Organisations (NGO). Four of the NGO’s have a strong focus on young children between the ages of 0-6 and the fifth organisation includes children up to the age of 18 years. They are all registered Non Profit Organisations which are independent and rely on funds from a range of local, national and international donors.

A thematic approach was used to collect the data. The researcher adopted the five disciplines of a learning organisation as identified by Peter Senge in his book The Fifth Discipline (1990). The researcher included an additional theme on transformative leadership as this was considered relevant and important for the current context of democracy in South Africa.

The researcher utilized the case study method to collect information on the organisational profile of each of the five NGO’s by focusing on the history and strategic development and changes over the past 10 years. Questions were posed around their understanding of the developmental context and what they thought Government’s role was in development. They were also asked about the threats and opportunities that their organisations were faced with. Each respondent was then asked questions around the five selected themes of a learning organisation according to Senge (1990), namely, systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and the added transformative leadership.
The information was gathered primarily through the semi-structured interviews and then additional information was collected from the relevant documentation acquired. The researcher requested each NGO’s annual report, vision and mission statement, website information and any other documents that may be useful for the study. The amount of literature available from each respondent differed considerably with three respondents providing well written and professional annual reports and two who had not produced an annual report due to various constraints, one being financial.

The questions in the interview schedule were grouped according to the themes and the recordings of the respondents was transcribed in full. Answers to each of the questions was studied and where interesting trends or patterns emerged, those were documented.

4.2 ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

4.2.1 Case Study 1

History of the Organisation
An established NGO in East London took the initiative to extend its services by creating a new NGO in the Hewu area, Queenstown. A Project Manager was appointed to start a satellite resource centre in January 1989 to serve pre-school teachers that had been trained in the area. Within two years the satellite was able to raise sufficient funds to become independent and then changed their name. Presently, they employ a staff of 23 full time members serving a large rural area in the Chris Hani Municipal areas. The present Director was the founding Director and had served the Organisation since its inception.

Vision and Mission
Their mission statement reads:

We are committed to working together with communities in the provision of high quality early childhood development programmes and services, by respectfully facilitating and nurturing initiatives that promote integrated development (Khululeka, Annual report: 2007:3).
They have also developed a values statement stating that:

Our approach informal and experiential, our conduct that of respect and acknowledgement, our aim to share information, our purpose to work in the interests of families and young children (Khululeka, Annual Report, 2007:3).

**Aims of the Organisation**

The organisation articulates its aims as follows:

- To advocate and promote the establishment of programmes, facilities, training, support and resources for the provision of early childhood development
- To build capacity by increasing access to relevant and appropriate programmes and services, in support of, and in response to, the expressed needs of the communities which we serve
- To encourage active community involvement in the education and care of young children through an integrated and holistic approach to their developmental needs.
- To work towards establishing continuity between the learning environment of the home, early childhood development programme and the foundation phase
- To initiate the development and sustainability of partnerships and community networks of support to the child, the family and early childhood development practitioners (Khululeka, Annual Report. 2007:3).

**4.2.2 Case Study 2**

**History of the Organisation**

This NGO was established in 1981 as an Institute of a University to address a broad range of needs including young children, bursaries for tertiary education, nutrition and feeding schemes and other welfare components. The beneficiaries targeted were in the rural and urban areas of the Makana Municipality and this has not changed. There are 18 staff members in full time employment.
In its early years this organisation approached early childhood development services by establishing pre-school centres to cater for the education of the young child including capacity building programmes for parents. The main activity was the non-formal training of pre-school teachers. Many pre-school centres were constructed and staff were trained to manage the programmes. The NGO continued to administer the finances and overall management of the community centres and recently began a process of slowly handing over these functions to committees to run their own services.

In 2000 they moved away from welfare type programmes and narrowed their focus to supporting young children in their context. They then expanded their community work and used experiential learning as they searched for answers to some of the intractable problems faced by disadvantaged children. They committed themselves to look towards community based solutions for early childhood development.

**Vision and Mission**

Their vision and mission was reviewed in 2003 to reflect instead a Statement of Purpose which included the vision (first line), mission (second line), and values (third line). The statement reads that:

- The organisation envisions vibrant communities that take responsibility for the early childhood needs of their children as a foundation for achieving human potential. (Vision)
- The organisation facilitates the development of early childhood communities and imparts skills to practitioners to strengthen community-owned initiatives. (Mission)
- Their practice is based on a caring professionalism which builds relationships that affirm and support the ability of people to arrive at and sustain their own solutions. (Values statement) (CSD, Annual Report, 2005:2).
4.2.3 Case Study 3

History of the Organisation
This NGO was established in 1987 in East London. It was started as a direct result of a lack of resources for teachers in primary schools and they filled the gap by providing teaching and learning materials for teachers. Their name “Enrichment Teachers Centre” reflected this service and was only changed later, once they evolved to encompass a broader focus of beneficiaries. According to the Director, the organisation has done an “unbelievably varied amount of work from policing forums, early childhood development to HIV/AIDS training and resource provision”. The Director explained that much of their work is delivering skills programmes which have been designed in “response to what the community needs”.

Vision and Mission
The Director states that there is a very strong unifying theme that runs through all their work which is expressed in their mission:

   to be a world class, professional and self-sustaining organisation that facilitates development in communities (Annual Report, 2007/7:2).

The Director also mentioned that the organisation facilitates development and has been doing so for the past twenty years. She further states that “in whatever we do whether it is helping people to use computers or to facilitate a learning programme, we are in the business of facilitating development.” The organisation offers a number of programmes ranging from early childhood development qualifications to adult and computer literacy. The organisation generates a fair amount of income from Government Tenders which includes delivery of courses and consultancy work.

4.2.4 Case Study 4

History of the Organisation
The fourth case study is an organisation that was established in January 1988 in Zwelitsha by another established ECD NGO. In the early years their work consisted of ‘grass roots activities’ with communities to establish early childhood facilities. Over the
years and due to financial constraints the organisation has moved more towards skills training because according to the Director, funding is easier to secure for formal programmes. The Director stated that the work they do is dependent on what they receive funding for, which means the direction of the organisation is determined by the availability of funding and Donors. Although they claim children are their focus, they appear to have moved away from this and in order to survive, are involved in Government funded skills programmes like HIV and AIDS, computer literacy, domestic violence and computer literacy.

The Vision and Mission
The current vision statement reads:

Our children’s security, health (especially HIV/AIDS) and educational foundation will be addressed. Literacy and numeracy will be developed through quality ECD programmes and at home. Girls will take a leadership role alongside their brothers. These issues will be addressed with the caregivers and with the children themselves (Khanyisa Report 2007:2).

Their mission statement claims:

Young children in the rural area around King William’s Town and Bisho do not enjoy their right to basic health and education. Khanyisa provides training and support programmes for adults working with young children so that they are able to contribute MORE towards the general health and good educational foundations of their young children and at the same time towards their own development (Khanyisa report 2007:2).

4.2.5 Case Study 5

History of the Organisation
This NGO was established in 1986 in Port Elizabeth. They have always had a strong focus on the training of ECD Practitioners at Levels 1, 4 and 5 with the aim to upgrade the qualifications of ECD Practitioners. The organisation has had serious financial challenges due to poor payment of the two large Donors, namely the Lottery and ETDP
SETA. Their previous Director retired and they have appointed a new director from within the organisation. The new appointee has now been in the post for less than a year. The organisation only sees themselves as a training agency and do not visit communities except for the purpose of assessing and supporting ECD Practitioners. According to the Director, their vision is determined by the 'accreditation process' and not by the staff or needs of the community.

Vision and Mission

Their vision statement reads

Striving for life-long learning for Early Childhood Development (ECD) educators resulting in quality ECD for all young children in the 0-6 age cohort (www.sasix.co.za:1).

They highlight the words of Oliver Tambo who stated that the future of this country depends upon the education of the children of this country (www.sasix.co.za:1) and their mission is:

to provide quality outcomes-based programmes to enable Early Childhood Development (ECD) Practitioners to achieve an ECD National Qualification and to follow a relevant career path (www.sasix.co.za:1).

The NGO has a very strong focus on training courses and identify their core business as the ‘training of early childhood development practitioners at a nationally accredited level” (www.sasix.co.za 16/03/2008).

4.3 UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT

The five organisations under review have all been in existence for more than 20 years and although they all focus on young children, and offer training programmes for ECD practitioners, the principles that guide their practice and the quality of their programmes differs radically.
4.3.1 Governments role in the Organisation

The respondents were all asked how they think the NGO sector has changed since 1994, how their organisations have changed and what Government’s role is in development. All five respondents voiced disappointment in the fact that Government talks about partnerships with NGO’s and civil society but that there is little evidence of meaningful collaboration and partnership on their part. They all assumed that after 1994, Government would recognize the massive contribution NGO’s had made to the ECD sector and work with them to improve the wellbeing of children. They felt this had not happened.

Four of the five respondents recognized the major role government had played in developing policy to improve the wellbeing of children. However, three of the respondents identified the challenge of conflicting approaches in the White Paper No 5 for ECD where institutional programmes are recommended for 5 year olds and integrated developmental programmes are recommended for 0 to 4 year olds. It was felt that Government’s ECD policy was creating confusion as it is not consistent in promoting developmental and integrated services. Secondly, the shift from a narrow education view to an integrated communitarian approach is a paradigm shift which requires new understanding and insight. In response to this the organisations have invested heavily in upgrading staff development by registering them for various courses. It was interesting to note that 90% of the upgrade courses they had registered for were education specific. Very few focused on community development courses which would help them to understand the shift that needed to be made. Furthermore it was noted in all organizations that the healthy development of children was key to all programmes yet no staff employed to train and manage this aspect of the work were trained health professionals.

The question of collaboration with Government was asked and four respondents felt that working with Government has been a challenge and the limited success they have enjoyed had depended on relationships with individuals within Government departments, who were willing to collaborate. All five respondents felt that meaningful
collaboration with Government was scarce but they did realise the importance of co-operation so would continue trying to build bridges.

Three respondents stated that to date, the value in working with Government was financial only and the expertise in the NGO sector was not valued. It was felt that Government spoke about partnership and if and when it happened it was no more than one partner providing finance and the other expertise and implementation. One respondent felt that Government’s role in promoting ECD was to pay the practitioners’ salaries. One respondent believed in partnership but says because of a lack of delivery on Government’s part, NGO’s are now having to step into Governments role. Another respondent believes that Government’s role is to bring all players in development, together but that it was not fulfilling this co-ordination role. Respondents had different views on what Governments role was but did agree that there was a need for a meaningful, equal partnership which did not currently exist.

De Beer and Swanepoel (2000) are quite clear about the role that Governments and NGO’s should play in development and they suggest it should be a supportive role only, enabling decision-making instead of making decisions, enhancing ownership instead of being the owners of development. They write that in this way, local communities will take responsibility for their own development. When the question of Governments role was posed, one respondent felt that Government had a huge role to play in development but that the ECD Department within Government lacked skills, allowed politics to cloud their vision and wanted to ‘own’ development in communities. Two respondents believed that NGO’s have the capacity and skills to develop and test relevant models and then Government should come on board to take the models to scale. None of the respondents had confidence in the ability of Government to actually facilitate development and play a supportive role in community development processes.

The respondents felt that although Government claims that they are striving to be developmental in their practice, their funding has not reflected this and that huge amounts of money have been directed to formal training programmes, with very small
percentages going to community development work. The respondents felt that these ‘knock and drop’ training programmes with a strong focus on skills only, had not enhanced empowerment within communities. Another respondent agreed with the above in that they highlighted the danger of the Learnership programmes which focus on training large numbers of people without subsequent mentoring programmes to ensure effective impact in the community. They went on to say that the Government’s focus is on technical skills alone and not on the development and empowerment of people.

None of the respondents had received any Government funds to support or establish programmes that are community directed. Government funds that have been received by the respondents have been specifically for formal training courses. Three respondents have found themselves in financial difficulty due to the poor payment record of Government and the ETDP SETA (Education and Training Development Programmes - Sector Education and Training Authority) and the reliance on Government and ETDP SETA tenders. Two respondents have received funds for Learnership programmes from Government and the ETDP SETA but this has been a small percentage of their budget and although late payment was a challenge it did not cripple them, as they did have other funds to tide them over.

4.3.2 NGO’s role in Development

One respondent stated that in the past NGO’s had worked against the apartheid Government and were part of the struggle of working for a legitimate government. Two respondents stated that after the 1994 elections they had expected their financial situation to improve but in fact it had worsened because Donors were channeling their funds through Government who did not have the capacity to spend it.

Four respondents stated that pre-1994, NGO’s were working against the apartheid government and were ‘the critical voice of the masses’. Post 1994, NGO’s thought the new democratic Government would support their work and looked for meaningful partnerships which did not materialise and that politics seemed to get in the way. One
respondent concluded by saying that after 1994, many NGO’s become “bedfellows” of Government which unfortunately spelt the end of the powerful and shared voice of the ECD sector from an advocacy and lobbying perspective. The same respondent felt that NGO’s have the expertise which Government does not have, to respond quickly and appropriately to community needs. One respondent felt that Government did not value the depth of expertise in the ECD NGO sector and were in fact threatened by it. Another respondent was disillusioned with Government because they felt that there was no commitment to work with NGO’s and that Government was forcing NGO’s to become formal Further Education and Training (FET) Institutions to whom all funds would be channelled in the future. She blamed Government for the organisation’s poor financial situation and instability.

The NGOs appear to have some degree of understanding of the developmental context by describing their relationship with government through use of concepts such as partnership, cooperation and collaboration. Their understanding of the developmental context is that government needs to work in close partnership with the NGO sector. Three respondents felt that the NGO’s had expertise and had over time built up very good relationships with communities. This positioned them well to develop new and innovative models of early childhood development which Government could then adopt and take to scale.

The ECD NGO sector has enormous experience in the development of young children, particularly from an education perspective but more attention needs to be paid to the context in which the young child lives and grows. While understanding the context of development is important, their knowledge upgrading appears to be largely focussed to education.

4.3.3 Threats and Opportunities faced by ECD NGO’s

Two respondents felt that planning and succession planning in particular were challenges of this sector. Leadership was a major challenge because many staff had left to take up Government posts which were much better paid. One respondent felt
that the sector was not attracting the young and bright professionals and the average age of the professionals in the ECD NGO’s was getting older.

All five organisations in the study have to raise all the funds needed to run their operations each year and this was considered to be a major risk. The act of fundraising was time consuming and Donors did not always understand the challenges faced with development work. Furthermore it was felt that Donors often change their focus and were not keen to grant funds over an extended period of time.

Government funds for ECD have increased substantially but as already mentioned they have channelled these funds to organisations for formal ECD training courses. This has not promoted developmental work in the ECD NGO’s. Three respondents referred to the implementation of the Grade R programme in schools which has increased access for young children but provided a very poor quality education.

The five respondents all recognised the fact that early childhood development has become a priority with Government and with the private sector. There is a new awareness of the importance of this phase of development and more funding is becoming available.

Two respondents recognised the fact that Government is a large, clumsy bureaucracy and they cannot respond with the same speed and efficiency as NGO’s. They therefore believed that Organisations like NGO’s would always have a meaningful role to play at grassroots level. One respondent commented that if Government officials embraced and valued the role of ECD NGO’s, together they could make a meaningful difference.

4.4 DETERMINE THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE NGO IS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Given that the South African Government is aspiring to become a developmental state, it is necessary for ECD Organisations to provide services in a developmental manner.
Staying abreast of change and remaining relevant is the challenge faced by NGO’s. Senge repeatedly makes the statement in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, that becoming a learning organisation is critical to remaining relevant (Senge: 1990).

In order to determine the extent to which each of these case studies are learning organisations a number of questions were posed around 6 themes which are characteristics of learning organisations, namely systems thinking and an integrated approach, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and the added transformative leadership.

### 4.4.1 Systems Thinking and an Integrated Approach

Systemic thinking is the conceptual cornerstone of Peter Senge’s approach and is the discipline that integrates the others, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice (Senge, 1990: 12). Faerman (1996: 10) affirms Senge’s work on systems thinking commenting that it is a paradigm which is "premised upon the primacy of the whole – the antithesis of the traditional evolution of the concept of learning in western cultures". The ECD sector is trying to and has to shift from an exclusive, narrow education approach (of western influence) to a more inclusive, integrated systemic approach which will result in self-sufficient community-owned initiatives for children.

Senge (1990: 67) promotes systemic thinking and he explains that there is no outside and the cause of one’s problems are part of a single system and that the cure lies in the relationship with the enemy. His statement clarifies the need to work together and to understand that ECD NGOs are part of the problems encountered and it is only in collaboration with all role players that solutions will derived. In the South African Policy Framework (DoE 1996; Office of the President 1996; RSA 2001) the policies emphasize systems and integration between the state and civil society on one hand and between state departments on the other.
4.4.1.1 Integration between State and NGO systems

Firstly, ECD organisations have to see the state as part of the system and vice versa and therefore consideration must be given to the interrelationship between the State and NGO’s. All five Directors interviewed had made efforts to build relationships with Government but no genuine or lasting collaboration had been realised. Case study one stated that “we haven’t given up, we keep trying to work well with Government, it doesn’t always work, but it doesn’t give you the right to then give up”. It was suggested by two respondents that the NGO’s role is to develop innovative models and Government’s role is to take the models to scale as they have the resources. This view was positive in that they were clear about roles and the fact that they saw all partners as part of one system. Two respondents had not been successful in working with Government in an organized way but did recognize that they were part of the system and vital to work with.

Second, there needs to be good integration between state departments. Referring to the level of Government services being delivered from a number of different departments, case study two commented that you cannot compartmentalise people’s lives and that all aspects of the child needs to be taken into consideration including social, emotional, intellectual and physical. She was critical about the lack of integration across Government departments namely Social Development, Health, Education and Housing sectors. The respondent felt that integration had to start at the top, with Government collaborating around the needs of women and children in a more co-ordinated manner.

Case study two believes that their organisation started out responding to a number of unrelated welfare orientated needs and have now moved to a more co-ordinated and integrated approach. Furthermore, she acknowledged that their view was a very narrow education view which was prescriptive and limiting. She stated that they had worked hard to make the shift to a wider social development paradigm. The respondent goes on to say that there is still a lot of learning that needs to take place in terms of integrated community development approaches. One respondent felt that their
organisation was very developmental in its approach which took cognisance of the understanding that the child could not be educated in isolation of their family. However, with the formalisation of courses and the creation of national unit standards which led to accredited courses, they had been challenged to bring the two together. Her opinion was that due to financial problems, many ECD NGO’s in the country have turned their focus away from integrated community approaches, to offer exclusive practitioner training and have become financially dependent on Government tenders.

One respondent still believes the role of an NGO is to “develop communities” and feels threatened that Government is presently trying to take over the work of the NGO. This organisation focussed only on training programmes where funding was available and had little understanding of the humanist paradigm of development, still believing that they empowered people, rather than believing that people empowered themselves if the right environment and support was created.

Based on the discussions with all respondents and from their responses to the first question, it clearly shows that there is willingness and readiness on the part of NGO’s to form meaningful partnerships with Government departments, but that Government needs to be more inclusive and show the same level of commitment to work collaboratively.

4.4.1.2 Integration within each Organisation and at Community Level

Having discussed integration between the state and civil society and secondly within state departments, consideration must be given to how the NGO’s have organised themselves. For integrated development to happen at community level, it must first evolve at organisational level, if a genuine systemic approach is to be achieved at the point of delivery—which is the community. Integration within teams and departments varied considerably across the five organisations. It ranged from highly structured departments which had very tight boundaries and structures and accountability to loose arrangements that had no work plans.
One respondent felt strongly that the management systems and structures must be tight as they need to be accountable to Donors who support them. The respondent spoke about how teams collaborate and the high demands on documentation. There was a strict system with a fair amount of forms and schedules to be filled in at every point of contact with the community. The organisation plans for each quarter, with week one being devoted to teams planning their implementation programme. This results in a work schedule for every single programme which also has specifications against which the team will be evaluated at the end of the programme. Every individual person's work then gets drawn together into a departmental roster for the quarter. These then get authorised so the Director can check each task specification against each person. In the second week the teams go out and do what they planned. The last week of the quarter is then dedicated to a ‘Reflect and reveal session’ where through a structured process, a comprehensive report is generated with statistics and a narrative. This last week also includes a review of programme implementation. In this organisation staff are monitored in various ways using delivery assessment tools and a final performance appraisal. The Director of this organisation felt she spent an ‘enormous’ amount of time creating and designing reporting tools to ensure the staff have the capacity to analyse and reflect on practice. With regards to integration across departments this respondent explained that each department had very specific functions which served other departments. In this organisation, the community development and early childhood development departments are separate. The respondent claimed that the departments did work in an integrated manner “when it was necessary”. This understanding of integration could be seen as something which happened at certain points in time rather than as a process. If organisations organise themselves in departments then those components must fit into the whole rather than the whole fitting into the parts.

Another respondent felt their organisational system was sufficiently organised but not too structured and therefore promoted integration and collaboration. The respondent said they worked hard at ‘cross fertilizing’ programmes and that this was done by Facilitators training on each others programmes, visiting sites in pairs and attending community meetings together. The staff have been trained in the social development
approach and meet quarterly for ‘homeweeks’ which is time set aside to evaluate practice and learn from one another. They also use this time to introduce new ideas and interesting debates.

One respondent took a decision to train all staff with a number of skills (multi-skill) and this meant that a core group of trainers were able to offer a wide range of services and therefore able to work across a number of projects. The respondent felt that this allows for a better flow and overlap and made integration possible. This organisation delivers prescribed programmes and believes that integration may happen because of the trainers multi-skills but should not be forced. The respondent stated that integration is not a priority but is nice to have.

The remaining two respondents focussed only on training programmes. These are stand alone programmes for practitioners. Due to financial constraints, one organisation had diversified into training in computer courses and counselling in domestic violence. Both these respondents believe integration is necessary and claim to do what they can to promote it within the delivery of their courses. The understanding of case study five of integration is that it is “about bringing together a mixture of developments”.

There are high levels of collaboration and sharing between the organisations interviewed. They have an organized provincial network which is very active and through which they have remained well informed of new legislation, cutting edge ideas and at times, collectively responded to national issues on children. Three respondents recognized that some of their current problems came from ‘yesterday’s solutions’. Two respondents felt that their financial troubles were due to outside agencies and not themselves.

All five respondents are products of the South African education system which was heavily influenced by western thinking. This education system was structured in such a way that it organised information and activities into compartments and paid little
attention to systemic thinking and the interconnected nature of life. As a result there is a loss to the intrinsic sense of connection to the large whole. Although there is evidence within the organizations of reassembling the pieces and of being conscious of systems, the flow and deeper understanding of the value of a system is still limited.

The organizational structure in the five NGO’s ranged from being highly structured into Departments with tight work schedules to a very loose arrangement which was more the result of poor management. One respondent felt she could trust her staff and was sure the work was getting done because the programme was so structured. The researcher felt that little creativity was allowed in this system which was rather prescriptive, controlled and bureaucratic and that staff ownership might be a problem.

With regards to integrated practice, there is evidence from two respondents who have given attention to the context children live in and involved a number of stakeholders at community level. Innovative programmes for children have emerged with high levels of participants from the family and community. A further respondent spoke of capacitating the pre-school committees and working with ward councilors. Five respondents referred to health matters of children and three of those referred to initiatives being established on the ground to address the health and welfare of children in the communities.

The organisation within NGO’s is still very traditional with clear separation between departments for early childhood development and community development. This does not lend itself to integrated development. There are efforts by three NGO’s to move towards integrated development. In particular, two respondents have invested much in shaping innovative early childhood models driven by communities. However, the narrow education paradigm is still very dominant with a strong focus on teacher training which appears to be driven by the availability of Donor funding.

4.4.2 Individual Learning and Personal Mastery

It is understood in Senge’s writings (1990:139) that an organisation learns only through individuals who learn. He goes on to say that individual learning does not guarantee
organisational learning but that without it no organisational learning occurs. The researcher examined the learning offered in the ECD NGO’s and its relevance to supporting integrated and developmental approaches.

Traditionally ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province have not employed highly qualified staff in terms of tertiary qualifications. However all five case studies have made serious investments into individual learning in that most of their staff have moved from a matric (or lower) level to a tertiary level, achieving the following qualifications: Diploma in Education, Higher Education Diploma and Bachelor of Education degree, Education Honours and Masters degrees. It is interesting to note that only two members in five organisations chose to do community development qualifications, the rest opting to enrol for education specific diplomas and degrees. This is significant because education qualifications generally have a very narrow educational view and the focus is on the educating the child in isolation of the context in which he lives. All the respondents felt it was important to allow staff to select their own courses, none felt the need to influence or guide staff. One respondent was registered for a law degree. Three respondents assisted with courses relevant to the organisation, the others were not in a financial position to do so.

The importance of informal and experiential learning within the organisations does not appear to rank as highly as the formal qualifications. However, three respondents do consider informal courses important for good practice, but give it varying degrees of attention. Two of these respondents set aside regular reflective sessions and dedicate this time to generative learning. Another respondent has created two forums where the Director runs a stylized management training course. Much attention is given to quality and practice in this organisation and it is driven from the top management.

When asked about trust, two respondents felt it was important for learning that there were high levels of trust amongst the staff. One respondent viewed trust differently saying that she had created tight structures and systems in the organisation which ensured the people did their work and that this helped them to be trustworthy. Two
respondents said it is good to have trust but did not see the link to learning. They did not refer to trust between colleagues but rather whether or not they trusted their staff to do their job. One respondent felt that what was important was that staff trusted their Director.

Senge (2000) writes that in learning organisations, people learn continuously and consciously and their source of learning is primarily from their own experiences. He writes that we are all learning all the time but much of the valuable learning is lost because we do not document it and we do not consciously use it again. Two respondents said that they document learning in their organisation whereas the other three felt they did not do this enough. One respondent felt so strongly about this that they had recently established a new Development and Research Department as they recognised the importance of documenting their learning and sharing it and felt that they had neglected this.

All case studies felt that their staff often went on courses but application of new learning was not always evident. In many cases processing the learning and then applying it was a challenge. Only one respondent felt confident that formal courses did in most cases lead to improved practice. Three respondents had staff appraisals in place, however, one organisation was questioning the validity and authenticity of the assessment tool and had chosen to use it more developmentally so staff “could use it to grow and develop from the assessment”.

The upgrading of staff has received considerable attention in all five case studies which has been positive. The areas of study have been mostly educational with a very small percentage of staff selecting community or social development courses. The education has been strongly focussed on individual growth rather than organisational growth.

4.4.3 Assumptions and Working with Mental Models
None of the case respondents were conscious about mental models and had not attempted to work with them. Three respondents had picked up on some aspects
around attitudes and integrated them into various training programmes for the staff. One responded had considered her own deeply held perceptions and admitted to having challenged herself but had not considered working with the mental models held by staff. She felt it was a good idea to do so.

With regards to questions around the assumptions we make in the sector, respondents had engaged with some of these and had made the shifts, but according to them, more unconsciously, than consciously. One respondent said that we assume that children’s well being is a poor parent’s greatest concern and that they will lock into discussions easily if it is about children. She went on to say that the harsh reality is that their main concern is not children but rather survival. She admitted that for a long time she was only interested in increasing access to ECD for children and this was done using an institutional model which is what they felt was most suitable. The respondent feels now that she has come around to realise that the point of departure for decisions should be the community themselves as they do know what their priorities are. The respondent said that experience has taught them that you have to probe deeply to understand what the real needs are and that the community processes are very dynamic and unpredictable and that community ownership is very important.

Further evidence that the respondents had engaged with mental models was one respondent who said that they assumed that caregivers were not stimulating their children and that the only way children would have a chance in life is if they attend a pre-school facility. Another respondent said that an assumption made previously was that a woman could not care for a group of pre-school children unless they receive formal training. To this end the respondent feels that we go into communities and complicate their lives unnecessarily with formal courses when in fact the job of stimulating children is being done. The example she uses is that an individual running a playgroup is identified for a Learnership programme; she gets trained in a prescribed curriculum, gets little credit for what she already knows and is bogged down, amongst other things, with the preparation of portfolios. She believes we often disturb something that has been working for a community. One respondent commented that in
the past the ECD sector believed the best solution for the development of young children was a pre-school with a qualified teacher, this mental model they are now challenging and recognising that other ways of stimulating children do exist.

Four of the respondents felt that they had been able to create a safe environment where staff can discuss issues without becoming too defensive; one respondent said that there is a culture of silence in the organisation and staff do not like to engage in dialogue. None of the respondents were conscious of the mental models held by people but once the discipline was explained, they felt it was an area worth giving consideration.

4.4.4 Building Shared Vision and Team Learning

The one respondent traced their vision back to their early years when it was about training and resources for pre-school teachers working in pre-schools. Over time the vision has evolved to become participatory and to work with communities towards integrating the early childhood facility into the community system. They do not have a vision statement, only a mission statement which is “a commitment to work together with communities to provide high quality early childhood development programmes and services by facilitating initiatives that promote integrated development”. The respondent believes their vision evolved through beginning to “listen more carefully to communities”. She goes on to say the staff spent time together to develop the statement. She feels, however, that they work in too many communities to really make a difference and feels that Donors need to be educated about the pace of genuine and lasting development. This organisation sets a mission, goals, objectives and job specifications and evaluates against this. With regards to being a learning organisation Healy (2005:238) says a vision is seen as ongoing, continuous, developmental process of the group’s purpose.

Another respondent’s statement of purpose read as follows: “envisioning vibrant communities that take responsibility for the early childhood needs of their children as a foundation for achieving human potential”. Their mission is to pass skills on to practitioners to strengthen community-owned initiatives” and their values statement is to
“practice a caring professionalism which builds relationships which affirm and support people to arrive at their own solutions”. The respondent said the above had emerged out of a visioning process facilitated for the organisations staff and key community members. “To be a world class, professional and self sustaining organisation that facilitates development in communities”. This respondent felt strongly that what they needed to do was to become more professional as an organisation. She said their earlier vision statement was “to develop communities through our services” but then they questioned whether this was in fact what the organisation was about and decided that they needed to aim more towards being a professional organisation which could enjoy recognition by Government and other Agencies. The vision evolved from staff participation and the Director felt that operationalising the vision was something she had to drive.

One respondent’s vision was unclear and was a collection of a number of ideas and is articulated as follows: “Our children’s security, health (especially HIV/AIDS) and educational foundation will be addressed. Literacy and numeracy will be developed through quality ECD programmes and at home and girls will take a leadership role alongside their brothers. These issues will be addressed with the caregivers and with the children themselves.” Their mission was confused with the vision and it became clear when the respondent was asked how they arrived at the vision and her response was that they collected together all the objectives and things they wanted to achieve and then got their vision from that. Due to financial pressures, this organisation also offers courses for domestic workers and other unrelated topics and don’t necessarily use the vision as a point of departure which can guide practice.

The last respondent’s vision is to “offer quality ECD Qualifications”. She says that the National Accreditation process determined this vision. She felt strongly that organisations must fall into line with Government programmes and priorities.

When the respondents were asked if the staff are guided on a daily basis by the vision, none felt strongly that this happened except case study four but this response is
questionable because most of what the organisation is presently involved in is moving away from early childhood development.

All five organisations had vision statements, but none claimed to use them to guide practice and decisions on a daily basis. Four respondents arrived at the statement with staff participation, one did not. Senge (1990:208) comments that visions are exhilarating and that they create a spark. When discussing the vision with the five respondents, there was no evidence of it being a dynamic ‘living’ statement which excited or guided individuals and organisations.

4.4.5 Transformative Leadership
The five respondents all described their leadership style as democratic and participatory. The first respondent felt she was a charismatic leader and was able to energise, inspire and get people excited. She was concerned however, that when she was feeling down, the whole organisation went flat; they seemed to reflect what she felt. She enjoyed this type of leadership but felt it was very draining and the responsibility weighed heavily on her. She felt she took calculated risks and was innovative, often breaking new ground. She felt they shared ideas very generously across the ECD sector.

Two respondents felt that modelling the behaviour you want from staff was the most profound way to teach. One thought humility was important and was completely honest with the staff to the point of admitting when she was wrong. She thought job descriptions were necessary as they give people a sense of security but that they should be used as guidelines only and staff should not get fixed on them.

Another respondent felt she did her best to place responsibility in the hands of each individual staff member. She saw herself as part of the team and believed she had created a team of leaders because of her participatory style. She believed an important aspect of leadership was the ability to shape a vision and then to have the commitment to drive it. She believes leaders must be accountable and expects each staff member to
be the same. She does have job descriptions in the organisation but believes they should not be limiting and must allow for creativity. She believes that the reason for many ECD NGO’s closing down in the country is poor management (including financial management) and leadership. She believes she is reflective and does so automatically on a daily basis.

All five respondents believed reflecting on practice was an important aspect of the organisations development. Three respondents did allocate some time for this activity. One respondent felt that demands on NGO’s by Donors were high and therefore this forced them to invest their time in planning and implementation and no time was left for reflection. Only one respondent documented the learning and consciously applied it in planning new initiatives. Two other respondents said the learnings were applied but more unconsciously. The remaining two respondents did not allocate time to reflect on practice.

Three of the respondents showed various levels of innovation and new initiatives while two organisations had shown little change in practice and were offered training determined by funding they were able to raise.

4.5 CONCLUSION
Data presented and analysed in this chapter focussed on six key themes namely systems and integrated development, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team building and transformative leadership. The findings reflect that in all these themes there are varying degrees of applicability in the organisations studied, however the discipline of mental models show otherwise and there is little cognisance of the impact of these models to a developmental context.

The next chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the study, conclusion and recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

*(Maturana and Varela, 1998:245)*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning organisations are organisations that devote time to reflection and begin to challenge what they do, why they do it, how they do it and the effectiveness of their interventions. Creating communities of practice keeps organisations on the cutting edge of knowledge creation, thereby meeting the needs of the people they serve and developing suitable models to inform practice. In considering to what extent the five case studies researched are learning organisations, the researcher looked at the six most important characteristics of a learning organisation, namely systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, visioning, team learning and transformational leadership. This chapter will present a comprehensive analysis of the research findings under the six characteristics of learning organisations. Systems thinking is the first of the characteristics of a learning organisation and according to Senge, the most important. The researcher has included aspects of integration in this discussion as the two cannot be separated.

5.2 ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THEMES OF LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

The researcher organised the comprehensive analysis according to the themes selected and grouped systems with integration, individual learning with personal mastery and visioning with team learning. Mental models and transformative leadership have been analysed separately.
5.2.1 Systems and Integration
The South African experience of democratic development is relatively new and the major challenge facing a transforming society is the formulation of public policy that will guide development in South Africa and also the translation of that policy into practice. These two processes require high levels of co-operation, collaboration and trust between the state, its departments and civil society. They need to work together to evolve indigenous models that can better serve the development of young children within their context. There is a need to continuously challenge practice in order to remain relevant and effective.

The translation of policy proclamations on integrated inter-sectoral programming into concrete activities has for a number of reasons, been difficult to realize. To realize early childhood development models based on integrated community development models means a radical reform of state apparatus and a radically new approach to thinking about ECD practice by the state and civil society. The community development approach is necessary to confront the inequities of the past, particularly for marginalized children. The national government’s Grade R ECD policy, has prescribed an institutional model which mitigates against an integrated approach. However, the policy for 0-4 encourages integration.

If systems thinking is applied, then government departments and NGO’s need to realise they are part of one system and the lack of genuine partnerships at this level means an integrated systemic approach to ECD nationally, provincially and locally is not possible. There is little evidence of balanced, mutually beneficial partnerships between the state and the NGO’s interviewed. Collaboration recorded has been Government supplying financial resources and NGO’s implementing projects. This is a major stumbling block and has profound implications in terms of service delivery, accessing state and international funds and collaborative learning.

The one legacy of apartheid that will continue to be an impediment is the western analytical method adopted to solve problems which involves breaking problems into
components and dealing with them in isolation and then drawing conclusions for the whole. The result of this linear approach to thinking is that the new democratic government inherited a range of separate bureaucratic departments that addressed various issues such as, education, health, social development, housing with little or no collaboration and integration between them. Each of these departments is intended to serve children but their services are compartmentalised. This segregated approach is further reflected in the clearly divided and unlinked education system adopted in South Africa with pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education all being separate components of one education system. The almost impermeable boundaries between these structures have not done much to encourage systemic thinking and integration.

ECD NGO’s need to re-think how they organise their workforce in order to promote integrated systems approaches at community level. Healy (2005:238) says bureaucratic organisations fragment thinking which partitions the administrative from the professional, technical from policy, economic from social, empirical from the qualitative, and ‘doing’ from ‘thinking’ as opposed to the systems thinking in a learning organisation that affirms the interrelatedness of everything. All five case studies interviewed organised their staff into departments and separated the functions of community development, early childhood development and administration. The directors stated that they were challenged to get departments to work together and although three case studies made some effort to ‘cross fertilize’, there was a long way to go if genuine integrated development was to be realised at NGO level, let alone at community level. Since learning occurs in relationships, it is continually changing and organisational structures need to continually change too.

Development already exists in a community and each community has its own fragile system with its own resources, history, leadership and culture. When this is understood, then an intervention into a community is done with caution and respect for what already exists. Traditionally, NGO’s have taken development to, rather than facilitated development of communities and this is also true of the early childhood sector. There was evidence from two of the respondent organisations of piloting integrated community
development approaches to early childhood. Their pilot projects have acknowledged the systems that exist in communities and allowed the community to determine their own young children’s needs.

There is strong evidence that three of the respondents are grappling with integration at the various levels: between Government departments, between government services and communities, within their organisations and at community level. They still have a long way to go to implement integrated development in a manner which regroups and heals a community making them self-sustaining.

Government has invested heavily in formal training courses at the expense of more developmental community owned initiatives thus tempting NGOs to move towards compartmentalised ‘knock and drop’ work. There has been a strong focus on formal accredited skills in South Africa at the expense of more developmental community building approaches. Sector Education and Training Agencies (SETA) have been established to promote skills development. Both SETA’s and Government Departments have advertised numerous tenders for training courses and very little for community processes which do not lead to accredited certificates. This has resulted in NGO’s shifting away from developmental, systemic approaches in the community in search of finances which can be obtained from the delivery of accredited courses.

From the research findings, it was evident that much of the NGO’s time was taken up with accredited training courses for ECD practitioners. These courses are based on prescribed national unit standards and focus on technical skills. The courses are delivered as an end in themselves and are not part of an inclusive community development process to empower people.

The findings indicate that to some extent there has been a shift from a welfare approach to a more developmental approach. The evidence of this can be found in the nature of programmes of three of the respondents. Two of the respondents are also involved in progressive pilot programmes which have prioritised integrated community
development. There is also evidence of effort to work with families and communities beyond parent programmes and committee training interventions which have dominated. The researcher noted in the document analysis, a shift from traditional ‘dependency’ type projects like soup kitchens to more developmental projects like food gardens that are established by the community in order to address food security.

5.2.2 Individual Learning and Personal Mastery
Organisations learn through individuals who learn and therefore the researcher was looking at what individual learning was taking place within each NGO and its relevance to supporting integrated and developmental approaches.

In terms of capacity building and staff development within the NGO’s, major upgrading of formal qualifications has taken place. The history of ECD NGO’s in this country is that formal qualifications were not a requirement for employment and the expertise was found in the depth of experience of employees. However, all five respondents have made major efforts individually and through NECTA (Network of Eastern Cape Training Agencies) to assist staff to acquire qualifications. As mentioned earlier, case study two is linked to a University and all the NGO’s made use of courses offered which bridged the gap into tertiary education. Training and management staff was targeted and a high percentage now have degrees and some have diplomas. What is significant is that most of the qualifications acquired are education specialisation and only two staff members focussed on qualifications in social development. This may well have to do with the fact that organisations are still challenged to become more developmental and transform their practice from a narrow education view to a more integrated social development paradigm. Furthermore, all five organisations identified children’s health as key to all their programmes, yet no staff employed were health professionals.

The findings indicate that the importance of informal and experiential learning within the organisations does not appear to rank as highly as the formal qualifications. Two organisations showed commitment to experiential and informal type of learning by building in time to reflect on practice. One organisation set aside a fair amount of time
but had a very formal approach where leadership identified gaps and shaped training around a particular aspect. The remaining two organisations only focussing on ECD practitioner training did not factor in reflection time.

The findings indicate that the documentation of new learning was lacking in the NGO’s. James Taylor (1998) says the problem is not that individuals do not learn, they do so all the time, but what they fail to do is to become conscious of the learning taking place and then fail to apply it effectively in order to improve practice in organisations. The findings indicate that poor documentation of new learning may have contributed to poor application in the organisations. Two organisations have recently established research departments with the hope of improving documentation but also to contribute to the public domain. The development field is dynamic and the ECD sector needs to contribute to building a body of knowledge relevant to their practice and which can be shared.

O’Brien in (Senge, 1990:143) states that staff with high levels of personal mastery are more committed and responsible and that full personal development can impact on individual happiness. The findings indicate that there are high levels of commitment and ownership in three of the five NGO’s; the other two are strained under financial insecurity.

The findings indicate that managers are challenged to find the balance in the organisation between over-structuring and too little structure in order to allow for creativity and innovation to emerge. O’Brien in (Senge,1990:140) says that managers must give up the old dogma of planning, organising and controlling and rather create enabling conditions for people to lead the most enriching lives they can in an organisation. The respondents’ style of management ranged from over-planning to under-planning with two respondents conscious of finding a healthy tension between the two. Cowan in (Gilly, 1997:3) writes that we need to think more about the process of learning and that re-learning, re-examining, re-thinking, play, exploration and alternative paths become very important. He goes on to state that if we formalise and structure the
organisation too much, it will not create a learning environment where new and expansive ideas are created. Argyris in (Faerman, 1996:4) agrees and says people act to avoid embarrassment or threat by remaining in unilateral control, they maximise winning and minimise losing and they rationalise by setting clear objectives and evaluate their team against them. This bureaucratic style of management is not consistent with the principles of a learning organisation.

The findings indicate that three of the five respondents have managed to create safe environments of trust where people can share and learn freely. Faerman (1996:5) says that as a learning culture we have to say what we think and to take criticism without being on the defensive. She goes on to write that people and organisations learn by recognising their mistakes and correcting them and that no progress can be made if we pretend that the mistakes never happened. Three respondents felt that their staff have come a long way and do not become defensive as easily as before. One respondent said there was a culture of silence in the organisation which meant that trust levels were very low and there was no commitment to learning by the staff.

5.2.3 Mental Models
The findings indicate that there was little understanding and attention given to the mental models held in the organisations. This has undermined many efforts to foster systems thinking. Senge (1990:177) says we live in a world of presumption rather than a word of dynamic enquiry and we must guard against thinking our world view is fact, when it’s only a set of assumptions. Growing up in South Africa and living through apartheid years has provided some additional challenges. Firstly, to understand that one’s frame of reference needs to be challenged and a fair amount of un-learning needs to be done. Whites were conditioned to think Blacks were inferior, Blacks were suppressed and suffered under this rule and their mental models growing up, understanding who they were and their value, was distorted (Midgley :1995) Another example is that we assume training Early Childhood practitioners is sufficient to turn early childhood issues around for young children in South Africa. This belief has been adopted because of the conditioned mind-set of the ECD sector which has not been
challenged. By not working with mental models, limits solutions to the many challenges faced in these organisations. People can be taught to see their mental models and we have to challenge our practice, re-think beliefs and un-learn things to move forward in a dynamic way.

The findings indicate that there is little understanding of this discipline and none of the respondents worked with the mental models that existed in the individuals of the team. Indications are that organisations were more inclined to manage traditionally by organising and controlling as opposed to working with a vision, values and mental models (O’Brien in Senge, 1990:181). Two examples of the mental models identified will be highlighted. The first one is the assumption that an institutional model for ECD is the most suitable way to develop all young children, rich and poor. Although there is evidence of three of the respondents working with alternative models for ECD, the dominant view is still entrenched in the thinking of individuals.

The second mental model highlighted in the research emerged from two of the respondents. The assumption that under-development is about the lack of resources and once a community has the necessary resources their needs would be met. De Beer and Swanepoel (1998:27) state that development institutions with an altruistic attitude may, for example, under the cloak of empowerment, simply provide disadvantaged communities with goods in the belief that “having goods that were in short supply” is equal to being “empowered” – and that includes being provided with skills. Development is not about things, it is about people, about unleashing the potential of people to drive their own development (Taylor, 1998).

5.2.4 Visioning and Team Learning

The findings indicate that the vision and or mission in four organisations were arrived at collectively with the staff. None of the organisations involved their beneficiaries (community members) when preparing their vision or mission statement. From the research findings it was evident that although organisations had a vision, they did not live it and did not use it as their guiding purpose. Senge (1990) believes leaders are
stewards of the organisations vision. He says they have a commitment and responsibility to the vision but they do not own it.

Two of the respondent’s vision reflected very developmental approaches. The focus of the one respondent’s vision was the organisation itself as opposed to the beneficiaries by aiming to be a ‘world class professional institution’. The remaining two vision statements focussed very strongly on education. One of these organisations confused their mission with their vision and lacked clear direction and purpose. Assessment of the vision statements indicate that two organisations have made the mind shift to the current context of transformation and development in South Africa.

From the research findings it was evident that time dedicated to reflection was often regarded as ‘time out’ or a ‘nice to have’ luxury but not vital for the organisation. There was evidence of plenty of learning going on in the organisations but this was not formally captured or used to inform practice. The findings indicate that the NGO’s are under a lot of pressure to deliver and in many cases have unrealistic targets and time frames.

In terms of finding new ideas for the challenges faced by NGO’s, evidence indicates that respondents were more inclined to look ‘outside’ their organisations for expertise and new ideas. It can mean that existing knowledge is under-valued and there is a lack of commitment and opportunities to construct knowledge within the organisations.

5.2.5 Transformative Leadership
Organisations in South Africa need a new view of leadership if we are to embrace the changes that need to come with transforming a society from a deeply individualistic and non-systemic worldview to one that embraces democratic and developmental principles. Leaders in South Africa today need to be mature, work with their mental models and have a deep sense of generosity because they are responsible for learning and as Senge (1990) points out they need to build organisations where people continually
expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models.

The findings indicated that the leadership and management style was mostly democratic but there was evidence of the tendency to have ‘control over’ teams, rather than to decentralise power. In learning organisations, managers learn to think in terms of ‘control with’ rather than ‘control over’.

In terms of systems thinking, the research findings indicate that the respondents have done little to reorganise their organisational structure to reflect a more systemic approach to their work. Ray Strata (in Senge, 1990:343) writes that Leaders need to see the company as a system in which the parts are not only internally connected, but also connected to the external environment, and clarifying how the whole system can work better. The organisations interviewed still work with clearly defined departments and the respondents indicated that the collaboration across their departments and with government is disappointing. The respondents were positive about collaboration with other NGO’s.

The findings indicate that not enough time is dedicated to reviewing and reflecting on practice. Project management gets all the attention and appears to be the highest priority. Gilly (1997:6) maintains that managers and leaders will need to see their function become one of setting up opportunities for groups to socially construct and reconstruct the organisation’s knowledge.

The research findings indicate that respondents had difficulty in finding the balance and the correct ‘tension’ between order and disorder to allow creativity to flow while having some structure to guide and shape development. Weick and Western in (Gilly, 1997) explain that learning in an organisation needs a balance between order and disorder or disorganisation and organisation. Gilly (1997:6) refers to this tension when she writes that managers will have to be able to handle a more chaotic environment as everyone takes responsibility for and becomes part of creating learning communities.
The findings indicate that there is a strong commitment towards building social capital, enhanced values and wellbeing of staff. Three respondents gave examples of activities and conversations that was evidence supporting this. Senge (1990) talks of leaders as designers and Healy (2005:242) elaborates by advising leaders to ‘re-set’ the mindset from being pre-occupied on individuals, process and technology and shift to a wider focus which includes teams, values and culture.

In terms of the findings, none of the respondents gave any consideration to exposing and working with mental models in organisations. Max du Preez (1990) rules that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. Maturana, Humberto and Varela (1998:245) write that the world everyone sees is not the world but a world which we bring forth with others. We are too quick to think our assumptions are fact and don’t need to question our sets of beliefs. There was no evidence of leadership consciously working with theirs or their staff’s mental models.

5.3 CONCLUSION

South Africa has emerged from a painful past where the unequal provision of resources and services, disadvantaged young black children. The new democratic government has gone some way to addressing this by putting new policies that are developmental in nature, in place. However, the challenge is for these policies to be translated into practice at the grassroots level in a way that best meets the needs of young children, their families and the communities in which they live.

NGO’s have been major role-players in the delivery of early childhood education service to disadvantaged black children over the past thirty years. Their practice has been heavily influenced by western models designed for middle class children, approaches that have fallen short of the needs of deprived children living in poverty. The challenge for NGO’s is to make a paradigm shift in order to remain relevant and meet the new challenges.
This study proposes that this challenge can be addressed by ECD NGOs by being open to learning and integrating early childhood services into community development, rather than providing ECD service in isolation of the community.

The learning organisation is a strategy that allows organisations to re-invent themselves and remain relevant. Becoming a learning organisation is key to NGO’s finding creative, relevant and affordable ways of addressing the intractable challenges faced by young children on their development path. In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge repeatedly states that becoming a learning organisation is critical to remaining relevant (Senge: 1990). The researcher believes that it is not only critical to remaining relevant but also to providing ECD services that are integrated and developmental in nature.

The study aimed to explore the nature of the learning organisation in the current context of democracy and transformation in South Africa. Furthermore, the study explored the extent to which ECD NGO’s in the Eastern Cape Province were learning organisations and how each organisation’s experience was used to guide practice. The study focussed on key themes which are disciplines of the learning organisation and the findings can be summarised as follows:

### 5.3.1 Systems Thinking and an Integrated Approach

From the research findings, it is evident that although the national government is intending to become a developmental state with policies that promote a systems approach, the western analytical method of solving problems by organising things into component parts, dealing with them in isolation and then drawing conclusion from the whole still dominates in the ECD non-government organisations studied. The lack of integration that exists at the organisational level is also evident in the way they deliver their services at community level.
5.3.2 Individual Learning and Personal Mastery
The research findings indicate that much has been achieved in terms of upgrading formal qualifications as well as attending other available courses offered outside the organisations. There is little evidence of internal experiential learning and opportunities to reflect on practice. The findings reveal that this type of learning carries less value than learning that is formal or accessed externally. A close inspection of formal courses undertaken reveals that 95% of the staff opted to register for education degrees and diplomas with only 5% registering for community development qualifications. The research findings reveal that the organisations have not formalised a process for collecting and applying learning to new situations.

5.3.3 Assumptions and Working with Mental Models
The research findings indicate that little has been done to raise the consciousness on mental models held by individuals in the five organisations. Change is vital in a transforming society and as suggested by Senge, entrenched mental models will thwart changes that could come from systems thinking (Senge 1990:203). He goes on to warn that if managers believe their world views are facts, rather than a set of assumptions, they will not be open to challenging their views and thus will be limited in experimenting collaboratively with new ways of thinking.

5.3.4 Building Shared Vision and Team Learning
The research findings indicate that all five organisations have a prepared vision statement but that none use it as a guiding purpose. Senge (1990:209) states that a learning organisation cannot exist without a shared vision.

Faerman (1996) defines team learning as a discipline that starts with dialogue and the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together”. She goes on to say that team learning is vital because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations (Faerman 1996:23). The research findings reveal that there are high levels of collaboration but that not enough “thinking together” is done.
5.3.5 Transformative Leadership

Smit and Cronje (2002:293) state that transformational leaders are needed at every level in a transforming society such as South Africa. The findings of the research reveal that the capacity and will for change does exist in the respondents. Much has already been done to align their organisations with the new paradigm. The findings reveal that leaders look outside their organisations for ideas and don’t fully value what could emerge from within if the right opportunities are created.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations would assist organisations to master the disciplines of a learning organisation, which would help them to continuously re-invent themselves to remain relevant and viable in a rapidly changing environment and within the intended developmental context in a transforming society such as South Africa.

5.4.1 Systems Thinking and Integration

In the light of the findings, what is lacking is a clear understanding of community development as well as the developmental welfare approach. What is recommended is that an orientation and training programme is developed for all staff in the organisations, where clear conceptual understanding is provided as well as clarity around key principles of development. This would give the staff a clear understanding of where early childhood development fits into the developmental paradigm generally and community development processes in particular. It would also clarify how a community development approach can address the inequities suffered by children in the current South African society.

It is also recommended that NECTA take the initiative to formalise partnerships with Government services which focus on children in order to improve integration at community level. A further recommendation is that organisations interrogate their
present organisational structure and look for arrangements which are more systemic in nature and where integration will flow more organically.

5.4.2 Individual Learning and Personal Mastery
It has been identified through the research that the qualifications and skills of staff in the five ECD NGO’s studied focussed heavily on education qualifications. What is recommended is that funding and opportunities be created for individuals wishing to upgrade in community development courses.

It is further recommended that focussed reflective sessions are held regularly and tabled into the year plan. New ideas and learning must be documented and applied when planning and strategising.

5.4.3 Assumptions and Working with Mental Models
It is recommended that workshops for senior management are held to look specifically at the mental models and assumptions held within the organisation and the ECD sector. The purpose of the workshop would be to identify mental models that are positive and enhance practice as well as negative models and how to interrogate and dispel them. The workshops should thereafter be cascaded to encompass all staff of the ECD NGO.

5.4.4 Building a Shared Vision and Team Learning
It is recommended that organisations give serious consideration to how they arrive at a dynamic vision that energises staff, encourages generative learning and serves as a guiding purpose. Consideration needs to be given to involving key beneficiaries in the process of determining a vision for the organisation.

It is recommended that organisations clarify their vision and mission and do not confuse them. Faerman states that team learning is vital because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations (Faerman, 1996:23). It is recommended that regular opportunities are created as suggested in 5.4.2 for team
learning. As Senge (1990) claims this will serve to align teams, energise, complement one another’s efforts, affirm and acknowledge the contribution of individuals.

It is recommended that Organisations use their carefully constructed vision statements to guide their practice on a daily basis. It should be used as a point of departure and also a guiding principle when decisions are made.

5.4.5 Transformative Leadership

It is recommended that directors schedule regular sessions to allow the staff to reflect and generate new ideas and thinking. It is suggested that this time is not too structured and allows for creativity. When planning new interventions, it is recommended that all staff involved in the implementation of the project be on the planning team so that they can grapple with the various aspects of the design. Once a clear and dynamic vision has evolved through a collective, participatory process it is recommended that leadership find creative ways of keeping it alive by referring to it regularly and allowing it to guide practice and decisions on a daily basis.

Senge writes that leadership needs to think less like managers and more like biologists (Senge, 1999:6). Development is an organic process that unfolds at its own pace. There is a natural pattern in development which is fast at times and slow at others, depending on interplay between reinforcing growth processes and limiting processes. How far development progresses will depend on a host of limits, like managers’ commitment to change, shared vision, willingness to address deeper systemic causes of problems (not symptoms), willingness to challenge mental models, poor personal mastery in staff, poor team learning and the lack of strategies to sustain change. It is recommended that leadership heed Senge’s advice and begin to manage each intervention from an organic perspective.
5.5 CONCLUSION

It has been a challenge for ECD NGO’s to make the necessary transition from the activist role they played during the apartheid years to the role they now need to play in a transforming developmental state. Furthermore, many have closed down for financial and other reasons. Because of their history in ECD, they are vitally important players in the transformation of this sector but in order to really play a meaningful role they must learn to understand, manage and guide transformation by becoming adept at learning. They need to challenge themselves to continue looking for new ways to address the intractable problems such as poverty, child abuse and orphans faced by children in South Africa.

This study has explored the issue of learning in ECD organisations in relation to remaining relevant and meeting the challenges required in a transforming developmental state. Senge (1990) suggests that organisations only qualify as learning organisations when they “use what they know” to improve their practice which is a step beyond great insights and understanding. Two of the organisations meet 20% of the six criteria discussed and the other three meet approximately 60% of the criteria. These three organisations have created opportunities for reflection and learning and have begun to use this learning to inform and guide their practice. From these three organisations, innovative ECD models have evolved. However, these initiatives have mostly been designed and shaped by senior managers and have not emerged from the collective efforts of teams. None of the organisations are fully aligned with the six key areas discussed in this study. Therefore, the study concludes that overall, tremendous effort needs to be put into educating NGOs generally and ECD NGOs specifically to become learning organisations within a developmental paradigm in South Africa.
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APPENDIX A

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the Early Childhood Non-Government Organisations in the Eastern Cape Province and to assess what extent they meet the characteristics of a learning organisations. Through this interview the respondent’s understanding, experience and knowledge is sought, and therefore there are no wrong answers.

1. ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE
Could you please share the history of the Organisation?

2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT
What do you think Government’s role is in development?
What do you think the NGO’s role is in development? Has it changed since ’94?
Has your organisation changed the way they do things in the past 10 years. Has the focus and practice changed?
What threats and opportunities do you think ECD NGO’s are faced?

3. DETERMINING THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE NGO IS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

3.1 Systems thinking/ Integrated approach
• How do you organise your staff in the workplace – do they work in departments and if so do the departments interact with each other?
• What is your relationship with Government departments?
• What matters most in your organisation – business goals or people?
• What is your understanding of integration – do you feel it is important to your practice?
• How do you go about solving a problem in the organisation?
3.2 Personal Mastery

- How does individual learning happen on your staff? How do you support this?
- What is your understanding of generative and adaptive learning?
- What are your thoughts around staff commitment and the recognition thereof?
- What are your thoughts around how people learn?
- Once an individual on your staff has been exposed to new knowledge do you see any changes/application of the new learning? Have you noticed a link between attending workshops/courses and improved practice?
- Are opportunities for learning conversations or group dialogue created?
- Is trust an important value in the organisations?
- How do the staff feel about making mistakes?

3.3 Mental Models (deeply held internal images / perceptions / world views which dictate ones behaviours, they are ways of doing things – engrained ways of doing things)

- What do you understand by the term mental models?
- Are you aware of your and your staffs mental modes and if so how do you work with them?
- EMPOWERMENT – Do you think there is a difference between empowering communities and involving communities.
- What assumptions do you think we make in the ECD field

3.4 Building Shared Vision

- Does the Organisation have a vision statement?
- How did you arrive at it?
- How much does this vision guide staff on a daily basis?
- Is reflection time in the organisation important?

3.5 Team Learning/Building

- How do you organise your workforce?
• How well do your teams work – what do you look for (characteristics) of a good team?
• What opportunities do you create for collective learning – in and outside organisation? Do you document this learning?
• When the team look for answers – who do they look to?
• How does your teams cope with conflict?
• How does the team cope with constructive criticism given in the group and/or individually?
• How does your team learn?

3.6 Transformative Leadership
• What do you consider important in leadership?
• How would you explain your style of leadership?
• How important is learning to your organisation?
• Do you measure performance – how?
• What has been your biggest disappointment in the ECD sector?
• What are the challenges with the ECD sector? What has contributed to these challenges?
• What has been your biggest disappointment in your Organisation? Why do you think it went wrong?
• How do you as a leader – foster personal growth?
• Do you give yourself time for reflection?