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Learning and Leadership as key to organisational development: a study of how a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the South African education field grew from a regional entity into a national organisation

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Abstract

This study examines the nature of learning organisations with a special focus on how these organisations manage to sustain and reinvent themselves despite changing contexts. In particular, the study focuses on one NGO operating in the South African education field. The intention of this research report is to determine how the specified organisation has been able to sustain and expand its operations while remaining effective and relevant despite changing political, economic and social contexts. The findings of the study have been drawn from interviews held with key personnel who presently work or previously worked for the organisation under study. Data from the interviews was triangulated with data extracted from the organisation's annual reports. The data shows that the organisation grew from a regional entity to having offices all over South Africa. In order to do so, the organisation had to adapt to changing circumstances which it did by learning from experts and other organisations worldwide that were involved in similar pursuits. From these sources, the organisation learnt about innovative literacy materials and development strategies. The spearhead for many years behind these developments was a leader with a strong and charismatic personality and so, ultimately, it is difficult to distinguish between her personal learning and the organisational learning that took place.

Key terms

Learning, learning organisations, non-governmental organisations, interviews, common vision, visionary leadership and qualitative research.

Declaration

Person number: 406026

I hereby declare that **Learning and Leadership as key to organisational development: A study of how a non-governmental organisation in the South African education field grew from a regional entity into a national organisation** is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted from are indicated by means of complete references.

Signature: Date:

(Mr SW Ncokazi)

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Dedicated to the almighty, the Lord Jesus Christ
for His love and guidance.

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To my mother for inspiring my sister and I
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Acronymns

AAA	Association of Advertising Agencies
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANC	African National Congress
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DDG	Deputy Director General
DDSP	District Development Support Programme
DEAR	Drop Everything and Read
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EMIC	Educational Management and Information Consultants
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GPLMS	Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy
IEP	Integrated Education Project
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
JET	Joint Education Trust
MEC	Member of Executive Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PASO	Pan-African Student Organisation
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

Chapter 1

1.1 Historical Context of the Study

South Africa, like most developing countries, has undergone massive changes in all governmental sectors in pursuit of a better life for all its citizens. As one would expect, the education sector has not been exempt from these changes. Since the advent of democracy in 1994 in particular, a considerable number of initiatives have been introduced in a noble attempt to address past imbalances in the quality of education offered to the different racial groups (Christie, 2008). To initiate a massive transformation of the education system, the South African government banished the existing fragmented education departments (organised along colour lines) and introduced one national education system that was meant to cater for all learners in the country, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

Unsurprisingly, it was later realised that spontaneously combining all education departments into one was not a panacea for all the educational problems that South Africa faced. Mainly due to past laws, these departments were at different levels in terms of staffing, resources, quality of teaching and learning etc. In order to tackle the lack of consistency in terms of delivery of quality education, a new curriculum, in the form of outcomes-based education (OBE) was introduced in the country. The change in curriculum and its implementation drew heavy criticism and set off a spiral of curriculum changes, revisions and reintroductions in an attempt to find the right combination (Christie, 2008).

NGOs working in the education field have had to grapple with numerous changes in order to survive in the face of the changes instituted by governments (Habib, 2005). A chronological account of the changes that South African NGOs have had to deal with is useful. In the 1980s, South Africa displayed some signs of political reform as a result of the 1976 student revolts. Cynics saw these changes as nothing but the

"modernisation of Apartheid" (Aitchison, 2000). There were strong anti-Apartheid sentiments within civil society both at home and abroad at this stage and so NGOs received funding from foreign donors in their war against the injustices inculcated by the ruling party. Money was directly channelled towards NGOs with very few control systems in place. Soon after, pressure from the rest of the world and the effects of sanctions forced the government to consider some relaxation of its Apartheid policies. Inevitably, NGOs operated in this politically charged environment and it must be noted that they played a significant role in the struggle to end Apartheid in South Africa (Aitchison, 2000).

During the 1990s, the demise of Apartheid was visible on the political horizon and South African society began to consider what the new South Africa would look like, including asking what would be the role of NGOs. New economic policies were introduced after the 1994 democratic elections in order to address past imbalances which led to a sharp decline in foreign funding to NGOs since funding was now directly given to the government of the day. In view of this, NGOs were encouraged to work more closely with government (Harley and Rule, 2003).

The 2000s were characterised by questions from government, donors and civil society concerning the role played by NGOs and whether they furthered or undermined the national agenda. Democracy gradually strengthened and local government elections were held peacefully. Privatisation of parastatals increased, poverty deepened and unemployment worsened. Due to these challenges, foreign funders continued to aid NGOs and the National Lottery was established to assist in the drive to alleviate these social pressures (Habib, 2005).

1.2 Scope and Assumptions of the Study.

The aim of the study was to cover the history of the organization from its inception in 1979 to date. The focus of this report, therefore, was to explore how NGOs in the education sector in South Africa endured all these changes. I endeavoured to discover what these organisations have done in order to stay efficient and competitive despite constant change initiatives. I conducted interviews where I spoke to key employees in the organization to elicit their views about the organisation's development, the leadership style employed and the role played by learning in the organisation. I studied all the organisation's available annual reports in order to gather as much data as possible.

To facilitate this process, I studied a South African NGO in the education field which seems to have successfully weathered all the changes in the education system and remained both effective and efficient. I have called it *the organisation* which is a pseudonym given to the NGO in order to protect its identity.

At the beginning of the study I had the following assumptions. I believed that *the organization* had survived this long because of its charismatic leader who stayed with *the organization* from 1979 to 2010. In the process, she built a reputation as a fierce negotiator whose commitment to social upliftment could not be questioned. I believed that she used her influence to garner financial support from wealthy individuals and big corporate companies. In my view, she was a gifted networker who was able to attract experts from all over the world and convinced them to visit *the organisation* and to share their expertise. Interaction with all these visitors must have allowed her to stay abreast of developments in other countries. I also believed that *the organisation* survived because it adopted a clear and relevant literacy development strategy that was suitable for South African conditions. This strategy, in my view, was aggressively marketed to the South African public as a solution to poor achievement levels by second language English speakers in the country.

1.3 History of *The Organisation*

In the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, education in black township schools was in disarray. The culture of teaching and learning was severely affected by student demonstrations which intensified after 1976. As a result of the student protests, many government and municipal buildings were torched. Unfortunately, schools and public libraries were some of the institutions that suffered this fate.
Obviously, this had far reaching consequences for teaching and learning in the country. It is worthwhile to note that the culture of reading, in particular, was adversely compromised due to lack of books and other reading materials. Sadly, this was an on-going challenge caused by inequalities in the South African education system. It is in this context that *the organisation* was registered as an NGO in the late1970s in Pretoria.

Initially, *the organisation* was established with the sole aim of providing township schools with books to help them improve reading and writing skills amongst their learners. This was in order for the schools to compete favourably with their counterparts who came from affluent communities. *The organisation* was a

small operation based in the library of a private school. For many years after 1976, South African Black townships were engulfed in turmoil as students, parents and civil society in general violently challenged the might of the Apartheid regime. Police road blocks, burning tyres and marauding gangs of protesters were just some of the challenges that the organisation's volunteers had to overcome.

Despite these modest beginnings, *the organisation* has enjoyed phenomenal growth that has seen it opening offices in all the major centres of South Africa. The aim of *the organisation* has remained both simple and relevant over almost three decades of existence: "To help people throughout South Africa develop their reading, learning, information and communication skills so that they may become independent life-long learners". To achieve this goal, *the organisation* has sought funding from individuals, businesses and governments both nationally and internationally. Such funding has been used to train teachers on how to improve literacy instruction, to provide schools with appropriate reading materials and to visit classrooms where teachers are coached and supported by experienced trainers from *the organisation.*

1.4 Problem Statement

In South Africa, many NGOs were started in order to address the wrongs committed by the Apartheid regime against the poor and disenfranchised people of the country (Aitchison, 2000). Most of these NGOs were started in the late 1970s in the aftermath of the 1976 student protests. Violent scenes from these protests were broadcast on television screens all over the world and, in sympathy, foreign donors pumped money into South African NGOs to assist with the fight against Apartheid (Habib, 2005).

When South Africa became a democratic country, these foreign donors then changed their funding focus believing that the new democratically elected government should be helped to address past imbalances instead of individual organisations. As a result, NGOs were urged to work more closely with the government (Habib, 2005). Obviously, this posed challenges for these organisations since their very existence was prompted by a need to work independently from the government. Furthermore, donors started pushing for more accountability within the NGO sector and cries for these organisations to be more professional grew louder. To further complicate matters, experienced practitioners working for NGOs left the sector in large numbers and joined the civil service or became highly paid consultants. In

view of all these challenges, many non-governmental organisations were forced to close their doors. Despite this, some of them managed to prevail and still exist currently.

The focus of this study, therefore, was to investigate how such organisations managed to maintain their efficiency and effectiveness in the midst of all the challenges and changes that the South African NGO sector has had to grapple with over the years. As a basis of this study, I explored the possibility that organisational learning is central to an organisation's ability to cope with changing contexts. I paired this with an exploration of the characteristics of learning organisations as described in the literature. Both these areas were used to determine if companies that deal with change successfully are indeed learning organisations. I also looked at the role played by leadership in organisational development. Does a leader's leadership style contribute to an organisation's ability to sustain and re – invent itself? As an acid test, I conducted a case study on one South African NGO which seems to have successfully survived despite all the challenges discussed above.

1.5 Main Research Question

How do NGOs learn in periods of rapid change in the political, social and economic climate in which they operate?

1.6 Sub-Questions

How has learning and leadership contributed to change within *the organisation*?

What structures, if any, were put in place within *the organisation* in order to deal with change?

1.7 Rationale.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argue that the importance and significance of a study provides rationale on why a study should be conducted. I believe that this study is important because it adds to our understanding of learning organisations, and in particular, how the concept applies to NGOs. In my view,

this understanding will enable practitioners to know which strategies best suit their organisations and provide guidelines on how to make one's organisation more efficient and effective. Thus I believe that this study will enhance our understanding of how learning organisations function and whether the very notion is attainable.

The study will also highlight the challenges faced by NGOs in the South African context and explain the characteristics needed by organisations in order for them to survive shifts in their environment. This, in my view, will be of benefit since NGOs operate in an intensely competitive environment.
The study may also shed light on whether the practice of learning organisations can be applied to other types of organisations, for instance government departments, schools, supermarkets and so on.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this section I review literature on learning organisations and how these organisations use learning to transform themselves continually. The review is categorised into the following sub-topics: definitions, characteristics, benefits, and barriers to learning in organisations.

2.1 Definitions of Learning Organisations

Edwards (1997) asserts that learning is essential for organisational effectiveness in all types of organisations. He further claims that all NGOs aspire to be learning organisations. Despite these valiant sentiments, there is no consensus in the available literature on a common definition of a learning organisation. Britton (2002) argues that attempts to find a common definition could prove frustrating and possibly misguided. He further asserts that the most useful definition is the one where an organisation develops for itself. Garvin et al (2008) emphasise this point when they observe that a clear definition of learning organisations has proved elusive.

Senge (1990) is credited with providing one of the earliest definitions of learning organisations. He defines learning organisations as "organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together". It must be noted that Senge's definition emphasises learning continually in order to grow and achieve common goals. Taylor (1998) concurs with Senge's definition when he explains a learning organisation as one that builds and improves its own practice by consciously and continually devising and developing the means to draw learning from its own and others' experiences. Pedler *et al* (1991: 1) give a similar definition when they point out that a learning organisation is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself. Sinkula et al (1997) give a simple definition when they argue that learning organisations are those organisations that are competent learners.

Some authors, on the other hand, put emphasis on the relations that exist between members of an organisation and others. Moloi (2002) for instance asserts that a learning organisation can be described as a structured group capable of outstanding performance through collaborative practices within its internal and external environment. The Harvard Business Review (1991: 20), cited in Moloi (2002), describes a learning organisation as a group of people learning from the experience and best practices of others.

Aiken and Britton (1997), cited in Britton (2002), provide a more comprehensive definition when they define a learning organisation as "one which is skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring the knowledge of its members and partners through the development of practices, policies, procedures and systems in ways which continuously improve its ability to set and achieve goals, satisfy stakeholders, develop practice, value and develop its people and achieve its mission with its constituency". In contrast, Du Plessis, *et al* (1999) give a short and precise definition when they state that a learning organisation is an organisation that continually gets "smarter" because learning is planned, systematic and is in alignment with the organisation's strategic goals.

Silins et al (2002), when discussing schools as learning organisations define them as schools that employ processes of environmental scanning, develop shared goals, establish collaborative teaching and learning environments, encourage initiative and risk taking, regularly review all aspects related to and influencing the work of the school, recognize and reinforce good work, and, provide opportunities for continuing professional development. Leithwood and Aitken (1995) cited in Silins et al (2002) define learning organisations as a group of people pursuing common purposes with a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those purposes, modifying them when that makes sense, and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes.

Keating (1995) also cited in Silins et al (2002) emphasises the importance of collaboration when he defines learning organisations as a coordinated group effort towards commonly shared goals, active commitment to continuous improvement and to the diffusion of best practices throughout the organisation, horizontal networks of information flow to help bring together expertise as well as links with the external world, and, the ability to understand, analyse, and use the dynamic system within which they are functioning. Pedler et al (1991) cited in Awbrey et al (2005) define learning organisations as those that facilitate the learning of all their members and continuously transforms themselves.

Personally, I agree with definitions that put particular emphasis on continual learning and the ability to focus as a group on common goals in order to achieve organisational aims. Experience as both a teacher and a teacher trainer has taught me that it is easier and quicker to achieve set goals if people willingly work together to achieve organisational aims.

2.2 Characteristics of learning organisations

Arguably, Peter Senge has had the most impact of his peers on how people perceive learning organisations in the world of business. His book *The Fifth Discipline* has popularised the concept of organisational learning and has made him an authority on the subject. For many years Senge has studied how organisations react and respond to change initiatives. His focus seems to be the decentralisation of leadership in organisations in order to capacitate all employees so that they all contribute positively towards the achievement of common goals. The following, therefore, is a brief analysis of his views as expressed in *The Fifth Discipline* which was published in 1990.

Senge (1990) argues that learning organisations should exhibit the following basic principles: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision and team learning. Systems thinking, according to Senge, allows individuals within the organisation to understand the interrelations that exist in the organisation and be able to see the different parts as a whole. It is argued that systems thinking will help organisations to be more efficient and effective. Personal mastery, Senge asserts, allows individuals to understand their capabilities and fully utilise them to achieve their own goals. Thus an atmosphere is created where people are able to develop both personally and professionally.

Senge also points out that mental models are created when people in the organisation continually reflect and clarify their perception of the world and consider how this influences personal decisions and choices that are made. The author further argues that having a shared vision allows individuals to align their personal and organisational aspirations such that they are all united behind a common vision of the future. This allows individuals to harness their energies in order to achieve the kind of future that is desired by all. According to Senge, team learning is a unifying force that enables groups to be stronger and more

capable than any single individual in the group. As such, members are able to align their capabilities behind the achievement of a commonly desired future.

Although Senge's book has been immensely successful and has been purchased by millions of readers, there are those who firmly question his ideas. Some argue that although there has been a lot said about learning organisations, few real world examples can be readily found. Senge's views have been criticised as being too idealistic and irrelevant to the needs of many organisations. Personal mastery has been lambasted as an intangible concept, the benefits of which cannot be measured (O'Keefe, 2002). Some critics even see personal mastery as a threat to organisational well-being. Senge (1990) himself concedes that to empower people in an unaligned organisation can be self-destructive. Other critics argue that some people are simply allergic to change: buy-in must be at the individual level before it can be realised at organisational level. Some critics further assert that the bigger the organisation, the more difficult and complex knowledge sharing becomes (Serenko *et al*, 2007).

In the South African context, Professor KC Moloi has worked extensively on refining the notion of a learning organisation to suit the South African context. She has used Senge's book as a basis for guidance on how underperforming schools in South Africa can be turned around. According to Moloi (2002), underachieving schools must change their mindset in order to turn their fortunes around. Township schools, she argues, need this change in mindset as advocated by Senge in order to address past imbalances and ensure that they produce learners who can compete favourably with their peers who come from more advantaged backgrounds.

In her book, Moloi (2002) starts by arguing that although learning organisations share some common characteristics, they are also different from each other. She further notes that learning organisations continually assess their skills and their learning capacity. Such organisations, she observes, reward performance and endeavour to motivate and inspire employees. Extensive team work enables members to learn from each other thus encouraging a culture of continuous feedback and disclosure. Moloi further notes that these organisations are able to deal proactively with change and require a deep sense of commitment in order to provide the energy needed to succeed as a world-class organisation. The author states that in learning organisations, learning occurs at four levels: the individual, team, organisational and societal levels.

In my view, Garvin *et al* (2008) go deeper and try to explain the kind of atmosphere that must prevail in an organisation for learning to occur. Unlike Senge, Garvin *et al* do not just assume that all organisations have the capacity to learn, but go on to provide the kind of circumstances that must prevail for organisational learning to flourish. These authors refer to characteristics of learning organisations as building blocks. They point out that organisations must possess several blocks for organisational learning and adaptability to be possible. They assert that learning organisations need to have a supportive learning environment that provides psychological safety, where differences are appreciated, where there is openness to new ideas and time for reflection is catered for. It is also emphasised that organisations must have concrete learning processes and practices.

Thus, according to these authors, learning processes must involve the generation, collection, interpretation and dissemination of information. Garvin *et al* further note that organisational learning is strongly influenced by the behaviour of leaders. It is argued that when leaders actively question and listen to employees, they prompt dialogue and debate which encourages people to learn. This view is completely different from those presented by Senge because he implies that organisations should have a flat hierarchical structure to allow team learning to succeed. Garvin *et al*'s argument (that the behaviour of leaders impacts on the organisation's ability to learn) implies that leaders still have a strategic role to play even in progressive learning organisations.

On the other hand, Silins et al (2002) identify seven characteristics of learning organizations. They start with the idea of environmental scanning which refers to the organisation's ability to gather information which allows it to make informed decisions. Vision and planning refer to the commitment to a clear vision that guides the organisation's everyday actions, and shapes long term planning. Collaboration refers to the existence of a comfortable atmosphere that allows members to work together and share ideas. The idea of taking initiative and risks refer to the capacity the organisation has for change and new ideas. Review refers to the extent to which the organisation reviews, evaluates and actions its programs and practices. Recognition and reinforcement refer to the organisation's ability to sincerely recognize and value effort, initiative and achievement. Lastly, continuing professional development refers to the extent to which encouragement, opportunity and resources are provided to allow members to develop themselves so that the organisation can benefit from newly acquired knowledge and skills.

When discussing characteristics of learning organizations, Sinkula et al (1997) mention the following: Commitment to learning which refers to the organisations willingness to learn and embrace new ideas. Open mindedness which refers to the capacity to proactively question long held practices, assumptions and beliefs. According to Sinkula et al, this capacity can be referred to as the first phase of unlearning. Shared vision is also mentioned and the authors argue that it is different from commitment to learning and open mindedness because it influences the direction of learning whilst the others influence the intensity of learning.

2.3 The benefits of organisational learning

Senge (1990) points out that in situations of rapid change only those that are flexible, adaptable and productive will excel. For this to happen, he argues that organisations need to find a way of prompting people to learn at all levels within the organisation. According to him, learning organisations allow people to be part of teams and this makes learning a more meaningful experience. He also argues that learning organisations require both adaptive and generative learning thus enhancing its capacity to create.

On the other hand, Moloi (2002) argues that in learning organisations, transformation is nurtured through creating appropriate contexts for continuous learning.

Britton (1998) argues that as developmental organisations, NGOs have no option but to learn since knowing "what works and what does not" is a major part of their currency. According to Britton, being learning organisations allows organisations to learn how to be more effective.

He also argues that part of learning to be more effective includes finding out what the needs of potential clients are and devising appropriate programmes to assist. He also points out that organisations need to learn how to be more efficient.

Britton explains that the organisation must learn how to use its resources effectively so that it can achieve its goals at an acceptable cost. He further notes that organisations must learn how to expand. This, in practice, means that organisations must learn to "scale up" their work so that the maximum number of people can benefit from programmes which have been piloted.

This, Britton asserts, involves increasing the developmental impact of the organisation through the use of deliberative strategies that can be categorized as additive, multiplicative or diffusive. He further argues that if NGOs do not learn, they are likely to cease to exist as they will not be able to adapt sufficiently well to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves.

2.4 Barriers to organisational learning

Britton (2002, 1998) divides barriers to learning in organisations into two categories, namely: external and internal barriers. According to him, external factors arise from the organisation's external environment and the organisation may have little or no influence over them. In terms of NGOs, the author points out that the nature of donor priorities often force a fragmented project framework on development organisations which can inhibit learning or even make it impossible.

It is also noted that pressure to report low overheads to donors may make organisations reluctant to invest the time and other resources necessary for effective organisational learning. Britton further asserts that competition for funding amongst similar organisations may create a perceived pressure on the part of NGOs to demonstrate uncomplicated success stories to attract the public and other stakeholders.

The points raised by Britton clearly illustrate how difficult it can be for NGOs in particular to develop a learning culture. By their very nature, such organisations rely on donor funding and have to satisfy donor's needs at all times to stay ahead of the competition. In my experience as a teacher trainer within the non-profit sector, NGOs usually do not have the luxury of surplus funds to allocate to staff development programmes. Disposable funds are scarce and donor expectations usually restrict how donated funds can be used.

The second category of hindrances to organizational learning delineated by Britton refers to internal barriers. Britton argues that many organisations have characteristics which make organisational learning difficult. He cites Edwards (1996) who lists the following internal barriers to organisational learning:

> An activist culture may see learning as a luxury, separate from and secondary to the "real work". Thus time and space for learning may be difficult to find and protect. Hierarchical, centralised, control-oriented structures are inimical to learning, inflexibility of focus restricts learning as timescales are compressed and experimentation discouraged. Incentives and rewards for learning

> are weak and failures are disguised or punished while inertia, defensiveness, complacency and territoriality may override values of openness.

Britton also highlights the fact that organisations are not good at dealing with information which challenges the organisational consensus or threatens short-term institutional interests.

Taylor (1998) lists the following as factors that make organisational learning difficult. He argues that very few ostensibly obvious opportunities for learning are ever utilised thus the same mistakes are made repeatedly. Taylor also points out that it is difficult to engage in learning that goes beyond remembering and understanding to improved action because such learning requires behavioural change. He asserts that when behavioural change is expected, forces that are against change initiatives gain momentum.

Taylor further notes that in addition to personal difficulty in embracing new learning, there are organisational dynamics that also mitigate against learning. He explains that as part of their organisational identity, organisations differ in the balance they display between planning, acting and reflecting. According to him, some organisations view reflection as indulgent and inefficient and do not use the opportunity afforded by reflection to learn. On the other hand, Taylor argues that some organisations become fixated on reflection that seldom deliver sufficient clarity on which practical and implementable plans can be built. Taylor advises such organisations to find the balance between action and reflection that is right for them and produce learning which improves their practice. He further identifies – as one of the barriers to organisational learning – the tendency to undermine and threaten rather than provide challenging, supportive and trusting environments in which individuals can risk and learn.

From the literature discussed above, it is apparent that organisational learning is essential for company growth and adaptability. I fully agree with the notion that a non-threatening environment that embraces change is needed for learning to occur. It is also clear from the literature that the behaviour of leaders can either destroy or encourage organisational learning. During my teaching career, I was fortunate to have principals who led by example and encouraged their staff members to further their studies. This was motivating because, instead of being threatened, such leaders realise that teachers' academic growth will have a positive impact on effective teaching and learning at their schools.

Insights gleaned from the above literature informed this study. The questionnaire that was used during the interviews was based on this literature. In addition, characteristics of learning organisations emphasised in the literature were used as criteria to identify (or not) a particular organisation as a learning organisation. Furthermore, these criteria were used as a reference when archival records were studied. This allowed me to determine whether or not the organisation under study was indeed a learning organisation.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Why a Qualitative Study?

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2002), qualitative studies should be conducted for the following reasons: to allow one to gather data in a natural environment, thus enabling the researcher to study behaviour as it occurs or occurred. Working in the natural setting of a functional NGO allowed me to take note of contextual factors that could have a bearing on the findings of this report. It also allowed me to identify and collect relevant data directly from their sources.

Through the interviews conducted, I gathered rich data that confirm my findings. These in-depth interviews allowed me to investigate why and how particular phenomena occurred which provided me with deep insights into the organisation. A qualitative study allowed me to focus on the participants' personal perspectives, opinions and understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny which yields much richer data than a quantitative study would.

3.2 Case Study Selection Criteria

The organisation selected as the focus of this study was selected because it exhibited certain criteria which make it an ideal choice for analysis. The following are some of the characteristics that make this organisation such a good subject for the proposed study.

This particular NGO has been able to keep its doors open despite facing numerous challenges brought on by economic and political change in the South African context. It must be noted that many similar organisations in our country were unable to withstand such changes and ultimately were forced to shut their doors.

From modest beginnings, this organisation has been able to grow from a small endeavour into a force to be reckoned with in the fight against illiteracy in South Africa. As a former teacher, I have a deep understanding of educational issues in the South African context, therefore it was convenient for me to study an organisation renowned for teacher training.

Furthermore, as an employee of this organisation, I have a firsthand understanding of how the organisation functions and, by extension, how NGOs in the education field operate in the country. Due to my status as an employee, it became imperative to ensure the anonymity of the organisation in order not only to protect the integrity of the company, but to protect the interviewees as well.

3.3 Researcher Positioning.

As already indicated, I am presently employed by the organization under scrutiny. According to Chiseri – Strater (2002) all researchers are positioned. She also asserts that researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class nationality, institutional affiliation, historical - personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition. I acknowledge that due to my affiliation with the subject of this study, I had concerns with possible bias on my part and how that could possibly affect how the study is conducted and the legitimacy of my findings. Chiseri – Strater further points out that all researchers are positioned whether they write about it explicitly, separately or not at all.

As an insider in *the organisation*, I had to try to be objective and look at *the organisation* from an outsider's point of view. Obviously, this was not easy because affiliation with *the organisation* could have clouded my judgement and influenced how those interviewed related to me during our interview sessions. Were the interviewees completely at ease with the fact that one of their own was interviewing them on sensitive information pertaining to *the organisation*? Is my affiliation a factor which caused three colleagues to decline taking part in this project? In my view, this question guided me and compelled me to continually strive to remain objective throughout the commission of this study. Furthermore, my affiliation to the case study compelled me to be intentionally critical of the data I dealt with.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The research method used was a combination of two approaches. Interviews with key members of *the organisation* were conducted in order to gain an understanding of how it has operated over the years. In addition, organisational documentation was analysed in order to form a basis for assertions made and to act as a guide to inform conclusions that were drawn from the available evidence. This document analysis was also used, where possible, to close information gaps that emerged from the interviews.

Thus, the aim of using both interviews and documentation was so that I could triangulate data gathered from interviews with information gleaned from the annual reports. The organisation's annual reports proved to be the most useful source of information I could find. Unfortunately, I could not find annual reports dated earlier than the year 1985. According to the National Director, this was because the organisation's reports were quite archaic during the early years. As already indicated, these reports were used to triangulate information that I gathered from the interviews, this allowed me to cross check vital data and assess whether both sources were reliable and valid or not.

One of the founding members of the organisation has written an unpublished book on the organisation's history. This book proved to be a priceless source of information because it is a firsthand account of events that led to the formation of the organisation and the struggles that were faced throughout the organisation's history. In order to protect his identity, the author of this book will be referred to as the Deputy Director throughout this study.

Prior to the commencement of the study, written permission to conduct the study was secured from the organisation's present National Director. The whole study was conducted within the physical premises of the organisation. The interviews involved present and only one former employee of *the organisation.* I must state that initially, I had aimed to interview 8 individuals. Unfortunately, 3 individuals declined to take part in the study. As such, only five individuals were ultimately interviewed. To protect their identities, interviewees have been given pseudonymns that are used throughout the study. Namely the National Director, the Deputy Director, the Human Resources Officer, the Junior Trainer and the Senior Trainer. Interviewees were asked to sign consent forms as an indication that they willingly took part in the

study. Thus, the study was conducted in a confined and bounded environment because only one organisation and its present and former employees were included. I must state that the first National Director was interviewed in her home which is situated in one of the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg.

3.5 Ethical Considerations.

Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were required to read and sign a document which explained the following about their involvement in the study:
The fact that their involvement in the study will remain anonymous and that any information given will be kept in the strictest confidence. They were also assured that they had a right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the study without any punitive action taken against them. Participants were also assured that participation or non participation in the study will not affect their working conditions in any way. As such, they we instructed that their signatures imply informed consent and assured me that they understood all the ethical issues mentioned above.

3.6 Data Collection

To ensure that I gathered accurate information, the following documents were collected and scrutinised: project evaluation reports (both internal and external), annual reports, monthly reports done by trainers, pictures, newsletters, minutes of meetings, project proposals, brochures for marketing, circulars, memos and so on. To ensure that I gathered reliable and accurate information, I highlighted particular characteristics for suitable interviewees. I interviewed individuals who have been with the organisation for a minimum of 10 years. I also targeted individuals who held key positions within *the organisation.* This included an individual who has left *the organisation.* People who were part of the team that decided to start this literacy organisation in the late 1970s were interviewed. People who worked in the materials development department were asked to take part because they could shed light on why the decision was made to produce reading materials in-house instead of using materials produced by other publishers in the field.

I also interviewed an individual from the fundraising and public relations department since they were best placed to know what donors require in general. In my view, the characteristics mentioned above enabled me to gain a historical perspective and a deeper understanding of *the organisation*. This, I believe, allowed me to present valid and reliable research findings.

Chapter 4

4.1 Historical Background and Context

Introduction

One of the purposes of this chapter is to chronicle the history of the NGO under study. This was done by documenting the political and socio economic climate which prevailed in South Africa at the time. I believe that this enables the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the context under which *the organisation* thrived in South Africa. The other purpose is to identify key areas in the organisation's history that suggest organisational learning occurred which led to a review and refinement of materials, approaches and systems that the organisation used. I will also highlight the role that leadership played in ensuring that *the organisation* remained sustainable and relevant over a long period of time.

4.2 The Early Years

The story of this organisation cannot be told in isolation from the narrative of the country itself. If one is to gain a good understanding of the organisation's origins, one has to have an understanding of contextual factors in the country at the time.

South Africa, under Apartheid, was governed by laws that separated its citizens along racial lines in all areas of life. Socially, for example, people of different racial groupings were prohibited from bathing together at public beaches. Public amenities like parks, transport services and schools were, by law, allocated separately to the different racial groups that resided in the country. Inevitably, one racial group enjoyed a superior quality of life compared to others in the country. This group was White, particularly White Afrikaners.

In 1953, the Bantu Education Act came into being. The aim of the Act was to bring the education of the Black learner firmly under state control. Furthermore, the aim of this Act was to exercise control over the

Black masses while providing the South African economy with a much needed labour force. In spite of this Black civil society, labor unions and teacher formations resisted the implementation of the Bantu Education Act (Christie, 2008).

During this era, the South African government spent the most resources on the White population in the country. Consequently, stark disparities existed between Whites, Blacks, Indians, Coloureds and other groups that had made this country their home. Inevitably, such disparities were also evident in the quality of education that was provided to these groupings (Christie, 2008). Comparatively, Whites in South Africa enjoyed a superior quality of education when compared to Blacks and this was done explicitly. A National Party MP, JN Le Roux, argued in parliament that Black children must be trained and educated such that they understood their role as labourers in South African society (Bloch, 2009). As a result, racial tension, social unrest and economic inequality characterised life in South Africa. By the mid-1970s, racial tensions in the country were at an all-time high, with routine protests witnessed in many Black townships across the country.

In Soweto (South Africa's largest black township) students were beginning to voice their displeasure at the poor quality of education to which they were being subjected. In 1976, these tensions reached a zenith when the government attempted to compel Black learners in the country's township schools to be taught exclusively in Afrikaans. Learners had no problem with Afrikaans as a subject but they objected to having all lessons at school delivered in the language.

As a direct consequence, student formations in Soweto planned a march to be held on the 16th of June 1976. The purpose of the march was to protest peacefully while making it clear to the Apartheid government that oppressive education policies would no longer be tolerated. Unfortunately, security forces responded by shooting into the protesting crowds. In the ensuing chaos, a number of learners were shot dead. This resulted in the disruption of schooling, destruction of property and the boycotting of public transportation in most townships throughout the country in the subsequent days. Schools, shops, public libraries, drinking halls and so on were just some of the social institutions that were destroyed in the violence that followed the 16th of June 1976 march.

Professor Eskia Mphahlele makes the following observation about this period: "soon after the Soweto uprising and its terrifying aftermath – the air was thick with the wrath of an unforgiving state machinery".

This observation is quite poignant if one considers the racial tensions that prevailed in the country during this period. The state was intent on quelling the unrests and on enforcing Apartheid policies. Access to Black townships was tightly controlled by the security police while inside the townships themselves activists were attacking anything and anyone deemed to be associated with the regime in any way.

This is the general context that prevailed when *the organisation* was formed in 1979. Schooling in Soweto and other townships was in disarray. School buildings in some schools had been destroyed, including libraries and their contents. Undoubtedly, this state of affairs had a negative effect on effective teaching and learning. As already alluded to previously, one must remember that even before the violence that followed the 1976 unrest, resources in Black schools were not of the highest quality due to Apartheid and the Bantu Education Act. In an attempt to rebuild destroyed school libraries and rekindle the culture of effective teaching and learning in township schools, educationists, parents and other civil formations came together and tried to raise funds in order to rebuild schooling in Soweto. Big business and affluent individuals were approached by the founding members and funding was requested in order for libraries to be rebuilt and stocked with proper books suitable for the secondary school child in particular. In an interview, the Deputy Director stated that it was extremely difficult to convince business people to invest in this exercise since they demanded assurances that their investments would not go up in flames during periods of unrest in Soweto. Admittedly, he indicated, it was impossible for anyone to give such assurances.

A series of meetings were held in an attempt to solve this crisis. Ultimately, on Tuesday 27 March 1979, one such meeting was held at the Johannesburg Public Library in Room 75 at 10h00 where all people concerned with education in our country were invited. Prior to this meeting, invitations had been sent out to educators, community representatives, librarians, the business sector and others who were concerned. During an interview, the first National Director pointed out that students from township schools themselves attended these series of meetings and their views were solicited to ensure that their needs were met.

A second meeting was called on the 17th of September 1979 at which a steering committee was elected, known as the Soweto Committee. At the time, this name was considered appropriate since, in the early days, the organisation was only confined to Soweto and the surrounding areas. According to the Deputy Director, one of the founding members, the mandate of the committee was to raise funds that would be

used to rebuild libraries in Soweto and stock them with the necessary books. He indicates in his unpublished book that the original meeting agenda was as follows:

- Report of the Interim Committee
- Adoption of the Constitution
- Election of the Committee
- General

As time went on, other sectors of the population of greater Soweto were invited to be involved such as Whites, Indians and Coloureds, but according to the Deputy Director, their initial response was not very encouraging. This may be due to the fact that these groups were in a better position because of several factors, for instance the availability of resources. According to the Deputy Director, contrasting schools of thought on discrimination existed. Some argued that Coloureds and Indians, though discriminated against, did not suffer to the same extent as Blacks. In comparison, others felt that the organisation's conscious focus on Black areas was discriminatory. All these differing views existed alongside the relatively popular notion of Black Consciousness. Black leaders like Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko expressed the view that Black people should take pride in their ancestry and endeavour to help each other. They argued that Blacks, inclusive of all those oppressed under Apartheid, must claim their right to land and prosperity in the land of their birth. As one person put it, "the exclusion of other racial groups would be counterproductive and indeed contradictory, amounting to discrimination in reverse".

As *the organisation* developed, legitimate and compelling concerns were raised about the exclusion of these communities. The first National Director justified the status quo by pointing out that, historically, Blacks were the most severely disadvantaged in terms of facilities and therefore required more support than other communities at that time. In our interview, the first National Director argued that debate around this issue was not very robust because it was clearly evident that Black township schools were the most disadvantaged under Apartheid. She further indicated that despite this, *the organisation* did assist Coloured and Indian schools if and when requested to do so.

The Deputy Director, stated that the ultimate objective of formulating the organisation was "[t]o provide literacy, which would reduce the failure rate right from the initial grades and result in school leaving certificates". He goes on to assert that the formation of the organisation and its subsequent growth can be

credited to a handful of individuals who were concerned with the plight of Black learners who were institutionally forced to receive an inferior education.

Interestingly, for South Africa at the time, these concerned individuals were from diverse backgrounds and different racial groupings. Furthermore, he has the following to say about the pioneering founders:

> The organisation's pioneers comprised a representative group from a wide spectrum of communities. Identifying themselves as a single nation, their non-racial values and foresight created mechanisms through which the needs of the country could be met … Through these mechanisms, the organisation contributed significantly to the government's Nation Building concept.

The interracial formation and non-racial approach adopted by *the organisation* is quite intriguing if one considers the political climate that prevailed in South Africa at the time. In my view, this signals that the founding members were not only bold visionaries but were driven by a deep sense of duty and patriotism despite significant challenges. Clearly, this indicates that the founding members had an explicit political agenda when they started the organisation. Despite this, I wondered why would individuals who led a relatively comfortable lifestyle endanger their personal comforts and risk the wrath of the Apartheid government? What did their families have to say about this and what did they have to sacrifice in order to promote their cause?

Professor Eskia Mphahlele said the following about the founders, "Pioneers, innovators and constructive battering rams, nation builders, explorers – call them what you will – they began by measuring their own strengths against the task ahead: cultivating a reading culture".

4.3 The Founding Pioneers: The stories of people who were behind the organisation's initial success

One of these battering rams referred to by Professor Mphahlele was a librarian from one of the most prestigious private schools in Pretoria. At this point, she already had a reputation for being passionate about books. She was also well known for having initiated and sustained good relations with affluent parents whose children attended the school where she worked. These relations soon proved invaluable as these parents contributed much of the initial funding needed to jumpstart the NGO in question. I find it particularly interesting that although this individual first joined the organisation as an organiser, she

ultimately became its National Director for almost 30 years. In our interview, she confided that the turning point in her professional life came when she was invited by Mrs Harry Oppenheimer to visit school libraries in Soweto. During this visit, she says, she noticed that the books that were donated to these schools were second hand, were not at the required reading level and did not reflect the topics that high school students would be interested in. She further noted that this led to her belief that books must be given to "the correct learner, at the right level and at the right time".

In the interview held with the Deputy Director, he indicated that he was alerted about this lady by a Mr Jaap Strydom who was a Regional Director in the Department of Education's Southern Transvaal Region at the time.

According to the Deputy Director, the lady was highly recommended by Strydom because he believed that she could assist with fundraising and marketing the organisation since she had a reputation for being passionate about books and the improvement of literacy levels. This proved to be a critical turning point for *the organisation.* The first National Director indicated that she was alerted to the existence of the Soweto Literacy Committee by Mr Strydom and also mentioned that he was probably the only high ranking education official in the country who allowed the organisation's volunteers to conduct workshops in Soweto and allowed them free access to schools in the township.

It is also interesting to note that she agreed to resign from her relatively comfortable employment and join *the organisation* though she was warned that it still had to look for funding in order to pay her salary. The Deputy Director writes that this was "[a] great risk because we had hardly done any feasibility studies to ensure her regular income. Frankly, we hardly had contingency plans for our immediate future. It was a question of venturing and depending on hope". According to the first National Director, their faith was rewarded when the Anglo American company offered to pay the National Director's salary for a whole year to allow *the organisation* to gain momentum.

According to the Deputy Director, the first National Director must be credited for coining the organisation's name. In the 2010 Annual Report, the following was written about her:

> A determined and charismatic librarian, she had a vision for the organisation that made her an obvious choice for National Director. She is a problem solver and a visionary. She is a lateral thinker. She responds to challenges and difficulties with vigour. She is indefatigable and courageous.

In my view, this description allows one to understand the qualities that made the first National Director successful in building *the organisation*. It is clear that she was a focused visionary who was also a life-long learner. She seems to have been gifted with the ability to understand peoples' abilities and limitations. Although these are commendable qualities, one has to wonder whether she acted as part of a collective or as an individual. Perhaps she was able to achieve a delicate balance of both?

The other individual who played a pivotal role in the organisation's success was a school principal who was present at the initial meetings and has been a key member of the organisation from its inception to date. I have referred to him previously as the Deputy Director. I mainly sourced information about this man from the unpublished book he wrote about the history of *the organisation.*

Additional information about him comes from a published autobiography that gives details of his journey through life. He is said to have been born in the Eastern Cape. A qualified teacher, he first taught in Alexandra and later relocated to Soweto where he taught for 32 years. Twenty five of those years were spent as a principal of a primary school in the sprawling township. He was the chairman of the Principal's Board for 10 years as well as the chairman of the local teachers' association for the same number of years. Amongst numerous accolades that are listed in his author's profile, mention is made of the fact that he was the founder member of *the organisation* and that he has been its National Vice Chairman since inception. When writing the foreword for the Deputy Director's book, Professor Eskia Mphahlele describes him as "[a] veteran educator of high standing in the organisation's directorate, a man who writes out of a passionate sense of commitment which he nevertheless carries with humble and easy elegance".

At this stage, I must state my concern that the Deputy Director's book about the organisation remains unpublished. Why is it that despite his contacts in the country, particularly in education and political circles, he has still not been able to secure funding for the publication of his book? Does the quality of his book have anything to do with this state of affairs? Coming to the contents of the book itself one has to wonder if the Deputy Director was not biased towards favouring the organisation.

In the organisation's 2005 annual report, the following was written about him:

> From being a much loved and respected primary school principal to his current position of Senior Associate in *the organisation*, the Deputy Director's vision for *the organisation* remains an all-

> encompassing one. His passion for the welfare of South African society has always shown through his work in *the organisation*. His promotion of basic literacy skills, developing a love for reading in children, improving the education of South Africa's teachers and his ceaseless lobbying on behalf of *the organisation* across South Africa's private and public sectors have made him a key figure in *the organisation*.

In the same report, the Deputy Director emphasises his love for both the country and *the organisation* when he states that "staying involved with *the organisation* for 25 years has been the greatest fulfillment for me…"

The last individual worth mentioning came from a very wealthy white South African family that had considerable business interests throughout the country. She was a humanitarian who strove to improve the lives of those who were less fortunate. Again, I believe that this was particularly commendable if one considers the political climate that prevailed in the country at the time. According to the Deputy Director, when meetings were held in 1979 to discuss the plight of schooling, she attended as a representative of the Urban Foundation. In his book, the Deputy Director disclosed that although this individual was incredibly wealthy, she was humble and financed most of the new organisation's activities at the beginning. She even allowed her partners in the new venture to use her private jet to travel around the country in an attempt to canvass support.

For her part, the first National Director also disclosed that she met this individual when she came to visit the private school at which she worked before joining *the organisation*. She further indicated that this lady provided her with a list of her friends who were seen as potential donors for *the organisation*. The National Director concedes that although not all these possibilities came to fruition, she was able to start building quite a useful database of contacts that, for many years, assisted *the organisation* both financially and in kind.

According to a tribute written about this benefactress in the organisation's 2004 annual report, in 1982 she was elected the first chairman of the organisation's National Committee. When she retired, she was commended for serving *the organisation* tirelessly for 22 years. Furthermore, the following was written about her:

> By the time *the organisation* was started, she was already highly regarded for her work and involvement in community development and education in Soweto. Her record of commitment, integrity and genuine concern enabled her to drive the process of establishing our organisation as

> a respected, legitimate organisation, dedicated to improving the literacy levels of all the peoples of South Africa.

In the same annual report, it is duly noted that this individual has, over the years, attended all the organisation's major events and AGMs, and has been guest at many of the organisation's national and international functions, always promoting the cause of raising literacy levels in South Africa.

Evidence from the organisation's annual reports suggests that the three individuals described above played a huge role in ensuring that the new organisation was not only successful but that it also enjoyed credibility amongst its constituency. Additionally, the fact that when the Soweto Committee was elected in September 1979, all three individuals were elected into that first committee, is indicative of how loyal and supportive these people were not only to *the organisation* but also to the ideal of improving literacy levels in South Africa.

Funding has always been a concern for *the organisation* though. The Deputy Director writes that, at the beginning, it was a difficult task to identify potential funders for *the organisation* as people were understandably nervous about the stability or lack thereof in Black townships. He further explains that despite this, it was not long before potential funders realised that the country's future depended on an "educated, stable and secure youth". He also notes that "[a]s the project gained momentum, there was an apparent feeling of 'being counted' and being part of history in the country's reconstruction".

During our interview, the Deputy Director indicated that, in the beginning, some sponsors concentrated on physical conditions like schools and libraries that had been destroyed, while others provided monetary assistance.

In his book, the Deputy Director confirms that the organisation's initial budget was R150, 000 which was regarded as a huge sum at the time. He also admits that although many felt that the organisation's cause was worth espousing, the organisation's campaign also had negative effects. He further argues that the campaign to improve literacy levels in Black areas unintentionally alienated some Education Department officials who seemed threatened by the new philosophy which was transparent and unashamedly aimed at improving Black education. According to the Deputy Director, more often than not, these officials had the perception that *the organisation* was supplying schools with books that were "subversive" as they had not received prior official approval. The author further argues that these officials tended to be too restrictive in what they viewed as "good" for African children.

The first National Director, on the other hand, confirms that there were officials from the national department of education who resisted the work that was done by *the organisation* in township schools. In particular, she recalls that there was one official who was sent to investigate the work that *the organisation* was doing. According to the National Director, she got wind of the fact that this official went as far as trying to stop *the organisation* from getting a fundraising number by putting undue pressure on the concerned department. She further asserts that *the organisation* was accused of supplying schools with pornographic materials. The National Director indicated that this accusation could have emanated from art books given to schools that may have had nude pictures.

This context is worth analysing because it gives one an inkling of the challenges that *the organisation* must have faced. Clearly, the attempt to improve schooling in Black schools flew in the face of the approach adopted by the government when the Bantu Education Act came into being. These ideological differences must have put strain on relations between *the organisation* and the Department of Education and Training. *The organisation,* in particular, had to balance the need to address inequalities endured by Black township schools and the importance of fostering good relations with the Department of Education and the government of the day. One must remember that *the organisation* had to work in government-controlled schools. Undoubtedly, this new approach contradicted what the Bantu Education Act aimed to accomplish, which was to provide inferior education to Blacks. Many of those interviewed credit the organisation's success to the fact that it was not aligned to any ideologies. In our interview, the first National Director recalled that, although she was labelled a communist for her work in *the organisation,* the organisation itself has always made a point of being non-partisan. This allowed it to enjoy support from all sectors of South African society.

At the time of its inception, the Deputy Director argues in his book, there was an unfair tendency to regard all mainstream NGOs as the same, when in fact they were becoming increasingly different in their modus operandi. This argument from the Deputy Director suggests that *the organisation* rapidly became unique and different from others due to its ability to constantly reinvent itself and its attempts to meet the ever-changing demands of the education industry.

4.4 Conclusion.

From the available data, it is clear that three individuals played a central role to the formation and growth of *the organisation*. They travelled the length and breadth of South Africa promoting the organisation's cause. It is interesting to note that, at the beginning, this work was done voluntarily despite their responsibilities as professionals and to their families as well. The former teacher used her position in a priviledged school to garner support from wealthy parents and the school itself. Contacts from this school were relied upon to support the organisation financially and in kind.

The former school principal used his influence and position in Soweto to rally the community behind the organisation's goal of improving literacy levels in township schools. This was crucial in the aftermath of the 1976 Riots because communities in Black townships were suspicious of any outsiders coming into the townships. On the other hand, the lady from an affluent background used her wealth and influence to support *the organisation*. She ensured that her friends and colleagues knew what *the organisation* was about and that they offered their financial support.

The following chapter will look at how *the organisation* achieved its growth. The chapter will look at key figures that have visited *the organisation* over the years and scrutinize what was learnt from those visits. I will discuss specific changes that were experienced in *the organisation* as a result of these visits. These will include refinement of policies, changes in practices and the improvement of resources. I will also look at the role played by the National Director in ensuring that *the organisation* is sustainable and is able to accommodate the changing needs of its clients.

Chapter 5

5.1 The Formative Years (1980-1990)

In Black townships, life in the 1980s was characterised by heightened political awareness coupled with political activism. As one would expect, political rallies, strikes, riots, picketing and other forms of protest were used to oppose the Apartheid government. As such, the atmosphere was thick with political tension which negatively affected effective teaching and learning in Black schools.

Growing up in Kwa-Thema, a Black township in the East Rand, I had a front row seat for all the violence and disruption of schooling that came as a result of political instability. In our township, COSAS and PASO were the most vocal and visible student movements. The early eighties are a blur to me because I was still at primary school level. Luckily, by the time I moved to high school in 1985, I was more aware of developments in my immediate surroundings. I remember marvelling at how militant students were at high school. Matters concerning students were discussed at regular meetings that were called by either COSAS or PASO. These meetings were usually characterised by the singing of political songs and chanting of slogans. The theme of most of these songs promoted the idea of liberation before education, the importance of making the country ungovernable and the demand for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela from imprisonment.

Marches were held where petitions were handed over to Apartheid authorities for signing. Normally, these marches led to clashes with the security police because many of these were deemed to be illegal. Often, teargas and rubber bullets were used by the police to disperse demonstrating masses. Undoubtedly, these activities had an effect on the culture of teaching and learning. Generally, learners were difficult to control and teachers had a difficult time trying to conduct their lessons without disturbances. For years, it was common for classes to be disrupted by rioting gangs of students who pelted school windows with stones in an attempt to force all students to support their cause.

This is the context in which *the organisation* started its first decade as a literacy development agency. The atmosphere in the country was electric and fraught with political tension.

Many NGOs at the time strove to demonstrate their independence from the government in order to gain credibility in the eyes of the Black populace. Clearly, credibility was needed in order for such organisations to gain the necessary support and funding.

When writing about this period, the Deputy Director explains that a lot of energy was spent travelling the breadth and length of the country popularising the organisation's cause. He goes on to explain that the future National Director helped and travelled with him for this purpose. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the other partner sometimes put her private jet at their disposal for this venture. Admittedly, these three individuals worked together to ensure that the organisation's aim and vision was clearly understood by its constituency all over Soweto and ultimately throughout the country. As a result, the founding members spent a lot of time away from their families promoting a cause that must have been close to their hearts. Although I marveled at the commitment shown by these individuals, I also wondered what really motivated these acts of selflessness? What did their families have to endure and sacrifice in order for *the organisation* to flourish?

The National Director concedes that she owes her previous school a lot of gratitude because she was allowed to do most of the groundwork for *the organisation* at this school before she joined it on a full-time basis. According to her, at this stage the strategic planning behind the scenes was done at two centres: the private school where she worked and in Soweto with the help of the Soweto Literacy Committee. Obviously, the political and economic policies that were promulgated by the government of the day had an influence on the direction and focus that the founding members decided to take. Although it was difficult to access information about this period in the organisation's history, I was able to gather some data from the 1985, 1986 and 1987 annual reports.

At this point, it is of utmost importance to ask some pertinent questions about the organisation's annual reports. What was the purpose of these reports? Were they ever peer - reviewed by external experts? For what audience were these reports created? What impact did that have on the contents and tone adopted by the authors and contributors like trainers, teachers, principals etc? I believe that the purpose of the annual reports seems to be mainly to highlight the organisation's achievements to all relevant stakeholders

including existing and possible future donors. As such, I am of the view that they are nothing but marketing tools used to advertise what *the organisation* does. Understandably, the contents thereof would be biased towards reporting on only positive achievements that have been accomplished over the years.

Writing in the 1985 report, the chairman of the organisation indicates that *the organisation* started as a "professional task force committed to the improvement of the quality of education". She continues and reveals that *the organisation* started as a modest programme involving a small group of volunteers with a book-buying budget of just more than R100, 000. In the 1986 annual report it is disclosed that the budget of *the organisation* had grown from R276, 000 in 1981 to R1, 922, 819 in 1986.

According to the 1985 report, *the organisation* had a national footprint with six regional coordinators, four assistant coordinators, groups of voluntary field workers as well as administrative staff based at head office. In the report, *the organisation* claims that it is "expanding rapidly". As proof of this, the following points are made:

- New committees were established in the Eastern Cape, Natal and the Orange Free State.
- Three additional coordinators were appointed in the Western Cape, Soweto and Alexandria.
- Administrative systems were created to cope with the growth of *the organisation*.
- A newsletter to schools was established.
- A variety of competitions were tested and expanded and courses tested and documented.

The Book Festival competition, thanks to the support of the Otis Elevator Company, was extended to the whole country in 1985. A training manager was appointed in the same year to help *the organisation* cope with its ever-increasing training load. Although all these achievements were noted, the first National Director lamented the effect that political unrests had on the work done by *the organisation*. During this time, many schools were closed thus having a negative effect on the organisation's goal to expand its programmes. Despite these challenges, *the organisation* persevered and kept working towards achieving its goals. The former National Director asserted that by 1985, the organisation had built up a mailing list of some 327 donors and a further list of some 1 400 names as a database for future reference. Letters of request were sent to donors and they were sent regular progress reports by regional coordinators.

In my view, it would have been very helpful at this point for *the organisation* to comment on the type of relationship they had with teacher unions. Were such unions pleased with the work done by *the organisation*? Did these unions assist *the organisation* with the implementation of its programs or did they, in fact, hinder its progress?

In the 1986 annual report, the National Director announced that the organisation's budget had grown from R276 000 in 1981 to R2 million in 1986. She further indicated that as at March 1986, 314 primary school boxed libraries, 358 high school reference libraries and three technical college libraries had been established and 10 teacher training college libraries had been funded. She also noted that four thousand teachers and librarians had attended the organisation's training courses.

In the 1987 annual report, the National Director indicated that *the organisation* had changed offices during the year under review and had established the NCR Training Centre. According to her, both developments led to a more efficient and professional service. As already indicated above, such bold claims would have been more legitimate if they were verified as accurate by outside bodies. Again, the negative impact that political turmoil had on the organisation's operations is emphasised in the report. In recognition of the importance of materials development, *the organisation* appointed its first materials developer at the beginning of 1987. *The organisation* worked with the AAA to promote awareness of the need for improved literacy in South Africa.

Table 5.1 below shows a combination of figures from the 1985, 1986 and 1987 annual reports. It indicates the number of institutions that *the organisation* funded from inception until 1987.

	Inception to March 1985	**April 1985 to March 1986**	**April 1986 to March 1987**	**Total from inception to end March 1987**
Primary Schools	213	109	253	575
High Schools	297	53	17	367
Junior Secondary	10	17		27
Teacher Colleges	06	04	11	21
Technical Colleges	02			02
Youth Clubs	02		01	03

Community Centres			02	02

During our interview, the first National Director explained that, during the early years, *the organisation* benefitted greatly from the "Sullivan Code". She explained that this code compelled companies who had businesses in South Africa to fund and support worthwhile community projects in the country. *The organisation*, because of its commitment to offering quality education to the most marginalised members of society, was an ideal organisation for this purpose. In the 1987 annual report, the National Treasurer of the organisation conceded that *the organisation* "relied, to a substantial degree, on the support of Sullivan Signatory companies during the formative years".

5.2 Flexibility, Change and the Consolidation Years (1990 to 2000)

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 together with the unbanning of all political formations in the country signalled the dawn of a new era in South African politics. For many of us, these events were an indication that the end of Apartheid was inevitable. When democracy was finally achieved in the country, many donors felt that their mission had been accomplished since all races in the country would now enjoy equal treatment from the new democratic government. The implication was that the organisation's major sources of funding were abruptly lost after democracy was achieved in the country. International donors shifted their focus from working closely with NGOs to assisting the new democratic government in its attempts to address the wrongs of the past. According to the Junior Trainer, this changed the playing field as known by *the organisation.* Instead of working independently and almost exclusively from government, the organisation and other similar formations now had to find ways of working with the new ANC government. According to the first National Director, working closely with the government allowed the organisation to reach more schools, teachers and learners. She further noted that many individuals who had been trained by the organisation over the years received high profile positions in government. She highlighted an example of a principal who used to work very closely with the organisation and ultimately became a full cabinet minister in the new government.

I found this admission by the first National Director quite fascinating. I wondered if this familiarity with influential people advantaged *the organisation* in any way. Did these associations enable *the organisation* to gain access to information that was not readily available to its competitors? Thus giving it an unfair advantage over others? Did this situation lead to *the organisation* being awarded more government contracts than its peers in the same industry?

Evidence suggests that for *the organisation* to survive this period, a major shift in mindset was required. Financial statements found in the organisation's annual reports from the early years show that, for many years, *the organisation* relied heavily on local and international donors. Evidence, mostly from the organisation's annual reports, suggests that the years between 1990 and 2000 were characterised by commendable growth. According to the 1990 annual report, *the organisation* grew from a local project and was now "working hand in hand with community groups, teacher training colleges, parent groups, school principals, subject teachers, librarians and newly literate adults throughout the country". The same publication marked 1990 as the International Year of Literacy.

When *the organisation* started, it was only represented in Soweto and Alexandra but by the 1990s it enjoyed a presence in 10 regions across South Africa. *The organisation* was now represented in the Border Region with bases in both Umtata and East London; the Eastern Cape with projects in Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown; the Highveld Region with projects in the East Rand Area, and KwaZulu-Natal where *the organisation* worked in schools in Nongoma, Piet Retief, Los Kop and Kosi Bay. *The organisation* also worked in the Northern Cape, particularly in Kimberley, the Northern Transvaal in areas such as Attredgeville and Mamelodi, in the Orange Free State, especially in Mangaung, Harrismith, Clocolan, Tweespruit, Marseilles, Brandfort, Marquard and Bloemfontein, the Orange Vaal in areas like Sebokeng, Warden and Kroonstad, in the Southern Transvaal, particularly Soweto and Alexandra and lastly the Western Cape, where *the organisation* worked in areas like Khayelitsha, Nyanga and Gugulethu.

Projects and Activities (1990 - 2000)

In the Border Region *the organisation* was involved in the process of "rescuing" books and this involved the sorting and processing of books that *the organisation* had bought earlier. School librarians were encouraged to visit the school library services and select books. Regular monitoring of lessons took place in 16 schools in the Umtata area. A reading competition and workshops on motivation in relation to reading were held in the then Ciskei. A model library was used to demonstrate to teachers what could be achieved and a mobile resource unit was used to take a variety of books to several schools in the region. In 1990, this region had three staff members, two advisors and a coordinator. The organisation's Border office was based in East London. Schools participating in the organisation's programmes were encouraged to link to one another across racial and cultural barriers by visiting each other in order to read and perform short plays.

In the Eastern Cape, an in-depth survey of needs in all schools indicated that a revision of course modules at the primary school level was needed. Story kits were introduced and training was conducted one school at a time. Teachers from both rural and urban schools attended revision courses. Regular meetings were held with librarians, teachers and principals in an attempt to improve library use in the region. Community libraries were built, stocked and librarians appointed to run them in areas such as New Brighton, Walmer and Uitenhage. Community outreach programmes were held where adults were trained on money matters and on a street law course. Box libraries were put in every classroom and students were trained to assist teachers as library monitors. Leader teachers in the region started training and mentoring their counterparts from neighbouring schools.

In the Highveld/Eastern Gauteng region, *the organisation* managed to raise funds for its activities in the area. R50, 000 was received in donations in 1990 alone. These funds were used to build libraries and to source appropriate books. Prototype schools were established and leader teachers were trained in order to take on some of the responsibility of spreading the organisation's approach to literacy developement. Teachers in the region travelled to the organisation's training centre in Johannesburg and follow-up visits usually revealed that teachers were implementing what they were trained in their classrooms. In addition, pensioners from Duduza were organized to conduct reading and storytelling events to children in the township. Unfortunately, due to overcrowding in some schools, libraries had to be converted into classrooms.

When reading this, I wondered what happened to the library resources in such instances? Were they distributed amongst all the classes? Was a temporary shelter built to house them? Were they donated to other schools or were they just left outside to perish?

In the Northern Cape town of Kimberley, *the organisation* initiated a project to provide library and reading facilities to all local schools and also worked with these schools to improve language competence. Public speaking competitions, book festivals and story- telling meetings were held to encourage reading in the region. The DEAR period was also introduced to schools in the region which involved an amount of time dedicated to independent reading on a regular basis.

In KwaZulu-Natal, *the organisation* raised funding to develop reading-related materials in farm and community schools. Reading programmes were run in many schools with *the organisation* actively encouraging parental involvement in all its activities. Speech and Drama competitions were used to motivate teachers, learners and parents alike. In 1990, regional staff included 10 members who were placed across the region. *The organisation* worked closely with other literacy organisations in the region in order to integrate their intervention strategies, particularly in the Empangeni area.

Unfortunately, quite often the annual reports do not give enough data on how such initiatives panned out. Did these initiatives lead to a closer working relationship amongst the literacy organisations working in the Kwa Zulu Natal? Were there any lessons learnt from this initiative and were these used to improve the organisation's practices in any way? Principals were also encouraged to visit model schools in the region in order for them to share ideas and take ownership of what happened in their own schools. A rural project was initiated to test the organisation's effectiveness in rural schools in the region.

Political unrests in the early nineties compelled *the organisation* to focus on rural schools as opposed to urban ones. This led the organisation's trainers to discover that although all schools were trained at more or less the same time, rural schools lagged behind when compared to their urban counterparts. Modified refresher courses and "on the spot" workshops were held to address this deficiency. Pamphlets promoting reading were distributed through the local press and helped to raise awareness in the community. Together with the University of the Witwatersrand, *the organisation* evaluated course materials and coordinated teacher training and the presentation of special lessons to learners.

In the Northern Transvaal/Northern Gauteng region, *the organisation* ran Reading Competitions and worked in 18 high schools and 10 primary schools in Attredgeville and Mamelodi. *The organisation* also donated books to farm schools in the region. Working in high schools proved difficult in this region due to political unrests. Nevertheless, time was spent training high school librarians to ensure that libraries are used effectively in the region. Ultimately, the organisation's influence grew to include schools in Pietersburg and Bophuthatswana.

In the Free State, *the organisation* presented dictionaries, story books, science packs and story packs to schools in Harrismith, Clocolan, Excelsior, Tweespruit, Marseilles, Brandfort, Marquard and Bloemfontein. Courses for teachers from 119 farm schools in the region were run and libraries in 25 primary schools were visited twice each term. Speech and reading competitions were used to promote community involvement. The Kagisanong Teacher Training Centre was fully equipped with a model primary school library which was used by students to prepare for practical demonstrations. Career information days were held where students were exposed to a variety of career options available to them and representatives from the University of the Free State took part. A reading centre was established within easy reach of 9 primary schools and learners from these schools were encouraged to attend afternoon sessions meant to increase their language competence. Voluntary computer classes were also held at the centre. Sadly, from the available data I could not determine who ran these computer classes. Did the organisation's trainers run these classes themselves or did they seek assistance from community members. If it was the latter, were these community members remunerated in any way or were they volunteering?

In the Vaal, *the organisation* worked very closely with the Vaal Education Centre. Enriched language teaching was offered to high school students. Syllabus linked Mathematics and Science programmes were presented to ensure that language problems in these subjects were overcome. Teachers were provided with material, seminars and practical help. Teachers from 97 schools were trained across Sebokeng, Warden and Kokstad. A huge book donation was distributed amongst schools in Parys, Sasolburg and Sebokeng while 121 matric students were trained on comprehension skills. Political unrests in the early nineties compelled trainers in the area to concentrate on pupil-related courses like English Enrichment and Study Skills due to teachers staying away from work. Extra attention was also given to farm schools because they were hardly affected by the unrests.

A pupil study centre was established and used well by students in the region. A prototype school was established and used to model high standards of teaching and learning.

In the Southern Transvaal/Southern Gauteng region, reading and speech competitions were held to promote reading and the use of books across the region. About 86 Soweto schools took part in these competitions with the support of the community. Tours of Soweto schools taking part in the organisation's programmes were arranged for sponsors and stimulated discussion and debate thus raising interest in the work done by *the organisation*. Teachers from 265 primary schools and 60 high schools were trained and monitored. 29 prototype schools were established in Soweto to model how *the organisation* worked. A study centre was established and it provided a quiet study area for learners and also ran a matric enrichment programme on Saturdays.

The organisation's programmes were made available to all schools in the Alexandra area. Where possible, libraries were upgraded and equipped with books. Teachers from this area were offered training on basic library skills, book selection and a careers workshop. Junior and senior speech competitions were held and used to promote community involvement. Yet again, political disruptions made it difficult for some time to work in this region. During this period, *the organisation* concentrated on training, fundraising and on motivational programmes. Ultimately, *the organisation* had varying degrees of presence in all Soweto schools. Leader teachers from prototype schools were trained to take ownership and empower their colleages from both their own schools and others. Annually, two librarians were selected to attend courses for librarians at the Ealing College of Education in England.

In the Western Cape, *the organisation* worked in 58 primary schools, 15 high schools, 6 community projects and 1 training college in 1990. These figures changed every year due to funding or lack thereof. Much work was done in many of the schools to ensure that their libraries were fully functional. Prototype schools were created in order to model the organisation's intervention strategies and market its materials.

The organisation also assisted librarians in Cape Town to redouble their efforts to reach non-readers in the region. Together with the Cape Town College of Education, work was done to bring teachers to the college over a period of eight weeks during which teachers and students worked together on a communication skills programme.

After 1990, a different pattern emerged. It is clear from the data that *the organisation* moved towards working more closely with National and Provincial Education Departments. One of the interviewees, the Junior Trainer, made the following statement about this change of affairs:

> In the beginning, we wanted to make a change and worked independently from the government. We did things the way the organisation wanted them done. Due to lack of funding, we had to align ourselves with the Department of Education and we did what they wanted us to do. We were less effective because of this. Our strength was in the monitoring visits. We had a lot of time to work with the teachers. Working with the Department restricted us. The quality of the training was not the same because of the time allocated.

Therefore this period was characterised by strengthened relations with government but less of the practices that had made *the organisation* so productive and effective. Funding was the key driver of this change.

5.3 The Latter Years 2000 – 2012

In the organisation's annual report published in the year 2000, the chairman of the organisation's Board of Trustees documents the organisation's activities and achievements. To do this, he traces all the activities that were engaged in from April 1983 to March 2000. The following table is used to document what *the organisation* achieved.

	April 1983 to March 1999	April 1999 to March 2000	April 1983 to March 2000
New institutions funded	2 629	888	3 517
Institutions visited	27 678	1 922	29 600
Workshops held	4 036	430	4 466
Courses held	3 873	286	4 159
Workshop delegates	77 189	8 698	85 887
Course delegates	68 976	6 250	75 226

Table 5.2. A breakdown of the organisation's activities from April 1983 to March 2000.

In the same annual report, the first National Director noted the following developments:

- Towards the end of 1999, *the organisation* began working with the SABC Education Service. A Grade 3 literacy programme of 20 episodes was developed for television while attempts were made to fund the provision of each school in the Learning for Living project with a television and video facility and to train the teachers to use this medium to enrich their teaching.
- A series of programmes on the teaching of language across the curriculum at the primary school level was developed for the organisation's training programmes and for the SABC's teacher education programme. Booklets and handbooks accompanied these programmes.
- The organisation's pre-school programme began to take shape in 1999. Packages of suitable materials were assembled and supporting courses were developed.

After scrutinizing the developments mentioned above, I have to ask the following questions. Did *the organisation* manage to raise funds in order to provision each school in the Learning for Living project with a television, video facility and to train teachers on their use? How were the training programmes developed for the SABC used? Were the booklets and handbooks that accompanied them distributed throughout the country or only to schools in a particular province? When and how did *the organisation* get involved in pre - school programmes? What brought about this change of focus?

It is clear from interviews and annual reports that the focus of *the organisation* at this point was on the Learning For Living project which was a nationwide initiative sponsored by the South African business community. The project ran from 1999 to 2004 and in the 2005 annual report a summary is provided of the scope of the project throughout South Africa. The following table is an adaptation of the information about the Learning for Living project given in the 2005 annual report.

Summary of Project Scope	**Numbers**
Schools affected	896
	27% Urban
	73% Rural
School Managers trained	896
Teachers trained	13 164

Learners benefitted	875 000
Materials (book packs) delivered	163 000
Courses trained to school managers	14
Courses trained to teachers	20
Monitoring visits to teachers	90 799

Table 5.3: An abridged summary of the Learning for Living project

According to the 2000 annual report, in the Gauteng Province, *the organisation* had three areas of work. It worked in on-going donor funded projects which involved 45 schools, the training of 964 teachers (who benefitted from a substantial book order placed by the GDE) and the training of 104 schools under the Learning for Living project. Seven trainers worked in schools and trained teachers across the whole province. *The organisation* had strong leader teachers in this part of the country and they helped with on-going teacher training which also took place on Saturdays. This demonstrates the commitment shown by teachers and enjoyed by *the organisation.* Annual book festivals, speech and reading competitions were held to motivate teachers, learners and parents. Often, these events also attracted schools that were not part of the organisation's projects.

By 2001, the Learning for Living project had expanded into the West Rand and the Vaal region. According to the 2001 annual report, Gauteng was a model for other provinces. This was because teachers in Gauteng in particular were always willing to receive visitors and to demonstrate lessons. The cordial relations enjoyed with the education department enabled *the organisation* to receive on-going support from education officials throughout the province.

In every project school, *the organisation* continued to select 2 or 3 teachers to become leader teachers who were trained intensively to turn their classrooms into model classes that could be visited by colleagues from their own schools and from other schools as well. Leader teachers were also trained in teaching writing and this allowed them to assist their peers in ensuring that learners are given regular writing activities. By 2003, teachers in the province were becoming confident and learner results were improving gradually. Teachers were trained on how to make materials for their classrooms and on how to use activities to create an integrated learning environment. Again, a claim is made that learner results

improved without providing legitimate proof from an outside body. This leads me to be skeptical of some of the assertions made in the annual reports.

In the 2004 annual report, the following information is provided about projects *the organisation* was involved in during 2004.

Name of Project	**Aim of Project**	**Number of Schools**
Edcon Project	Training Grade R practitioners on providing cognitive and developmental skills.	15 schools
The Model Schools Project	Training and equipping selected schools with resources in order to turn them into model schools.	18 schools
The Jim Joel Project	Providing a link between primary schools and feeder pre-schools within a geographical area.	18 primary schools
The New Settlers Foundation Project	Providing a literacy and language programme for Grades 1-7.	10 primary schools
The John Deree Project	Funding literacy development in schools in Duduza.	12 schools
The Timken Project	Funding training and resourcing for the teaching of Science and literacy.	8 primary schools
The Trident Steel Principal's Project	Enabling the training of school principals in Eastern Gauteng.	10 schools

Table 5.4: Summary of projects the organisation was engaged in during 2004

In 2004, the GDE requested *the organisation* to conduct an external evaluation of the impact of using a multilingual approach in Foundation Phase classrooms in Gauteng. The GDE also asked *the organisation* to develop a comprehensive Literacy Strategy.

In the Eastern Cape, the year 2000 started with the release of an evaluation report of the three year Komga – Kei rural project. The report concluded that the project had achieved significant pupil impact as a result of an extensive and systematic intervention (Annual Report, 2000). The 10 trainers in the Eastern Cape spent a lot of time in 2000 preparing for the implementation of the Learning for Living project. Together with provincial departmental officials, project districts were selected by the organisation's trainers with the officials selecting the final schools themselves. Before the commencement of this project, contracts were signed and school information forms completed. *The organisation* continued to hold book festivals, reading competitions and other motivational events. These enjoyed some media coverage from the local press. Leader teachers in the province played a pivotal role in ensuring that *the organisation* was successful by acting as a support base for all the organisation's activities in the province.

In 2001, *the organisation* continued with the implementation of the Learning for Living project in 122 schools selected by the provincial department of education. New trainers appointed for this project were trained and mentored by more experienced trainers and benefitted from training sessions held at the organisation's head offices. Learners from Peddie, Mdantsane, Tsomo, Engcobo, Mount Frere, Umtata, Grahamstown, Queenstown and Port Elizabeth benefitted greatly from the Learning for Living project. Other smaller projects were conducted in the Eastern Cape and allowed *the organisation* to work in high schools and to include mathematics and science in their training. Non-project schools frequently requested *the organisation* to include them in its activities and this was done when extra funding became available. District officials were usually so impressed with the work done by *the organisation* that they were continually thinking of ways they could spread the organisation's practices to non-project schools. The role *the organisation* played in the province was recognised in May 2001 when it was awarded the Eastern Cape Premier's Award.

When schools reopened on 23 January 2002, teachers were able to work effectively from day one thanks to the planning workshops that were presented by *the organisation* towards the end of the previous year. By 2002, the High Schools project had grown from 24 schools to 34 schools throughout four regions in the province. *The organisation* arranged a partnership where Eastern Cape schools were able to share

learning experiences with their counterparts in the United Kingdom. 2 high schools and 2 primary schools benefitted from this initiative. By 2003, teachers from all learning areas were incorporated into the Learning for Living project.

The year 2003 also saw the beginning of the Oprah Winfrey project which supplied 63 schools in the greater Umtata, Harding and Kokstad areas with classroom resource collections, and trained teachers in the use and administration of these materials. The High Schools project saw 10 schools in the Mdantsane area being supplied with teacher training and resources. *The organisation* assisted the department of education with the training of the RNCS during September and November 2003. Furthermore, *the organisation* was invited to be part of the District Development Plan for 2004 – 2007 in the Eastern Cape. In the Mount Frere, Engcobo and Cofimvaba areas, subject advisors accompanied trainers on their class visits and sat in during training sessions when they could.

In the same year, more experienced trainers from the Eastern Cape were invited to assist with the mentoring of trainers in the Limpopo Province. This sharing of expertise between trainers across two similar provinces must have benefitted learners, teachers and trainers themselves. The lack of sufficient IsiXhosa materials and confusion caused by other intervention programmes were some of the challenges that trainers constantly faced.

At the beginning of 2000, *the organisation* saw an increase in the number of trainers it had in KwaZulu-Natal from 6 to 14. This increase was due to the implementation of the Learning for Living project in the province. Senior staff members were trained and prepared as mentors for the new cohort.

In this province, *the organisation* enjoyed a very close working relationship with the provincial department of education. Speech and debate contests, reading competitions and other motivational events were also held in this province in order to promote the objectives of *the organisation* while encouraging community involvement. As was the case in all provinces, the organisation used leader teachers to lighten the workload of its trainers in the field and to ensure the sustainability of its projects throughout the province.

By 2001, many classes in project schools had bright, colourful displays on the walls which contrasted sharply with the stark and impoverished surroundings. A sugar producing company funded an on-going

project in 8 schools and a USAID Project in Nkandla was finalised to start around May 2001. From 2002, principals were trained in management skills and in turn they shared this new knowledge with their counterparts who were not in the project schools. The organisation's project coordinator in the province usually visited all the provincial curriculum unit representatives to ensure that the organisation's activities were known to as many decision makers as possible. Turnaround in education officials, ever-increasing trainer workloads and teacher concerns over the conflicting messages received from different service providers were some of the challenges faced by trainers in this province.

By 2003, the education department had seen the benefits of training leader teachers and started contributing financially to their training. The organisation's book distribution department managed to deliver project resources even in the most inaccessible areas of the province. This went a long way towards ensuring that the work done remained effective and beneficial to both learners and teachers. In the 2004 annual report, it is pointed out that, in 2004, the organisation had only 3 projects in KwaZulu-Natal. The Toyota Teach project aimed to assist teachers in upgrading their language, Mathematics and Science qualifications in conjunction with the University of Natal. This project reached 52 teachers from 27 schools. The Oprah Winfrey project supplied 33 schools in Kokstad and Harding with classroom resource collections and trained teachers in their use and administration. The Vuka Moya project aimed to improve learner's English language and reading skills.

In the Western Cape, the year 2000 started with *the organisation* having 5 staff members. Like other provinces during this period, the focus was on the Learning for Living project which was implemented mainly in the Peninsula and Boland areas and involved 54 schools. This project had a positive effect on the relationship *the organisation* had with the provincial education department.

Annual motivational programmes were run to promote the importance of having a literate nation. Learners were encouraged to dramatise their favorite stories and to perform choral verse. During 2001 and the following years, *the organisation* in the Western Province concentrated on the Learning for Living project, on the delivery of books project and on schools that traditionally worked with *the organisation*. In 2001 the Learning for Living project also started including the Intermediate and Senior Phases. The book delivery project operated in 18 schools in the Cedarberg, Clanwilliam and Lambert's Bay areas. Leader teachers in the province assisted schools that took part in the organisation's motivational events with outstanding results. The province was represented at the National Storytelling

competition by a teacher from one of the Learning for Living project schools in 2001. Like in the other provinces, the greatest challenge faced was insufficient training time since teachers could only be trained after school in the afternoons.

By 2003, principals were trained on management skills which allowed them to contribute more positively to interventions at their schools. Monitoring visits revealed that generally, more progress was gained in the Foundation Phase when compared to the Intermediate Phase. Evidence suggested that classes were becoming more learner friendly and that learners were beginning to enjoy reading and retelling stories. The organisation's book distribution division managed to deliver books according to the set schedule. This ensured that project goals were met with relative ease. Yet again, training and monitoring visits were interrupted by conflicting commitments that teachers had. During February 2004, the organisation trained 1678 delegates across the Western Cape as part of the WCED's "Books Plus" project.

In 2004, *the organisation* had two provincial projects in the Western Cape. The Atlantis Schools project provided resources and teacher training for the Wesfleur, Protea Park and Reygersdal Primary Schools over a three year period. The Boschendal Rural Schools project benefitted schools in Wemmershoek, Westeind, Pniel and PC Petersen.

After a year-long break from working in the Free State, *the organisation* established an office in Bloemfontein in August 2000 and employed 4 staff members. This revival was due to the Learning for Living project which enabled *the organisation* to work in 61 schools. Senior education officials in the province were invited to the organisation's head offices where a presentation on the project was made. Again, *the organisation* worked very closely with its counterparts from the provincial education department. In June 2000, a concert was organised at Sasolburg Technical College to celebrate the organisation's 20th anniversary and the event proved to be very successful. As with all the other provinces, *the organisation* held annual motivational events that brought communities together.

In 2001, all project principals were trained on management skills and conflict resolution in order to allow them to contribute positively to the success of the Learning for Living project. To meet the challenges of insufficient training time, additional workshops and demonstration lessons were presented at individual schools. From 2001, Intermediate Phase teachers were included in the project. Often, district officials

accompanied the organisation's trainers during class visits. Thus, relations between *the organisation* and education officials were further strengthened.

The Free State team of trainers benefitted from a 2002 visit by Bobbie Neate. She ran a course explaining reading and writing methods used in the United Kingdom and how these could be adapted for urban and rural schools in South Africa. The impact made by the organisation's work in the province was evident in classrooms that were now more print rich and had learner's work displayed on the walls. When the Learning for Living project ended in 2004, a lot of time was spent revising courses used in the project with the aim of cementing gains made during this project. I find the revision of courses quite interesting because the show how *the organisation* worked to ensure that its interventions are sustainable and remain relevant to their clients.

It was not always easy to find funding to work in the Northern Cape. Fortunately, enough funding was secured that allowed *the organisation* to train teachers on the implementation of OBE in the Foundation Phase. Leader teachers were also used in this province and they assisted trainers by ensuring that their colleagues implemented the teaching strategies that they had been trained on. After holding initial visits with the department of education, the Learning for Living project was implemented in 61 schools in the Kimberley, De Aar and Upington regions. Like the rest of the provinces, the Northern Cape held annual motivational events that highlighted the work done by *the organisation* and involved whole communities. Public speaking, debating, speech competitions and essay writing were some of the activities that were held annually.

By 2001, *the organisation* worked in 110 schools allocated to 2 different projects. The Learning for Living project involved 63 primary schools and the Department of Education's District Improvement Project included 35 primary schools and 12 high schools. The project spread to Noupoort, Colesburg, Douglas, Postmasburg and Kuruman. Regular planning meetings were held with departmental officials to discuss proposed training schedules and to avoid course duplication. By 2003, lack of teacher mobility and insufficient home language resources were some of the challenges that were successfully addressed in this province. Monitoring visits revealed that classes were becoming more print rich, learners were more confident readers and teacher-learner relations more conducive to outcomes-based teaching and learning. Visits further revealed that books had been accessioned in most schools, learners were reading independently and were able to retell stories with comprehension. In 2004, the provincial government

demonstrated its faith in *the organisation* by requesting it to train teachers in road safety in schools on behalf of the Provincial Department of Transport. Furthermore, one trainer was also requested to assist the department of education with the training of teachers on the RNCS.

At the beginning of 2000, Mpumalanga had four trainers working for *the organisation*. They were working on 3 projects throughout the province: a donor-funded project that was implemented in 49 rural schools in Malelane, a project that focused on the delivery of books in 12 schools and the Learning for Living project that was implemented in 51 schools. All these schools received resources, were trained on the organisation's courses and classroom practice was monitored to ensure delivery. Annual motivational events were held and led to more involvement of learners, teachers, parents and district officials in the organisation's activities. This led the provincial department to suggest that an official be appointed as a direct contact for each trainer.

In 2001, the rural nature of the Learning for Living project led to the addition of 2 staff members thus allowing trainers to reach rural schools with more ease. The province is vast and roads were a challenge even for the most experienced trainer/driver. Areas like Malelane, Moretele and Badplaas continued to benefit from the project. By 2002, *the organisation* had added another project in this province. It was funded by the DBSA and as part of this project, principals were trained in financial management, strategic planning, communication and conflict management. The impact *the organisation* was having in Mpumalanga province was demonstrated by the fact that project schools often achieved top positions when partaking in competitions like Love Life Games, the Colgate Competitions and general storytelling and drama activities.

By 2003, monitoring visits revealed that lessons were becoming more learner-centered and that learner's communication and writing skills were improving. In many instances, primary school graduates returned to their old schools in order to access books and secondary teachers expressed the view that learners from project schools were generally academically superior when compared to their counterparts from non-project schools. Events were held to market the materials that are used in the organisation's project schools and this allowed non-project schools to access these and thus benefit from the organisation's expertise. One of the highlights of 2003 was the training of school managers in the Nkangala area on how to manage the delivery of the organisation's projects in their schools. Another was the staff training in early childhood development conducted by a team of Israeli experts.

In the Northern/Limpopo Province, the Learning for Living project allowed *the organisation* to work in this project quite extensively for the first time since its inception. This enabled *the organisation* to work in 150 schools in 7 of the most remote areas of the province. In the year 2000, the province enjoyed the services of 7 trainers. Unfortunately, some schools had to be excluded from the project due to torrential rains which made it impossible to train and monitor them. A sound relationship with all stakeholders in the province allowed *the organisation* to organise holiday teacher training sessions with the blessing of teacher unions and the MEC for Education in the province, Edgar Mushwana. In all the schools that *the organisation* was working in, training was conducted, resources were handed out and continuous monitoring was done. Annual motivational programmes were also held to forge closer ties with communities who lived in and around the organisation's project schools.

By 2001, the organisation's projects in the Northern Province were growing. 13 additional schools were selected for the delivery of books project while 255 schools were chosen for the USAID Library Project. The number of trainers grew to 10 in this province. Community members, led by the Rain Queen Kgosigadi Modjadji, continued to support the organisation's programmes leading to *the organisation* winning the Premier's Award in Education for the Northern Province. By 2002, principals and leader teachers in this province were holding regular school-based workshops in order to assist their peers and also provided on-going support to their trainers. In some cases, principals started conducting class visits even in the absence of the organisation's trainers. VIP reading visits were organised where celebrities and other dignitaries read to and where read to by learners from schools throughout the province.

By 2003, teachers and learners in the province were operating at a much higher level and weaknesses were detected during class visits. Demonstrations and reinforcement workshops were held to address these. The province also benefitted from a visit by Professor Misty Sailors from Texas. She presented workshops on writing for reader response. In June 2004, the province witnessed the beginning of the Edcon project which worked with Grade R practitioners. As support for its work in the province, *the organisation* was given an office by the Department of Education at Hoxani College in the Bushbuckridge area. Also in 2004, *the organisation* conducted training for the provincial department of transport.

In the year 2000, the North West province had 3 newly appointed trainers and 1 regional secretary. According to the 2000 annual report, this province produced its first regional report in the same year. The region worked solely on the Learning for Living project and by the beginning of 2000, 62 schools had been signed up to the project. Focus was on the training of the following courses: management skills, introduction to OBE, using stories for language development, reading and writing. Trainers in the province worked closely with education officials and this led to a specific curriculum developer being assigned to liaise with *the organisation*.

In 2001, the North West province was included in the book delivery project that *the organisation* already ran in other provinces. An extra trainer was appointed for this purpose and a lot of time was spent selecting, visiting and communicating with potential schools. Exceptional support was received from the MEC for Education Mr ZP Tolo and Dr AM Karodia who was the DDG of Education in the North West Province. All 52 Foundation and Intermediate Phase subject advisors in the province were trained by the organisation and this assisted in entrenching the project methodology in the province.

In 2003, the Executive Manager of Professional Services, Mr E Pedro, advised teachers in the province to continue implementing the organisation's strategies and to concentrate on teaching English as an additional language to ensure a successful future. In 2003, *the organisation* was requested by the Superintendent General of Education to prepare a dossier for presentation to the National Minister of Education. This presented a model for training subject advisors which could be duplicated in all the other provinces. Also in 2003, the North West staff was trained in the writing for reader response course by Professor Jim Hoffman from the University of Texas. In 2004, the organisation's trainers in the North West were invited to attend a full day's training on the IQMS by the Department of Education.
From 2005, the format of the organisation's annual reports changed and regional reporting was discontinued. Instead, project reports were done under the following headings:

- Early Childhood Development
- Primary School
- High School
- Special Projects

The following table highlights projects that *the organisation* was engaged in in 2005:

Early Childhood Development

Name of Project	**Project Details**
Edcon Project Donor: Edcon	Three year project (2003 – 2005) in which teachers from 20 schools in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo, were trained in four courses. Teachers led an outreach programme to 40 other schools in their province.
Lotteries Project Donor: National Lotteries Board	A one year project in 900 Grade R classrooms in 787 schools. To support the training, each classroom was stocked with books and other educational equipment so that teachers were able to implement the programme successfully.
Jim Joel Project Donor: Jim Joel Trust	A two year Grade R project in 16 schools in Gauteng. Each project school had two outreach schools that they trained and mentored.
D G Murray Project Donor: D G Murray Trust	A one year project in which 67 teachers in 13 schools in the Paarl area of the Western Cape were trained to be more effective in Grade R and Grade 1.
Limpopo Project	51 Grade R teachers in 48 schools were trained in a variety of teaching strategies to work in schools in Limpopo.

Table 5.5: Summary of the ECD projects that were active in 2005

In the 2007 annual report, some highlights were mentioned. Graduates from schools in the Jim Joel Grade R project were usually put directly into Grade 1 because they were already "school ready". The National

Lotteries Caregiver's Project aimed to empower caregivers with entrepreneurial skills and to provide children with a safe and stimulating learning environment.

In the 2008 annual report, a snapshot of all ECD projects was given. It showed that in the previous year, the organisation implemented four separately funded projects in all nine provinces.

All ECD Projects	
Donors	04
Provinces	09
Pre-schools and Crèches	263
Children benefitted	10 828
Teachers/Caregivers trained in 2007	1838

Table 5.6: Summary of ECD projects in 2008

From the 2009 annual report, it is evident that during this period *the organisation* was implementing two separately funded interventions at this level. The table below illustrates the statistics relating to these projects like names of donors, the number of schools and learners and so on.

Name of Project	Singita Sabi Sands	Jim Joel
Donor	Singita (Pty) Ltd	Jim Joel Foundation
Province	Mpumalanga	Eastern Cape
No. of schools	12	25
No. of learners	1040	815
No. of practitioners	12	43

Table 5.6: Statistics from a 2009 project

Evidence from the 2010 annual report indicates *the organisation* was engaged in six projects during this period. This is an increase from two the previous year to six projects in 2010.They were spread across five South African provinces, namely Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. The organisation's ECD programme provided training and mentoring to practitioners who provided childcare

services to communities, either in home-based centers or more formal ECD centers or crèches (Annual Report, 2010).

According to the 2011 annual report, that same year *the organisation* was implementing eight projects across four provinces, namely the Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo and Eastern Cape. The donors were the Jim Joel Foundation, FNB Fund, Free State Department of Social Development, Singita Ltd, Telkom Foundation, Roger Federer Foundation and the National Lottery Distribution Fund.

Primary School Projects/Training

According to the 2005 annual report, the Integrated Education Project (IEP) ran from 2004 to 2007. It continued from the provincial and national education departments' District Development Support Programme (DDSP). Records indicate that the DDSP supported basic teacher education, curriculum development, school management and governance programmes in selected districts of four provinces with the aim of improving primary education. It was funded by USAID South Africa and aimed to improve the education system's ability to deliver quality Mathematics and Science programmes. This project allowed *the organisation* to forge close working relations with other partners in this project.

In the 2006 annual report, the following activities were mentioned: AngloGold Ashanti Project (a three-year project in which teachers and school managers were trained in Kwa-Thema and Tsakane in Eastern Gauteng), the ABSA Foundation/Buffelshoek Trust Project (which was implemented in five schools in Manyelete and where the project schools served as centres of excellence for schools not in the project), the Bunyan Tree Foundation's Limpopo Project (which was implemented in Mahwelereng and Bela Bela) and the First National Eastern Cape Leader Teacher Project, a three year project in which leader teachers were trained on effective teaching methodologies.

In the 2007 report, it is clear that *the organisation* was continuing with projects from the previous years while engaging in new ones as well. The Astra Zeneca project was one of the new projects noted. Its scope covered a broad spectrum of support including management and infrastructure, sport, literacy and numeracy. *The organisation* was a literacy partner in this project which covered one school in KwaZulu-Natal, impacting 9 educators and 345 learners.

In the 2008 annual report, a snapshot of all primary school projects is given. It shows that in the reporting year, *the organisation* implemented six separately funded primary school projects on behalf of five corporate sponsors.

All Primary School Projects	
Donors	06
Provinces	5 (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West Province, Western Cape)
Projects	10
Schools	90
Learners benefitted	41 602
Principals and teachers trained	1015

Table 5.7: Summary of primary school projects in 2008

In the 2009 annual report, it is made evident that *the organisation* was implementing six projects at primary school level. All these projects were in conjunction with provincial education departments. The table below shows the statistics as they relate to these projects.

Project	Free State	Pep Academy	Pep Academy	Empowerment Trust	Lit/Num Strategy	FFS Refiners
Donor	Free State Department of Education Hagart Trust	Social Innovations (Pty) Ltd	Social Innovations (Pty) Ltd	McMillan and Various	WCED	FFS Refiners
Province	Free State	Gauteng	W Cape	Gauteng	W Cape	KZN
Number of schools	1 656	4	2	23	125	12
Number of learners	131 646	160	160	16 059	69 699	2 588

Number of educators	5 047	24	12	441	2 077	36

Table 5.8: Summary of primary school projects in 2009

In 2010, *the organisation* was involved in nine projects all over the country at this level. These projects had a variety of donors ranging from provincial education departments to private individuals and companies in the private sector. In all these projects, the company continued with its approach of offering training, delivering appropriate resources and providing on - going support visits to practitioners. The training emphasised the teaching strategies that *the organisation* had promoted over many years.

The table below gives a summary of these projects as shown in the 2010 annual report.

Number of Projects	09
Names of Donors	• Sven Tumba Education Fund • Guisepe and Rita Raimondo Trust • Impala Platinum • WCED • PEP • Sasol • WeSizwe Platinum • Zenex Foundation • Free State Dept of Education
Provinces	• Western Cape • Gauteng • KwaZulu-Natal • North West • Limpopo • Mpumalanga • North West • Free State • Eastern Cape

Table 5.9: Summary of primary school projects in 2010

In 2011, *the organisation* had six projects being implemented at this level. Each project was located in a different province from the others. Two of them were provincial literacy interventions sponsored by the relevant provincial departments. The rest were sponsored by private sector companies. The following table provides a statistical synopsis of these projects.

Project	**Donor**	**No of Teachers**	**No of Learners**	**No of Schools**
Gauteng Literacy Strategy	GDE	972	42 149	130
Lit/Num Strategy	WCED	1563		126
PEP 2011	Social Innovations	63	1440	09
Stef Project	Sven Tumba	42	1632	04
WeSizwe Platinum	WeSizwe Platinum Ltd	37	1428	06
Implats	Impala Community Trust	104	6035	07

Table 5.10: Summary of primary school projects in 2011

Presently, in Gauteng, *the organisation* is involved in a project called the Gauteng Province Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS). It is led by the GDE and aims to improve both literacy and numeracy in selected primary schools in the province. *The organisation* is one of five NGOs that have been contracted to work in this project.

High School Projects/Training

The following table shows high school training that *the organisation* was involved in as illustrated by the 2005 annual report.

Name of Project	**Donor**	**Project Details**
Bushbuckridge High School Project	Net Aid Foundation Kaiser Family Foundation	Launched in April 2003 in ten high schools in the Bushbuckridge area of Limpopo.
Queenstown High School Project	R B Hagart Trust Sage Foundation Johnnic Communications Anglo Gold Fund New Settlers Foundation Stella and Paul Loewenstein	Started in 2005 in ten high schools in the Eastern Cape.
Scaw Metals/Trident Steel Project	Scaw Metals Trident Steel	Two high schools in Katlehong partnered in order to improve their educational delivery.
Mamelodi/Attredgeville	Japanese Embassy Momentum Sasfin Holdings	Four schools received substantial donations of library resources and their teachers trained on a variety of book-based teaching strategies.
Moletsane High School	Brait Foundation	The library of this school was stocked with resources and its teachers and librarian trained on Group Reading and library administration.
Northern Cape High School Project	De Beers Fund Educational Trust	Ten high schools were trained on various teaching strategies and their School Management Teams were trained on effective school governance.
Bojanala High School Project	Anglo American Chairman's Fund	17 high schools in the North West received training on effective teaching strategies.

Table 5.11: Summary of high school projects in 2005

In the 2006 annual report, several new projects were discussed. These included the De Beers Northern Cape Project where 200 teachers and school managers were trained on how to support the organisation's interventions; the Sasfin Bank Literacy Project in Tshwane where forty teachers in Mamelodi and Attredgeville were trained on the enhancement of financial skills, and the NetAid Limpopo Project in which matriculants at ten high schools in Bushbuckridge were trained in preparation for their final English Literature Examinations.

In the 2007 annual report, the Bojanala and Cofimvaba high school projects were mentioned as highlights. Over the previous two years, intensive training in basic reading and writing strategies elevated the targeted schools from struggling ones to centres of excellence. In Cofimvaba, the training of matriculants on literature skills enabled the district to improve its pass rate by 2.09 percent.

In the 2008 annual report, a snapshot of all high school projects is given. It shows that *the organisation* implemented four projects at high school level during this period.

All High School Projects	
Donors	04
Provinces	04 (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West Province)
Schools	61
Learners benefitted	8940
Teachers, principals and departmental officials trained in 2007	131
Teachers who received classroom support	127

Table 5.12: Summary of high school projects in 2008

The 2009 annual report shows that during this period, *the organisation* was working in only two projects in the Gauteng province. The stated aim of these projects was to enable teachers to prepare Grade 12s for their final examinations and for life in the real world. The project was called the Fundanawe Reading

Scheme and the donor was Avusa Limited. Independent reading schemes were supplied to the project schools and were used by learners for independent reading which improved their confidence and proficiency in reading and enriched their vocabulary.

In 2010, evidence suggests that *the organisation* was involved in two separately funded projects at this level. Both projects aimed to prepare learners for academic success by immersing them in literature which expanded their language awareness and critical thinking skills. The table below gives a synopsis of the two projects.

Name of Project	Trident Steel	Sugar Association
Name of Donor	Trident Steel	Sugar Trust Fund
Number of Teachers	16	14
Number of Learners	2 789	560
Number of Schools	05	10

Table 5.13: Summary of high school projects in 2010

In 2011, *the organisation* had two high school projects, both in Gauteng Province. In one project, *the organisation* provided resources, training and monitoring to five schools in Katlehong using the Fundanawe Reading Scheme. This is a levelled reading scheme that learners use for independent reading. The other project, funded by the Zenex Foundation, was a two-year endeavour that aimed to develop teachers in four high schools in Dobsonville, Eldorado Park, Turrfontein and Kwa Zuma.

Currently, *the organisation* has 56 trainers in Gauteng, 10 in the Western Cape, 6 in the Free State, 3 in KwaZulu-Natal, 2 in Limpopo, 2 in Mpumalanga, 2 in the North West and only 1 in the Northern and Eastern Cape respectively. In most of these provinces, the organisation is still working very closely with the different provincial departments of education.

5.4 Conclusion.

It is clear from the above data that *the organisation* has grown considerably over the years. From humble beginnings operating in Soweto and its surrounding areas, *the organisation* flourished into a national force. Obviously, a lot of resources were spent arranging motivational events throughout the country which brought communities together while promoting the aims and objectives of *the organisation* at the same time. The concept of leader teachers was introduced nationally and this went a long way towards sustaining the organisation's achievements long after projects have ended. The idea of establishing regional communities also ensured that leaders at community level were used to assist trainers on the ground whilst their involvement gave the organization much needed legitimacy in communities where it worked.

Close working relations were established with education officials throughout the country. This must have gone a long way towards ensuring that *the organisation* was awarded government contracts in all nine provinces. The Learning for Living project, in particular, enabled *the organisation* to work simultaneously in all nine of South Africa's provinces. Obviously, this opportunity cemented its relationship with provincial education departments while its literacy development approach was spread countrywide.

In the next chapter, I will look at specific events that enabled *the organisation* to remain sustainable and relevant over many years. A timeline detailing visits made by experts from all over the world will be drawn. Lessons learnt from these visits will be discussed and clear examples given of how these visits influenced change in *the organisation*. Evaluations conducted on the organisation's policies, practices and resources will be discussed. To consolidate this process, themes will be formulated from the data discussed in chapter five and these will be used to explain how *the organisation* used learning and leadership to develop itself.

Chapter 6.

Presentation of Findings.

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify events and instances in the organisation's history that seem to have stimulated learning in *the organisation*. Clearly, this organisation has been able to remain relevant despite constant change in the South African education landscape. In this chapter, I will highlight specific ways in which *the organisation* learnt and refined its practice. I will also highlight the role that the leader of the organisation played in ensuring that *the organisation* remains sustainable, successful and relevant. To aid this process, themes will be used to show exactly how learning took place in *the organisation* and how such learning led to innovation and enabled it to stay abreast of developments in the field of literacy development. The formulation of these themes was informed by the data that was collected and reflected in the previous chapter. The data clearly indicates how *the organisation* was able to sustain and re – invent itself over the years and this knowledge was then used to formulate the following themes.

6.2 Theme 1: The ability to learn from and adapt to changing circumstances

Pedler et al (1991) point out that a learning organisation is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself. Du Plessis et al (1999), on the other hand, assert that a learning organisation is one that continually becomes smarter. In my opinion, both definitions highlight the need for an organisation to be flexible and display the ability to continually assess itself and re-align its practices in order to stay abreast of developments. Moloi (2002) argues that learning organisations are able to deal proactively with change and require a deep sense of commitment in order to provide the energy needed to succeed as a world-class organisation.

A close scrutiny of evidence suggests that despite sticking to one vision for many years, the organisation was able to implement changes in other areas. It became apparent to me that at operational level, the organisation has been able to respond positively to political and socioeconomic changes in South Africa.

From the very beginning, *the organisation* faced numerous challenges. In his book, the Deputy Director mentions the following about the challenges that faced *the organisation* at its inception:

> The uphill battle facing *the organisation* was that it was dealing with a society that was ill-prepared educationally but was founded on the subservience and perceived inferiority of the majority and White privilege. This implies that in a population as large as ours, civil values that ranged from the most basic rights to the sophistication of career choices, needed to form the cornerstones a nation needed.

Another of the challenges that *the organisation* must have faced was to constantly revise its model of intervention. As already stated the initial aim of *the organisation* was the supply of library books to schools in and around Soweto. The challenges facing *the organisation* during its second and third decades were considerably different.

Although the exact timeframe is not clearly indicated, it is stated in many company records that during a visit to one of the Soweto schools the first National Director realised that the mere supply of library books was not enough to improve literacy levels in Black township schools. This realisation came about when she noticed that learners at high school level were still unable to read and write fluently. It became clear to her that a more effective intervention strategy was required and that it needed to start earlier when learners were still at primary school level. In my view, this was a major shift in ideology and this is significant because it must have had implications for the type of resources that were used and the amount of funding needed for *the organisation* to remain effective.

In his book, the Deputy Director asserts that the organisation's model of intervention has always been based on the following: needs analysis and language teaching at schools with support given in relevant areas (for instance teacher training, resource provisioning, classroom monitoring and class visits). All this, according to him, is done in collaboration with the National and Provincial Education Departments.

In the 1985 annual report, the following assertion is made: "Certain events last year had a considerable effect on the direction and emphasis of the organisation's programmes planned for the future". In my opinion, this statement illustrates the organisation's flexibility and ability to realign its approach in order to deal with changes within our borders and beyond. Furthermore, this indicates that *the organisation* has always provided relevant programmes designed to cater for different South African contexts. To further

prove this point, it is noted that when the National Department of Education and Training provided books to 320 high schools and 60 junior secondary schools in 1984, *the organisation* responded by providing initial training courses for all high schools and their counterparts from junior secondary schools to ensure that the allocated books were used effectively and efficiently.
In my view, this initiative by *the organisation* further highlights its ability to be proactive and to boldly seize opportunities in order to improve literacy levels in South Africa.

In 1986, the chairperson of *the organisation,* writing in the annual report, made the following observation:

> There is a strong awareness in our organisation of the need for balance. On the one hand we have to be disciplined in the use of our resources and specific professional skills. On the other, we must have the capacity to respond to immediate needs. These needs frequently arise as a result of the political circumstances in which we find ourselves. That balance has been reasonably maintained and it will be our constant endeavour to continue to do so.

Clearly, the points as raised above show the organisation's ability to read contextual factors in the country and in the education field in particular and use that knowledge to constantly modify its approach to literacy development.

Currently, *the organisation* prefers to work in disadvantaged schools that are generally deemed to be underperforming. Such schools are identified with the help of education officials who work in the targeted areas. Once the schools are chosen, a baseline test is usually administered to determine the learners' reading and writing proficiency before the intervention commences. Teachers are then thoroughly trained by highly skilled personnel who themselves were good teachers before they joined *the organisation*. This training is then supported by regular class visits where teachers are observed in practice and given individualised guidance and support. Teachers are also given carefully selected books that are used to enhance both teaching and learning experiences.

In an interview, the Human Resource officer in *the organisation* had the following to say about the same period:

> In the past, we showed government the way. When things changed, government forged a new way. We have become more supportive of the government, this means that we have to reevaluate where we are going. When democracy came, governmental foes became your friends in government. Now we were no longer pointing fingers but we were saying how do we help them address deficits from the past?

In my opinion, both these statements indicate quite clearly that the change brought about by political developments in the country had a direct impact on how *the organisation* was funded and in turn, on how that affected its literacy development strategy. Therein lie a crucial question that has to be asked and hopefully answered by this report. Who or what enabled this organisation to cope with all the changes that were experienced in its decades of existence?

A notable development in the organisation's history was its production of Big Books. In the 1994 annual report, *the organisation* announced the production of its first ever Big Books by its materials development department. These books were designed to be used by the teacher with the whole class.

It is worthwhile to note that these were the first Big Books manufactured in South Africa. Before this, Big Books were imported at great expense or handmade in classrooms across the country. *The organisation* claimed that their Big Books came with two innovations: encouraging the use of languages other than English and that these books were based on themes which were then explored across the different subjects/learning areas.

In the same annual report, an announcement is made of the introduction of groundbreaking Home Language materials. These materials are said "to develop learners' literacy and language skills simultaneously within the meaningful context of real books". Additionally, *the organisation* proudly announced that it has forged an alliance with the Wendy Pye Organisation of New Zealand. Due to this alliance, *the organisation* became the sole Southern African distributor of its series of readers, Sunshine Books. The Wendy Pye Organisation also helped to train local personnel in a range of sales and management skills (Annual Report, 1997).

Furthermore, an important milestone was the 1997 establishment of a publishing division within *the organisation*. In the 2008 annual report, this company is described as a Section 21 company (non profit). This addition was meant to provide a book selection, processing and distribution service to South African

educational institutions. The proceeds from this company would then be used to support the attempts of the sister company in its fight against illiteracy in the country.

Clearly, *the organisation* realised that it could not rely solely on donor funding, hence the creation of this sister company. According to the first National Director, she realised that if *the organisation* was to expand, it would not be able to finance all its activities. This realisation led to the establishment of the publishing arm of *the organisation*. In my opinion, the establishment of this company is proof that *the organisation* was led with vision and seemed to relish treading on new ground. In fact, I think that the creation of the publishing company improved the organisation's prospects of long-term survival. It was a savvy move on the part of the leader and again, showed how pro active she was.

During this period (2001), a document was developed in order to explain the philosophy, principles and practice of *the organisation* so as to answer commonly asked questions about how the organisation operated. In the document, it is asserted that *the organisation* is "[a]n independent professional organisation, funded by the South African private sector and foreign donors, and it is primarily a teacher development agency". This description indicates that, mainly, *the organisation* had only two sources of funding, the South African private sector and foreign donors. Nevertheless, it is particularly interesting to note that, as early as the 1980s, *the organisation* was driven by a passion to "create a consumer demand from the teacher and pupil communities that would persuade the authorities that the kind of services *the organisation* offered were of fundamental importance to the quality of education".

The organisation has also been able to grow from a locally based programme around the Johannesburg area to having offices all over South Africa. When *the organisation* was first initiated, it had only R10,000 for its book buying budget, but by 1985 it had an annual budget of more than R1,5 million (Annual Report, 1985). This, in my view, further proves that *the organisation* historically has had the willingness and capacity to rise to its challenges.

Considerable time and finances have been spent improving and refining the organisation's training programmes. This is adequately illustrated through the following objectives for the years 1985 and 1986:

- Document training programmes
- Revise and edit existing programmes
- Produce audio visual programmes, charts, transparencies and work cards (Annual Report, 1985).

The revision and editing of existing programmes was, in my view, the organisation's acknowledgement that staying abreast of changes in South Africa and beyond requires constant improvement of its products. Britton (1998) argues that, as developmental organisations, NGOs have no option but to learn since knowing what "works and what does not" is a major part of their currency.
He further states that part of learning to be more effective includes finding out what the needs of potential clients are and devising programmes to assist.

Undoubtedly, *the organisation* demonstrated foresight and vision when they capitalised on small localised successes and turned them into national programmes. Evidence suggests that throughout its history, *the organisation* has worked hard to establish itself as a community-based organisation. One of the ways this was done was to hold motivational competitions where members of the broad South African public were invited to either partake or attend. In its attempt to reach out to the community, *the organisation* initiated competitions that were open to the public.

According to the 1985 annual report, 1984 proved how valuable competitions are. Consequently, *the organisation* took the decision to nationalise competitions like the Festival of Books and the Easy Reading Competition. These community-based initiatives were meant to improve the organisation's profile while working towards its goal of literacy development. According to the first National Director, these festivals and competitions raised the organisation's profile and kept it in the limelight. She expressed regret that these had to be abandoned due to lack of funding.

I think that this is yet another example of the organisation's ability to read the context it operated in and devise strategies that would enable it continually to improve its practices thus remaining relevant and effective. Another development that proved how much *the organisation* valued working with communities was the establishment of Regional Committees.

In his book, the Deputy Director asserts that as *the organisation* spread throughout the country, it became apparent that a support structure was needed outside the confines of the organisation. He further explains that *the organisation* identified members of the community who were committed and willing to volunteer and requested them to offer the organisation their skills by serving on advisory committees. The organisation's employees were no longer coping with the workload in the provinces and needed help with

their administration. Such volunteers were elected at open meetings where there were representatives from education departments, the private sector, civil society, teacher formations and various other stakeholders. Committee members were required to always work in consultation with the organisation's coordinators. Chairpersons of committees nationwide formed the organisation's National Committee. The first National Director confirmed this state of affairs when she asserted that *the organisation* established committees everywhere it worked and that through them they were able to connect to underground structures thus gaining legitimacy wherever *the organisation* worked. This strategy, in my view, allowed *the organisation* to tap into a variety of skills that were on offer in the different provinces while increasing its credibility in the communities in which its employees and volunteers conducted their work. According to the Deputy Director, committee members were usually highly regarded in their respective communities and were able to use their influence to publicise the organisation's activities in their respective communities. This influence must have also been used in their workplaces to ensure that *the organisation* enjoyed the necessary financial support it needed to run its programmes. Most importantly, these committees served as a link between *the organisation* and its various constituencies.

Additionally, *the organisation* introduced the concept of leader teachers. These were outstanding individuals who had received training in the organisation's programmes. They were meant to assist the organisation's trainers since they could not possibly cope with all their duties in all the provinces of South Africa. In each region, exceptional teachers were identified and given intensive training. The aim was to ensure that they would be able to train their counterparts long after projects had been completed. This initiative ensured that there would be sustainability. One such leader is quoted in the Deputy Director's book describing a leader teacher's role as the following:

> As a leader teacher, I was exposed to wider horizons than an ordinary teacher was. I was developed professionally by a variety of courses on inner personal growth and on academic issues. It's not easy being a leader teacher. One has to make a lot of sacrifices, for example give up your personal time to help colleagues. One is subjected to a lot of unpleasantness at work, particularly if colleagues are not contributing as they should.

The same leader teacher continues by describing some of the characteristics that a leader teacher has to possess and asserts that

> A leader teacher has to be level-headed at all times, even under trying circumstances. This quality does not come easily. You have to lead by example. You must arrive on time at school and leave in the afternoons after making sure that everything is in perfect working condition to start work the following day. Your class outlay, preparations, learner's books and department should be a

> shining example. A leader teacher is a resource person in schools, so he has to move an extra mile than the rest of the team. Go out and get information and disseminate it to colleagues. Being a resource person means that you are easily approachable, be willing to help others and be able to help them as you rise to greater heights.

According to the Deputy Director, leader teachers did their work as a voluntary contribution to the education of our children. They have proved to be leaders in transformation in their geographic areas. He further states that their unstinting enthusiasm has been a great support to the organisation's campaign against illiteracy. He also adds that the leader teacher programme was started in 1989 when thirty teachers (chosen for their excellent teaching and leadership qualities) were trained in the use of non-fiction books for subject teaching.

The table below summarises events and developments that illustrate the organisation's ability to adapt and respond positively to changing contexts. In the same table, an analysis of these events and developments is made.

Year	**Event/Development**	**Analysis**
1984	Upon hearing that the Department of Education had supplied books to 320 high schools and 60 junior secondary schools, *the organisation* provided initial book training to affected teachers thus ensuring that books were used effectively.	This shows the organisation's willingness to work within existing interventions thus ensuring that synergy existed between itself and other agencies. It also proves that it had the ability to "rise to the occasion".
1984	*The organisation* nationalised motivational events.	This shows that *the organisation* realised the effectiveness of motivational events at regional level and duplicated them at national level.
1985	Regional Committees were established.	Upon realising the need to work more closely with communities,

		the organisation formed these in order to improve relations and have representation at local level.
1985/6	*The organisation* embarked on the revision and editing of existing programmes.	This shows that *the organisation* was constantly refining programmes in order to satisfy changing customer needs.
1985/6	The production of audiovisual programmes, charts, transparencies and work cards commenced.	Again, this shows that *the organisation* aimed to constantly modernise its products thus ensuring effectiveness.
1985	The concept of leader teachers was introduced.	This must have been done to gain credibility in communities and ensured that gains were sustainable long after projects had been concluded.
1994	After the country's first democratic elections *the organisation* forged closer working ties with the South African government.	This was obviously a response to a changing political landscape. *The organisation* had to adapt to changing demands by donors who insisted that NGOs work more closely with the newly elected democratic government.
1994	The introduction of Home Language materials occurred.	The shortage in Home Language materials was recognised and *the organisation* responded accordingly.
1994	The first ever Big Books in South Africa are produced.	*The organisation* learnt from countries with similar contexts and introduced Big Books as a proven tool to improve language skills in second language

		speakers.
1996	An alliance with the Wendy Pye Organisation was formed.	*The organisation* recognised that Wendy Pye was a contemporary leader in the development of literacy materials and formed an alliance which enabled the organisation to learn continually while solely distributing Wendy Pye products in Southern Africa.
1997	*The organisation* established a publishing division.	*The organisation* realised that donor priorities were changing and established another source of income for the organisation.

Table 6.1: Summary of developments that illustrate the organisation's ability to adapt

6.3. Theme 2: Learning from the experiences and practices of others and the constant evaluation of the organisation's own systems and practices

When discussing the characteristics of learning organisations, many scholars highlight organisations' ability to learn continually and to adapt to changing circumstances. Edwards (1997) argues that learning is essential to organisational effectiveness. Moloi (2002) also asserts that learning organisations continually assess their skills and their learning capacity. She further points out that learning organisations deal proactively with change and require a deep sense of commitment in order to provide the energy needed to succeed as a world-class organisation. Moloi continues and describes learning organisations as organisations that continually assess their skills and their learning capacity.

The Harvard Business Review (1991:20), cited in Moloi (2002), defines a learning organisation as a group of people learning from the experience and best practice of others. When scrutinising the

development of the organisation in question, a clear picture emerges that indicates that learning did play a major role in how *the organisation* has been able to enhance its skills and practices. It is evident that this organisation learnt in mainly two ways: through external experts in the field and external evaluations of *the organisation*. It learnt a lot from outside experts and scholars who visited *the organisation* from time to time. These individuals came from all over the world and had varied backgrounds. Some were academics from prominent universities, others were literacy experts eager to share their knowledge and expertise, while others were leaders of similar organisations operating in other countries. *The organisation* also learnt from the external evaluations of its operations, systems and practices.

As early as March 1987, *the organisation* hosted Edie Garvie in South Africa. Garvie was a lecturer, writer and freelance consultant in multicultural education. She was also an international expert on reading and its place in language development (Annual Report, 1987). The purpose of this visit and proof that *the organisation* gained from it is provided by the first National Director's assertion that "Ms Garvie's visit has helped me with policy decisions regarding the future of *the organisation*, particularly in respect of its role as a non-racial organisation in a multicultural society. It has left me with new avenues to explore with regard to the role of the story pack, a low-cost easily developed aid to activity learning and in-service training". Importantly, this visit gave the National Director ideas on how to strategically position *the organisation* as a non-racial organisation in a multicultural society. This was of paramount importance if one considers that, at the time, South Africa was politically volatile due to the system of Apartheid. *The organisation,* in order to ensure its very survival, had to remain non-political although it had taken a firm stand to work only with previously disadvantaged Black township schools.

Garvie's visit, I believe, was important in that from it *the organisation* learnt how to navigate in the South African political landscape without alienating any section of society. This must have gone a long way towards attracting possible donors to *the organisation*. As an NGO, it relied heavily on the goodwill of donors and it was important to appear impartial at all times.

Moreover, the National Director's comments highlight two important points. Firstly, they demonstrate that she was almost solely in charge of the development of *the organisation*. It is particularly interesting to note that she speaks in singular form when she discusses the lessons that were learnt from Garvie's visit. Secondly, her comments indicate that *the organisation* took advice from others very seriously and used the information gained to improve the day-to-day running of the organisation. Clearly, this included

the evaluation of the products that were being used to determine their effectiveness and to make decisions about the pricing of such products.

In 1995, Warwick Elley (Emeritus Professor at the University of New Zealand and a world-renowned expert on reading assessment) visited the organisation's schools in three provinces. These visits must have provided him with the opportunity to assess both the organisation's approach to literacy development and the quality and effectiveness of its resources. According to the organisation's 1996 annual report, this visit resulted in the revision of several courses that *the organisation* offered. From this visit, I believe that *the organisation* learnt and gained the following. It was prompted to revisit and refine its approach to literacy development. (This was vitally important because of differing views that have always existed on what is the best possible approach to improve literacy levels in a variety of contexts.)

The organisation was also compelled to assess the quality of its resources. It must have been compelled to comparatively analyse how its resources fared when compared to those used in other countries with similar contexts. Furthermore, *the organisation* had to determine whether its resources were effective or not. This self-analysis, I believe, is needed by any organisation in order to identify both strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses in particular, provide an organisation with the opportunity to discuss issues, learn from its mistakes and plot the way forward. The fact that this visit led to the revision of several courses is confirmation of the value that *the organisation* put on such visits.

Still in 1996, *the organisation* hosted Christopher Cook and Professor Robin Campbell. Cook, who served on accreditation boards in the United Kingdom, helped the organisation prepare its courses for accreditation. It is important to note that *the organisation* strove to change with the times and endeavoured to remain relevant throughout its existence. This visit suggests that *the organisation* realised that offering good courses was no longer enough but that it needed to have them accredited. Hence the visit from Cook, who was from a country with an exceptionally strong qualifications framework in place. The accreditation of courses is an on-going process because, to this very day, *the organisation* is still working towards having some of its courses accredited. Campbell, an authority in literacy development, helped with the content and design of primary school courses (Annual Report 1996).

In 1998, *the organisation* announced visits by Judith Warren and Simon Wilby. Warren, from Educational Management and Information Consultants (EMIC), worked at *the organisation* for two-and-a-half months to help with course development. Wilby, a UK consultant, ran a two-week children's book illustration workshop for *the organisation*. Wilby's visit must have been motivated by the organisation's need to develop its own series of books instead of relying solely on other publishers. The two week course on book illustration must have empowered the organisation's materials developers. Again, I think that these visits allowed *the organisation* not only to learn of developments globally but also ensured that its courses and products compared favourably with those found in other countries.

The table below provides a summarized account of external experts who visited *the organisation* over the years.

Who?	**When?**	**What?**	**Change / Innovation**
Miss Edie Garvie	March 1987	Sensitised *the organisation* to its role as a non-racial organisation in a multi-racial society.	Influenced company policies and helped it explore the use of cost effective materials, for example Story Packs.
Warwick Elley	1995	Assessed the organisation's approach to literacy development and the effectiveness of its resources.	The visit led to the revision of several courses offered by *the organisation*.
Christopher Cook	1996	Assisted *the organisation* to prepare its courses for accreditation.	Enabled *the organisation* to ensure that its courses were in line with the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
Prof. Robin Campbell	1996	Helped with the design and content of primary	Courses offered by *the organisation* were

		school courses.	improved to internationally acceptable standards.
Simon Wilby	1998	Ran a two-week children's book illustration workshop.	Skills gained in this workshop must have been used to create the organisation's own series of books.
Judith Warren	1998	Assisted *the organisation* with course development.	Skills gained were used in creating own range of materials.

Table 6.2: Summary of external experts who visited the organisation

As already pointed out, *the organisation* also exposed itself to a lot of external evaluations of its practices, materials and systems. In 1986, *the organisation* requested the British Council to evaluate the organisation's formation, programmes and projects, its organisational structure and its regional operations. This resulted in a frank report by Pat Bailey which was subsequently used to improve the organisation's operations. For instance, Bailey suggested a more participative approach to course development (Annual Report, 1987). I believe that this recommendation went a long way towards enabling *the organisation* to gain credibility in communities where it worked and has informed its approach to course development since then. The organisation endeavours to involve as many people as possible in the process of developing course materials. The evidence for this is the system which *the organisation* follows when new materials are developed.

Usually, a donor for a particular project is sourced. The materials development team then invites teachers who fit the targeted profile to give an indication of what their learners' needs are. Materials are then created using their ideas to make them suitable for the organisation's clientele. Experienced staff members from the training unit are also invited to have an input on the product under development. The final product will then be piloted in a few schools before it is rolled out nationally. When interviewed, the

first National Director thanked Dr Bailey for visiting *the organisation* regularly in order to assist with the writing of courses and for always sharing her knowledge and expertise willingly.

In 1996, *the organisation* commissioned the evaluation of reading and writing skills of pupils participating in its programmes. This evaluation was conducted by independent evaluators, namely Neil Le Roux and Eric Schollar. At this stage, I think it is crucial for me to express my concern at the fact that many evaluations done on *the organisation* were mostly led by Mr Schollar. One has to wonder whether this had any bearing on the consistently positive results that the organisation's evaluations seem to enjoy over the years.
Conclusions of this particular survey confirmed the international findings which show that a book-based approach to teaching English as a second language benefits pupils in terms of their communicative skills in using English as a second language (A Survey Report on the Reading and Writing Skills of Pupils, 1996). These findings must have been taken seriously by *the organisation* and must have influenced its approach to literacy development. To this day, *the organisation* believes that a book-based literacy intervention is the best method if one wants to improve literacy levels in any context.

In the 1999 annual report, the first National Director announced results from independent evaluations that had been conducted by JET. JET was requested to assess the effect of providing materials as support to teachers who had to deal with large classes. This evaluation commended the provision of materials and asserted that the organisation's materials such as Big Books allowed teachers to engage in a variety of classroom interaction whilst still maintaining control of large classes. I believe that these findings must have been empowering for *the organisation* since it mainly operated in township schools which remain notorious for overcrowded classrooms. This must have influenced the organisation's choice of materials that are supplied to schools. To date, Big Books play a central role in all the organisation's literacy interventions.

Professor Sarah Murray of Rhodes University evaluated the organisation's Home Language Core Reading Programme. As a consequence, the results thereof proved that the materials were world class and improved results in the pilot classrooms by ten percent. The following table gives a summary of these evaluation sessions.

Who?	When?	What?	Recommendations
British Council/Pat Bailey	1986	The organisation's formation, programmes and projects were evaluated.	A more participative approach to course development was advised.
Neil Le Roux/Eric Scholar	1996	The reading and writing skills of learners partaking in the organisation's programmes were evaluated.	Affirmation that a book-based approach to literacy development benefits learners who study English as their second language.
Joint Education Trust (JET)	1999	The effect of providing resources to teachers with large classes was assessed.	The organisation's materials were commended for allowing teachers with large classes to engage in a variety of activities.
Prof. Sarah Murray	2000	An evaluation of the organisation's Home Language Core Reading Programme was conducted.	Affirmation that the programme was world class and improved learner results in the pilot classrooms by ten percent.

Table 6.3: Summary of external evaluations carried out on the organisation

During an interview, the first National Director went to great lengths to clarify the role played by outsiders in the development of the organisation's systems and practices. According to her, *the organisation* succeeded because "it learnt from the best".

Despite these evaluations, not enough evidence exists to suggest that they were used to enhance the organisation's materials, practices and systems. Evaluations of any kind present opportunities for self-analysis, reflection and should stimulate growth and improvement. Was this the case with the organisation in question? Did the evaluations mentioned above stimulate discussion, reflection and growth? Did they lead to better management systems and practices?

In my opinion, these evaluations were nothing more than a public relations exercise. As already alluded to, not enough evidence exists that suggests otherwise. Could this be the possible reason why I could not find even a single evaluation criticizing the organisation's policies, practices and resources? This leads me to wonder what influenced the need to secure donors played in the commission of these evaluation exercises. Were these evaluations carried out in order to satisfy donors' urge to "see" progress in the projects that they funded? Or were they meant to influence the organisation's practices and systems?

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Context and Background

From the available literature, it is apparent that NGO's, in particular, operate in continually changing contexts, as such, they have to be flexible and adaptable. The organisation that I studied had to adapt to changes in the economy, power shifts in the political arena and social changes which led to a demand for new and improved materials. Initially, *the organisation* mainly relied on donor funding but political changes in South Africa compelled NGO's to work more closely with the government thus forcing them to have government as a major source of their funding and to seek out other sources to boost their coffers.

7.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to understand the features of learning organisations through a case study. The chosen case study was analyzed to determine how it was able to grow and sustain itself in a relatively competitive environment. Furthermore, the study attempted to find out ways in which this organisation has changed, over the years, in response to new developments in the education sector. I also wanted to explore whether learning has contributed to developments and changes in the organisation's practices, systems and materials. I also looked at the impact that the leader of the organisation has had on the organisation's ability to sustain its operations and re- invent itself. The study also attempted to find out if any structures were put in place to deal with constant changes in the education sector.

7.3 Chapter Outline

The aim of this chapter is to achieve the following: To give a summary of the relevant literature that pertains to learning organisations thus giving an outline of what leading theorists assert. A summary of the findings will be presented and attempts made to explain how these relate to the available literature.

I then proceed by showing how this study has contributed to the field of learning organisations and the literature thereof. I will then share my thoughts on possibilities for future research and suggest ways to confirm and broaden my findings from this case study.

7.4 Summary of the Literature

Clearly, the literature on learning organisations differs on how to define these organisations. On the one hand, you have classic definitions of learning organisations while on the other, one is presented with progressive views of how such organisations should be defined. Both Senge (1990) and Taylor (1998) provide a traditional view in their definitions when they put a lot of emphasis on organisational learning and how these organisations devise ways of continually learning from themselves and from those in their external environment.

Moloi (2002), in particular, places a lot of emphasis on structure and the collaborative practices that allow learning organisations to engage with both the internal and external environments. In my view, this implies that according to these authors, learning organisations are supposed to be open systems. As such, they should be able to influence those around them and in turn, allow themselves to be influenced by others as well.

Senge asserts that for learning organisations to flourish, the following features must be evident: Personal Mastery, Systems Thinking, Team Learning and a Shared Vision. Possession of personal mastery means that members in an organisation know their strengths and weaknesses and are able to use this knowledge to their advantage. This means that they are not simply followers but are able to think independently thus enriching the organisation with their ideas. Systems thinking means that members of an organisation should have the ability to see the bigger picture. They must understand that ideas come together to form the whole. Thus they understand that economic, social and political issues have a collective impact on their organisation. Team Learning prompts the organisation to provide opportunities for members to learn and grow together. As expected, this allows members to share ideas on how to improve practices thus benefitting the overall welfare of the organisation. Having a shared vision means that members of an organization are united behind a common vision. Under such circumstances, all initiatives and efforts are geared towards the achievement of previously agreed upon organisational goals.

Clearly, Senge's ideas on learning organisations are not adequate. To this end, Moloi argues that organisational learning has to occur at four levels. Namely,the individual, team, organisational and societal levels. This means that to Moloi, society has a pivotal role to play in learning organisations. In my view, this confirms the notion that learning organisations are open systems, as such, they influence are are in turn influenced by societies in which they operate.

Although both Senge and Moloi have made important contributions to the literature, it is worth noting that Garvin pushes the thinking on learning organisations even further. He states that a particular atmosphere must prevail for learning to occur in any organisation. Garvin explains that organisations must possess a supportive learning atmosphere that offers psychological safety to its members. According to Garvin, differences must be embraced, new ideas cherished and time for reflection provided.

7.5 Summary of the Main Findings

The organisation stayed abreast of relevant legislation and thus was able to take full advantage of the Sullivan Code which compelled American companies (in particular) operating in Apartheid South Africa to donate to worthy community causes.

It is also clear from the data that there was some form of personal mastery in *the organisation*. Obviously, the leader of *the organisation* was distinctly aware of her strengths and shortcomings. As such, she was able to use her strengths to the benefit *the organisation*. She had a knack for convincing donors that *the organisation* had a legitimate cause. She used her charm to garner support from business leaders across the world. Despite this, of concern is the fact that although she clearly displays traces of personal mastery, she seems to be the only individual in the organisation who achieved this state. This leads me to believe that other members of *the organisation* simply followed her lead.

This prompts me to discuss the issue of team learning. Evidence suggests that *the organisation* achieved success and stability through learning from experts who visited from all over the world. Despite this, the leader seems to be the only individual within *the organisation* who enjoyed continuous learning. This is proven by the fact that she always spoke in singular when discussing lessons learnt and the application of

ideas. So, although there was organisational learning, team learning was almost non- existent in *the organisation*.

Those interviewed confirmed the existence of a common vision within *the organisation*. The leader's passion, focus and dedication seem to have been infectious. New recruits were introduced to the organisation's goals with the view of ensuring that all members are united behind a common vision. Despite this, findings are not consistent with Garvin's assertion that for learning to occur, an atmosphere that promotes psychological safety must prevail. During the interviews, it was clear that many members of *the organisation* were intimidated by the leader's personality and management style. They felt that their duty was to follow directives without questioning or voicing their concerns and reservations.

7.6 How the study contributes to the literature

The findings of this study present a somewhat unique picture of what learning organisations look like. As such, they confirm, challenge and extend the existing body of knowledge on how learning organisations function and what strategies they use to ensure their relevance and grow their client base.

These findings confirm the notion that leaders play a crucial role in how their organisations learn and function. Both their attitude and leadership style have a bearing on the culture of the organisation and may influence whether it stays abreast of developments in its field, thus determining its lifespan. The findings also support the view that a deep sense of commitment is needed thus enabling any organisation to be considered to be of a world class standard.

On the other, these findings challenge the idea that all learning organisations have a decentralized leadership style that allows all members of the organisation to contribute equally towards the achievement of common goals.

Clearly, the leader of the organisation in question was passionate, focused and driven towards the achievement of her vision of a literate South Africa. As already stated above, it is somewhat difficult to distinguish between her learning and that of *the organisation*.

Contrary to popular characterisations of learning organisations, I would argue that the National Director was, for many years, solely in charge of strategic direction that *the organisation* took. The question therefore, is how will this affect *the organisation* now that she has left it?

Evidence suggests that there was a blur between the leader and *the organisation*. As such, it is not always easy to distinguish between organisational learning and the leader's own personal learning. Not enough evidence exists that suggests that the National Director adopted an inclusive leadership style. In fact, at some point, she speaks in the singular when explaining lessons learnt from those visiting *the organisation* from time to time.

Evidence also indicates that the leader wielded a lot of power and influence within and outside *the organisation*. This enabled her to establish and sustain relations that benefitted *the organisation* financially and otherwise. It is important to note that not enough evidence was found that suggest that the strategic leadership function was fulfilled by more than one individual. In many of the annual reports that were studied, it is evident that the National Director was at the heart of its operations. In many instances, her personal experiences are relayed as if they reflect those of *the organisation* itself.

Furthermore, the findings also confirm that learning organisations have the capacity to grow and reinvent themselves. They remain relevant by responding to the needs of their client base and always strive to reach as many people as possible. They continually attempt to improve both their services and products through learning from the practices and experiences of others. As already alluded to, the organisation in question did this by inviting experts from all over the world to come and share their experiences and expertise through the presentation of courses and workshops.

Evidence suggests that the knowledge gained from these visits was used to improve the organisation's systems, training materials and practices.

I believe that this practice is unusual, having constant input from experts from within and outside South African borders must have accelerated the organisation's development. This interaction with leaders from various fields must have ensured that *the organisation* is kept informed of the latest trends in the field of literacy development worldwide.

This must have ensured that *the organisation* remains at the cutting edge of innovation. The fact that this organisation was the first one to introduce Big Books in South Africa confirms its status as an innovative industry leader.

The findings also highlight the use of evaluations to constantly evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the organisation's systems, materials and practices.

As already discussed, these evaluations do not seem to have been used to conduct an extensive analysis of the organisation's programmes. Instead, it was used as an accountability exercise to keep the donors happy. The results thereof must have also been used to attract new donors and sponsors. Although these evaluations were not used optimally to improve *the organisation*, I believe that it was a revolutionary strategy to use them as a marketing tool.

Having said that, it is worth noting that reports that reflect negatively on *the organisation* are not readily available. Does this mean that all evaluations done on the organisation's policies, practices and resources were all full of compliments and positive feedback? I believe that only positive evaluations were given prominence because they enabled *the organisation* to further its aims and objectives.

7.7 Possibilities for Future Research

Despite this being quite an extensive study, one has to consider the fact that only one organisation was scrutinized. As such, a bigger sample may be needed in future in order to verify these findings. To further complicate matters, the interviews that I conducted were quite complicated. In my view, not all the participants were willing to divulge sensitive information and speak to me frankly. As such, I spent a lot of time studying what was said during the interviews and "reading between the lines". In fact, it is worth noting that 3 key staff members practically refused to be interviewed. Was this paranoia on their part or was it out of loyalty to the organization and its founding National Director? As already indicated above, the annual reports were designed to put the organisation in a good light so as to attract possible donors and keep existing ones.

In particular, the following possibilities may be explored in future:

The possibility that learning organisations do not necessarily display the same characteristics has to be considered. This is important because it would broaden our perspective on how learning organisations function. Furthermore, learning organisations from different disciplines could be compared to determine whether some characteristics are more prevalent in some fields than others.

A comparative analysis of learning organisations from the education field could be conducted to determine whether the same strategies are employed to keep these organisations relevant and to stimulate growth. As such, a more comprehensive study of the different roles played by leaders in learning organisations need further clarity. Does a leader's personality and work ethic guarantee that an organisation will grow and remain sustainable?

Finally, a study is needed to determine the impact of having a leader who employs too much power and influence over a learning organisation. What happens to such an organisation after the leader's departure? How long will it take for the innovations and strategies to crumble?

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