

AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY OF AN NGO THAT DELIVERS EMPOWERMENT DRIVEN
EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that “An Appreciative Inquiry of the Educhange and Research Foundation” is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Signature:

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2011-08-29

Date

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ABSTRACT

Title: An Appreciative Inquiry of an NGO that delivers empowerment driven education support services

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ABSTRACT

The South African education system is in crisis; with low matric pass rates, high dropout rates, teacher strikes, rising pregnancy rates among teenaged learners, and assaults by learners on educators and other learners. The system is unable to cope with the multiple demands placed on it and a number of NGOs are stepping in to aid the system. This study is an evaluation of an NGO aimed at developing learners through the application of the Appreciative Inquiry approach. The Appreciative Inquiry approach is a method for generating change within an organisation by looking at what works in the organisation and facilitating active participation. The main findings from this study were that the programme seems to have positively affected learners' performance both academically and behaviourally; the programme was perceived to have raised the general standard of academic performance at the school.

Key words: Appreciative Inquiry, AI, Social Construction, NGO, Education, Programme Evaluation, Formative Evaluation, 4-D Cycle, 4-I Cycle

CHAPTER 1 : FIRST STEPS

Welcome to the journey of my dissertation. These notes were born of a desire to hold to my personal journey through the research process. I use this space to express my thoughts, feelings and personal reflections at various phases of the research process without censorship from academic protocol (internalised or externally enforced). I am aware that researchers, especially qualitative researchers, are encouraged – indeed required – to reflect their voice within the text and not to create artificial boundaries in the data. In these notes I reflect on my experiences as a student who is conducting his first bona fide research project and not as the expert, participative, immersed and academically bound researcher. In addition, by clearly delineating the personal from the professional I hope to give you, my reader, the choice of whether you follow the journey in addition to the process.

Introduction

Overview

The focus of this dissertation is on an evaluation of the activities of the Educhange and Research Foundation (ERF) as well as on the process of the evaluation itself. The structure of this dissertation is provided visually in figure 1.1. The aim of this chapter is to provide the social, political, economic and historic background to the study. This chapter also provides the motivation for the research in brief before discussing the problem statement and research questions which shaped the study. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation. The socio-politico-economic milieu within which ERF operates is discussed in chapter 3. The research design and method is covered in greater detail in chapter 4. The results of the study and the discussion of these results wrap up the dissertation in chapter 5 and 6.

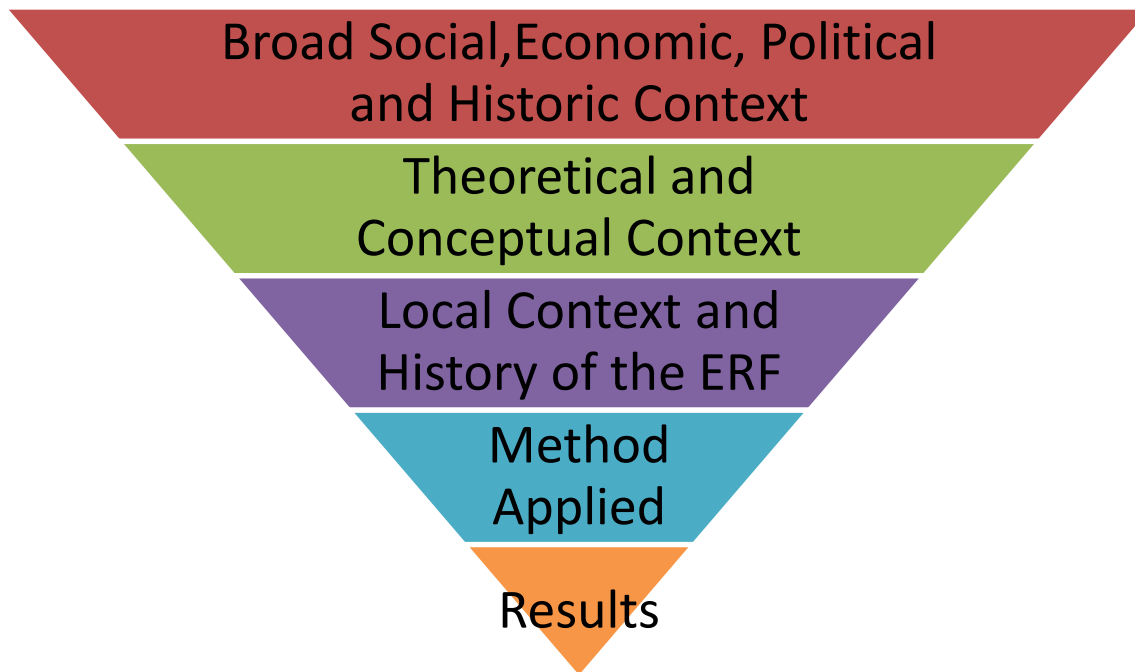


Figure 1.1 The structure of the dissertation

Background

South Africa is sixteen years into its democracy and the country is still undergoing an evolution into a first world power. Hailed as one of the African continent's leaders, South Africa has a critical role to play on the international stage in bringing the value of Africa to the world. To do so, however, South Africa needs to ensure that it continues to grow and develop as an innovator and generator of knowledge. This would not be possible without the infrastructure to provide quality education to its future leaders.

The South African education system is in crisis; with low matric pass rates, high dropout rates, teacher strikes, rising pregnancy rates among teenaged learners, and assaults by learners on educators and other learners (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010; Williams, 2010). This system is plagued by a number of social issues that threaten the integrity of the system. These issues are embedded within the wider social systems and are symptomatic of a social structure that fails to sufficiently meet the needs of individuals, social groups and communities (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Jansen & Taylor, 2003; Motala, 2009). Schools are embedded within

these systems and are affected by the same issues. The education is not only faced with external challenges but also struggles with issues unique to the context largely due to the lack of infrastructure that leads to overcrowding in class rooms and insufficient learning materials (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010; Williams, 2010). High attrition rates due to voluntary resignations to emigrate to escape the high crime rates or move to higher paying work, as well as due to death as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the education legacy of apartheid have also led to a large number of under-qualified teachers being placed within the system (Arends, 2007; Demombynes & Ozler, 2005; Hammet, 2007; Molteno, 1984).

The education system is tasked with the responsibility of aiding learners with the development of basic skills required to develop a learner body that contributes to the continued socio-economic development of South Africa (South African Department of Education, 1995; South African Department of Education, 1998). At first glance this mandate appears simple enough: Align the curriculum to the skills needed and develop learners to be participative citizens through the provision of relevant learning opportunities; and provide the necessary infrastructure and skilled human resources (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002; Rose, 2006). These participative citizens are responsible and necessary for the continued economic and democratic development of South Africa. A brief definition of participative, democratic and critical citizenship is a citizenship that takes ownership of the power granted to them through the democratic process; that takes responsibility for their actions and the enforcement of shared, accepted social norms; and that critically interacts with the political, policy and societal structures to ensure that these structures are geared toward the healthy development of all individuals in society (Liebowitz, 2000).

When the history and socio-economic context of South Africa, the structure of the South African Education system, and the challenges to and within the education system are examined it becomes apparent that the above mandate is anything but simple (Jansen & Taylor, 2003; Liebowitz, 2000). The reality of the situation is that education in South Africa takes place in a context of historic inequities that transcend generations; where widespread poverty and unemployment limit individual and community access to basic services which includes education (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974); where the culture of teaching and learning does not adequately address the needs of the stakeholders within the education system; where human rights are enshrined in policy but are not upheld in practice; and where control of the identity of, and

approaches employed by the education system are often placed out of reach of those stakeholders who are most directly affected by it (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Harber, 2002; Liebowitz, 2000; Motala, 2009; Williams, 2010).

In the sections that follow I briefly discuss the above issues to provide the complex and dynamic context in which education provision takes place in South Africa.

The Role of Education in Society

Before discussing the historic and socio-economic context of education in South Africa it is essential to discuss the role that education plays in society. Education is inextricably linked to the political ideology of the ruling majority of a country (Christie & Gordon, 1992). As such the construction of the identity of the education system is linked to the prevailing political opinions and ideologies of the ruling elite (Mazibuko, 2009; Molteno, 1984). The relationship between education and the rights and responsibilities of citizens is a reciprocal one (Christie & Gordon, 1992). The education system is tasked with creating an environment where members of society can be shaped into good citizens (South African Department of Education, 1995; South African Department of Education, 1998). The environment here consists of the infrastructure, skilled human resource, social norms and standards utilised by schools to shape citizens-in-the-making into productive and responsible members of society (South African Department of Education, 1998). The definition of a good citizen is primarily determined by the ruling elite and through this definition the elite holds control over the identity of a large proportion of the populace (Molteno, 1984). The specific characteristics and traits valued by each era of education will be discussed in the section below that discusses the policy framework for each era of education. This is due, in part, to the fact that policy development is embedded within a specific political ideology and a holistic discussion of these topics requires integrated discussion (Deacon, Osman, & Buchler, 2010).

The use of education as a tool for shaping the identity of the populace is not only linked to the power dynamics in society but also to the developmental phases of individuals. This statement is expanded on by Christie (1998) who states that “schools together with families are the major social institutions for children and youth in modern societies” (p. 284). The education career of a learner takes place during phases of development that are crucial to identity formation (Merry,

2005). From the point where learners enter the system at Foundation phase (grades R – 3) until they exit the system at either the level of Further Education (grades 10 -12) or Higher Education (Diplomas and Degrees) learners are exposed to the language and culture of learning and teaching (Christie & Gordon, 1992; Cross, Carpentier, & Ait-Mehdi, 2009). The culture of learning and teaching can be described as the norms and standards that are accepted as the school environment. Like all cultures, the culture of teaching and learning has its own rituals designed to regulate behaviour. Bernstein (1975) in Christie (1998) describes ritual as follows:

Ritual in humans generally refers to a relatively rigid pattern of acts, specific to a situation, which construct a framework of meaning over and beyond the specific situational meanings. Here, the symbolic function of ritual is to relate the individual through ritualistic acts to a social order, to heighten respect for that order, to revivify that order within the individual and, in particular, to deepen acceptance of the procedures which are used to maintain continuity, order and boundary and which control ambivalence towards the social order. (p. 287)

In the description above ritual has two primary functions. First, it aims to provide a relationship between an individual and a social order (Warnick, 2010). In the context of a school the rituals specific to teaching and learning aim to create a relationship between the educator and learner, the learner and other learners, the learner and the larger school administrative system and the learner and society in general by defining sets of behaviour for specific circumstances. For example, while in a classroom setting learners are expected to listen attentively to the educator who in turn is expected to provide instruction in a prescribed curriculum. In this example the behaviour of the two groups are clearly delineated and provide a point of reference even in circumstances where individual educators and learners may not know each other or share a pre-existing relationship (Higgins, 2010).

The second function of ritual in the school context is to instil a sense of respect for the education system and its rules within learners (Warnick, 2010). This function is essential in maintaining an environment where the common need for education can be addressed in the context of competing, sometimes conflicting individual needs (Haberman, 1994). At first glance these rituals appear to be directed at the learners within the education system; however, a deeper

examination of the descriptions and assumptions behind these rituals reveal that rituals are two-way interactions that require participation from all the stakeholders to be an effective social regulation mechanism (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). According to Christie (1998) consensual rituals such as assemblies, ceremonies, uniforms and badges bind members of the school together as a moral community; differentiating rituals such as age and sex groupings reinforce and deepen the authority relations of the school and contribute towards order and control (p. 287). In a sense the ritual is a play where each actor has a role and only when all actors collaborate can the storyline come together.

Like a play, the school ritual has a very clear delineation in terms of two key cultural mechanisms that are used to regulate behaviour in any culture, namely, space and time. Clock time provides the basic organisational framework around which all activities in the education system can be coordinated. At the largest time scale time is divided into school and non-school time (holidays and “after school”) each with its own set of behaviours (Christie, 1998). The primary purpose of the time divisions above is to clearly delineate the boundaries of the function and authority of the school from that of broader societal, community and family systems (Warnick, 2010). These delineations preserve the autonomy of the school from these systems to a degree and represent an agreement between the school and society of a transfer of power over the learners for a set period (Higgins, 2010).

School time is further divided into terms which are divided into weeks, weeks into school days, school days into starting and finishing times and within these times, periods and breaks (Christie, 1998). These specific time allocations allow for the coordination of the roles played by each individual within the school system (Warnick, 2010). These specific role allocations facilitate the “micro-governance” of learners with regard to their behaviour in specific circumstances with clearly defined desirable and undesirable behaviour such as punctuality versus lateness; active attentiveness versus inattentiveness; correct forms of address in speech toward peers and authority figures versus insolence and personal hygiene versus a lack of the same (Christie, 1998).

The second, and closely intertwined, cultural mechanism is space (Higgins, 2010). Schools are relational spaces in which learning and teaching is expected to happen and is often used for

nothing else (Chetty, 1992; Christie, 1998). This serves to create or reinforce the boundary between the school and the broader societal structures described earlier and is the physical representation of the agreement between the school and society. Space is further sub-divided within the school space into classrooms, play areas, staff rooms for educators and assembly areas. Space and individual status are closely intertwined concepts in that an individual's status within the system determines which areas they may access at which time (Warnick, 2010). Space, like time, is linked to authority, and transgression of space warrant disciplinary action in the codes of schools (Christie, 1998). For instance, learners who fail are denied access to the spatial area delineated for learners of a higher grade and are required to remain in the physical space of their current grade even though their peer-group may have moved on. Another example of this link is in the act of suspension where learners are denied access to the physical space of the school as punishment for habitual transgression of the norms of the system. The relevance of these rituals and observance of these cultural mechanisms in the lives of individuals becomes apparent when cognisance is taken of the fact that they apply to the "world of work" which also shares clear delineations of time and space for specific functions linked to access and authority. The role of school enculturation in this sense is to indoctrinate learners to these norms so that when they enter the world of work they are familiar with and hold an innate understanding of the behavioural expectations of them (Christie, 1998; Enslin, 1984).

The discussion above should not be seen to construct learners as passive recipients empty of context, experience, knowledge and agency (Warnick, 2010). Learners enter the system with their own, as well as the collective expectations of their family and peers of obtaining the means to the good life (Haberman, 1994; Resnik, 2006) and for the education system to be effective it must explicitly define, understand and meet or adjust these expectations (Resnik, 2006). This entails educators and school administrators working closely with the community and the learners to define whose vision of the good life is being followed and how this may be obtained (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Higgins, 2010). Learners also enter the system with values and personal beliefs that impact on the interpretation of the relational spaces that exist within the school (Christie & Gordon, 1992; Jansen & Taylor, 2003). Through these complex interactions between the education system, the educators, the community and the learners is the complex relational space of teaching and learning defined (Gonzalez, 2011; Luntley, 2010).

In addition to being a primary socialisation mechanism, education is acknowledged as the keystone for sustainable economic growth of the country with job creation a critical part of this economic development (South African Department of Finance, 2011). However, job creation is not possible or sustainable without adequately educated and skilled labour to fill the positions created (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Christie & Gordon, 1992; Deacon, Osman, & Buchler, 2010; Pring, 2007).

The South African government acknowledged this interdependence between economic development and education standards (Rose, 2006). As such education in South Africa gets the largest portion of the national budget which amounts to approximately 21 percent of the non-interest allocations and receives the largest share of the additional allocations (South African Department of Finance, 2011). For the year 2011 the amount of R8.3 billion was allocated for maintaining and upgrading school infrastructure. In the 2011 budget speech the Finance Minister allocated approximately R14 billion for further education and training colleges (South African Department of Finance, 2011). R20 billion was allocated to Sector Education and Training Authorities and R5 billion to the National Skills Fund which is responsible for training work-seekers.

In an attempt to encourage more individuals to train as educators, the government has allocated R1 billion to the *funza lushaka* teacher bursary fund (South African Department of Finance, 2011). According to Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, the Departments of Basic and Higher Education exercise stewardship over the largest network of service providers in our economy and represent the most important programme of investment in future growth and redistribution (South African Department of Finance, 2011). This strong emphasis on training and development in the budget speech can be seen as an indication that the government recognises the central role education plays in the development of the country, but this development is not purely economic and cannot be addressed by simply allocating greater amounts of the national budget to educating the country. The stance of this dissertation is that education cannot and should not only encompass the development of knowledge and skills related to economic development but should also encompass the transference of morals, values, beliefs and norms. As discussed above, education is often linked to the political and ideological beliefs of the ruling elite and is used as a mechanism to instil these within the populace.

In summary, education plays multiple roles in society simultaneously. The implication here is that changes to the education system may have unanticipated consequences in another, seemingly unrelated sector of society. It is therefore imperative that any changes created within the education system be carefully examined in terms of the impact they may have and that clear and thorough consultation processes be followed when seeking to create change within this system. This recommendation is simple in concept but complex in implementation. The decentralised nature of education provision in South Africa and the broad range of stakeholders who may be affected by these changes make full consultation unfeasible in practice. As such it is essential that any organisation seeking to intervene in the education system be open to and to make provision for iterative changes to the process where stakeholders are allowed to recommend changes to the intervention that most directly affect them.

Historic and Socio-Economic Context of Education in South Africa

The history of apartheid and its legacy are well documented (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). One of the lasting impacts from the Apartheid era is the socio-economic divide that exists within South Africa today. The exclusionary policies implemented by the Apartheid government ensured a high quality of life for the economic elite while the majority of the country's inhabitants were left in relative, and in some cases absolute poverty (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Demombynes & Ozler, 2005). While the new dispensation has made great progress in addressing these inequalities, there is still a large proportion of the country that exists in relative poverty. The concept of relative poverty here defines a state where a group of the population exists within a socio-economic state that is disproportionately low in comparison to the socio-economically privileged (Foster, 1998). This division within the social structure has been termed the "socio-economic divide" and it has its roots in the colonial era (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). This dissertation will only discuss the history of the socio-economic divide from the Apartheid era and how it has impacted on the socio-economic context of South Africa today.

The architects of the Apartheid system sought to create a racially stratified society in which power and control of resources was vested with the White minority who were considered the elite (Brook, 1996; Hyslop, 2005). At the other end of the racial continuum was the black race which was – and still is – the majority as well as the poorest economic grouping. Race

determined social class which in turn determined or limited economic capacity (Johnson, 1982). The economic capacity of individuals and communities determined the quality of services accessible to these communities and the individuals within them (Roberts, 1994). This statement is a blatant oversimplification of the complex impacts of the Apartheid social structure but is aimed at describing the underpinning ideology of the time. Officially apartheid was about preserving ethnic identities and proposed a separation between ethnic groups to achieve this preservation (Johnson, 1982; Thompson, 1962). The slogan, “separate but equal” (Enslin, 1984) was the official face of the system which was also aimed at constructing the identity of the non-White races as inferior and therefore provided an inferior quality of education aimed at ‘assisting’ the non-White to fulfil his or her role in the hierarchy below the white man (Dubow, 1992; Johnson, 1982). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to conduct a detailed and nuanced discussion of the purpose, effects and eventual decline of the Apartheid system.

The Apartheid system utilised education as a tool for reinforcing the class system through providing what it termed education appropriate for the level in society that the individual occupied (Johnson, 1982; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). The ideal learner under this education system was constructed as obedient, compliant, hard working, passive, disempowered and useful (Dubow, 1992; Finkel & Ernst, 2005). These values were espoused across all the social classes and were aimed at creating a nation of individuals who did not question authority, who uncritically accepted knowledge from their betters and whose identity and worth was based on their utility to the system (Sakarai, 1976; Hyslop, 2005). Knowledge was coupled to power under this system and was closely regulated. The infrastructure available to the various social classes belonged to the government and no sense of ownership was encouraged. This discourse of disempowerment and disinvestment meant that learners in the education system were subjects to the government who could not alter or direct their learning in any manner (Brook, 1996).

The liberation movements resisted the use of the education system as a tool to enforce socio-economic segregation by mobilising the youth in protest against the system (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). These movements vowed to make the country ungovernable and encouraged a culture of non-compliance and resistance among the youth and communities (Frankel, 1981). The liberation movements encouraged the destruction of infrastructure as this was the property of the government at the time and repairs would deplete its resources (Fiske &

Writing this section was difficult for a number of reasons. The main reason being that finding text that gives an integrated view of what apartheid was and how it affected the social spaces is difficult. It seems that the political positioning of that time still shapes the construction of its identity today. It is also quite difficult to write a balanced argument about the past, I constantly find myself lapsing into the subjective and not always my own subjectivity I may add. Reading through the work on the history of discrimination leaves me alternatively outraged and, against my better judgement, impressed at the way it was all constructed and positioned. I want to be outraged, I want to condemn but at the same time I have a story to tell.

Ladd, 2004). In a sense these movements turned the disinvestment of the people against the Apartheid government by acknowledging the fact that the burden of providing and maintaining the infrastructure – no matter how inferior – was placed on the government. The residue of this political mobilisation and social engineering is evident today in the nature of the service delivery protests that periodically sweep the country. During these protests it is not uncommon to witness the destruction of infrastructure and disruption to public services.

The liberation movements also worked at creating awareness among the non-White social classes of the inability of the education system to provide a higher quality of life. This devaluation of education further distanced the broader population from the education system under the slogan “no education before liberation” (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Frankel, 1981). The resistance movements fought for an education equal to that being provided to the White populace and placed a high value on the education provided in “White schools”. This approach can be seen to have inadvertently created the perception that white things are invariably better (Mangcu, To the Brink, 2008).

The perception that the quality of education provided in what are now termed historically black schools is inferior to the quality of education provided in the historically White schools still holds true today (Cross, Carpentier, & Ait-Mehdi, 2009). This perception led to a mass exodus of families with the financial resources and ecological expertise to formally White areas to ensure that their children received a decent education (Christie, 1999; Roberts, 1994; South African Institute of Race Relations, 2009). This exodus depleted the capacity of many black communities to improve the quality of education that was accessible to them. To effectively reform the education system and provide access to quality education for all would require social engineering at a similar scale to that discussed above (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001). However, with

the transfer of power to the new dispensation the new government was faced with a number of urgent priorities, limited resources and an economic deficit (Glad, 1996; Moller, 1998; Finkel & Ernst, 2005). As such the re-constructing perceptions of the value and ownership of education was not addressed as comprehensively as it could have been. The disinvestment of communities, educators, parents and learners in the education system remains firmly embedded within the social structure of South Africa today (Hentz, 2005). This lack of ownership and disempowerment is manifested in a lack of responsibility among these stakeholders for the provision and quality of education with the expectation that the new government will provide (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). As briefly mentioned above, the government lacks the financial and human resource required to effectively overhaul the education system and has been bringing community to the fore in an attempt to address a number of social issues such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, crime, poverty and the education crisis (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005; Harber, 2002; Hyslop, 2005).

In the context of the education crisis the approach has been for government to provide basic access to education by pre-determining the national curriculum as a step toward ensuring that all learners are taught the same subject matter (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002), by allocating clearly delineated areas in which schooling can take place, by designing and implementing educator training subsidies to enhance and expand the existing pool of educators (South African Department of Education, 1998). The government then mandated schools to appoint governing bodies who are responsible for levying school fees from the communities that these schools serve (Williams, 2010). The school fees are intended to supplement the subsidy provided by the government to each school. The benefit of this approach is that it allows government to concentrate on those schools that are most in need of support without depleting the resources of schools that function well (Brook, 1996). This approach was adopted when the government realised that redistributing resources allocated to previously White schools would not be sufficient to raise the standard of education in South Africa by a significant level and would cripple these schools at the same time which would further aggravate the situation (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002). This approach, while more democratic and participative in nature, does little to address the need for access to quality education among the majority of the population. Those communities with the resources and capacity to take on the additional burden of supplementing the government funding to schools remain a small elite (Ahmed & Sayed,

2009). The primary difference between the situation today and the situation during the Apartheid era is that the elite today are defined by socio-economic class as opposed to race exclusively. There are however overlaps between socio-economic class and race due to the inequities of the past and a system of transformation rife with corruption and incompetence (Mangcu, 2008). Therefore the poorest racial grouping in South Africa remains black South Africans, in particular black South African women (Shefer, 2010).

The vulnerability of black South African women and girls due to cultural practices within patriarchal power systems that systematically disinvest women of power has been recognised and there have been a number of measures implemented to redress this (Banks, 2007; McKeever, 1998). The most visible and easily quantifiable change has been to prioritise the education of young black girls and to provide labour legislation that enforces hiring practices that give preference to black females within the world of work especially within management and executive levels of employment, at least in policy (Taylor & Yu, 2009). However, those most in need of this transformative process, the poorest black women are those with the least amount of access to the mechanisms and resources available to redress the power imbalances that shape their lives (Nattrass & Seekings, 2001). As such a large majority of black South African women still exist within the “double handicap” which is a term used to describe the double discrimination that comes with being female and being black in South Africa (Mangcu, 2008; Shefer, 2010).

There is also a new form of segregation occurring within society and government which dictates access to power and control. There is an emerging trend within the political landscape where an informal – but very real – social structure has been set. Mangcu (2008) states that in the simplest terms that “the current, particularly political, trend of condemning anyone who is not black and who is not on the side of the government is a negative and destructive one that has developed in the past eight years. This concept stands in stark contrast to the approach that allows all citizens’ voices to be heard and welcomes vigorous and open debate on issues” (Southall, 2005). At the bottom of this social structure are the White racial groups who are sometimes perceived as not being allowed to comment on or participate in the power dynamics that govern South Africa because “they have had their turn” (see figure 1.2) (Mangcu, 2008). Above the White racial group are the other non-White racial groups. Within this social structure the black racial group is

viewed as a privileged group to be accorded preferential access to resources, work, information and, most importantly, a preferential voice when commenting or voting on the state of affairs in South Africa. Within the black population there are those who were part of the Struggle – the term used to describe the resistance movements against the Apartheid regime – who have a greater voice than those in the black race group that are not recognised as having participated in the Struggle (Mangu, 2008). What is important to note here is that it is not actual participation in the Struggle that accords one status but the acknowledgement by others that an individual or group have contributed toward the success of the Struggle (Mangu, 2008). Within the group who participated in the Struggle those who are associated with the African National Congress hold positions of greater privilege and power. Within the African National Congress those who are allied with the most powerful faction are accorded the pinnacle of power and privilege (Mangu, 2008).

The discussion above should not be taken as a simple statement of fact; it is a description of a snapshot of the current political landscape in South Africa but is not intended as a comprehensive, robust description. The purpose of this discussion is simply to illustrate the difficult landscape in which innovation and transformation in the South African education system must take place. As stated earlier in this chapter, education has always been linked to political ideology and is closely tied to the identity of the ruling elite. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to understand that any intervention, especially those interventions seeking to create sustainable change must take cognisance of the prevailing political climate if they are to succeed. This state of affairs is especially pertinent to those who wish to engage in political and policy discourse within the field of education because it is so closely linked with power, access and individual, societal and national identity.

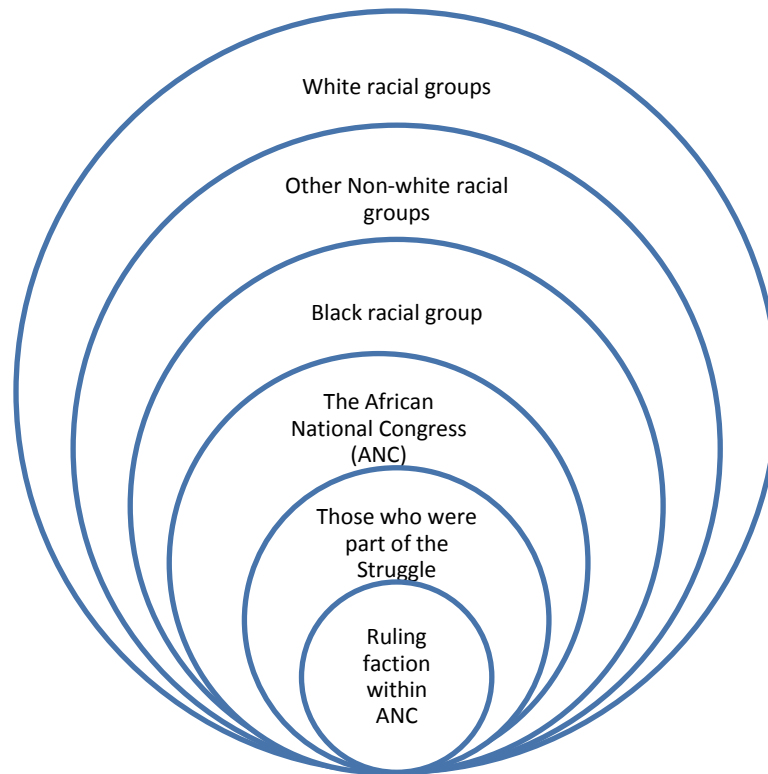


Figure 1.2 The layers of power within South African Politics (Mangu, 2008)

In summary the South African education system has been shaped by a socio-economic history that had at its core a philosophy of segregation, social elitism and racial superiority. The education system during this time was utilised as a tool to enforce social segregation and reinforce the ideologies of the Apartheid government. The primary outcome of this process was a divided education system with unequal levels of quality in the education provided. During the same period the resistance movements conducted a campaign of social resistance to destabilise the education system with the aim of reducing its effectiveness. This campaign was aimed at creating a resistance to authority and devaluing the education system in the eyes of the majority of the populace. The effect of this was a large scale disinvestment of the non-White populace in South Africa from the education system. Both the divided education system and the devaluing of education still impact on the education system today (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). There have been attempts to redress the imbalances and heal the split in the education system but these have not been effectively sustainable. Today many with the necessary socio-economic resources have

migrated to the historically White suburbs and schools to ensure that their children receive a good quality education (McKeever, 1998). This has left the historically black schools under resourced in terms of financial, human and community or social capital, which is a crucial component in increasing the quality of education available to a community (Williams, 2010). This is in light of a policy adopted by the new government in which schools are mandated to appoint governing bodies to levy school fees from the community members who utilise its services.

The structure of the South African education system: Then and now

This section aims to provide a brief discussion of the policy and structural frameworks that the education system operates within. The discussion takes a chronological journey of where our current education system comes from with the aim of highlighting underlying assumptions and ideologies that may have been transferred through the different eras of education in South Africa. The need to explore and discuss the ideologies behind policies lies in the fact that policy-making constitutes a political action that is underpinned by value-judgements and statements that are embedded within political or ideological foundations (Kallaway, 1984). A secondary aim of this discussion is to highlight the complex historical process in which each new development is contested by interested parties and to make explicit the power relations embodied in the schooling system, its political construction and the mix of initiatives and constraints in society that give rise to policy settlements (Kallaway, 1984; Southall, 2005). This section is not intended as a detailed or nuanced discussion of the policies and the ideologies behind them but rather it is intended to serve as a brief highlight reel of education in South Africa over time, culminating in the current education policy framework and how its underlying assumptions and ideologies influence the nature of education today.

Colonial Education

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a detailed and nuanced account of the development of colonial education in South Africa, it is important at the very least to consider the objectives and purpose of education in this period. Formal schools made their appearance in Southern Africa as part of the new social relations introduced with colonialism (Molteno, 1984). The objectives of these early schools were to entrench within the slaves a basic understanding of

their place within society by undermining identity through indoctrination within a new religion, namely Christianity, and new languages, namely English and Dutch (Bude, 1983; Molteno, 1984). The instruction of slaves in the language of the masters was motivated by economic need; to fulfil their function as labourers the slaves and masters would need a means of communication. Due to the unequal relationship between slave and master it would be unseemly for the master to be subjected to tedious instruction by slaves in the construction of meaning in their language and therefore it was the slaves who had to learn English and Dutch (Bude, 1983). The greater the subjugation of the slaves, the less likely they would be to resist the system of forced labour in which they were trapped (Molteno, 1984). The education system at this time therefore placed great emphasis on weeding out heathen practices and beliefs and instilling good Christian values in the slaves (Brook, 1996). The slaves were driven physically and psychologically into their master's world (Molteno, 1984). The purpose was to create an efficient workforce that was obedient and disciplined and that had displayed the 'correct' respect toward their superiors. The slaves were however not passive recipients of colonisation and they resisted the system as far as they could at the time (Kallaway, 1984). The primary form of resistance at the time was flight, where slaves would escape into the uncharted wildernesses of the time. In some cases the flight and resistance to education was of such scale that schools would be shut down (Enslin, 1984).

The second objective of the early school system was to ensure that the subjects of the colony, now removed from their familiar social structures and institutional regulatory mechanisms, remained united in a common ideology (Dubow, 1992; Molteno, 1984). Religious instruction was utilised to create and perpetuate a set of dogmas to which all had to adhere (Giliomee, 2003). Although the education seemed to be religious instruction on the surface, it was closely interwoven with propaganda that espoused the superiority of the colonists over the slaves and rigidly expressed a set of behaviours that was expected of each colonist as a proper citizen. These behaviours included the maintenance of the power divide in social structures between owner and slave through prescribed behaviour sets for each role player. As a result of the rigid and dogmatic method of teaching education often deteriorated into mere formalism with the three R's becoming incidental to religious and ideological instruction (Molteno, 1984; Giliomee, 2003). The fear that 'false' doctrines that undermined the objectives of the Imperial powers could be spread led to the establishment of a central control over who should be permitted to teach and

what may be taught to whom (Brook, 1996). The education system for the colonists also sought to provide a basic education required to survive in the new land and placed great emphasis on the characteristics and skills required to be pioneers. Malherbe (1925) in (Molteno, 1984) writes that “this type of education helped to preserve [the colonists] against spiritual as well as physical dangers (p. 47).”

Two interesting characteristics of the education system described above are the separate classes of education for colonists who were predominantly of European descent and for the slave caste who were non-European. In many ways this system of education is the precursor of the separatist education system of the Apartheid years. The second interesting characteristic is the emphasis on control, compliance, restriction of access to information and privilege. Both groups in the education system of this time were expected to grow into compliant citizens who upheld the ideology of the ruling groups without question.

The colonial education system was primarily geared toward providing a workforce of educated White colonists who were indoctrinated in the ideologies of their country of origin to maintain loyalty within the colonists to that country to ensure that they delivered the economic benefit of the colony back to the country of origin (Giliomee, 2003). Simultaneously the education system of this era sought to create a compliant servant base to serve the colonists and to increase production of goods. This system also served as the precursor to the dual education system that marked education during the Apartheid era.

Christian National Education

When the shift of power moved away from the British minority in South Africa toward the Afrikaans minority one of the first reforms put in place by the Afrikaners was to revamp the education system. This was an acknowledgement of the crucial role played by education in shaping the identity of society and individuals. The Christian National Education (CNE) policy of 1948 purports to be a policy for White Afrikaans speaking children in South Africa but goes on to outline far-reaching consequences for all South Africans living during that era (Dubow, 1992; Giliomee, 2003). Much of the ideology expressed in the CNE policy found expression in the Bantu Education system. The CNE policy primarily called for White South Africa to take responsibility for Black education and for the Boer nation to act as the senior White trustee of the

native who was considered to be in a state of ‘cultural infancy’ (Enslin, 1984; Finkel & Ernst, 2005). This paternalistic attitude toward Blacks was cultivated as the main rationale behind the segregation and oppressive policies that were developed during the Apartheid era and constructed the Afrikaner race as the benefactors of the ignorant Black masses (Williams, 2010). Therefore any act on the part of the Afrikaner on the Black race was constructed as ‘for their own good’ and with the aim of uplifting them to their proper station in society or to keep them in their place in society when they sought to rise above stations set aside for them by the Afrikaner (Glad, 1996). In the typical paternalistic construction, the white elite would alternatively reward or punish behaviour with the aim of moulding non-White classes into obedient, civilised citizens. In line with this ideology the CNE policy specifically set out the following conditions regarding Black education:

- It should be in the mother tongue
- It should not be funded at the expense of White education
- It should not prepare blacks for equal participation in economic and social life
- It should preserve the cultural identity of the black community
- It should lead the black community to an acceptance of Christian and National principles
- It must be organised and administered by Whites (Enslin, 1984).

The guidelines set out above for Black education clearly read as an agenda for oppressing the Black races with the aim of maintaining their status quo within the social structure of South African society at the time. While the policy appeared to protect the cultural identity of the Black race on the surface it systematically deprived them of their existing ideologies and identities and sought to replace these with Nationalist ideologies which held the racial superiority of the White race at their core (Johnson, 1982; Kallaway, 1984; Mazibuko, 2009). The fact that the stewardship of the Black cultural identity rested with the White minority speaks volumes of the unequal power distributions of the time. By maintaining control of what was considered as acceptable “African” behaviour, the CNE system could discourage the dissemination of any Black ideology that questioned or contradicted the prevailing ideology of White superiority (Molteno, 1984). As with the education policies of the colonial era, the CNE policy sought to create a compliant workforce that understood and accepted an identity of a second class citizen who exists to serve the needs of their superiors.

In addition to the blatantly racist agenda behind the CNE this policy also espoused an ideology that placed men in a superior position to women in the social structure. This chauvinistic agenda sought to isolate the White male as the supreme citizen within the social structure and preserved the rights of citizenship for these small elite alone (Enslin, 1984). The CNE policy was in many ways an explicit expression of the dominant ideologies of the time and served the purpose of justifying a separate and inferior education system for blacks (Enslin, 1984). The beliefs and ideologies expressed in the CNE were later firmly entrenched and implemented in the Black or Bantu Education Policy.

Black or “Bantu” education

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 (No. 47) was an act of the South African Apartheid system which sought to make provision for the complete separation of races in education institutions. The Act was developed by the Commission for Native Education under Dr W. W. M. Eiselen (Christie & Collins, 1982). The policy of Bantu (African) education was intended to direct black or non-White youth to the unskilled labour market (Byrnes, 1996). In Molteno (1984) the then Minister of Education, Hendrik Verwoerd stated that:

There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...for that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze. (p. 93)

The above quote illustrates the contrast between the official, explicit ideology of apartheid which is described as protecting the identity of the non-White while keeping him in an inferior position to the White race. This official stance was taken because the apartheid government knew that their position of racial superiority was out of sync with international consensus on equality (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001). The Bantu Education Act was one of a series of legislative bricks used to build the wall of policy that segregated schooling during this time. The Coloured Persons Education Act of 1963 allowed for the transfer of responsibility for the education of children classified as Coloured from the provinces to a division within the Department of

Coloured Affairs (Molteno, 1984). The Indian Education Act of 1965 made provision for a similar transfer of responsibility to the Department of Indian Affairs (Christie & Gordon, 1992). Ostensibly these Acts allowed each race control over their cultural identity and education. However, the fact that the Acts allowed the South African National Party complete control over the curriculum of the segregated school, even of the books available to the education system meant that ultimate control over what was taught remained with the White minority (Brook, 1996; Finkel & Ernst, 2005). Under the auspices of these Acts the National Party also withdrew funding from many of the schools classified as Black, Indian or Coloured. The educators in these schools were rigidly regimented and syllabus revision was centralised in Pretoria. The cost per student was reduced by the introduction of double sessions, employing more under qualified educators, paying minimal salaries to educators and by extracting more from the non-White communities themselves by phasing out school feeding schemes, abolishing caretakers' posts and making learners responsible for maintenance of the school facilities (Giliomee, 2003; Molteno, 1984). All schools had to be registered with the relevant racial authority and it was declared illegal to establish and run a school without approval from the central authorities.

The education system was seen as a mechanism for oppression and control of the non-White populations. The ANC and other political parties began mobilising the country in protests and boycotts of the education system (Wieder, 2004). The most notable of these was the protest that led to what has since been described as the Soweto Uprising in 1976 which culminated in police forces firing live ammunition at learners who were protesting Afrikaans as the language of learning and teaching in a professional world that increasingly demanded English fluency as a prerequisite for employment (Wieder, 2004).

A second but equally important motivation for the segregation of the education system was that it allowed the National Party to diffuse the non-White population that was migrating toward urban centres as a result of economic pressures such as taxes on land aimed at dispossessing the few remaining non-White landowners (Hyslop, 2005). A trend was emerging at the time that gave rise to a spirit of African Nationalism which was recognised by the White Nationalists as a threat to their power. Indeed it was a similar spirit of Nationalism that gave momentum to the Afrikaner movement for independence and power over the English. The Bantu Education Act and associated policies allowed the Nationalist government to crystallise the place of the non-

White in the social order and to diffuse the sense of unity developing by firmly segregating each race and tribe under the auspices of “cultural preservation” (Wieder, 2004).

During the time of the Christian National Education and Black or Bantu Education systems the country was also undergoing a large shift toward mechanisation in production which shifted the needs of the production sector which in turn shifted the demands placed on the education systems of the time (Molteno, 1984). The implication of mechanisation was that it allowed skilled crafts to be broken down into component parts which could then be dealt with by either machines or semi-skilled labour (Kallaway, 1984). This shift led to workers being classified in three main categories:

- a) Highly skilled workers trained in science and technology that create the original design and production of automated systems.
- b) The second category of worker is those who are trained in running these automated systems.
- c) The last category of worker refers to the operatives who are mostly unskilled. They are paid low wages relative to the other categories and are easy to replace as they do not hold specific skills that are difficult to obtain. Therefore this group does not hold a large amount of bargaining power. This group also comprises the largest proportion of the workforce and are often the group most adversely affected by changes in labour and education policy (Kallaway, *An Introduction to the study of education for Blacks in South Africa*, 1984).

These categories further divided society along worker class lines in addition to the racial divisions that were enforced. These categories also filtered into the education system where different races were automatically channelled into one of the three categories with the first category being reserved exclusively for White races (Banks, 2007). The second category accepted certain non-White races (primarily Indian and Coloured) into the semi-skilled labour category in addition to the White population groups. The third category was mainly reserved for the Black population groups. The channelling into these categories was facilitated through the quality of education provided to each racial group (Brook, 1996). As repeatedly mentioned in this section, capital needs are not the only factor that influenced the education policy development during this period. The racial ideologies of the ruling White elite also strongly influenced the quality of education made available to each race (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). The

socio-economic status of individual families also played a role in the level of access available in the education system.

The Bantu Education policy and other policies relating to access to higher education institutions as well as work as skilled labourers were gradually relaxed as the Apartheid government faced increasing pressure from internal resistance movements, external sanctions and growing demands for economic growth without the concomitant growth in skilled labour supply (Cross, Carpentier, & Ait-Mehdi, 2009). As the policies around these areas relaxed they provided the foundation for the policies that were developed in the early years following the transition of power evidenced in the historic 1994 elections.

The interesting characteristic visible in both the Christian National Education system and the Black or Bantu education system is that both officially purported to protect the cultural identity of the non-White populations while provide mechanisms for crystallising class divisions and act to preserve the interests of the middle class (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Deacon, Osman, & Buchler, 2010). This is in contradiction to the perception that education provides individuals with the opportunity to migrate across classes with the aim of improving quality of life. Schools did and do provide mobility for a relatively small number of society and the larger, poorer majority of the population are forced to play a kind of lottery through compulsory education which was defended in terms of educational rights of children and equal opportunity (Molteno, 1984; Sakarai, 1976). This state of affairs can be partially attributed to the fact that education systems are subject to the needs of productive and political systems of which they form part. Within the capitalist framework this means that schools form part of the struggle between owners and workers which seeks to promote the interests of some groups over others (Sakarai, 1976). This process is not a linear one, however; there exists a complex interplay between various forms of power within the layers of society that govern and shape the development of policies and their subsequent implementation (Daun, 2000). As briefly discussed above, not all were in support of the Apartheid policies and resistance, while subdued, was common with the example of schools and universities that unofficially took in non-White students used as an example. What is suggested is not simple reductionism that states that all education policies can be defined in terms of economic or capital needs because these needs are cross-cut by different sets of ideological, political or social factors such as gender, religion, culture and race (Kallaway, 1984).

The relevance of highlighting these characteristics lies in the fact that although the Apartheid system is dismantled to a great extent, the struggle between the social need for equality, liberty and the right to education for all and the capitalist needs with regard to educated and un-educated but skilled labour continues today (Christie, 1998). It is imperative that any project seeking to intervene in the education system be conscious of these tensions within the system so as to ensure informed decision making. The following section examines the transformation from the Apartheid education system to a system of Democratic citizenship and it is important to bear in mind the points highlighted above as we seek patterns within the current education system (Karlsson, 2010).

As the Apartheid era came to a close the foundation was being laid for the development of policies that allowed for the integration of curricula and vocational needs. The purpose of these policy revisions was to make education more relevant, to rationalise the curriculum and to eliminate unnecessary overlapping of subject content (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002). In 1989 the Department of National Education (DNE) sought to develop new curriculum policies that aimed to address the issues above. This is one of the movements within the education system that laid the foundation for the Outcomes Based Curriculum that followed with the change of dispensation. In 1991, the formulation of a Curriculum Model for South Africa (CUMSA) was aimed at addressing a range of concerns but primarily driven by the need to modernise the Apartheid education system to minimise local and international protests and contestation. This model aimed to address labour market concerns by strengthening the vocational component of the education system to make it more relevant to economic needs (Cross *et al.*, 2002).

Democratic Citizenship and Curriculum 2005

The development of the Constitution signalled a change in the ideology of the education system to what was termed Democratic Citizenship (Arthur & Sawyer, 2009). The democratic citizenship education system was aimed at redressing the inequalities of the past and held critical, participative citizenship as its ideal. This participative citizenship entails an education system that encourages critical and reflexive thinking in learners and the development of learners' moral thinking in addition to their cognitive development (Williams, 2010). What form

this moral development should take is still open for debate among the various stakeholders in the South African context.

When the new dispensation took over in 1994, many of South Africa's schools were not integrated and on a similar educational standard (Glad, 1996). The current government has been channelling large amounts of funding into the education system to redress teaching skill discrepancies and to ensure a uniform standard of education for all. The South African government has placed emphasis on the development of policies and mechanisms aimed at redressing the legacy of a racially and ethnically fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal education system (Cross et al, 2002). This reform required a process of open and honest consultation between the governance system, trade unions, professional bodies and communities (Moller, 1998; Sayed, 2002). In a sense South Africa has excelled in setting up a governance system which encourages local and community participation through school governing bodies (SGBs) and a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that harmonises the vertical and horizontal movement of learners within the system. This is in contrast to the practice of policy-making as a ritual of secrecy and authoritarianism developed during Apartheid which was a top-down approach that drew heavily on scientific experts (Chetty, 1992; Sayed, 2002). While the principle of consultation was laudable, the implementation of this process was fraught with difficulty where conflicting needs and priorities of the different sectors dragged negotiations to a halt. Nevertheless the interim government managed to form the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) that developed the initial policy framework for the new dispensation (Roberts, 1994). This framework held at its core the South African Constitution which emphasised those values denied by the Apartheid regime such as equity, increased participation, democratic process, and redress (Cross *et al.*, 2002). These policies were the foundation for the education reconstruction to which South Africa committed itself. However, these policies were largely symbolic, substantive and redistributive and aimed at addressing issues of access, redress and equity in a context of constraints such as scarcity of resources and budget cuts (Christie, 1999). While this did result in gaps between policy and implementation, the government did achieve a reform of the policies within the framework of the new Constitution and purged the education system of the most gross and evident apartheid, racial and ethnic stereotypes (Cross *et al.*, 2002).

In addition to the policy and implementation constraints highlighted above, the new dispensation sought to better align the education system with the vocational requirements of the labour market. The pressure for this alignment can be attributed in part to the labour movement that sought to overhaul the education system and incorporate an integrated approach to education and training (Cross *et al.*, 2002). This shift was toward what is known as Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which can be described as a global education curriculum reform that emphasises vertical integration of training outcomes aimed at specific vocational outcomes within broader critical outcomes (Cross *et al.*, 2002). The OBE framework has critical outcomes which are described as broad, generic cross-curricula outcomes that have been developed to encourage greater integration between different learning areas and state that learners should be able to perform the following:

- Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation
- Identify and solve problems using creative and critical thinking
- Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively
- Work effectively with others in a team, group, organisation and community
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information
- Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others
- Understand that the world is a related set of systems. This means that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation (Cross *et al.*, 2002)

The genesis of OBE seems to lie specifically with the National Training Board (NTB) and the labour union COSATU who strove for recognition from the education community for what workers knew and were able to do with the aim of increasing mobility of workers (Cross *et al.*, 2002). This call for integration was answered within the political and administrative legacy of the Apartheid system and the ANC-led government placed education and training in two separate ministries, namely, Education and Labour. This continued the divided education and training system that had been a hallmark of the education system since its inception (Brook, 1996; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The legacy of Apartheid limited the current education system in many ways, one of the most notable being the ‘sunset clause’ which the newly established Department of Education was obliged to accept as part of a compromise that formed part of the transfer of power from the Apartheid regime to the new dispensation (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002). The sunset clause was the contract negotiated for the National Party’s handover

of power to the ANC and stipulated the conditions of the ANC's takeover (Chetty, 1992). This led to the formation of two layers of administration within the Department of Education which for five years held conflicting interests, cultures and disparate levels of capacity (Christie, 1999; Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The dual education system continued to undermine the efforts of the new dispensation to serve an education for all. The education system today is still as divided as it was under the restrictive policy frameworks of the Apartheid education system. The primary difference however is that today the division between the two systems lies in socio-economic circumstances as opposed to race (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). The difficulty of delivering education within the new dispensation is further complicated by the fact that the large proportion of the adult population is poorly educated which creates competition between providing education for children and providing education for adults (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Education in South Africa today

South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) recognises three broad bands of education: General Education and Training, Further Education and Training, and Higher Education and Training (see Figure 1.3).

BAND	SCHOOL GRADES	NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS
HIGHER		8	Doctor's degree
		7	Master's degree
			Honours degree
			Postgraduate diploma
		6	General first degree
			Professional first degree postgraduate
			Bachelor's degree
		5	First diploma
			Higher certificate
			Certificate
FURTHER	12	4	Diplomas
	11	3	Certificates
	10	2	
GENERAL	9	1	Grade 9 / Adult Basic Education and Training level 4
	8		
	7		
	6		
	5		
	4		
	3		
	2		
	1		
R			

Figure 1.3 Levels of education in South Africa (Big Media Publishers, 2011)

In 2009 President Jacob Zuma announced that the National Department of Education would be split into two Ministries, namely, Basic Education and Higher Education and Training (Government Communication and Information System, 2011).

School life spans 13 years or grades, from grade 0, otherwise known as grade R or "reception year", through to grade 12 or "matric" - the year of matriculation. General Education and Training runs from grade 0 to grade 9. Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, education is compulsory for all South Africans from age 7 (grade 1) to age 15, or the completion of grade 9. General Education and Training (GET) also includes Adult Basic Education and Training (South African Department of Education, 1995; South African Department of Education, 2008).

Grade 10 to 12 is the Further Education and Training (FET) Band of education in South Africa. The FET band is pivotal in developing a pool of individuals capable of contributing

meaningfully to the South African economy. This band is driven by professional, vocational, technical and academic learning programmes (Government Communication and Information System, 2011).

The central government provides a national framework for school policy, but administrative responsibility lies with the provinces. Power is further devolved to grassroots level via elected school governing bodies, which should have a significant say in the running of their schools (South African Department of Education, 1998).

The national Department of Higher Education and Training is responsible for higher education which includes undergraduate and post graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and doctorates. Private schools and higher education institutions have a fair amount of autonomy, but are expected to fall in line with certain government non-negotiables, for example, no child may be excluded from a school on grounds of his or her race or religion (Big Media Publishers, 2011; South African Department of Education, 2008).

Education is the largest category of government spending (see Table 1.1) despite competing against other urgent social needs such as health, social welfare and housing and totalled R 105.5 billion for 2007/2008 (South African Department of Education, 2008). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, approximately R 48.3 billion has been allocated for the 2011 financial year to specifically fund training and development above the typical year on year expenditure required to maintain the education system (South African Department of Finance, 2011).

Table 1.1 Provincial education expenditure, 2003/2004 to 2009/2010 (in R millions) (South African Department of Education, 2008)

Province	2003/2004 outcome	2004/2005 outcome	2005/2006 outcome	2006/2007 prelim	2007/2008 estimated	2008/2009 estimated	2009/2010 estimated
Eastern Cape	10 308	10 654	11 523	12 873	14 726	16 616	17 681
Free State	4 087	4 400	4 916	5 346	5 692	6 331	7 013
Gauteng	9 539	9 835	10 406	11 623	14 543	15 967	17 131
KwaZulu-Natal	12 022	13 033	15 030	16 234	18 577	20 385	22 533
Limpopo	8 264	9 610	10 362	11 367	11 948	13 638	15 022
Mpumalanga	4 529	4 871	5 780	6 273	7 956	8 601	9 373
Northern Cape	1 305	1 397	1 563	1 643	2 267	2 535	2 771
North West	4 896	5 179	5 951	6 686	5 324	5 936	6 462
Western Cape	5 305	5 691	6 449	6 920	7 685	8 497	9 341
Total	60 255	64 670	71 980	78 965	88 718	98 506	107 327

Note: These figures include the National School Nutrition Programme (funded by conditional grant).

South Africa subscribes to the 1 Goal campaign. The 1Goal Campaign is a coalition of 100 organisations from 100 countries established in 2009 to raise awareness about the 72 million children around the world who are said to have no access to quality basic education. The initiative aims to get all children across the world to school by 2015 (Government Communication and Information System, 2011).

Challenges facing learners and educators

In examining the challenges facing learners and educators it is important that we go beyond the list method which is simply a brief list and descriptions of the problems that teachers and learners face (Christie, 1998). Christie (1998) further proposes that the aim in discussing challenges should be for “thick descriptions” which can be defined as descriptions of data in context reported with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgements about transferability to be made by the reader (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

What follows is an attempt at providing a thick description of the challenges facing the learners and educators in the South African context. It is important to bear in mind that these issues, while described separately for the sake of conceptual clarity, are dynamically interlinked to each other and to the various contexts described earlier in this chapter. In Chapter 3 these challenges

will be further explored in the specific context of the ERF but the descriptions that follow can be considered to be general challenges that transfer between contexts.

Breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching:

Christie (1998) states that there is no breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching, rather in many of our schools there exists a culture of learning and teaching that developed out of the culture of opposition and disruption and economic deprivation that is not conducive to learning and teaching. She further goes on to state that what is necessary is not a reconstruction of the culture of learning and teaching but a transformation of it (Higgins, 2010). The practical implications behind the above discussion is that a form of social reform similar to that conducted during the height of the Apartheid regime with the aim of re-establishing the value of education in society is required (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). The system of violent protest against the education structure must be dismantled with a focus on changing the attitudes of learners and educators toward the education system. The educator training programmes should also facilitate the development of a culture of learning and teaching in a consultative manner.

Changing social landscape:

The social landscape has always been recognised as dynamic and constantly changing. This change is multilayered and nuanced in nature and incorporates all aspects of modern living. The rate of change has rapidly accelerated, resulting in a social landscape that takes on a kaleidoscopic rate of transition. The Finance Minister of South Africa, Pravin Gordhan, stated in his budget speech that:

We live in an extraordinary time in human history – a time of immense transition, of profound risks, but also of great opportunity. (South African Department of Finance, 2011, p. 4)

A point to highlight within the discussion of the changing landscape is the de/evolution of social norms within the socio-economic context. The HIV pandemic has irrevocably changed the family structure of many households in South Africa. The number of child-headed households due to the loss of both parents to HIV/AIDS is growing. While this may at first glance primarily seem to be a broader social issue removed from the education context, a deeper examination

reveals the deep impact this disease has had within the learning space (Christie & Gordon, 1992). Learners who have taken responsibility for the care of sick parents often cannot attend school and subsequently drop out. To demand that these learners deny the familial bond between child and parent for the sake of a career is not only unfeasible but unconstitutional. Once out of school these children fall into the cracks of the education system and into the hands of the social system (Hentz, 2005). The loss of an opportunity to education further increases the chances that the family unit will remain or fall into the poverty cycle. The poverty cycle is referred to a set of circumstances, factors or events by which poverty is likely to continue unless there is outside intervention aimed at empowering those individuals caught within the cycle to remain self reliant (Orford, 2008). The challenge facing educators here is that the learner requires greater levels of social support from the social and education systems which are often struggling to meet the basic needs of learners (Manicom, 1992). There are often not enough resources within the school and community to provide for the health needs of the parents thereby enabling the learner to remain in school. This is further complicated in instances where the learner has younger siblings to care for and drops out of school to earn an income for the family often in circumstances of great risk (Harber, 2002).

One of the side effects of the extreme poverty that some individuals experience is that young female learners enter into sexual relationships with older, employed males in exchange for financial security (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod, & Letsoalo, 2009). These relationships are characterised by extremely skewed power dynamics in which the young girl has limited negotiating power for delaying or safe sexual practices and as such is put at greater risk of contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease or of falling pregnant which exacerbates the cycle of poverty in the lives of these young girls, their families and the community in which they live (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod, & Letsoalo, 2009; UNICEF, 2008). Educators have to take cognisance of the difficulties facing these learners and, because educators are expected to provide a moral compass for these learners, provide guidance away from situations that exacerbate the “poverty trap” without the authority within the education system or the broader social system to enforce any decisions made (UNICEF, 2009). This disparity between the responsibility and authority given to educators is another important factor to bear in mind when considering the challenges faced in the education system.

Educator Burnout:

The high workload that educators are faced with in the challenging social landscape in which they are required to perform may lead to burnout among educators (Tomic & Tomic, 2008). Burnout can lead to lowered performance levels, flat emotional affect, and lowered levels of empathy with colleagues and learners and disinvestment from the education system. Educators who have disconnected from the education system may not follow the cultural norms and standards required of the culture of teaching and learning and may contribute to the disruption of the education system. This discussion does not imply that every educator who does not perform is burnt out as there are socio-economic circumstances that force individuals into the field of education even though they have no affinity for it (Higgins, 2010). These educators may not internalise the values and ideologies of the education system and in turn cannot pass these on to their learners. Linked to these issues are the salaries paid to educators, the hiring practices and policies with regard to educator employment and the qualification of educators (Liebowitz, 2000). The high demand for educators has at times resulted in under qualified educators being employed which in turn impacts on the perception of the quality of work delivered and places pressure on qualified, experienced educators to pick up the work load and train under qualified staff members in an attempt to develop an equal level of education (Liebowitz, 2000).

Task time:

According to the SAIRR (2009), research found there were some schools where teaching only occurred for 3.5 hours a day as opposed to the minimum requirement of 6.5 hours a day. The minimum requirement is the minimum required to achieve competency in a subject. For learners to achieve exceptional standards, it is essential that the number of hours be increased. However, in a context where learners are often expected to perform duties around the house in addition to school work, where lack of infrastructure means that learners do not have access to electricity to work past sundown and where low education levels among parents means that learners do not have academic support outside of the schooling environment, the minimum task time requirement becomes an incredibly difficult standard to obtain.

Learner to Teacher Ratio:

The learner to teacher ratio in South Africa is averaged at 26.1 (SAIRR, 2009), which is significantly higher than the global average of 17.1. The average does not reflect the situation in schools where the ratio is significantly worse than 17.1. This entails less individual attention for learners. This ratio makes it particularly challenging to accommodate students with learning difficulties who may require more individual attention.

Quality of Education:

Fiske and Ladd (2004) define the concept of educational adequacy as the education level needed for an individual to participate fully in the political and economic life of the country. The approach to education adequacy in South Africa has been to set predetermined minimum pass criteria that allow for the socio-economic circumstances of individuals. The aim behind this approach was to create a level playing field for all. This process seemingly did not consider the applicability of this level of education and as a result further disadvantaged learners by lowering standards below that accepted by the work and tertiary education contexts (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002). Quality education that facilitated individual mobility within the system remains accessible only to those socio-economic classes with the financial and human resources to fully invest in their children to ensure that the performance obtained is at a level recognised by the work and tertiary education contexts.

The challenges discussed above are but a brief cross-section of the issues facing the education system. When examined within the broader context of the South African social structure the complexity and breadth of the problem becomes apparent. The South African government does not have the political, economic or human resources to fully address the issues facing the education system today. A system will always shift in a manner that addresses its greatest needs and the South African social system has been increasingly shifting back toward community as a resource for addressing large scale social issues. Within the education system this trend has resulted in a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) being formed to address the gaps in the education system with the aim of realising the goal of education for all. These organisations are often developed independently of the Department of Education and of each other and as such can lead to fragmentation of knowledge, practice and loss of experience within the field. Research into these organisations serves to preserve knowledge, share best practice,

and disseminate key findings and to aid these organisations in fundraising and establishing credibility. The next section briefly discusses the Educhange and Research Foundation before moving on to define the problem statement.

The Educhange Research Foundation

The Educhange Research Foundation (ERF) is a non-profit organisation which aims to broaden the platform for generating more solutions toward a better education for all¹.

The ERF's mission is to become the most comprehensive agent in transforming education in South Africa. It seeks to achieve this mission by addressing the national imperative of increasing the level of literacy in black communities; by normalising the learning and teaching environment in township schools and by generating innovative ideas, frameworks and tools for improving the quality of education in South African schools.

To achieve this mission the ERF aspires to the following objectives:

- To generate knowledge in the field of Education to inform policy and practice
- To create centres of excellence within schools that are located in under-resourced communities

The ERF has put in place a programme of support for learners of township schools. The programme of support is described as a holistic, empowerment focussed programme aimed at preparing learners for a successful transition from school to the world of work or tertiary education.

Figure 1.4 is a depiction of the various components of the ERF, namely mentorship, financial support, learner empowerment and research.

The ERF aims to provide learners with both academic and psycho-social support. Both of these aspects are provided by placing each learner with a mentor. The mentorship component of the support is designed to assist learners to deal with the aspects of their curriculum that they find challenging. By creating a one on one environment for learning, the programme ensures that each student can learn at an optimal pace. The mentors are young professionals from a range of

¹ The information on the ERF is derived from interviews with various board members and the first annual report.

fields that include Engineering and Financial Specialists. The mentors offer their services on a voluntary basis. The mentors act as role models for the students to model attitudes, behaviours and skills that the learner will need to be successful in life.

The ERF intervenes in a context where there are high levels of poverty and unemployment. As such, some learners do not have access to these basic resources which hampers their ability to learn. The ERF also provides financial support to the learners selected into the programme. The financial support of the learners aims to provide the learners with the basic materials needed to ensure that teaching and learning takes place. This includes purchasing school uniforms, stationery, text books and additional study material.

The psychological, academic and social development of the learners is the core objective of the ERF and as such the learners are also required to attend a series of workshops aimed at personal growth and development. The workshop topics include career orientation, self awareness, communication, goal setting and being a teenager. This is referred to as the learner empowerment component of the programme. This component is aimed at providing the learners with a safe space to learn and practice life skills that are deemed crucial to their success in their schooling career, as well as in their post schooling career. The workshops emphasise experiential learning and place the learners in situations where they can practice the skills taught to them in these workshops. As such, the learners are often required to present what they've learnt in the classrooms to their peers.

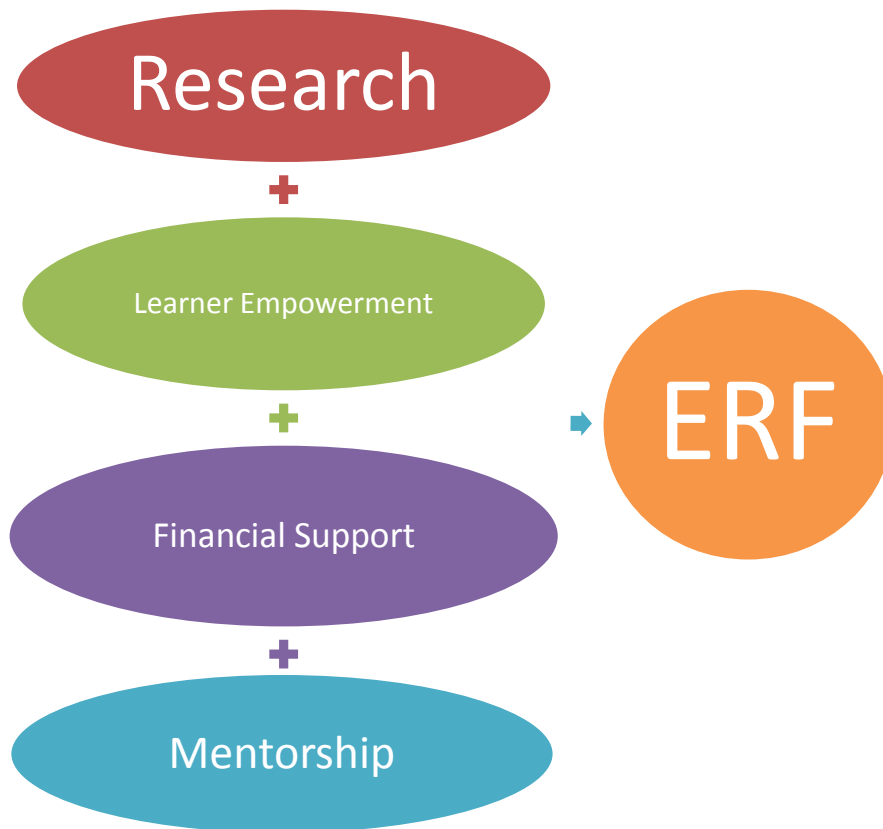


Figure 1.4 An overview of the ERF

The ERF seeks to encourage a holistic approach to learning which recognises that a learner does not exist in isolation but is imbedded in a broader societal system that is made up of different subsystems such as the family, school, church, etc. As a result, their focus is not only on the learners but on their teachers, the broader school environment, the family and home environment and the broader social environment within which the learner exists. The programme actively encourages members of the community in which the student lives, as well as members of other communities, to volunteer in the organisation in a manner that suits their time, resources and skill set.

The last component to the ERF is the research component. As mentioned above, the ERF seeks to generate new ideas, develop frameworks and tools for improving the quality of education in South African schools. To achieve this objective the ERF will need to develop a practice built on a firm foundation of scientific knowledge and practical experience. Through this approach the ERF aims to inform policy with practice that has a firm evidence base, has contextualised,

practical application and is developed to be holistic and sustainable within the South African context.

The research vision of the ERF is to craft the leading Educational Research hub in South Africa. This vision aligns with the ERF mission objective to become the most comprehensive agent in transforming education in South Africa.

The research leg of the ERF gained momentum in the year 2010 and the activities it executed reflect the youth of the ERF. The research activities of the ERF mainly revolved around creating the framework and guidelines that will guide future research in the ERF. In addition, the research during this year also focussed on documenting the growth and development of the ERF and conducting an evaluation of the ERF's activities for the year ended 2009. A more detailed description of the ERF is provided in chapter 3.

Problem Statement

The ERF scholarship programme has been involved with supporting learners of a high school in Soweto. The programme has been operating for more than a year and there are calls from the stakeholders to assess the progress made.

The board of the ERF therefore decided to conduct an evaluation of the scholarship programme implemented at the high school that served as the pilot site for the ERF scholarship programme. The ERF consulted with the Unisa Department of Psychology on the best possible means of doing so and a formative evaluation was agreed upon. After an initial attempt to conduct an evaluation and needs assessment, the research team and the ERF Executive Director decided to utilise the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. The research team referred to in this study consisted of M, my supervisor, and myself. Later, we were joined by T, the ERF Executive Director.

Evaluation is defined as the systematic examination and assessment of an initiative and its effects, in order to produce information that can be used by those who have an interest in its improvement or effectiveness World Health Organisation (WHO) in Green & South (2006). A formative evaluation is carried out at the same time as an initiative is being implemented and developed. It therefore holds greater relevance for those who are responsible for implementing

the initiative as it provides essential information and feedback to guide the further development of the initiative (Chen, 2005; Green & South, 2006; Potter, Programme Evaluation, 1999). The formative evaluation should be viewed as a process which seeks to form the initiative into a more relevant and better functioning process (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Formative evaluations are often concerned with processes but assessing progress of the initiative against stated objectives is often the first step in any form of evaluation and provides for a more comprehensive picture (Alkin M. C., 1990; Patton, 1994; Patton, 2008).

The formative evaluation of the ERF would take the form of an Appreciative Inquiry that had the overall aim of improving the ERF's scholarship programme.

Research Aims

The main aim of the research study was to conduct an Appreciative Inquiry evaluation of the ERF's scholarship programme. This aim was supported by a number of complementary aims which are mentioned below.

- The research first established whether the ERF meets the basic criteria for an evaluation and based on this whether to conduct a formal evaluation.
- The evaluation also explored the stakeholder's perceptions of the implementation ERF scholarship programme in the pilot site.
- Another secondary aim was to identify the strengths of the ERF scholarship programme to enable the ERF to expand the programme into neighbouring schools in the district.
- The evaluation collaboratively developed objectives for the future development of the ERF based on the needs of stakeholders.
- The evaluation also considered areas of development within the ERF scholarship programme and explored collective solutions to strengthening these areas.
- The final objective of the research was to reflexively investigate the implementation of the AI process and identify means of improving the process in future.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided this study was:

What are the aspects critical to the success of the ERF and how do participants believe these aspects contribute to the organisation?

The above research question represents the departure point for the study and was unpacked into a number of sub questions during the consulting process with stakeholders in the organisation.

The research team first interviewed the ERF founding members to explore and unpack the initial assumptions, beliefs, values and motives for the establishment of the ERF. This allowed the research team to establish whether the ERF meets the basic criteria for an evaluation. The basic criteria for evaluation are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The research study then moved on to the formative evaluation of the ERF by taking cognisance of the information supplied during the pre-evaluation and by applying the Appreciative Inquiry technique. The research questions were guided by the objectives of the various phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The four phases of the Appreciative Inquiry method are Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. The Discovery Phase is aimed at discovering what works in the organisation. The Dream Phase is aimed at extracting the expectations and hopes for the organisation from the various stakeholders. The Design Phase draws on the collective expertise of the stakeholders to design measures aimed at achieving the dreams identified in the previous phase. The Destiny Phase is the phase where the organisation implements the plans developed during the Design phase and monitors progress toward attaining the dreams. The research questions derived from the overarching research question are described in chapter 4 where they are discussed in the context in which they were developed.

Research Method

The research method is based on the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach which is a Participative Action Research approach (PAR) and will seek to obtain rich descriptions of the context and experiences of the participants within the study with the goal of describing to obtain understanding (Vestehen) (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This can be contrasted with the quantitative aims of explanation and prediction of human behaviour (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005). This dissertation seeks to embody key ideas of this approach such as participatory involvement, action, dialectic dialogue and generating change through research (Babbie &

Mouton, 2008; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Reed, 2007). What these principles mean in practice is that the researcher is placed as a participant within the system being researched and the participants in the research study hold as much power to shape and contribute the knowledge being generated as the researcher (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). In this paradigm the researcher's position can be described as the depowered expert (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This describes a state of being where the researcher remains an expert in research and theoretical expertise but is only part of a larger team of collaborators, each individual with an area of expertise, drawn from the study population (Datta, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Patton, 2003; Rogers & Fraser, 2003). The primary benefit of this approach is that it greatly aids the generation of buy-in into interventions and it facilitates sustainable change by consistently provoking generative conversations aimed at producing positive action (Bushe, 2007).

The evaluation section of the research study will be based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI can be described as exploring ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they do (Bushe G. R., 2007; Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Reed, 2007). AI aims to work on ways that build on the strengths of what people have achieved in their organisation, rather than concentrating on their problems (Catsambas & Webb, 2003).

The five principles of AI are based on the original work of David Cooperrider (1986) and are described by Reed (2007) as the Constructivist principle, the principle of Simultaneity, the Poetic principle, the Anticipatory principle and the Positive principle. These principles are unpacked in detail in the method chapter of this dissertation.

The five principles form the foundation of the AI process and guide the discussions aimed at generating the energy needed to reshape and redirect the organisation toward a more positive future (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). However, they are quite abstract and may be difficult to apply (Reed, 2007). It is for this reason that AI practitioners have developed assumptions, which are the principles translated into statements, to assist AI practitioners to clarify the process of AI. There are five overarching assumptions that inform AI practice to guide practitioners through the process of implementing the principles (Patton, 2003). These assumptions are the result of a long process of thought and discussion

within the field of AI through practitioners around the world sharing their experiences of the method in community forums such as the AI Commons and academic journals (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

In line with the principles of AI we will primarily we will be gathering data in a consultative workshop where all stakeholders of the ERF scholarship programme are present and participating actively to generate an image of the ERF as a functional organisation in context and to collectively dream up the future success stories of the ERF.

Overview of subsequent chapters

The aim of this chapter was to establish the rationale and approach to the study in the context of the South African education system. Chapter 2 aims to provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework that informed this study. The rationale for discussing the theoretical framework is that it allows for the assumptions and value judgements of the various theories applied in this study to be made explicit. This aids in the replication of the study and in evaluating whether the study was conducted within the constraints and acceptable standards of the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 discusses the ERF approach and intervention strategies in greater depth. The purpose here is to expose the values, beliefs and assumptions behind the various components of the ERF and will provide a more detailed background against which the results of this study can be discussed. Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the method applied during the course of this study. This chapter will explore and explain any deviations from the original research design and will provide the background against which future studies can be recommended. Chapter 5 describes the research process as data and is a reflexive account of the implementation of the AI approach as a research method. Chapter 6 describes and discusses the results of the AI into the ERF's scholarship programme. The dissertation concludes with recommendations for future studies and appendices of the workshop schedules utilised to gather data.

Chapter summary

The aim of the first chapter was to provide a detailed overview of the context in which the education system operates. The rationale for this lies in the fact that the education system

influences and is influenced by the broader context in which it operates. As this study is an evaluation of an NGO that delivers education support services within a specific school, it was imperative that the history and socio economic conditions that gave rise to the need for organisations of this type are discussed. The chapter then discussed the policy structure of the education system and highlighted the assumptions, ideologies and legacies of the Colonial, Christian National and Bantu Education systems before going on to discuss the current education system in which the evaluation takes place. The chapter then went on to briefly discuss the ERF and highlight its approach before moving on to discuss the problem statement. The research questions were then made explicit. The chapter then closed off with an overview of subsequent chapters and a summary.

CHAPTER 2 : UNDERPINNING THEORIES, VALUES AND BELIEFS

I must admit to struggling intensely with this chapter. I never believed that it would be so difficult and tiring to tie together in writing what comes together so effortlessly in my life. I am driven by a desire to provide an accurate description of the process of my dissertation because I am tired of seeing research reports and dissertations all neatly packaged and complete as if the process was a smooth, well-planned and executed one. Real research is messy, dynamic and forces you to think outside of the box and sometimes to make the box from scratch. I know that there are gaps in the links between the various theoretical frameworks I've attempted to bind above but this is an attempt to demonstrate how I experienced the research. Perhaps the links can never be truly seamless, perhaps the messiness I've experienced in the field is being reflected on paper and I am frustrated because I AM trying to create a neatly packaged final product to impress the University community. I therefore took the decision to focus on the research process while unpacking the literature relevant to the study.

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to orient the reader to the theoretical framework that underpins the research study and to situate the research within this framework. At first appearance and at its most basic this study is an Appreciative Inquiry study and subscribes to the values and practices inherent to the field of Appreciative Inquiry. There is however a broader underlying theoretical base that underlies the surface manifestation of the study. Much like an iceberg, most of the theoretical underpinnings for this study lie below the surface. This section aims to bring these theoretical underpinnings to the fore and to meticulously unpack them in relation to this study.

Figure 2.1 is a depiction of the theoretical framework for the study. At the top of the pyramid is Appreciative Inquiry which is an evaluation method and which is the explicit or visible theory that informed the direction and application of this study. However, it is rare that a social research

study is purely influenced by one theoretical paradigm. This would suggest an isolation that is not possible to achieve in social science research.

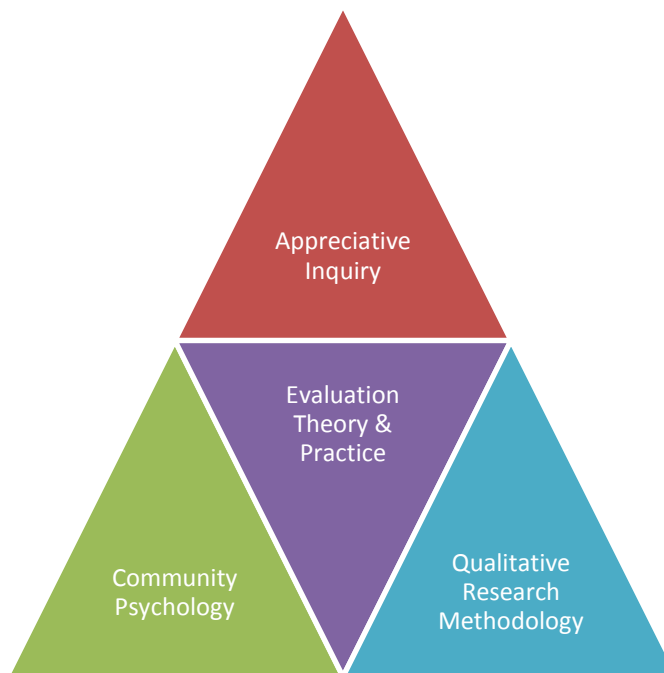


Figure 2.1The theoretical structure of this study

In addition to the Appreciative Inquiry theoretical framework this study is underpinned by the Community Psychology paradigm. The discussion begins with an overview of Community Psychology and how the research fits within the theoretical framework of Community Psychology. This will be followed by a discussion of Qualitative Research Methodology. The chapter will then discuss Evaluation Theory and its application in this study before moving on to discuss the specific techniques and principles of Evaluation as they are applied in Appreciative Inquiry. The principles, values and approaches of Community Psychology made a significant contribution to the development of the research approach. The methods and principles of Qualitative Research Methodology constituted the other underlying theoretical paradigm that influenced the development of the research approach. The commonalities between the various approaches mentioned above were linked together through the application of Evaluation Theory and Practice.

In the previous chapter we discussed the dynamics that exist within the South African socio-economic milieu in general before highlighting the difficulties faced within the education sector of South African society. The chapter discussed the trend toward utilising Community as a resource for addressing a range of social problems (McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sampson, 1999). Community has been brought to the fore in an attempt to create sustainable solutions to widespread social problems (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001). The assumption behind this approach is that communities possess the contextual knowledge and expertise required to provide sustainable solutions to the problems they face in everyday life; that given a structured support system facilitated by outside stakeholders, a community will be able to identify and produce long term solutions to any problem (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Nowell & Boyd, 2010).

There have been a large number of efforts launched that focus on promoting community change through community development and community building practices that focus on going beyond community-based service provision (O'Neill, 2010). Some argue that community development should seek to strengthen informal relationships and the organisational infrastructure of communities so that these communities can develop the capacity to generate and sustain change at a community level (Chaskin, George, Skyles, & Gultinan, 2006; Nowell & Boyd, 2010). This emphasis on community and community-driven services has given rise to a substantial number of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) that aim to address societal issues. As this study is an evaluation of one of these CBOs, it was deemed appropriate to conduct this evaluation from within a Community Psychology framework.

Community Psychology

In writing this chapter I came to realise how my value system shaped the nature of the study. The principles and underlying assumptions of each of these theoretical frameworks are congruent with my own values. These theoretical frameworks in turn come with their own assumptions - some of which I have accepted uncritically, others which I have conditionally accepted, which also impacts the nature of the study. While my values, beliefs and subsequent choice of theory may have provided this study with a distinct view, they may have prevented me from examining other equally important angles to the “story”. As Dalton et al. (2007, p. 6) stated: “Our cultural background, personal experiences, education and biases (and sometimes the biases that came with our education) help shape those assumptions, which may actually prevent effective responses to the problem.” I’ll share how each of these theories linked to my value system as the chapter progresses and where I am aware of it I will share how they may have prevented the study from taking on a more holistic framework or approach. Where I have failed to do so, I invite you to enter and unpack my motives, assumptions and understanding.

This study is an evaluation of an organisation that practices **community** interventions that have an appreciative emphasis. As such the evaluation of the organisation must take place within the context of the community in which it exists. Working at a community level entails taking cognisance of the multi-levelled complexities that exist in society. The multi-layered complexity of society and social problems requires a robust theoretical framework that can accommodate complex intergroup and inter personal dynamics as well as the intricate interaction between cultural, economic, political and social contexts while allowing for the application of scientifically accepted research methods.

This study is not explicitly focussed on the Macro-societal level (national, broad based effects and change), nor on the Meso-societal level (community or group level effects and change), but on the individual level or Micro level (intra personal effects and change) and the interaction/linkages between these various levels of society (Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001). It is this focus on the individual in the Micro, Meso and Macro contexts that distinguishes Community Psychology from Sociology, Social Work and other sub-disciplines of Psychology such as Social Psychology (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007). It is with this understanding of Community Psychology that this study was designed and conducted. In essence, Community Psychology provides the overall framework in which this study should be interpreted and

understood. In defining Community Psychology this chapter looks at the defining characteristics of the discipline and summarise these into a working definition of Community Psychology.

Toward a working definition of Community Psychology

In this section I've attempted to create a mosaic of the field where each individual tile is examined separately and presented as is, chipped, scratched and imperfect. I believe that each view of the field is a facet that constructs a greater whole and that what seems as a paradox or conflict between two authors may be alternative angles to the whole picture that the mosaic ultimately presents...this attempt may create an intricate weaving of the different emphasis each Community Psychologist has brought to the field or it may result in a fairly linear conversation of definition, discussion, definition, discussion. For better or worse, let us journey across the mosaic of Community Psychology.

This section of the chapter is a conversation where the definition of Community Psychology that framed the study is gradually built while exploring the various definitions of the field. The final definition discussed in this section is not the standard or universally accepted definition for the field but is a reflection what this study defines as Community Psychology.

Defining Community Psychology is a complex issue and no single definition can accurately capture the complexities inherent in its theory and praxis (Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001). Community Psychology is difficult to define because it has been described as a new paradigm, perspective or way of thinking that is constantly evolving rather than a fixed and distinct theoretical perspective (Rappaport, 1977). This statement is echoed by Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007) who state that: "Community Psychologists think outside the traditional boxes of Psychology to define problems and generate interventions at many levels, not just individuals" (p. 6). The complexity of defining Community Psychology is apparent to all in the juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory terms: Community and Psychology. Community suggests the idea of persons coming together in some shared endeavour or identity (an identity that may be self constructed or imposed) or at least geographic proximity while Psychology is traditionally concerned with individual cognition, emotion, behaviour, development and related processes (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). Anyone seeking to practice Community Psychology has to be aware of and constantly and consistently balance the

tension between the collective act of community intervention and the psychological emphasis on the individual's worth and role within the community.

A further complexity in defining Community Psychology lies in the origins of the discipline. While some may consider Community Psychology as a young field developed in the United States in the early 1960s, the principles on which Community Psychology is built can be traced back to ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato (Fowler & Toro, 2008; Fryer, 2008; Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007). Ideas such as community and political consciousness and their connection to social and psychological well-being have been part of societal and family structures in cultures across the world and pre-date the founding of Community Psychology (Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007). Other concepts prevalent in Community Psychology such as empowerment and liberation are also found in cultures across the world and pre-date the “birth” of Community Psychology in the 1960s (Fryer, 2008; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1993). This biased perception of the United States as a nexus for Community Psychology is part of a historic and global trend that valued Western perceptions, understandings and compositions of knowledge over knowledge produced in cultures that draw on epistemologies other than the Western epistemology (Fowler & Toro, 2008; Fryer, 2008; Montero, 2008; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

I wonder how different the field would look if the development of the discipline was considered less from a Euro and U.S. centric perspective. How would we conceptualise communities if we examined concepts through the lens of Ubuntu as opposed to Ubuntu being the object of study....

Although Psychology with a community health perspective has a long history in the United States (Campbell & Murray, 2004; Murray, Nelson, Poland, Maticka-Tyndale, & Ferris, 2004; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) the birth of Community Psychology is often presented as having occurred in 1965 at the Swampscott conference where psychologists called for the creation of a new sub-discipline of Psychology that transcended the limits of Mainstream Psychology – which held an individualistic, bio-medical approach to health and well-being - and began thinking about community wellness in terms of prevention and in terms of the health of communities (Angelique & Culley, 2007). Community Psychology in the United States was birthed during a period of broad social change where the civil rights movement was in full force during the 1960s, where gay rights activists increasingly became visible in their fight for equality and

recognition, where the second wave of the women's movement through which women fought for full citizenship via an equal rights amendment was rising and where widespread protests against the Vietnam War called for social justice (Angelique & Culley, 2007; Kelly & Chang, 2008). This is the context that gave form to the critical activism that still defines Community Psychology today.

An important characteristic of Community Psychology is the close link between socio-political context and the definition of Community Psychology. This characteristic is due to the fact that the field developed at a specific time (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Community Psychology was - and still is - expected to acknowledge power inequalities when analysing socio-political context and to actively engage with or change societal and organisational structures that maintained patterns of unequal power distribution which lead to oppression. In enacting this social activism Community Psychology has had to embrace an understanding of the concepts of Liberation, Empowerment and to redefine traditional understandings of Well-being (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Angelique & Culley, 2007; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011). These concepts have been developed into key principles that inform the practice of Community Psychology today. I will discuss these concepts later in this section when dealing with the principles that inform Community Psychology.

In addition to critical activism, another defining characteristic of Community Psychology is its focus on the transfer of power and control to communities away from experts such as psychologists (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Montero, 2008). In Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005), Montero (1996) states that Community Psychologists embraced the following definition of community psychology:

The study of psychosocial factors enabling the development, growth and maintenance of the control and power that people can exert over their individual lives and social environments, in order to solve problems and achieve changes in these environments and social structures. (p. 15)

The above definition places the study and development of control and power that individuals can exert over their immediate environment as the central area of focus of Community Psychologists. The term "environment" in this definition describes the social, economic, physical and political

milieu in which individuals and communities exist. In this definition Community Psychologists are portrayed as the catalyst through which communities can (re)gain control over their individual lives. When unpacking this definition, two main concepts become apparent: the Community Psychologist as an agent of change and a belief in the inherent ability of communities to gain and exercise control over their individual lives and immediate environment (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Trickett, Espino, & Hawe, 2011). The role of the Community Psychologist as an agent of change links to the responsibility placed on the discipline to generate and drive social change.

To be effective, Community Psychology would have to acknowledge the plurality of everyday life. By foregrounding the fact that individuals exist within multiple levels of society that are interrelated, Community Psychology can begin the work of immersion and intervention. Dalton *et al.* (2007, pp. 15-16) define Community Psychology as:

Concern[ing] the relationships of individuals with communities and societies. By integrating research with action, it seeks to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities and societies.

While Community Psychology is concerned with generating and sustaining change at the macro level it is also prepared to work and take action at the micro level (Pillay, 2003). This entails developing an understanding of the links between individuals and broader society. This is known as the Ecological Approach which I will discuss later in this section when dealing with the principles and values of Community Psychology. Community Psychology does not simply examine society at a distance but is expected to generate transformative understandings of mental health by developing contextual understandings of the aetiology and determinants of psychosocial and mental health problems (Bhana, Petersen, & RoCHAT, 2007; Keys & Frank, 1987). These transformative understandings are expected to inform the social change that Community Psychology is expected to perform. Social Change can briefly be described as citizens acting collectively to acquire and use power to promote changes in their communities and society (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

Community Psychology is also defined as more accessible to the general population than Mainstream Psychology. Access to quality services, especially in South Africa, is limited to a

relatively small percentage of the population who belong to the socio-economic classes that have the financial means to afford these services (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001). As mentioned in the previous chapter, inequality in South Africa is now divided along socio-economic lines as opposed to racial divisions (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005). There is a link between socio-economic class and race due to the legacy of apartheid and population ratios among the different racial groups. The upshot of this is that the poorer, predominantly black, population – who form the majority of the South African population – do not have access to quality mental health, education, medical or basic services (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005). Community Psychology's development in South Africa was largely driven by the "relevance debate" which was focussed on the relevance of Western and middle class theories and practices, but also emphasised access to quality mental health care. This required a re-think of how Psychological services were delivered in the country that entailed a critical examination of the dominant bio-medical approach to mental health care in South Africa (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007; Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001).

The bio-medical approach to mental health care in theory (with the extensive focus on psychopathology and diagnosis) and in practice (within clinical settings such as psychiatric hospitals) has led to a focus on curative hospital-based services within an individualist, one-on-one therapeutic model (Angelique & Culley, 2007; Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007; O'Neill, 2010). This critical examination of the role of Psychology resulted in a call for a shift away from the bio-medical model to a more community centred, preventative focused approach to mental health that was accessible to the greater proportion of the population (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001). The envisaged new roles would require that Psychologists, especially Community Psychologists, involve themselves in activities that would include resource mobilization for poor communities, advocacy, training of mental health workers and using networks to help support community initiatives (Pillay, 2003). Community Psychology therefore underwent a transition at a time of transformation in South African society as a whole (Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001). This transition was primarily concerned with developing praxis for Community Psychology in the new dispensation that upheld the social ideals enshrined within the Constitution. During this phase a key concern for Community Psychology in Post-apartheid South Africa was addressing historical disadvantages which entail practically analysing issues such as redress, access and equity (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007).

The discussion above aimed to highlight the key characteristics of the field of Community Psychology that continue to shape the nature and scope of the field today. The purpose of discussing these characteristics was to take the first step toward developing a working definition that guide the nature and scope of this study. The working definition of Community Psychology used for this study attempts to integrate the key features of the field in a manner that directly informs practice. The first attempt at defining Community Psychology for this study as:

Community Psychology is concerned with the relationships of individuals with communities and societies. By integrating research with action, it seeks to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities and societies (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). This is done through the study of psychosocial factors enabling the development, growth and maintenance of the control and power that people can exert over their individual lives and social environments, in order to solve problems and achieve changes in these environments and social structures (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Montero, 2008). Community Psychology is expected to acknowledge power inequalities when analysing socio-political context and to actively engage with or change societal and organisational structures that maintained patterns of unequal power distribution which leads to oppression (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). In enacting this social activism Community Psychology has to embrace an understanding of the concepts of Liberation and Empowerment and redefine traditional understandings of Well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

The above definition constructs an image of a discipline that acts as the social conscience of society and of those in power. Community Psychology is defined in such a manner that it becomes the liberator of the oppressed and the saviour of the weak. This construction of the field gives the impression that the field has found the means of addressing the inequalities that exist within society due to race, sexual orientation, gender, social class, religious and cultural beliefs and disability.

The reality is that the field of Community Psychology is itself plagued with skewed power dynamics created by the environments in which it practices (Fowler & Toro, 2008; Fryer, 2008; O'Neill, 2010). Community Psychology, like the communities it intervenes in, exists within

multiple levels of society. At the smallest level of analysis there is the individual psychologist who exists with the cultural, religious and socio-economic framework in which they were raised, the theoretical frameworks in which they were trained and within their own emotional and cognitive processes.

At the microsystem level Community Psychology exists within universities that control the amount of funding and human resources that are allocated to the field and that place restrictions on the teaching approaches employed by those who teach the discipline. At the Organisational level Community Psychology exists within the psychological associations and professional boards of each country in which it is practiced. These associations bring with them rules of conduct and epistemologies that influence and shape the nature of Community Psychology in that country.

At the level of locality Community Psychology is influenced by the cultural and behavioural norms of the communities in which it seeks to intervene. An example of this is where Community Psychologists have changed the focus of a study to accommodate Community Advisory Board demands or where Community Psychologists have had to adapt to the demands of participants.

At the macrosystem level Community Psychology exists within the political, policy and economic structures of the country in which it is practiced as well as in the global context. The manifestation of this is evident in the types of projects that are prioritised by governments and funders who control the flow of funds to the communities, universities, associations and funders with whom Community Psychologists work.

The relevance of the above discussion lies in illustrating the point that the field does not and cannot operate within a vacuum. With specific reference to the evaluation of the ERF, the above discussion briefly highlights the various levels in which this study took place in simultaneously. As discussed in the definition of Community Psychology, the field has been shaped by outside forces from its inception with the social rights movements in the United States and the resistance against the apartheid government in South Africa and Western psychology being cited as influences in the conceptualisation of Community Psychology. In light of the discussion above, the working definition adopted for this study is insufficient and inaccurate. To ensure a more

accurate representation of what Community Psychology is I propose we add the following considerations to the definition.

Community Psychology has as one of its obligations the responsibility to consistently and constantly perform critical self reflection in which it acknowledges the power dynamics in which it is entrenched; the cultural values which it seeks to espouse in each interaction with communities; and the gains to be made, be they monetary, prestige, research data, greater exposure for the field or the satisfaction of a deed well done. This should be clearly highlighted at the beginning and during each interaction with communities. This will allow the communities with which Community Psychologists interact, greater leverage and insight when deciding whether they wish to engage with Community Psychologists and the constituencies they may represent (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz, & Leibowitz, 2010; Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007; O'Neill, 2010; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

In addition to the above, Community Psychology has to act respectfully towards the cultural and belief framework of the communities in which it intervenes. In practical terms this will entail a lifelong journey of learning for the Community Psychologist, regardless of whether they teach, intervene or do research. The Community Psychologist will have to be open minded and ready to learn from communities, to tap into the ecological expertise of the individuals within these communities before attempting to apply any of the principles or techniques that exist within the discipline (Nowell & Boyd, 2010; McMillan D. W., 1996). To approach communities the other way around would be to impose the expertise of the discipline on communities in which interventions or research is enacted.

With this in mind the working definition of Community Psychology now reads as follows:

Community Psychology is concerned with the relationships of individuals with communities and societies. By integrating research with action, it seeks to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities and societies (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). This is done through the study of psychosocial factors enabling the development, growth and maintenance of the control and power that people can exert over their individual lives and social environments, in order to solve problems and

achieve changes in these environments and social structures (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Montero, 2008). This study is conducted primarily from within the frame of reference of the communities with which Community Psychologists interact and great value is placed on ecological expertise possessed by the community. Community Psychology is expected to acknowledge and change power inequalities when analysing socio-political context and to actively engage with or change societal and organisational structures that maintain patterns of unequal power distribution which leads to oppression (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). Part of this acknowledgement entails full disclosure of the position, motives and ability of Community Psychology within these contexts and inequalities with an explicit emphasis on the failure of Psychology as a discipline to meet the widespread need for mental services in society, in particular for South African society (O'Neill, 2010; Pillay, 2003; Sampson, 1999). In enacting this social activism against multiple levels of oppression Community Psychology has to embrace an understanding of the concepts of Liberation, Empowerment and redefine traditional understandings of Well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1992).

The above definition is the understanding of Community Psychology that shaped this study and directed the decision-making processes throughout the research process. The above definition is not proposed as the new standard for Community Psychology but rather as another tile to be added to the mosaic. The concepts included in the definition are embedded with the field as was demonstrated during the discussions of the various definitions of Community Psychology. The definition proposed by this study has been changed to reflect the unique similarity of the researchers and community that the study represents.

Key Principles and values of Community Psychology

The practice of Community Psychology is based on five key principles that inform all aspects of the discipline. These principles provide the framework in which Community Psychology operates. The principles below are the key principles, but they are not the only principles that inform Community Psychology.

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) state that for Community Psychology to be effective it requires an alignment of the values and principles that provide the framework for praxis. They distinguish between principles and values by stating that values are the vision that Community Psychologists have of an ideal or utopian future because values are concerned with what should be. On the other hand, they state that principles are the conceptual tools that can help to realise this utopian future. Prilleltensky, Laurendau, Chamberland, and Peirson (2001) set out a template of values which they argue could guide the work of Community Psychology. The values they posit are holism, health, caring, compassion and support for community structures, self-determination, participation and social justice, respect for diversity and accountability to oppressed groups.

“Holism” suggests that Community Psychologists should focus on the whole person in context as is suggested by the ecological model of intervention discussed below. “Health” is more than the absence of illness and describes a state of physical, psychological, social and material well-being and is the definition of health currently employed by the World Health Organisation. “Caring, compassion and support for community organisations” describes a practice driven by empathy and concern that respects the capacity of community structures to facilitate change within communities. “Self determination” is having the opportunity and power to direct one’s life according to one’s own values, beliefs and objectives so as to lead a meaningful life. “Social justice” addresses fair and equitable distribution of resources and the allocation of obligations within society. “Diversity” as a value asserts that the unique identities of individuals and communities should be respected and accepted. Finally, “accountability to oppressed groups” is a higher-order value that states that dominant groups and individuals have the responsibility to work with disadvantaged people toward social change.

The value framework described above is seemingly comprehensive and culturally transferable, but a deeper inspection of the values reveals a framework that values the individual within the collective. Therefore this study proposes one more value to be added to the list, namely, to “value the collective within the individual”. This value describes awareness by Community Psychologists of the cultural, religious and political belief systems that form part of individual identity and to respect these aspects of individual identity by accepting them as part of the individual’s lived world. This value is especially important when seeking to create social change at a level that involves changing cultural frameworks deemed to be oppressive.

The purpose of the value-driven framework is to reduce the blind spots within the field of Community Psychology and to ensure that the field does not lapse into the ivory tower mentality that it criticises Mainstream Psychology of having. To avoid the noble ivory tower mentality it is important that the values described above are consistently interrogated in practice and discourse with the various stakeholders that Community Psychologists interact with.

These values are embedded, whether implicitly or explicitly, in the principles that provide the conceptual toolbox for the praxis of Community Psychology. The five principles of Community Psychology that guided this study are the Ecological perspective, Community, Empowerment, Well-being and Liberation.

Ecological Perspective

Community Psychology has an ecological focus. An ecological focus entails the realisation that a single event may have multiple causes (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). An ecological focus also has multiple levels of analysis, a concept originated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), that are an interlinked web (see Figure 2.2).

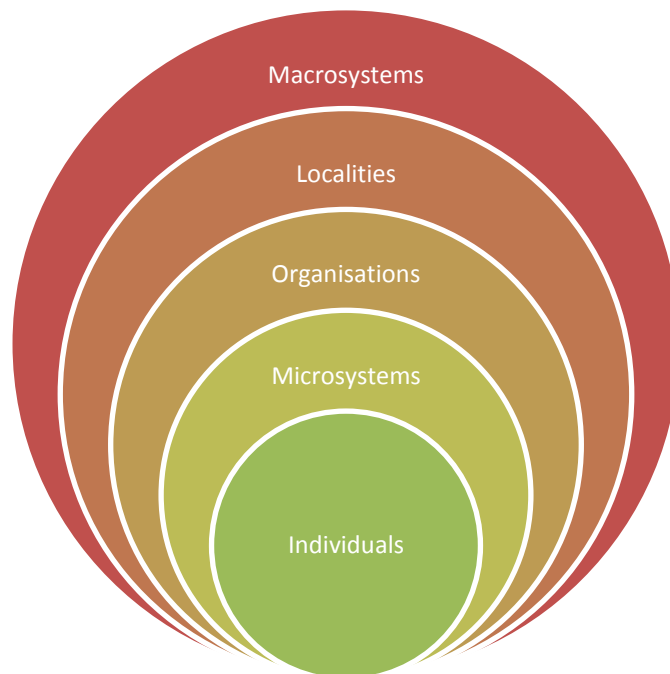


Figure 2.2 Bronfenbrenner's Levels of Analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

The ecological metaphor can be further defined as the interaction between individuals and the multiple social systems in which they are embedded (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Prilleltensky, Nelson and Peirson (2001a; in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) further refined the levels of analysis above by merging Organisations and Localities into the Meso level to fit in with the general levels of analysis within modern Community Psychology. They define these levels as the personal (micro), relational (meso) and collective (macro). Linked to these levels of analysis are the four principles of the ecological perspective developed by Kelly (1966) and Trickett, Kelly and Todd (1972; in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) which are interdependence, cycling of resources, adaptation and succession.

The principle of interdependence asserts that the different parts of an eco-system are interconnected and that changes in any one part of the system will have ripple effects on the rest of the system (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This principle brings forward the very important consideration of the law of unintended consequence (Orford, 2008). This is when a positive result for an intervention results in negative effects in another part of the system. A simple example of this would be when an intervention aimed at strengthening a particular school in a region is so successful that it draws students from neighbouring regions and leaves these regions under resourced.

Cycling of resources refers to the identification, development and allocation of resources within systems (Murray, Nelson, Poland, Maticka-Tyndale, & Ferris, 2004). This process entails a critical appraisal of the resources available to communities and places emphasis on identifying new or untapped resources within the system. The cycling process has focussed strongly on the community as a resource for those with serious mental illness, chronic illness, extreme levels of poverty and who have been affected by natural and man-made disasters.

The principle of adaptation refers to the ability of individuals and systems to adapt to circumstances in order to survive (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Coping strategies employed by communities and individuals must be identified and assessed in context (Rappaport, 1977). What may seem like maladaptive behaviour to an outsider may be the best survival strategy available to a community caught up in extreme circumstances. For example, many rural communities are caught up in a cycle where grandparents are tasked with the care of young children in the

absence of parents who have migrated to the urban centres in search of work. The large developmental gap between these groups may mean that children receive less than adequate care from grandparents who no longer have the mobility or physical health to keep a young child stimulated. However, this strategy, while less than ideal, is one that keeps the larger family system alive as the younger adults are able to send back money to sustain the older and younger members of the family.

The principle of succession takes a long-term perspective to social problems, draws attention to the historical context of a problem and emphasises the need to plan for an ideal future (Orford, 2008). This principle is strongly intertwined with the principle of interdependence and focuses heavily on the collateral effects of intervention while maintaining sight of the objectives of the intervention. The delineations between each level of analysis are not as clear cut in practice as they are depicted in Figure 2.2. For example, some organisations may be small enough to operate in a similar manner to a micro system such as a family. In addition, individuals exist within each of these levels simultaneously and an individual's movement between these levels of analysis is a dynamic process and is dependent on a number of economic, political, cultural and power distribution factors.

Community Psychology focuses on each of the levels depicted in Figure 2.2 as well as the dynamic manner in which they interact (Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz, & Leibowitz, 2010). It implies a holistic analysis of the person in context that ranges from micro systems (such as family or peer groups) to macro-political and economic structures. The focus on the ecological perspective in Community Psychology has developed primarily as a result of the criticism that Mainstream Psychology focused too strongly on individual psychological processes and neglected the important role that social systems play in human development (Campbell & Murray, 2004; Keys & Frank, 1987). Cowen (1994; in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) further states that Community Psychologists need to understand and identify the pathogenic or debilitating effects of individuals' environments that limit personal growth and create problems in living so that these circumstances and factors can be taken into consideration in the therapeutic or intervention setting.

Community

Central to the practice of Community Psychology is the concept of community. Common understandings of communities construct a clearly defined, immutable group of individuals who share a common geographic area, value system, religion, culture, purpose, race, social problem, and economic or social class (Castellini, Colombo, Maffeis, & Montali, 2011; Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999).

The concept of a psychological sense of community was first unpacked by Sarason (1974) who stated that individuals need support and connectedness to deal with daily living and to prevent the development of isolation and psychosocial problems (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). Sarason went on to argue that individuals need more than caring and compassionate therapists who intervene for relatively short periods of time in the life of an individual and who are representative of a high resource cost to the individual, but require a supportive and compassionate community to provide a sense of relation or connection as well as support during times of crisis (Nowell & Boyd, 2010). Sarason placed the responsibility of generating a psychological sense of community squarely within the field of Community Psychology (Sarason, 1974). Sarason defined community as a “readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships on which one could depend” (p. 1). Interdependence is the keystone to the definition of community and is a consistent factor in all types of community.

Communities can be separated into geographic or locality-based communities on one end of the continuum and relational communities on the other end. Geographic communities exemplify the traditional conception of community, which entails grouping people by an agreed physical boundary such as neighbourhoods, small towns, cities, villages, countries, tribal regions and rural regions (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). This conception of community is the backbone of the administration and management of communities by local or national authorities. Geographically bound communities have ties between members, but they are bound by geographic proximity and not by choice.

Relational communities are defined by interpersonal relationships that are not necessarily bound by geographic proximity (Castellini, Colombo, Maffeis, & Montali, 2011). These communities are formed around common interests, shared values, beliefs, traditions, cultures, race or social

issues. Examples of these communities include athletics teams, nations, religions, labour unions, professions and scientific disciplines. These communities are primarily self-defined but it is important to acknowledge that this may entail a struggle with external systems that seek to define the group for instrumental reasons (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

These concepts of community are not mutually exclusive but are representative of the two most common traits of all communities. In other words, communities are all a combination of varying degrees of each of the traits above (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Sarason, 1974). As a practitioner who aims to work closely with communities, it is essential to understand how a community defines itself and to adopt this definition to ensure that all interventions are conducted within the framework of the community's identity. In an attempt to clarify how communities define themselves Sarason (1974) as well as McMillan and Chavis (1986) put forward four elements that comprise the sense of community. Each element is comprised of a number of attributes that shape the element which in turn shape the community. According to these authors all four elements must be present to define a sense of community and no one element is the root of community but it is rather the interplay between these elements that create the sense of community. The four elements are Membership, Influence, Integration and fulfilment of needs and Shared emotional connection (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

The element of membership has five attributes, namely, boundaries, common symbols, emotional safety, personal investment and sense of belonging and identification with community. Boundaries simply refer to the necessity of defining what includes and excludes members. These boundaries can be rigid or permeable and are necessary for the community to differentiate itself from the broader society. Common symbols help define boundaries by setting clear methods of identifying members or territory (Castellini, Colombo, Maffei, & Montali, 2011). Emotional safety refers to the sense of safety that group members experience from being a part of a clearly defined community. According to McMillan (1996) the process of establishing emotional safety requires mutual processes of self-disclosure and group acceptance. Personal investment in the community refers to the act of making a long-term commitment to the community by an individual (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). The sense of belonging and identification with the community involves a process where the individual identifies personal identity partly in terms of membership in the community.

The element of influence refers to both the power that members exercise over the group and the reciprocal process that group dynamics exert on individuals (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) individuals are most strongly attracted to a group where they feel influential. Conversely the most influential members in the group are often those who take care of the needs and uphold the values of others. The more cohesive a group, the greater the pressure for conformity to the shared commitment to the group is exerted on individual members (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). This strong positive association with the group identity can be a disadvantage in situations where social change attempts to change the composition or structure of the community. Individuals would strongly resist any attempt to alter the group identity as it is strongly tied to individual identity.

The element of integration and fulfilment of needs is concerned with the horizontal alignment of relations between individuals and overall community (McMillan D. W., 2011). Integration has two aspects, namely, shared values and exchange of resources. Shared values are the ideals that are shared by both the community and the individual and that can be pursued by community involvement. Exchange of resources refers to the need satisfaction and exchanging resources among community members which McMillan (1996) refers to as a community economy.

The element of shared emotional connection is considered as the definitive element for true community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This concept is difficult to define and even more difficult to quantify, but refers to a deep, emotional connection shared by members of the community which may be recognisable in behaviour, speech and shared cultural cues. This bond is strengthened by shared rituals or community experiences such as birth ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, funerals, celebrations and shared stories (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

The identification of a community is often the first step in any intervention. It is also the most difficult and arduous step, especially in the urbanised, multicultural society that currently dominates. Within this cosmopolitan culture it is increasingly difficult to define a community that holds an identity independent to some degree of the all accepting, all consuming culture of functional uniformity that is broadcast in the media and practiced to some degree by every community. The adoption of this culture by many of the communities in South Africa has led to a multi-cultural society in which many individuals belong to a number of communities

simultaneously. This multiplicity extends to entire communities which may hold multiple identities simultaneously. The Community Psychologist today has to be aware of this multiplicity and seek to unpack any conflicts present between the multiple identities of communities before beginning the intervention.

Empowerment

The focus of the field of Community Psychology was shifted by Rappaport (1981, 1987) with the introduction of the concept of empowerment. This drew the attention of the discipline to the power dynamics that affect well-being. As a result of this shift in focus Community Psychologists have spoken more about empowerment than about power. The definition of empowerment remains in contention today with various authors bringing their own emphasis to the concept. This section will briefly discuss the definition most commonly used and highlight some of the best known variations of the definition.

Rappaport (1981) refers to empowerment as a process, the mechanism by which people, organisations and communities gain mastery over their lives. The core goal of empowerment according to this definition is gaining mastery over one's own life. To achieve this Rappaport suggested that the focus be placed on the rights of citizens, providing choices among the types of helping available to individuals and promoting the positive psychological effects of exercising choice and power (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

An alternative definition to the one provided by Rappaport was put forward by the Cornell Empowerment Group (in Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007) and placed the emphasis centrally on the outcome of gaining control over valued resources. The contrast between these definitions, namely the emphasis on process versus the emphasis on outcome, should not be seen as a dichotomy but rather as parallel objectives that reinforce each other. The conflict between these objectives often comes to the fore in circumstances where there is limited time and a choice has to be made between the two (O'Neill, 2010). In these cases the value system of the Community Psychologist and the community play a crucial role in determining which of these goals are prioritised.

The definitions of empowerment emphasise three key characteristics of the concept. The first is that empowerment is an ongoing process that entails mutual respect, critical reflection, compassion, empathy and active participation by all involved. Second, empowerment cannot be given to a community or individual. It is a self-driven process that requires ownership and responsibility by all stakeholders involved. Last, empowerment requires a balance between the process of empowerment and the outcomes of empowerment. This entails a delicate iterative process where stakeholders meticulously monitor their progress toward shared goals while maintaining the shared process of empowerment by ensuring that no individuals or sub-groups are privileged at the expense of the collective (O'Neill, 2010; Orford, 2008; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011; Trickett, Espino, & Hawe, 2011).

According to Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) it is essential that a clear understanding of the concept of power be developed to aid the empowerment process. The concept of power is mutable and its identity is constructed differently depending on context, objectives, and individual and community characteristics. Community Psychology concerns itself with power to the degree that the concept of power forms part of the core identity of the discipline. The process of empowerment is the mechanism through which Community Psychologists exercise their particular form of power within society (Keys & Frank, 1987).

In the process of seeking to transfer power from the centred, dominant groups in society to the marginalised, disempowered groups, Community Psychologists exercise the power granted to them by virtue of their profession (Psychology) and their discipline (Community Psychology). The creation of this power in the social structure is the result of a collective action by individuals within the field of Community Psychology. However, there exists a paradox between the concept of empowerment and the concept of community.

This paradox was noted and discussed in a landmark article by Rappaport (1981) who stated that in seeking to empower communities we have to empower individuals within the community. If done uncritically the process of empowerment can perpetuate power inequalities by shifting the power base from one minority to another. He suggested a dialectic approach which entails a constant awareness of the status quo and consistent effort to ensure that community problems do not come to be defined from a single perspective. This approach he succinctly sums up in

Rappaport's Rule: "When most people agree with you, worry" (p. 3). Community Psychologists therefore have to constantly and consistently engage in reflection with the community in which they intervene and not just with "elected representatives" of the community to ensure that individual empowerment does not supersede community empowerment.

According to Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) a shared values framework is critical to ensuring that community and individual empowerment take place as parallel processes and not as competing outcomes. This exemplifies the paradox of empowerment: developing communities entails depowering individuals within the community to a degree in order to preserve the power balance; empowering individuals entails a shift within the power balance that can alienate individuals from the broader community and if taken to the extreme, can perpetuate oppressive systems by recreating extreme inequities. Being aware of this paradox and accepting it is the first step on the journey toward becoming a Community Psychologist who understands that quality of life for individuals, communities and society is inextricable.

Liberation

The concept of Liberation is the embodiment of the vision of the Community Psychology values framework. The importance of the concept of Liberation in Community Psychology lies in the mission of the field to oppose oppression in all sectors of society and at all levels of analysis. Liberation is intricately intertwined with the concept of empowerment, so much so that there is often confusion regarding the two terms. Empowerment is described as a collaborative, participative process through which people regain mastery over their own lives and access to critical resources (Castellini, Colombo, Maffei, & Montali, 2011; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007; Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007). Liberation can be defined as the process of overcoming internal and external sources of oppression and freedom to pursue well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). These authors state that: "Liberation from external oppression entails emancipation from class exploitation, gender domination and ethnic discrimination... Liberation from internal and psychological sources includes overcoming fears, obsessions or other psychological phenomena that interfere with a person's subjective experience of well-being." (p. 108)

Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007) take the concept of liberation a step further by stating that it is a call to action to liberate both the oppressed and the privileged or, in some cases, the oppressed and the oppressor. These authors acknowledge the reciprocal relationship of oppression and highlight the ecological nature of oppression and liberation. They distinguish between First Order Change which simply replaces the currently privileged group with the currently oppressed group. This end result is often mistaken for true liberation and is often the goal of social groups that aim to emancipate oppressed members of society. It is understandable that the disenfranchised and underprivileged would desire the position of the privileged and strive to replace them at the top of the “pecking order”. This does not constitute true change as the system of oppression remains intact and continues the cycle of oppression, albeit with the role players in different roles or even with entirely new role players. Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007) state that the true objective of liberation is to bring about second order change which is aimed at dismantling the oppressive system and its inequalities.

The process of liberation can be linked to Paulo Freire’s concept of conscientisation which is a process during which a population a) gradually gains awareness of the oppression under which they exist, b) seek out other individuals who are experiencing similar circumstances and c) either collectively or individually liberate themselves from these internal or external forces of oppression (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007; Freire, 1970; Freire, 1973).

According to Friere (1970/1993) in Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007) there are three resources required to dismantle oppression, namely, a critical awareness and understanding of the oppressive system; involvement and leadership from members of the subordinated group; and collective action as solely individual actions are hard to sustain against powerful opposition. A note of caution should be made at this point. While it is indeed the role and responsibility of Community Psychologists to work toward dismantling oppressive systems, it is crucial that an alternative system be ready to replace the vacuum that will be left by the absence of the oppressive system. Oppressive systems, repulsive and undesirable as they may be to some, are still functional systems that bring a sense of order to the interactions within society. Without an overarching system in which human interaction can take place we run the risk of powerful groups overpowering weaker groups to assert dominance for the sake of “restoring order”.

The concept of liberation is not the traditional terrain of psychology, which has typically responded by 'helping' disadvantaged individuals adjust to unjust social circumstances (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). According to these authors the role of Community Psychology should be to recognise the injustices that disadvantaged people have experienced and work in partnership with them towards social change. This approach means that Community Psychologists have to accompany community members on their journey to liberation, playing a specific role that has been collaboratively constructed, and not make the journey for the community. Community Psychologists are not tasked to act as the liberators of the oppressed or the crusaders for freedom and equality, but are rather tasked as conscientious, skilled participants in the journey toward liberation.

Well-being

One of the objectives of Community Psychology is to promote well-being for all individuals within society. The concept of well-being is chosen in contrast to the concept of health. The traditional understanding of health can be reduced to the absence of illness. This definition is narrow and does not encompass the full range of human interaction and activity. Well-being refers to the holistic conceptualisation of health and is not limited to physical and mental health. Life satisfaction, job satisfaction, positive affect, self-esteem and academic achievement are wellness outcomes that represent what is meant by health being more than the absence of symptoms (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007; World Health Organisation, 2003). Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) extend this definition to include effective coping, resilience, dignity and self-respect, a sense of control and voice and choice. Orford (2008) goes further by stating that health is not only individual well-being but includes equality and social justice and entails investment of societies in public resources that contribute to public health.

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) also expand the concept of wellness to various levels of analysis. They distinguish between wellness at the individual or personal level, the relational level and at the collective level. The personal level is often the point of focus for organisations that seek to bring about social change. This is due to the embedded and largely invisible effects of the scientific and biomedical approaches that influenced Mainstream Psychology and which

emphasise treatment or amelioration over transformation (Rappaport, 2000a). This is equal to the primary level of intervention discussed earlier in this section.

The relational level of well-being consists of being part of and participating in supportive relationships and includes relationships between family, friends or work colleagues. It also involves being able to display and experience caring and compassion in the relationships in one's life and experiencing and displaying respect for diversity in these relationships. The relational level of well-being also entails participation in decisions affecting one's life. This level of wellness also emphasises the experience of good parenting. While this experience is not generic to all individuals, for example those who chose not to have children, it is a significant part of most individuals' lives and meaningful interaction in this domain may increase the quality of life of individuals.

The collective level of wellness or well-being includes a sense of improved safety which goes beyond the reduction of physical risks to include a sense of feeling safe in one's environment. The concept of feeling safe can be extended to include freedom from fear of discrimination and victimisation by criminal acts, freedom from fear for the safety of loved ones due to an unsafe physical environment. Economic productivity is another indicator of collective wellness and includes access to and participation in the mechanisms of the economy. This includes access to paid employment, access to goods and services and access to mechanism to aid career development or progression. A sense of community and enhanced social capital are the last two indicators provided by these authors (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

The concept of wellness and well-being is not universally accepted, with Rappaport (2000a), one of the key figures in the field of Community Psychology, criticising the use of the term to invite individualistic perspectives and further perpetuating the biases of the biomedical notions of prevention and intervention. The levels of wellness described by Nelson and Prilleltensky could be expanded to include personal and social levels of wellness such as participating in and being allowed to practice traditional cultural practices. This could be placed under the concept of sense of community but this would water down the essence to make it seem as if these practices were nothing more than a mechanism for creating the illusion of unity among a group as opposed to an individual expression of a shared identity that binds across generations. Another concept that

could and should be included in the definitions of wellness is spiritual well-being (World Health Organisation, 2009) which refers to the concept of a higher-order relationship between individuals and a higher power that contributes to the individual's sense of personal well-being. While the concept of wellbeing may be one that is contested, it does provide Community Psychologists and communities with a guideline towards which they can collaboratively strive.

Criticisms of Community Psychology

This section does not seek to provide an exhaustive list of the criticisms against Community Psychology but will highlight a few that are pertinent to this study. These criticisms will therefore be focussed on the South African context primarily and will include international trends or discourses that impact on the South African context. This is done to refocus the section on the context in which the study took place against the broader theoretical backdrop of the theory of Community Psychology.

Community Psychology has been criticised by both opponents and proponents of the discipline. The response and opposition from Mainstream Psychology can be understood when one considers the fact that Community Psychology was formed due to dissatisfaction with the methods and principles of Mainstream Psychology in the early 1960s. This set the stage for what could have been an antagonistic relationship between the sub-disciplines.

Community Psychology has recently been criticised for having an ameliorative rather than transformative agenda in post-apartheid South Africa (Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004). This is tantamount to helping individuals adjust to the unfair conditions in which they live without taking any measures toward addressing third order change that would dismantle the structures that reinforced the unfair and unhealthy conditions that the majority of South Africans live in (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001). The ameliorative agenda is primarily driven by the urgent need within communities to address the most glaring and debilitating social problems they are experiencing (Seedat, Lazarus, & Duncan, 2001). This agenda is also driven by the political priorities of the new government who want to demonstrate that steps are being taken to improve the quality of life of the average South African. In a context where limited resources and large structural, social and economic inequalities are a fact of daily living, it is understandable that a largely ameliorative agenda would dominate the field. This becomes even more apparent when

one considers the need within the field of Community Psychology to make Psychology as a discipline more relevant to South Africans and to establish itself as a field recognised for contributing to the South African context and gaining greater recognition by communities, academic and research institutions, government and professional psychological bodies (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). The satisfaction of this need will see Community Psychology moved from the position of an ad hoc function or underlying theoretical framework of Mainstream Psychology and clinical practice.

The most salient criticism of Community Psychology is that it has not engaged in systematically developing and building a theory of practice that is recognised as being South African (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007). This criticism reflects on the fact that Community Psychology, like Mainstream Psychology, was imported from other continents and adapted to the South African context. The norms and standards for the discipline have been set outside the borders of local practitioners who could not contribute to the practice and theory of the field. This should not imply that South African Community Psychology has been a passive recipient of foreign knowledge. The discipline has developed into a vibrant local community with a unique identity. The criticism is that this identity has not translated into a formal theory that reflects the realities of practice in the South African context which deals with issues of cultural diversity, deeply embedded racial segregation and inter-generational trauma in a poverty-stricken context.

The integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the training and practice of Community Psychology is still marginal (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007). While Community Psychology advocates the promotion of cultural relativism and communities as producers of knowledge, the field has done very little to formally incorporate indigenous knowledge systems into the field. The development of Community Psychology has been conspicuously Euro-centric and American-centric with the roots of the discipline perceived to be in these continents; and the founding fathers of the discipline are perceived to be white males (Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007). This can be attributed to the fact that the publishing houses for the scientific community are primarily located on these continents, and should not be constructed as an indication that Community Psychology was not practiced, albeit under a different name, on other continents. This lack of indigenous knowledge within the discipline was noted by Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky and Montero (2007) who conducted a study of the field across the globe. The

exclusion of indigenous knowledge systems can also be attributed to the fact that only knowledge deemed to be scientific can be published. Scientific knowledge claims to be objective, measurable, accurate and useful but is actually a culturally bound concept (Graham & Ismail, 2011). Indigenous knowledge systems are excluded because they do not fit the “objective” criteria of the scientific culture, and because Community Psychology is striving for recognition within this culture it excludes, whether deliberately or unwittingly, these systems of knowledge.

Community Psychology seeks to explore the “thick” or lived experience of communities to gain a greater understanding of the lives of individuals and communities. This entails an approach that effectively embraces both qualitative and quantitative approaches equally and an acknowledgement of the relative strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. In a study that analysed the content and methods employed in the field, Graham and Ismail (2011) analysed contributions to the Journal of Community Psychology for the period of 2003 to 2007 and found that the majority of the articles (53.7%) utilised a positivist approach. “This suggests an underrepresentation of methods that promote contextually bound, critical-political or interpretive views of communities and the dominance of positivist paradigmatic choices (Graham & Ismail, 2011, p. 131). This trend can be attributed to the dominance of positivistic, empirical studies in the field of Psychology. This trend is part of a broader paradigm within the academic sphere where the natural sciences are still considered as the ideal scientific method and therefore a discipline can only be acknowledge as a science if it strives for and achieves the ideals of the positivistic scientific approach. The relevance of these ideals to a field that seeks to promote subjectivity, diversity and cultural relativism is questionable (Mkhize, 2004, in Graham & Ismail, 2011) and Community Psychologists should be aware of the complex interplay present between the demands of the broader discipline of Psychology and the demands of the praxis of Community Psychology.

The applicability of Community Psychology to the study

Despite the criticisms of Community Psychology discussed above, the discipline is, arguably, the most relevant branch of Psychology for the South African context. The value and principle framework of Community Psychology provides researchers with a rare opportunity to engage

communities in scientific research that is designed to bring about sustainable change by generating a collective commitment to investigate issues; by acting on the desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity on the issue; by taking a joint decision to engage in collective action that leads to a useful solution; and by building alliances between researchers and community members in the planning, implementation and dissemination of the research process (McIntyre, 2008). In the context of the study it was important to select a research approach that would create space for the integration of the value systems of the participants, community, the commissioning organisation and the research team. A shared value framework would aid the process of communication and foster a sense of community among those involved in the research process.

A second consideration that informed the selection of the theoretical framework was the multiple needs of the commissioning organisation, the Educhange and Research Foundation (ERF). The ERF needed an evaluation of their activities to demonstrate the effect of their programme to current stakeholders and potential stakeholders. They also needed greater buy-in from their current stakeholders to address practical issues faced during the implementation process. It was therefore essential that the chosen theoretical framework would be a process of consultation as opposed to a purely empirical process that fostered a sense of distance and disinvestment among the community members. The Community Psychology theoretical framework therefore provided the ideal overarching or underpinning theory to guide the research process. While Community Psychology provided the guidelines for the research, it does not provide a mechanism through which the research could be enacted. Therefore Community Psychology theory had to be linked with a research method that aligned with the principles and values of Community Psychology. The Qualitative Research approach was chosen, not because Quantitative Research cannot be informed by Community Psychology theories but because Qualitative Research also allowed for a facilitative, interactive research approach required in the context of the ERF's intervention.

Qualitative Research Methods Embedded within this study

I would describe myself as a research generalist as I have no preference for a particular paradigm from a technical perspective. Rather, I believe that each paradigm has a unique contribution to make to every study. What I truly value about the Qualitative approaches is that it allows one to engage with participants in ways that transport one out of one's own skin and into the lived world of your participants. Each time I've engaged in Qualitative work I've grown as a person. I've learnt courage, endurance, patience and plain old guts from the participants that I've had the pleasure of sharing lives with over the years. Each time I believe that I am entering a research setting where there is a story within the story, the Qualitative approach is my first option. In the context of this study, the fact that so many of the participants were not proficient enough in English for me to draw them into the study through a questionnaire meant that I had to find a way to meet them where they are at. The next step was allowing them to meet me where I was at as I was not proficient enough in their home languages to effectively interview them. That's what I believed anyway...

The second theoretical framework that underpinned this study was that of Qualitative Research Methodology. This section will not provide a detailed overview of Qualitative Methodology as the field is covered in detail a number of textbooks, among others Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2004), Babbie and Mouton (2008) and de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2005). The purpose of this section is to discuss the Qualitative Method that underpinned this study. As such there may be large sections of the approach that will not be covered in depth but will be briefly discussed. The assumption behind this omission is that much of what could be written on Qualitative Research is common knowledge and repeating it here would be redundant.

Definition

The Qualitative Research approach used in this study can be described as an approach that attempts to study human action from the insider's perspective and is firmly embedded within the Social Constructionism paradigm (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This research approach has as its goal describing and understanding rather than prediction, generalisation and explanation. In short, Qualitative Research is interested in developing a depth of knowledge about a particular subject within a particular context. Nelson *et al.* (1992) in Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe Qualitative Research as inter-, trans- and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that crosscuts the humanities and social sciences with its multiparadigmatic focus. Developing an understanding

from an insider's perspective entails developing an empathic understanding of human behaviour in context by utilising methods that stay close to the research subject (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The definition of Qualitative Research can be expanded to include approaches and techniques that focus on obtaining "thick description" (Maxwell, 2005). An empathic understanding of human behaviour implies that the researcher should place him/herself in the shoes of the participant and attempt to view the world from the understanding of the participant through the use of the everyday language of the participant (Patton, 1987; Patton, 2002a; Sandelowski, 2000). This often takes the form of pure description of the programme with the aim of giving the reader an insight into the everyday experience of the participant. Empathic understanding does not simply entail repeating the words of the participants in academic language but includes maintaining the tension between developing closeness with the data while ensuring that enough distanciation is ensured to provide a level of critical analysis on the part of the researcher where the words of the participants are placed within their broader ecological context (Kelly K. , 1999).

The degree of distanciation will be determined by the specific Qualitative approach employed by the researcher. Distanciation is the process through which an emotional or intellectual distance is created between the researcher and the research participants. This process serves to place a critical gap or lens between the researcher and the entire research context to allow for reflection and analysis to take place more objectively (Kelly K. , 1999; Patton, 2002b). According to Kelly (1999): "Distanciation adds to meaning not by imposition, but by pointing to the subjective and contextual *limits* of understanding" (p. 400). Distanciation varies according to whether the research approach is located within the Interpretive paradigm, which emphasises understanding from within the context of the participant, or the Social Constructionist paradigm which a more distanced, sceptical understanding of phenomena. Approaches lie on a continuum between these paradigms and are not to be viewed as exclusively one or the other.

Qualitative Research designs are focussed on studying human behaviour in its natural setting and from the insider's perspective with an emphasis on understanding phenomena within the context (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Therefore Qualitative approaches will typically have the following features:

- A detailed engagement with the object/participant under study.

- Selection of a small number of cases to be studied.
- Open to multiple sources of data.
- Flexible design features that allow the researcher to adapt the study where necessary (reflexivity) (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995; Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

As briefly discussed in the first chapter, thick description refers to sufficiently detailed descriptions of context that are reported with sufficient detail and precision to allow the study to be replicated or judgements about transferability of the results to be made by the reader (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Thick descriptions are but part of a bigger framework of methods built into Qualitative Research design to ensure rigour, reliability and validity. Babbie and Mouton (2008) discuss two frameworks that define rigour, reliability and validity in Qualitative Research, namely, the M \ddot{u} nchhausen conception and the notion of “Trustworthiness”. The M \ddot{u} nchhausen conception is the work of Dutch philosopher Adriaan Smaling (1989) and places emphasis on doing justice to the object of study and allowing respondents to speak freely through the application of a rigorous framework (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). This framework aims to enhance reliability and validity through triangulation, writing extensive field notes, member checks, peer review, reasoned consensus and an audit trial (Babbie & Mouton, 2008; Carter & Delamont, 1996; Patton, 2002a).

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, paradigms and researchers. Field notes are necessary to develop the study according to an emergent design (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). The process of keeping field notes allows researchers to reflect and reflexively redesign the study as the study evolves and develops (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Member checks refer to the process where research participants are consulted to verify that the results are a true reflection of what they said and meant (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Peer review describes the process where two or more researchers debate various issues within the research study and come to a reasoned consensus on the data (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). An audit trial refers to the process where all theoretical ideas, raw data and interpretations are handed over to an independent examiner who studies the research approach critically (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

These processes are aimed at increasing the rigour of the study and at endorsing the credibility of the findings. A similar process of establishing rigour is found in the concept of Trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness, based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), is constructed around credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Credibility within this process refers to whether the construction of reality in the data is a reflection of the constructed realities present in the minds of the research participants. Credibility is ensured by prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy, peer debriefing and member checks. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to different contexts or respondents.

In light of the discussion above we can define Qualitative Research as the research process that studies human behaviour through developing a critical empathic understanding of the everyday experiences of respondents by applying research approaches that emphasise trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability by immersing the researcher into the research context. The application of Qualitative Research within the Community Psychology paradigm entails conducting a study of human behaviour through developing an empathic understanding of the communities, power dynamics, needs, desires of the respondents from their perspective and shedding light on concepts of empowerment, well-being and liberation through the use of the everyday language of these respondents.

As mentioned earlier, this section is not intended to provide a detailed discussion of the Qualitative paradigm, its theoretical and epistemological background, but is rather aimed at discussing Qualitative Research in the context of the theoretical framework of the study. Therefore certain concepts will be mentioned without detailed, nuanced discussions of their origins and the various definitions that refer to them.

The power of the researcher and gaining access

Inherent to the research process is a power dynamic between the researcher and research participants, between the researcher and the commissioning organisation, and between the researcher and the context of the discipline in which they operate. There are a number of ethical guidelines in place to guide and define the role of the researcher within these interactions. Concepts such as Informed Consent, Non-Maleficence, Beneficence, Voluntary Participation and Confidentiality have been developed to guide researchers in their interaction with research participants (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005). The key point of all of the concepts

mentioned is that the responsibility rests with the researcher to ensure that they are effectively applied within the research process. In effect the ethical procedures put in place to govern researchers disempower research participants by placing the onus on the researcher to ensure that the participants are protected.

While individuals can refuse to participate, there is often external or internal pressure to participate in the research process. External pressure can include situations where the senior management of an organisation has instructed individuals to provide the researchers with their full support. These individuals may fear a form of reprisal from the organisation if they are identified as hindering the research process. While there are ethical measures in place to prevent this, the respondent understands the system and its observation/accountability mechanisms, both formal and informal, better than the researcher and will know that their “research performance” is being evaluated. In the context of community research where the context is more open and a less clearly defined hierarchical structure is in place, external pressure can come in the form of desperate or dire social conditions that the research process claims to study. In this case respondents may feel compelled to participate to “do something to make it better”.

The construction of researchers as experts is another factor that may contribute to the external pressure on individual participants. This refers to the tendency to treat the researcher as the expert who has the answers to the problems facing individuals within their social systems and as such is placed in positions of privilege to which all cooperation should be given. Internal pressure to participate may come from sources such as personal beliefs or the need to be heard, especially in contexts where the population group under study has been silenced by broader social systems. The respondents may believe that participation can lead to elevated social status within the broader community and participate in the research process on this basis. The participants may relate to or like the researcher on an interpersonal level and participate on this basis. The purpose of this discussion is not to construct the research participant as the helpless, hapless individual being manipulated by the researcher and broader contextual dynamics but to briefly sketch the power distribution within the research process and highlight the importance of the position of the participant in the research process.

One of the first considerations that should be made with regards to the individuals who are studied in the research process is whether they are to be viewed as research subjects or as research participants. The research subject is an accurate description of the position of the individuals under study in the traditional positivist paradigm, as this term denotes a more passive role in the research process and implies an unequal power relationship between the researcher and subject of study.

The term participant by contrast implies an active role in the research process, both as a consumer and producer of knowledge, for the individuals around whom the study is built. The term participant implies a clearly delineated role within the research process to which there are key responsibilities attached. For the relationship between the researcher and the participant to be an equal one it is important to ensure that the responsibilities allocated to the participant come with the necessary authority to fulfil these responsibilities. The responsibility for ensuring access to authority lies with both the researcher and the participant and should be viewed as a process of empowerment of the research participant. The process of empowerment here refers to the process where the researcher provides the research participant with the space and autonomy to give voice to their experience and to correct the researcher where necessary to ensure that the authenticity of their voice is preserved. In other words, Qualitative Research aims to give voice to research participants (Carter & Delamont, 1996), but the onus remains on the participants to speak. In this process the research participant takes the role of collaborating expert where their field of expertise is their local knowledge of their lives, context and experiences.

The collaboration process described above requires a parallel process of empowerment of the participant and depowerment of the researcher. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) refer to depowerment as the process where the researcher consciously shares knowledge and power with research or community participants with the aim of becoming an expert participant themselves. Implicit in this process of depowerment is the acknowledgement of the position of the participant as one of importance. This can be contrasted with an empowerment process where the participants are expected to “pull” themselves up to a level of power that is deemed fit for the researcher or decision-makers in the context.

Embedded in the collaborative research process is mutual accountability between the researcher, the research participant, the research context and the research audience. This process should be envisioned as a complex interaction where the aggregated power distribution between these groups is even but varies according to context. In simpler terms, this process is a continuous “conversation” between the various stakeholders mentioned above that occurs in multiple domains, sometimes at the same time. Each of the stakeholders in this process holds varying degrees of power in each context and could exercise this power to ensure that their specific needs are met by the research process.

The researcher has a responsibility to the participants to ensure that the research process is carried out with scientific professionalism that is informed by compassion and empathy. Simultaneously the researcher has a responsibility to the discipline in which they operate to uphold the ethical and scientific principles of the discipline to ensure that they do not discredit or alienate the discipline from broader societal structures. The researcher is also held to account by the context in which the research takes place through cultural, religious and social norms that dictate acceptable behaviour within this context.

The research audience, which here includes funders, media, community members not participating in the study, research participants and the organisation commissioning the research, holds the researcher accountable for ensuring that the research results are disseminated in a manner that is accessible, accurate and relevant to their needs. The research participant is responsible for providing the researcher with information that is accurate to the best of their knowledge. The participant has co-responsibility with the researcher to ensure that their rights are not violated and that the research process meets their needs. As with the researcher, the research participant has multiple responsibilities to multiple stakeholders but these will not be discussed or mentioned as they deviate from the current line of discussion.

As previously mentioned it is necessary to link responsibility with the requisite amount of authority for the collaborative relationship to be considered equal. This process of accountability is relational and requires each stakeholder to play their role of being responsible for their own role and simultaneously holding the other stakeholders as responsible for their roles. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) suggest several mechanisms for the promotion of accountability which

includes the establishment of steering committees composed of all participants in the research process. The provision of information such as the regulatory bodies to which participants are bound by virtue of their discipline, occupation, cultural or religious affiliations could also be supplied to all stakeholders to ensure that there are methods of recourse available in case the accountability relationship disintegrates.

This description of the accountability process and the methods for recourse should it fail does not take into account the broader socio-political dynamics – as discussed in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter – that influence these relationships and as such the description above depicts a linear, recursive relationship that appears to be clear cut. A detailed, nuanced discussion of this process is beyond the scope of this chapter; the purpose of this discussion was to indicate that the position of power enjoyed by the researcher is relative to a number of stakeholders and is bound by a relational process of accountability.

Gaining access to research participants is a critical part of the research process because one has to get into the context of the participants in order to get access to the information. This obvious statement hides the complexity involved in the *process* of gaining access which affects what information is available and the quality of the information available (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). This extends the impact of the consideration of access beyond the planning phase of the research design process to the research reporting phase where the quality of one's access influences what information one has and therefore what questions one is able to answer (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003).

Research is an invasive process, Qualitative Research more so than Quantitative in some cases as it often requires a fair amount of the participants' time and aims to delve deep into the lives of the participants. Often researchers have very little to offer to research participants in return for the information they provide but are still allowed to gain access, a practice that has been termed as the central paradox of access by Feldman *et al.* (2003). This paradox is addressed somewhat by the ethical values of Beneficence or Justice which places the onus on the researcher to ensure that the research participants receive a benefit equal to the risk or burden they accept as a result of the research. These principles do not fully account for the reasons that researchers still gain access to research participants or why certain gate keepers to participants become champions for

the researchers throughout the process. Some of the reasons for this are mentioned in the discussion above and relate to the internal and external pressures on research participants.

The process of access is a relational one that is focussed on building rapport with research participants and continues throughout the research process. This is in contrast to the linear process described in generalist research textbooks such as Babbie and Mouton (2008) where access is depicted as a formal process that requires negotiation with key gatekeepers who are clearly defined from the general research population. This endorsement by gatekeepers is essential in establishing the credibility of the researcher and forms part of the process of developing trust. In practice gaining access to participants is a process of constant renegotiation which involves all participants. For example, while a participant may consent to be interviewed on their experience of poverty, they may refuse to discuss the abuse they have experienced due to the context in which they live. Gaining this additional information is part of the broader process of gaining access.

Gaining access requires a key set of interpersonal skills which include, but are not limited to, having conversations, keeping commitments, relating to others, keeping confidence within the entire research process and conveying appreciation (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). The application of these skills and by inference, the degree of skill required, will depend largely on the type of research being conducted and the context in which the research is conducted.

There are a few meta-skills that transcend context and research design and include: “The ability to be flexible, to be persistent without being annoying, to recognise luck and accept opportunities when they are offered” (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003, p. XI). Flexibility in the research process is required at intrapersonal, methodological, theoretical and interpersonal levels. Flexibility here can be understood as being willing to adapt to the needs and demands of other stakeholders and the context. At the intrapersonal level researchers are required to adopt multiple identities at various phases of the research process. They may be required to act as the expert and authoritatively dictate the manner in which data gathering procedures are to be adhered to one minute and to be the respectful, deferring younger member of a social structure when engaging with a cultural, religious or social representative the next.

An individual has more than one identity that has to be balanced within the research process and within the self as the other identities do not disappear when the individual is acting out one. Some of the identities that individual researchers may hold include race, religion, gender, class (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003) and can be expanded to include ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender presentation, professional status, wealth, appearance as it is related to social norms of beauty. Each of these identities can aid or hinder the process of gaining access as they influence the individuals with whom the researcher interacts. Sherryl Kleinman (2003) in (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003) states that “by broadening the range of relevant identities, researchers can acquire data they might not get otherwise” (p. 38). The implicit message behind the need for intrapersonal flexibility in research is that the researcher is a person with a history, beliefs, desires, needs and shortcomings that acutely affect the research process and that we cannot portray the researcher as an “immaculate being” in pursuit of scientific objectivity. This statement is especially true of Qualitative research where the researcher is the primary instrument of data gathering and analysis.

Interpersonal flexibility describes the ability to accommodate the personality traits and communication styles of a variety of individuals. It is the ability to relate to participants and gatekeepers in a manner that will facilitate the development of trust. It requires the ability to read an individual’s interpersonal style and adapting with the aim of easing or smoothing the communication process. Interpersonal flexibility is focussed on developing rapport with the participants which can be described as a harmonious relationship between the researcher and participant (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003).

Similarities between the researcher and the participants aids the development of rapport and speeds up the process through which a researcher becomes an “enlightened insider” with whom information can be freely shared. This process can hinder the research process as it may lead to participants glossing over certain facts or experiences under the assumption that the researcher has a shared knowledge of these experiences (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). An example of this is when participants who are questioned about their experience of living in South Africa may gloss over the “normal” fear that they experience of being a crime victim when speaking to a fellow South African whereas with a foreign researcher this “implicit knowledge” is more likely to be shared. Similarly, difference can aid or impede the development of rapport and in turn

access to information. This is particularly true for gender, culture, sexual orientation, nationality and race as these are the characteristics that most often carry conflicting norms in different cultures (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). For instance, it may be unacceptable in certain cultures for a man to be alone in a room with an unmarried woman.

Part of the ability to display interpersonal flexibility is the ability to facilitate the process of legitimising the researcher (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). This refers to the process through which the researcher demonstrates that the study is being conducted by a credible researcher. This can take place through the explicit systems in a setting such as Ethics Review Boards, quality assurance bodies and gaining approval from recognised community agencies. It can also take place through the implicit systems that permeate all social levels and can include activities where the research is discussed informally with a group representative of the target population, enlisting the assistance of a co-researcher that is drawn from the target population of the study.

Methodological and Theoretical flexibility refers to the researcher being willing to make changes to the planned method or theory for the study. Pressure to do so may come from the Ethics Review Board of their institution, the steering committee of the study, research participants or funders. This is often accompanied by a slight shift in emphasis in the objectives and focus of the research study. In cases where the change required is drastic, the researcher then has to decide whether continuing with the study remains worthwhile.

Persistence is another skill that transcends context and research approach in the process of gaining access. Persistence is a necessary habit to develop in the initial phases of the research where it is common to meet with rejection during the first contact with gatekeepers or participants (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). In contexts where individuals are not bound to or associated with specific organisations or bodies it may be necessary to repeatedly make initial contacts, each time with a new potential participant. Persistence is necessary due to the emotional impact of rejection, especially on inexperienced researchers, by participants, funders or gatekeepers, regardless of whether the rejection was of the study or of the researcher personally. It is important to bear in mind that being persistent has to be balanced against an empathic understanding of where the participant is at the time of contact. Aggressive persistence can be construed as rude, obnoxious, inappropriate and invasive and can alienate stakeholders.

The ability to recognise luck or opportunities is a crucial, if understated, ability to develop as a researcher. It is exceedingly rare for a research process to play out exactly as planned and often opportunities to conduct or complete the study come in unexpected forms. Linked to this ability to perceive opportunity is the ability to effectively display appreciation for assistance. This will aid in the development of the long term connection between the researcher and the individuals who aid the research process and provides an indication of the researcher's approach to interpersonal interactions.

Feldman *et al.* (2003) identify five stages in the process of gaining access, namely, finding informants, gaining permission to contact informants, making initial contacts, developing rapport and ending the relationship. These authors utilise the term informants in a manner consistent with the use of the term participants and these terms are used interchangeably in the discussion that follows.

The process of gaining access begins long before the researcher enters the fieldwork phase. During the design phase of a study it is necessary to consider the target population and who can constitute a representative sample of this group. It is during this process that access is first considered in the context of the study and that access to participants often defines the larger research design. Researchers may select questions on the assumption that they are the type of question that the participants can answer and would want to answer.

This process begins with gathering information about the type of participant that will be included in the study and defining characteristics are identified. This information can be obtained through a literature review, obtaining the names and addresses of particular sites or physically entering the context to become familiar with it (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). This process is also particularly useful in Qualitative Research as it provides firsthand knowledge of the context which facilitates data interpretation. During this phase the researcher develops a network of contacts in the context in which the data will be gathered. These contacts can be representatives of the target population, community members who will not participate in the research process, Community Based Organisations, Government organisations and/or other researchers who have experience in the context.

The next phase involves gaining permission to contact the participants and entails contacting the relevant gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are individuals, committees, boards or organisations that can grant or deny initial access to participants and can hinder or aid the access process (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). Access through a gatekeeper, if granted, can make research easy as this individual or entity vouches for the legitimacy of the researcher but this is only applicable if the gatekeeper has the recognised authority among the participants to grant access. If there is no gatekeeper to the participants then each individual acts as a gatekeeper and the researcher has to begin the process of gaining access anew with each individual. It is important to note that permission from a gatekeeper does not compel all identified individuals to take part in the research process and individual consent must be obtained.

The negotiation with gatekeepers can occur simultaneously with the previous process where participants are identified or it can signal the initiation of the fieldwork phase of the research. This phase requires that the researcher get the attention of the necessary individuals, through meetings, letters or phone calls, that the research “plot” be summarised in a format that can be easily understood by others, that the benefits of the research are explicitly stated and, lastly, that the cost and risks associated with the research are clearly stated.

The initial contact phase represents the phase where formal contact with the research participants takes place for the first time. This can be done through a letter drafted in terms that are accessible to the participants and that clearly state the identity of the researcher and their affiliations, the purpose of the research, the benefits of the research and the costs/risks involved in participating in the research. The letter should also explain the rights and responsibilities of the participants and provide contact information for the regulatory body to which the researcher answers. This process can also take place by means of a stakeholder summit, a community forum, a meeting or an official memo from the organisational head. Regardless of the specific approach employed the content of the initial contact remains the same. The initial contact session is the opportunity for the researcher to establish credibility and to begin building rapport with the participants.

The process of developing rapport is centred on the process of building trust. The researcher needs to earn the trust of the participants in a relatively short space of time and has to demonstrate a genuine concern about the participants. Interpersonal skills play a crucial role in

this process, in particular listening skills, congruence, honesty and compassion. Developing a relationship built on trust with each participant is essential as each participant that receives a positive experience from the research becomes a potential recruiter and vice versa. One of the mechanisms that can be employed to build trust with participants is what Feldman *et al.* (2003) term Commitment acts.

Commitment acts are activities that are undertaken in response to a need expressed by the participants that is not directly relevant to the study and that are not guaranteed to benefit the study in any way. It is important that these activities not be undertaken with the express purpose of building rapport as this may be perceived as manipulation. Rather a commitment act is one where the researcher demonstrates real kindness, respect or compassion toward the research participants. Through commitment acts researchers become more than people who just want information or who just want to take yet more from the participants (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). The quality of the rapport developed directly affects the degree of access provided to the researcher.

When researchers have the information they need, they cannot simply disappear. Ending the relationship with the participant in a positive manner is equally as important as the establishment of the relationship. Often researchers need to return to the field to gather more data or to check the integrity of data. Researchers may also have developed close relationships with individuals while out in the field. It may also be the case that researchers would like to continue engagement or return to the field with an intervention based on the research conducted. Regardless of the final result of the exit, the process of exiting is crucial. It is essential that the researcher be explicit about what the process of the research will be going forward. Any promises made to participants about follow ups or additional assistance should be honoured. A gradual process of exit allows for the researcher and participants to tie off all issues that need to be addressed and can provide a sense of emotional closure about the process. The research may have concluded at the moment but it may be necessary to work with the participants in future. It also assists other researchers who may wish to work with the participant groups for a related study. It is important to constantly be aware of the impact that one's presence as a researcher is having on one's participants and to ensure that one's actions as a researcher maintain the credibility of the discipline one represents.

The discussion above focussed on aspects of Qualitative Research that are discussed less often but are crucial aspects of the research process. The purpose of discussing these aspects is to move these aspects to the foreground of the research process so that their effects on the context and data can be demonstrated in the various phases of the research.

Criticisms of the Qualitative Approach

The primary criticism of the Qualitative approach is the defensibility of the claims made by Qualitative Researchers. This criticism relates back to the reliability and validity of the data gathered by Qualitative approaches to empirical research. The criticism of Qualitative research originates from the difference in ontology between the Qualitative and Quantitative paradigms. Quantitative Research fits within the positivist paradigm and advocates value-neutral objectivist science that studies a stable, unchanging reality from which “truth” can be derived (Topper, 2005).

Qualitative Research on the other hand firmly locates itself within the world of lived experience and works at the intersection of individual belief, action and culture where knowledge is co-created (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The opposition to the idea of an objective, value-free truth is seen as an attack on reason and truth by positivist scientism and the Qualitative paradigm has been deemed to be a soft science that is critical, subjective and a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The Qualitative Research paradigm is seen to criticise the traditional positivist approaches when it represents the views, beliefs and understandings of participants who criticise structural inequalities and forms of oppression present within social structures. This is due to the symbiotic relationship between the traditional, positivist approaches to science and the powerful elite who utilise science as a tool for justifying unequal power distribution and discrimination (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Knowledge is a commodity and as such is closely linked with power and politics (de Vos A. S., Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005; Topper, 2005). It is natural then that those who possess or seek power will seek knowledge that is accurate, valid and transferable, qualities of Quantitative Research data. Simultaneously, if it can be proven that science is objective and only reveals reality then any ideology of the elite framed in the language of science is automatically validated as a true and credible reflection of reality.

Qualitative approaches are also criticised for the manner in which they are implemented. The rigorous approaches described above have advanced the credibility of the paradigm significantly; however, some argue that this rigour exists on paper alone. The implementation of Qualitative research perpetuates the image of the approach as the “soft” alternative to the “real” science of Quantitative approaches. Qualitative research is viewed as an easy alternative to conducting the “hard” research involved in Quantitative studies.

The discussion above on the politics of power between the two paradigms is the primary contributor to this perception. Other reasons for this perception include the perception that Qualitative techniques require no special skills, that everybody knows how to have a conversation and by extension how to interview (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This statement is refuted by de Vos *et al.* (2005) who state that the skill set required by Qualitative Researchers, while different from those required by Quantitative Researchers, are equally specialised. Listening skills, empathy, observation skills, the ability to analytically examine text for meaning and the numerous other interpersonal and critical skills required for Qualitative research are part of our daily lives and are performed on a daily basis. It is the degree to which these skills are honed that defines a skilled Qualitative Researcher from an untrained individual.

A further criticism that can be levelled against the Qualitative Research paradigm is that, despite theoretical inclinations toward accepting reality as dynamic and constructed through the meaning making processes followed by individuals, social groups and communities, Qualitative Research practice places great emphasis on stabilising truth and depicting reality as a separate, stable state to be studied through the eyes of the participants (Lather, 1993). This trend can be linked to the “performance” conducted by Qualitative Research to the broader scientific community in an attempt to be acknowledged as a real science. This criticism should be viewed against the broader background of the power conflicts between the paradigms described above, but it should not be dismissed lightly as it holds serious implications for the practice of Qualitative Research. The trend described above runs contrary to the underpinning assumptions of many interpretive and constructivist approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and places researchers in a position where analyses conducted are an incoherent blend of Qualitative techniques based on Quantitative assumptions. This misappropriation of Qualitative Research is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 under the section that deals with the justification of the method.

Applicability of the Qualitative Approach to the study

The Qualitative Researcher can employ a number of techniques in the course of a single study and as such is equipped to produce research that provides a well-rounded, full-bodied account of a phenomenon under study. When placed within a context where participants have been systematically disempowered and silenced, Qualitative Researchers have methods that are aimed at telling the story of these participants and uncovering the deeper meanings behind everyday life. The Qualitative Research approach incorporates the expertise of the participant into the design and execution of the study as opposed to relegating them to the position of informant or subject of study. Within the context of the ERF the Qualitative approach allows the research team to enter into a conversation with the stakeholders in the programme and explore their perceptions within the context. The discussion the Qualitative approach is ideal for environments where the the information required is complex and dynamic in nature.

The Qualitative approach allows the researchers to create space for participants to express themselves in a manner that is most comfortable and appropriate to their world view. This approach also facilitates the empowerment/depowerment process between the researcher and participants as it encourages an open dialog through which relative positions could be adjusted as necessary to ensure an optimal flow of information between researchers and participants. The Qualitative paradigm, coupled with the principles and values of the Community Psychology theoretical framework, provided the core theoretical structure for enabling the *process* of the research. The process of the research here refers to the assumptions and values that underpin the decision making process in the day-to-day interactions with stakeholders in the study.

These two paradigms also satisfied the need for a theoretical framework to hold the study that would facilitate the writing and publications of accredited academic output. The need of the primary stakeholder, the ERF, was for an evaluation of their activities during the course of the implementation of the programme. In line with the principles of both Community Psychology and the Qualitative paradigms, the research team incorporated the need of the stakeholder by integrating the evaluation theory and practice framework into the study. The Evaluation framework also provided a clear guiding structure for the application of the Qualitative

techniques employed in a manner that would meet the needs of both the ERF and the research team while maintaining the integrity of the research paradigm.

Evaluation Theory and Practice

My fascination with evaluation stems from my obsession of how things work, especially within the social context. I have always strived to understand how individuals, and later communities, manage to achieve what they have. Initially this was motivated by a selfish desire to improve my set of skills and knowledge to aid me in my life's journey. Now this is motivated by the selfish desire to assist organisations, communities and social programmes in improving what they do by sharing organisational knowledge across disciplines, sectors and geographic locations and to be recognised for my role in this. My fascination with Evaluation also stems from the anxiety it evokes in individuals and the challenges it poses to me as a researcher because of this reaction to it. I also believe that effective evaluation is essential to the continued survival of any successful human endeavour.

As stated earlier in this section, this study is an **evaluation** of a community intervention located in a school in a township in Johannesburg, Gauteng. The study explicitly focussed on the application of Evaluation Theory and practice with the objective of describing the activities of the ERF in the context they operate within. The specific technique applied in the evaluation is the Appreciative Inquiry approach which was briefly described in the previous chapter as an approach that emphasises the positive and what works in an organisation and builds on these strengths. While Appreciative Inquiry has its own history and assumptions, it is heavily influenced by the theory and practice of Evaluation. It is therefore essential to discuss the definition, purpose, and types of Evaluations to clarify how the Appreciative Inquiry process fits within this field. The paradigms and methodological principles of Evaluation Research are essential for demonstrating how the Qualitative Research paradigm fits within what is often considered to be a Quantitative field. The section concludes with a brief discussion of the applicability of Evaluation Theory and practice to this study.

Definition

Chen (2005) defines Programme Evaluation as “the application of evaluation approaches, techniques and knowledge to systematically assess and improve the planning, implementation

and effectiveness of programmes” (p. 3). Evaluation, Evaluative research and Programme Evaluation are terms that will be used interchangeably within this section as is the norm in the field. The use of the term Programme Evaluation results from the fact that interventions, community projects or any set of activities set to achieve external objectives to meet some social need or to solve an identified problem are closely tied to the practice of evaluation research (Rutman, 1984). Evaluation and social intervention programmes are inextricably linked. One cannot discuss Evaluation without discussing the nature, purpose and types of social intervention programme. This contributes to Evaluation also being defined as the application of the social sciences to determine whether social programmes are needed, effective and likely to be used (Alkin M. C., 1990; Birckmayer & Weiss, 2000).

Rossi and Freeman (in Babbie & Mouton, 2008) assert that Programme Evaluation is the domain of the social sciences in which the full range of social science methods are applied in assessing a social programme. Social programmes are aimed at addressing specific social issues that have been identified as a priority or urgent within a context. According to de Vos, Strydom *et al.* (2005) social issues or problems “are not themselves objective phenomena but are social constructions involving assertions that certain conditions constitute problems that require public attention and ameliorative programmes” (pp. 371-372). These programmes often operate within severe human, financial, time, political and social resource limitations and as such are required to be efficient and effective to justify their existence to the funders and the communities in which they intervene (Azzam, 2011; Campbell D. , 2011; Hourton, 1999).

Evaluation refers to a research purpose rather than a specific research technique (Chen, 2005; Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh, 2011; Patton, 1997). The rise of the prevalence of Evaluation research as an area of specialisation within the social sciences can be credited to the desire of social scientists to make an actual difference in the world (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). The increase in the emphasis on programme efficacy can also be attributed to a rise in the awareness of the prevalence of social issues and the shift back to communities as the mechanism for addressing these social issues (Azzam, 2011; Stufflebeam, 2001). This trend, coupled with the financial crisis facing the global markets, has led to calls for increased accountability in terms of expenditure. Programme Evaluation has therefore received an increasing amount of attention in the social research sphere with the responsibility of providing decision makers in the political

and business sectors with the empirical evidence to initiate and sustain social intervention programmes that are relevant, efficient and effective (Brunner, 2004; Kaufman, *et al.*, 2006). Potter (1999) therefore correctly asserts that Evaluation research is not theoretical but focuses on answering specific practical questions about social programmes and their development. The definitions of Evaluation are as varied as the programmes which they evaluate due to the reflexive nature of evaluation research but there are common characteristics of Evaluation Research which cut across the sectors, disciplines, communities, social issues and motivations that influence how evaluations take place (Chen & Rossi, 1980; Hourton, 1999; Jaycox, *et al.*, 2006).

Pretskill and Catsambas (2006, in Dunlap, 2008) highlight several key characteristics of Evaluation that aid the definition of the practice. The first key characteristic of evaluation is that it is a systematic process. On the one hand this means that an attribute of evaluation is that it is an approach with a clear progression through various phases and that each phase may require a distinct approach. The phases in evaluation will be discussed in the section below which deals with the purpose of evaluation. A second attribute of the systematic approach of evaluation is that it evaluates systems and not phenomena in isolation.

The second key characteristic of evaluation according to Pretskill and Catsambas (2006) is that Evaluation is a planned and purposeful activity. What this implies is that all evaluations arise from a carefully considered assessment of the state of a programme and are aimed at addressing a specific need of the programme (Patton, 2008). The process of conducting this assessment and the various aims of Evaluation are discussed in the sections that follow.

The third characteristic of Evaluations is that they involve data collection on two levels that occur simultaneously. The first level of data collection occurs within the programme or organisation in particular. At this level the focus of the researcher is almost exclusively on the context of the programme and its environment, which includes its direct stakeholders. The second level of data collection involves collecting data about questions or issues that affect society in general. This is because evaluations need to take place in context (Reed, 2007) and cannot be done in a vacuum. The social milieu in which a programme or organisation exists has a significant impact on the nature, focus and impact of the programme and evaluation (Patton,

1987; Patton, 1999). This principle has significant overlap with the principles of Ecology in Community Psychology and the principle of Contextual interest in Qualitative Research.

Another key characteristic of Evaluation is that it is a process of enhancing knowledge for decision making. This characteristic remains at the fore of the Evaluation process regardless of the focus or motivation for conducting the evaluation (Kaufman, *et al.*, 2006). In other words the evaluator's role of informant to key decision makers remains a central function regardless of whether the purpose of the evaluation is assessment of progress, improvement of the programme or a needs assessment (Behrens & Kelly, 2008; Dunlap, 2008). The fifth characteristic of Evaluation is that it involves asking questions about issues that arise from everyday practice. As mentioned earlier in this section, Evaluation is interested in the practical application of knowledge to social issues and is less interested in the theoretical aspects of intervention in society. The focus of evaluation is therefore on the implementation and outcomes of service, as well as the quality of this service (Patton, 1997; Patton, 1998; Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

The sixth characteristic of Evaluation is that it highlights the role of the Evaluator and places the focus on the effect of the actions of the evaluator in the context of culture, society and the work environment (Dunlap, 2008; Potter, 2006). This characteristic demonstrates a form of reflexivity built into the core of the practice of Evaluation where the role of the evaluator is acknowledged within a larger context. This principle demonstrates an awareness of the role, position and power of the researcher as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The final characteristic of Evaluation highlighted by Pretskill and Catsambas (2006) is that Evaluation represents a significant allocation of time and resources. The implication behind this is that organisations or programmes cannot afford to invest in Evaluative activities unless there is a clear, pre-defined benefit to be gained from engaging in these activities.

In summary, the definition of Evaluation can vary considerably depending on the nature of the programme under assessment, the motivation for conducting the evaluation and the context in which the evaluation takes place. There are a number of key characteristics that define Evaluation research from general Social Science research and the central theme of these characteristics is Accountability. Accountability, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a relational process in which all stakeholders have a key role to play in ensuring that a shared

objective is achieved through a collective investment of resources and effort. Evaluation research is the application of Social Science methods to ensure that these collective efforts are being applied in the most effective and efficient manner possible and to highlight areas of improvement where relevant.

The field of Evaluation Research is guided by certain paradigms that shape the nature of a specific evaluation and it is essential to explore these paradigms in defining individual evaluations. The section that follows will discuss the paradigms that guide the field of Evaluation Research.

Paradigms in Evaluation Research

Potter (1999, 2006) classifies Evaluation paradigms into three broad categories, namely, Positivist approaches to Evaluation, Interpretive approaches to Evaluation and Critical-Emancipatory approaches to Evaluation. The practice of Evaluative research fits within the larger context of the scientific traditions and therefore shares much of the values, functions, beliefs, politics and assumptions of these traditions. Evaluative Research should be envisioned as a part of this context and therefore the contextual knowledge and background of these traditions applies to the field of Evaluation research. Consequently this section, which could be a detailed, nuanced discussion of the various paradigms in Evaluation research, will only briefly discuss the most basic relationships between Evaluation Research and the various research paradigms.

Positivist evaluation research is based on the premise that evaluation is limited to those aspects of the programme that can be objectively observed, tested and for which unambiguous proof can be supplied (Potter, 1999). As the name clearly indicates, the positivist paradigm follows the epistemological, ontological values, beliefs, traditions and assumptions of the positivist scientific traditions. The typical designs followed by positivist evaluators are experimental or quasi-experimental and are concerned with objectively measuring the outcomes and impacts of social programmes or organisations (Patton, 2008). The primary benefit of the positivist approaches is that they allowed evaluators to assess the depth of impact on a broad range of stakeholders in the programme or organisation.

The interpretative or naturalistic paradigms in Evaluation follow closely the assumptions, beliefs and principles of the interpretative and the constructionist traditions (Patton, 2002a; Patton, 2002b). This paradigm developed as an alternative to the objective, measurement-based methods of the positivist paradigm in which the researcher observed the programme or organisation as an outsider (Patton, 1987; Potter 1999). The positivist paradigm is criticised by proponents of the interpretative approach as too limited in focus to be useful for decision-making (Potter, 1999; Patton, 1987; Patton, 1999). The interpretative paradigm allows the evaluator to study the social programme or organisation through the use of methods that were sensitive to the values of the stakeholders in a programme and provided a broader focus for studying the impact of a programme (Peshkin, 1988). The reflexive nature of the approaches within this paradigm allows evaluators to iteratively refine the research design based on feedback from the field.

The critical-emancipatory paradigm places emphasis on the social concerns and agendas of the participants in an evaluation (Potter, 1999). This paradigm is based on the Critical social sciences and carries the view that researchers are either conscious or unconscious agents of the operation of wider social forces and that research, if taken uncritically, can be used to reinforce the status quo and existing power relations in society (Patton, 1994; Patton, 1997). A key issue in this form of research is how the evaluator's values and beliefs relate to the issues being dealt with in the programme and the role of the evaluator in this paradigm is scientific activist. The underpinning assumption of this paradigm is that the issues, focus, questions and understandings of the evaluation should arise from those within the programme as opposed to bureaucratic or external systems (Babbie & Mouton, 2008; Potter, 2006).

The paradigm in which an evaluation is situated clearly determines the emphasis and focus that the evaluation – and by extension the evaluator – will bring to the research. It is therefore essential that the paradigm in which the study will be situated be explicitly stated to aid both internal and external audiences in judging the true position of the research. This study fits firmly within the interpretative and constructionist tradition of evaluation.

The second step in defining an evaluation is clarifying the purpose of the evaluation which is discussed in the next section.

Purpose of Evaluation

As mentioned above, the specific definition of an evaluation is partly determined by the purpose behind the evaluation. Babbie and Mouton (2008) identify three distinct purposes for Evaluation, namely, Judgement-oriented, Improvement-oriented and knowledge-oriented evaluations. Judgement-oriented evaluations are driven by the need to establish the intrinsic value, merit or worth of a programme (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). These Evaluations are the type of evaluation most requested, and focus on whether the programme is successful (Campbell D. , 2011). Measuring success entails assessing the efficacy of the programme in addressing the social issue stated in its aims and objectives (Brunner, 2004; Chen & Rossi, 1980). It also entails assessing whether the targeted beneficiary group received the benefit of the intervention.

This form of evaluation often entails a Summative evaluation which emphasises the achievement of the set objectives of the programme. The key focus of this type of evaluation is accountability, compliance and these evaluations can be in the form of an audit (Yeaton & Sechrest, 1986). As discussed earlier evaluations are not exclusively focused on the financial cost of implementing a programme but also consider the human and social resources involved in implementing a programme. The considerations that inform this type of Evaluation typically include cost-benefit decisions for the stakeholders who are directly affected by the programme; quality control considerations for accreditation and regulatory bodies such as the Health Professionals Council of South Africa; funders of a programme may be interested in conducting audits of the services to ensure that the programme coordinators are held accountable; and lastly, this form of evaluation can aid decisions that impact on the programme's future (Alkin M. C., 1990; Azzam, 2011; Behrens & Kelly, 2008). Potter (1999, 2006) describes the judgement-oriented approach as the positivist approach and states that this approach limits evaluation to those aspects of social programmes that can be objectively observed and tested. The initiation of a judgement-oriented evaluation is often from outside actors or for the information of outside actors which speaks of power dynamics between inside and outside actors (Stufflebeam, 2001; Taylor & Balloch, 2005). The dynamics and politics of power in evaluation will be discussed in the section below which deals with the methodological principles of Evaluation Research.

Improvement-oriented approaches on the other hand are less formal; however, this should not be read as less rigid and rigorous by extension, and are aimed at improving the programme in some way. According to Babbie and Mouton (2008) improvement-oriented evaluations collect data at very specific periods of time during the life time of the programme, typically during the start up phase or early implementation phase, so as to make suggestions critical to the improvement of the programme and to identify and solve unanticipated problems. This process involves crucial feedback loops during which researchers and stakeholders consult to establish whether progress is being made toward desired outcomes and to adjust the implementation of the programme where necessary. Potter (1999) states that this process incorporates programme monitoring to identify aspects of the programme that work and areas of development. Improvement-oriented evaluations are often initiated internally by stakeholders who are involved with the everyday operation of the social programme. Both judgement-oriented and improvement oriented evaluations are concerned with the use and application of the information generated by the evaluation study. The considerations that inform this approach to evaluation include local model adoption, quality enhancement, enhancement of management strategies and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

Knowledge-oriented evaluations in contrast are concerned with generating understanding of how programmes work and how people change their behaviours and attitudes because of successful programmes (Alkin & Christie, 2004; Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This approach to evaluation has as its purpose the generation of new knowledge in the form of a programme model or underlying theory that distinguishes between types of intervention (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This approach allows all stakeholders and other evaluators to openly examine the purpose, objectives, context and implementation of the evaluation to lay bare all the assumptions and biases that underlie the results of the evaluation (Hourton, 1999). This approach can be contrasted with the “black box” approach typically employed by other evaluations in which evaluators play the role of expert and create an air of mystique in which the evaluation process involves a hidden analysis phase before the results are produced (Alkin & Christie, 2004). This approach to research is often driven by actors outside the programme, typically evaluators or research institutions who have identified the programme as a case study which could contribute to the knowledge base of the field they intervene in, as well as to the broader knowledge system of the field of Evaluation (Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh, 2011).

It is important to note that the above approaches are not mutually exclusive and that most evaluations fall on a continuum between the approaches discussed above. The considerations that inform knowledge-oriented evaluations are the generalisations that could be made about the effectiveness of a programme, informing policy related to the social issue being addressed, extrapolating principles about what works in relation to the social issue being addressed and building new theories and models about intervention in specific social issues and for evaluating social programmes in specific contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The purpose of the evaluation shapes the evaluation in that it: determines the type of questions asked, the measure of involvement of the stakeholders, the position of the evaluator within the programme and evaluation process and the methods chosen to conduct the evaluation. The chronology of the evaluation process places the process of determining the purpose of the evaluation as the first step in conducting an evaluation (Potter, 1999) which places this phase at the core of any evaluation study. Later in this section the politics of evaluation will be discussed and the power dynamics that influence this phase of the evaluation process will be highlighted but suffice it to say that the practice or act of evaluating is in many ways a political one which implies that evaluators are required to maintain a critical awareness of the power dynamics of the context in which they interact. The third step in defining a specific evaluation is the selection of the type of evaluation.

Types of Evaluation

The section above discussed how the intentions or purposes of an evaluation shaped the identity of the research study from conception. This section discusses the selection of the specific type of evaluation, which is dependent on the phase in which the programme finds itself at the time where the evaluation is implemented (Chen, 2005). According to Chen (2005) selecting evaluation options best suited to the needs of the programme often involves reconciling trade-offs between these options to ensure the best fit. This statement implies that there is no perfect fit between programme and evaluation type and that one should always anticipate some measure of error in the course of the evaluation study. Babbie and Mouton (2008) divide Evaluation studies into the Evaluation of need, the Evaluation of process, the Evaluation of outcome, and the Evaluation of efficiency. Similarly, Alken and Christie (2004) classify the types of evaluation

into approaches that emphasise methods, use and valuing. Chen (2005) on the other hand classifies evaluation types as dependent on four phases of a programme, namely, the formulation and development phase, the initial implementation phase, the mature implementation phase and the outcome evaluation phase. Similarly, Rossi and Freeman (2004) classify the analyses that fit within these categories of evaluation as the analysis related to the conceptualisation and design of interventions, the monitoring and implementation of the programme and the assessment of programme effectiveness and efficiency.

The classifications proposed by Babbie and Mouton, Rossi and Freeman, and Chen share a number of similarities and are discussed simultaneously in this section with the subtle differences between these authors briefly highlighted. The classification by Alken and Christie represent the continuum of Evaluation methods and can be considered as an aid to positioning any Evaluation study.

As stated above, the phase of the programme determines the selection of the type of evaluation. This is due to the fact that a social programme has a number of distinct phases, each with a specific set of needs. This phase of the programme often consists of two sub-phases, namely a needs assessment or evaluation and formative research (Chen, 2005). The evaluation of need aims to establish what the specific needs of a target population are in respect to the programme being considered (Babbie & Mouton, 2008; Rossi & Freeman, 2004). This is due to the fact that the development of a social programme is often a response to a social problem which describes a set of phenomena that detract from the quality of life of a particular social group (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). This phase informs the evaluability assessment of the programme or organisation in the later phases if it is performed correctly. Evaluability assessment refers to the procedures followed by evaluators in determining whether a programme is ready to be managed for results and whether an evaluation would contribute to the performance of the programme (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). The evaluability assessment is also referred to as the pre-assessment of evaluability and is concerned with whether the goals and objectives of a programme are defined clearly enough to be measurable, whether the logic behind the intervention strategy is defined in a manner that can be tested, the internal accountability structures and procedures and whether the programme or organisation has the capacity to act on evaluation findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The formative research process is one that aims to investigate the characteristics, cultures and contexts of the target group and can provide the context for the opinions expressed in the needs assessment (Chen, 2005). This process aims to establish the specific expectations that potential clients of the programme hold. This aids the development of the rationale for the programme and is the first step in developing the infrastructure of the programme when coupled with the programme plan (Chen, 2005; Patton, 2008). The programme plan and rationale provide the means for communicating the purpose, objectives, specific aims, method and risk management strategies for the programme to key stakeholder groups. Once the planning and development of the programme has been completed it is time to move onto the implementation phase where as Chen (2005) puts it: “is where the action is in programs” (p. 129).

The implementation phase is termed the Evaluation of process by Babbie and Mouton (2008) and is the consistent assessment of whether the programme is being implemented in a manner consistent with the stated aims and objectives. Chen (2005) on the other hand reserves the term Process evaluation for the mature phase of implementation and places emphasis on distinguishing the initial implementation phase from the mature implementation phase. According to Chen the initial implementation phase is defined by the need to quickly assess the implementation of the programme to date and to route this feedback to programme coordinators for the development of the programme. The purpose behind this phase of evaluation is often improvement-oriented and as such is often driven by internal needs and actors (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). Another term for this form of improvement-oriented approach to evaluation is Formative Evaluation which is an evaluation that is conducted simultaneously to the implementation of a programme with the aim of improving the programme (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). The evaluation of the initial phase of implementation requires a flexible approach that is carried out swiftly without sacrificing scientific rigour (Chen, 2005).

The mature phase of evaluation by contrast is often driven by the need for accountability and is aimed at external audiences who are required to make some sort of value judgement of the programme. This phase of the programme requires implementation evaluation. Implementation evaluation constitutes an essential part of all evaluations and can take place even when the outcomes of an evaluation are not assessed (Azzam, 2011; Kaufman, *et al.*, 2006). Implementation evaluation is more commonly referred to as Programme Monitoring and

describes a process of systematically assessing the programme in practice (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). This process is essential to the evaluation process in that it provides the information necessary to determine the extent of programme delivery with the aim of substantiating programme efficacy (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). In addition Programme Monitoring aids the diffusion of the programme in other contexts as it details the day-to-day activities required to establish and maintain the programme. Programme Monitoring provides the organisation with the means to incorporate corrective measures as a regular part of programme operations to ensure that the programme remains responsive to the dynamic environment in which it exists while remaining on course with the guiding objectives (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). The outside audiences often initiate an evaluation with the purpose of assessing the success of the programme and as such this type of evaluation fits within the judgement-oriented approach (Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh, 2011). The judgement-oriented approach is also associated with the evaluation of outcome and efficiency (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The evaluation of outcome or Outcomes evaluation or Summative evaluation describes an assessment that is guided by the objectives of the programme and through the use of reliable and valid measures or indicators, determines whether these objectives have been met satisfactorily (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). The establishment of outcome is not sufficient for the development of a sustainable programme model. It is necessary to carry out the implementation of a programme in a manner that is as efficient as possible. The process of determining the efficiency of a programme is termed the evaluation of efficiency or a Cost-Benefit evaluation. The purpose of a Cost-Benefit evaluation is to determine whether the measured benefit accrued to the target population balances against the accrued cost of implementing the programme (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). The evaluation procedures used during this phase emphasize scientific rigour over speed and seek to be exhaustive in the examination of the programme (Chen, 2005). It is important to note that both phases of implementation can have either improvement-oriented or judgement-oriented purposes and that the description given above of the distinction between the two phases of implementation is merely the typical needs associated with each phase.

The brief discussion above is intended to provide an overview of where the various types of evaluation fit in but did not elaborate in any detail on the specific types of evaluation for the sake of simplicity. We will briefly discuss three interlinked themes that cut across all types of

evaluation, namely, accountability, coverage and bias. As briefly described in the section discussing Community Psychology, accountability is a relational process that requires participation from a particular group of stakeholders who share a vision or objective relative to a particular phenomenon. Within this relational process, each stakeholder has the dual responsibility of ensuring that they play their role within the collaborative process and that others play their roles within the process. This process applies within the context of Evaluative research but will be expanded to fit the Evaluative framework more effectively.

Alkin and Christie (2004) compare accountability with auditing by stating that it refers to a process of giving account or being answerable or being capable of being accounted for. This process of accounting within the evaluation context has three distinct features, namely goal accountability, process accountability and outcome accountability. Goal accountability describes the process through which reasonable and appropriate goals are established for the programme by stakeholders both within and external to the programme (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Regulatory bodies, steering committees, community representatives and the managing structures of the programme are responsible for establishing this type of accountability. Process accountability examines whether reasonable and appropriate procedures for accomplishing those goals have been established and implemented (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Process accountability can be address through a well-developed monitoring system that is rigorously applied.

Rossi and Freeman (2004) identify three reasons why programmes may fail process accountability, namely, no or not enough treatment, delivery of the wrong treatment and unstandardised treatment implementation. The first category describes a situation where the intervention does not reach the target population at all or in an insignificant manner. The second category describes a situation where the manner in which the intervention is carried out negates the benefit derived from the intervention or that the delivery system requirements are too sophisticated for the resources available to the programme (Rossi & Freeman, 2004). The last category describes a situation where the intervention is delivered at the discretion of operators and not according to a reasonable standardised procedure. The programme management and operators are responsible for ensuring this type of accountability (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Accountability can be considered the process that underpins the need for determining coverage and bias. Coverage refers to the extent to which the intervention reaches the target population at

the levels specified in the programme design (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Bias on the other hand is the process through which only certain sub-groups of the target population receiving proper application of the programme's intervention. Examining coverage and bias forms part of all the phases of the evaluation process to a greater or lesser degree.

The discussion above separated evaluation approaches into Needs Assessment, Formative Evaluation, Programme Monitoring, Implementation Evaluation, Outcomes/Summative Evaluation and Cost-Benefit Evaluation. The classification by Alkin and Christie (2004) places these various Evaluations into three broad categories, namely, methods, valuing and use. The field of Evaluation, like all other research fields, is complex, dynamic and nuanced in application. The classification of evaluation categories into higher orders that relate to specific underpinning assumptions in the field assists evaluators in positioning themselves and the study in a manner that aids the interpretation of the results. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, it is essential that all of the underpinning philosophies, values, beliefs and assumptions of a paradigm be made explicit to aid the replication of the research. Within the classification by Alkin and Christie the Evaluation paradigm is built on the twin pillars of Accountability and Social Inquiry. According to these authors Evaluation research provides the information necessary to determine what an organisation or social programme is answerable for and whether it can account for its role in the process. Furthermore they state that the Social Inquiry pillar deals with the systemic study of the behaviour of groups in social contexts and what the appropriate measures are for studying this behaviour (Alkin & Christie, 2004).

Within this classification the Methods branch of Evaluation is concerned with obtaining generalisability and the construction of knowledge (Alkin & Christie, 2004). All evaluators have methodological concerns and place emphasis on the maintenance of scientific rigour in the application of social science research methods within the Evaluation paradigm. The Evaluation theorists classified within the Methods branch, however, view the research process as the genesis of programme evaluation and emphasise well-designed experimental studies with clearly defined controls that are applied rigorously (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Providing a nuanced discussion of the key role players in the development of this particular branch of evaluation is beyond the scope of this dissertation but the key theorists will be mentioned briefly. The theorist's name and the year of the key publication as indicated by Alkin and Christie (2004) will be mentioned and

where I am familiar with the work of a particular theorist, I will add publications I consider critical. Theorists credited as critical to this branch by Alkin and Christie (2004) include Donald Campbell (1957), Ralph Tyler (1940), Eduard Suchman (1967), Thomas Cook (1966), Robert Boruch (1997), Peter Rossi (1979) and here I would include his later work (Rossi, 2004), Huey-Tsyh Chen (1987) as well as his later work (Chen, 2005), Lee Cronbach (1980) and Carol Weiss (1972a, 1972b, 1973). These authors focused on the development of a reliable and valid research framework that fitted with the practical constraints of Evaluation Research. Evaluation that is aimed at developing the available method set for experimental approaches to evaluation often fall within this classification.

The Valuing branch of Evaluation theory places emphasis on the role of the evaluator in placing value on the data (Alkin & Christie, 2004). This branch of Evaluation works from the position that the role of the evaluator is to make judgements of the data and based on the data. This branch of Evaluation practice is primarily driven by the work of Michael Scriven, especially on his early work (1967, 1972a) in which he clearly defined the role of the evaluator as empirical judge. According to Scriven (1983) in (Alkin & Christie, 2004) the greatest failure of an evaluator would be simply to provide information to decision-makers under the guise of remaining neutral. Scriven was also one of the first evaluators to advocate goal-free evaluation which advocates the rejection of the programme outcomes as the default reference point for the evaluation and for the evaluator to identify the real accomplishments of the programme. Other theorists credited with making critical contributions to this branch of Evaluation theory includes Elliot Eisner (1976, 1985, 1991a/b, 1998), Thomas Owens and Robert Wolf who were proponents of Adversary Evaluation in the 1980s, Barry McDonald (1979) who depicted the evaluator as a negotiator between the multiple perspectives of participants, Ernest House (1991,1993) who rejected the utilitarianism of the Methods branch which holds the assumption that policies and guidelines are inherently correct, Robert Stake (1975, 2000, 2001) who recognised the multiplicity of stakeholder values but adamantly reserved the role of evaluating and valuing for the evaluator, Barry MacDonald (1979) who recognised the multiplicity of perspectives that need to be considered when making a value judgement and posited that it is the responsibility of the evaluator to present the values of different stakeholder groups, Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1989) who worked from the position that the value judgement should be made by participants but facilitated by the evaluator. Implicit in this approach to evaluation is the

assumption that some data holds greater worth than others and that the investment in the most valuable accomplishments of the programme or organisation is the key to sustainable success of the programme or organisation.

The last branch of classification is the use branch which is also referred to as the decision-oriented theories (Alkin & Christie, 2004). This branch of Evaluation theory aims to provide decision-makers with information deemed critical to the decision-making processes in an organisation or social programme. Daniel Stufflebeam is credited by Alkin and Christie (2004) as a key figure in this branch of Evaluation theory with the contribution of his Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) model of evaluation. This cyclical process places emphasis on evaluation design that adheres to carefully designed evaluation models while maintaining flexibility to respond to context. This process emphasises the view that evaluation is not a product but a process that entails providing a continual stream of information to decision-makers to ensure that programmes continually improve themselves (Stufflebeam, 1983 in Alkin & Christie, 2004). Other key theorists in this branch of Evaluation include Malcolm Provus (1971) and Joseph Wholey (1981, 1983) who view the purpose of evaluation as a process designed to assist programme administrators and programme managers respectively (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Michael Patton is representative of a branch of the utilisation theorists that are concerned less about the needs of the decision maker's needs and more on producing evaluation that provides useful evaluation processes to a broader spectrum of stakeholders (Alkin & Christie, 2004). The use branch has a number of other key theorists who have contributed to developing nuanced approaches toward decision-oriented evaluation and detailed discussions on these theorists can be found in Alkin and Christie (2004). The purpose of the above discussion is to illustrate the level of nuance available when seeking position an evaluation within the field of Evaluation Research. The categorisation of an evaluation places it within a set of assumptions held by sub-sets of the discipline and the evaluator needs to be aware of these assumptions to ensure that they can reflect the research process as accurately as possible.

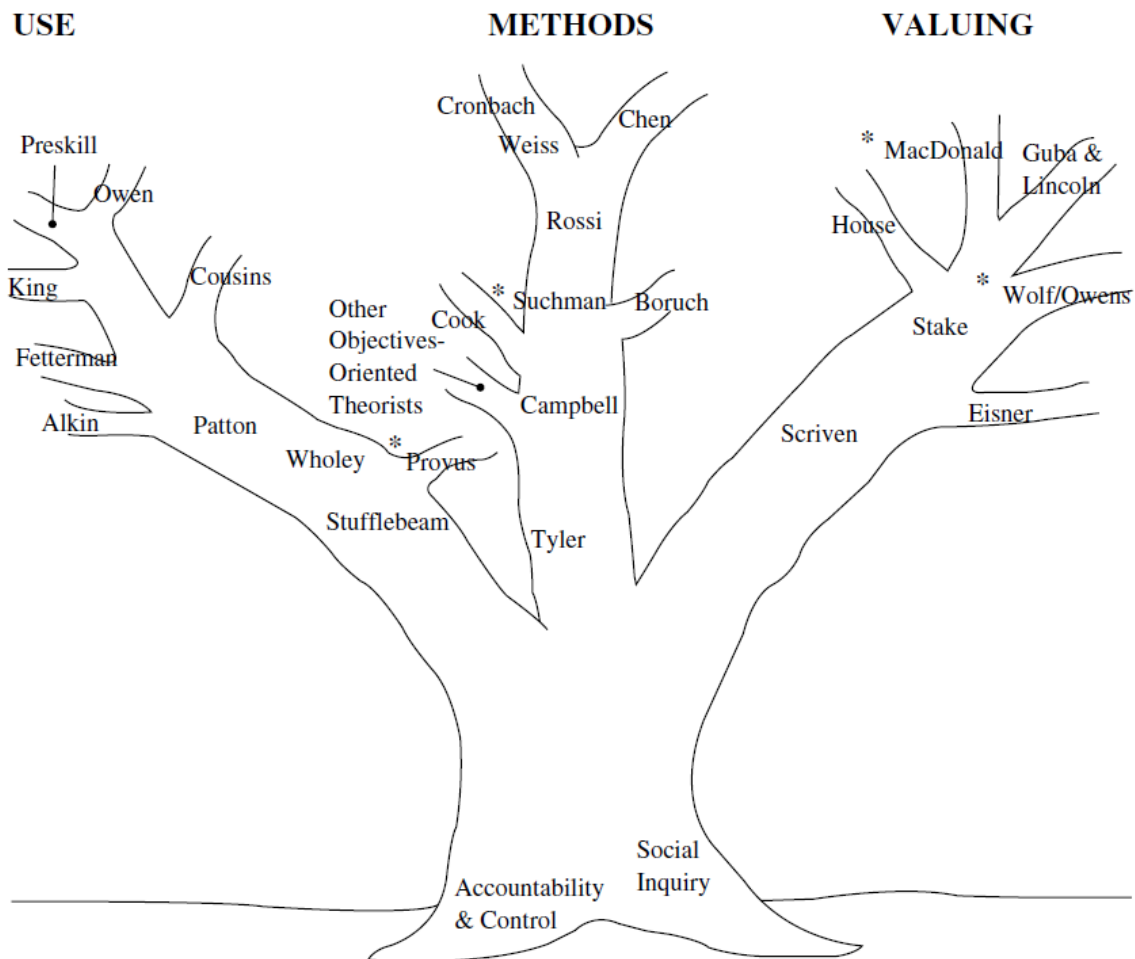


Figure 2.3 Alkin and Christie's (2004) Evaluation Theory Tree

The politics of evaluation

Evaluation research, like all other forms of research, is subject to a number of political undercurrents. On one level the politics in the field of Evaluative research is embedded in the broader power struggle between the conflicting paradigms in the social sciences. As briefly discussed in the section covering Qualitative research, the paradigm wars are embedded within a larger underlying power struggle concerning the production and ownership of knowledge. As an applied social science, Evaluation research is fully subject to the vagaries of the power struggles of the paradigm wars but also to the macro, meso and micro politics of the context in which the

programme being evaluated takes place. The paradigm wars serve to highlight the contested nature of knowledge and knowledge production and highlight the manner in which discriminatory ways of knowing are produced (Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh, 2011; Stufflebeam, 2001; Taylor & Balloch, 2005). The perception of science as an objective and neutral observer of human nature in the social sciences has often aided the maintenance of discriminatory social structures and contributed to the oppression of marginalised groups (Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; Pitts & Smith, 2007). This can be said to be particularly true in the case of Evaluation research which is constructed as a critical tool for decision-makers which is perceived to provide an objective tool for allocating credibility to social problems and those who seek to address them (Pitts & Smith, 2007).

According to Taylor and Balloch (2005) “evaluation should be understood as inherently political” (p. 1), which implies that the act of evaluation itself is a political act and not that evaluation acts within a political context. The distinction between the two phrases is a fine but crucial one. To construe all evaluations as political forces evaluators to constantly take cognisance of whose interests they are representing (Patton, 1997). The purpose of the evaluation links the expected outcomes of the study firmly to the broader context in that the purpose of the evaluation is closely linked to the motives of the various stakeholder groups. The act of evaluating is therefore a political act in that it represents the need and perspectives of certain stakeholder groups (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Issues such as ownership, relevance, understandability, access, involvement, improvement and capacity-building need to be moved from the margins of the research process to the focus and should be accorded the same importance as the issues of validity and reliability. Evaluation studies which emphasise empowerment and which claim to represent the plurality of stakeholder perspectives often fail to acknowledge the asymmetrical distribution of power within the context, social programme and the research process (Ambrose, 2005). Taylor and Balloch (2005) argue that the goal of the evaluator should not be to seek a more objective evaluation practice to overcome political bias but rather to accept and understand evaluation as an inherently and inescapably political exercise imbued with issues of power and privilege at every level.

Applicability of the Evaluation Research Approach to the current study

As stated in the discussion of the applicability of the Qualitative Paradigm, the need for an evaluative approach was expressed by the programme with which the research team collaborated on this study. The social programme required an evaluation to address the need to justify its existence in the complex social and political environment in which it exists. The programme also needed to assess the process of implementation to date to aid the improvement of implementation in future. While the majority of evaluations are quantitative, the various contexts in which the programme operates, the life-stage of the programme and the resource constraints faced by both research team and the social programme would seriously curtail the effective application of quantitative methods. It was essential that a research approach was chosen that would allow for the dynamic interaction between the research team and all of the stakeholders of the programme. The choice of a Qualitative Evaluation arose from the need to capture the complex and dynamic interactions that occurred within the social programme. This approach was preferable to the quantitative approach which placed emphasis on the development and measurement of pure variables devoid of context; the manipulation and control of processes being studied and the neutral stance of the evaluator which would create distance between the evaluator and the focus of the evaluation, namely the stakeholders (Kalafat & Illback, 1998). Using the classification structure provided by Alkin and Christie (2004) this study can be seen to be positioned on the Use branch of evaluative practices. This is because the ultimate aim of the study was to provide stakeholders with information in a facilitative manner that would lead to constructive change within the programme. The study was conducted during the early implementation phase of the organisation's life span and was therefore Formative in design and implementation.

As briefly discussed in the first chapter – and further elaborated on in the third chapter – the context in which the evaluation took place was one of skewed power dynamics and a context where there was much to be negative about. In an attempt to curtail an anticipated slew of complaints and finger pointing, the researchers sought an evaluative technique that would allow the researchers to engage with the stakeholders, emphasise what is working and allow for constructive criticism of the programme. The research technique chosen was Appreciative Inquiry which was accepted by the coordinating team of the social programme.

The Appreciative Inquiry Approach

When I first came across the Appreciative Inquiry Approach I was extremely excited at the prospect of using it in research. I was informed of the approach by another evaluator who told me of how the approach helped her generate excitement and interest among her research participants. My excitement stemmed from the fact that I was going to be able to be appreciative of the efforts of the programmes that I would evaluate. I always try to look for the positive in a situation and this approach would allow me to do so while executing an evaluation. I also foresaw how this approach could help generate buy-in from research participants who would otherwise be too intimidated to engage with me, the mighty researcher, on more than the superficial level. This approach, in my opinion, provided the perfect platform for giving participants a voice without my having to sacrifice control of the study and possibly risking the integrity of the findings. I am aware of how positivist that sounds...

The Appreciative Inquiry Approach is the tip of an iceberg that was visible to the various stakeholders who interacted with the research project. This approach was the explicit means through which the research was executed. As discussed in the introduction section of this chapter, the application of the Appreciative Inquiry approach is underpinned by the theoretical frameworks discussed above. This should not imply that the theory and practice inherent to the Appreciative Inquiry approach is not sufficiently robust to conduct the study. The amalgamation of the various theoretical frameworks described above happened organically in the course of the study. The Community Psychology and Qualitative Methods frameworks were among the first theoretical frameworks that the researcher was exposed to and as such influences his approach to research on all levels. The practice and theory of Evaluation become part of the researcher's frame of reference later in his career and, like the Community and Qualitative frameworks, became embedded in his frame of reference. The Appreciative Inquiry approach was selected because of the degree of overlap between the principles, assumptions and practices between the three approaches discussed above. The choice of the Appreciative Inquiry approach was therefore motivated by the ease with which it integrated with the Community Psychology, Qualitative Research and Evaluation theoretical frameworks. The choice of this approach was

also motivated by the need to proactively mitigate the anticipated negative bias associated with deficit-focused or problem centric evaluation approaches. The Appreciative Inquiry approach was also chosen because of its history of encouraging active participation from all stakeholders in a manner that compensated for skewed power relations in organisations or programmes by creating space for all stakeholders to voice their opinions. This section aims to discuss the history and development of Appreciative Inquiry and how this defined the field. The principles and assumptions underlying Appreciative Inquiry, already mentioned in Chapter 1, are then discussed in greater detail. The discussion then attempts to fit Appreciative Inquiry within research frameworks. Criticisms of Appreciative Inquiry are discussed, and a consideration of the applicability of Appreciative Inquiry to this study concludes this section.

Definition

Appreciative Inquiry is defined as “the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organisation, community [or social programme] when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological and human terms” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). Appreciative Inquiry is an approach that explicitly, but not exclusively, focuses on the positive within a community, social programme, organisation and the individuals within these entities. An explicit focus on the positive entails exploring those aspects of the organisation, community or programme that work and are valued by individuals within the organisation, community or programme (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Datta, 2003; Datta, 2007). “Appreciative Inquiry is a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in organisations in order to create a better future” (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p. 5). The approach works on the assumption that by focusing on the positive and collectively constructing ways of building on what works contributes to strength-based development for the programme, organisation or community (hereafter collectively referred to as the programme to ease reading). The Appreciative Inquiry approach is not a once-off measure that instantly corrects the deficits within the programme, but rather a process that incorporates the entire organisation in what is termed a whole system event (Reed, 2007). In simpler terms this means that while the inquiry summit, which is the event where all stakeholders are gathered and the inquiry process is first implemented, may be a single event in the life span of the programme, but the full Appreciative

Inquiry process continues long after the culmination of the inquiry summit and ideally embeds within the culture, practice, planning and collective thinking of the programme (Bushe G. R., 2007; Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Dunlap, 2008).

Appreciative Inquiry is also described as “social construction in action” (McNamee in Reed, 2007, p. viii). This statement describes the central role ascribed to the function of social construction within the approach. Social construction falls within the Constructionist paradigm and views reality as a fluid, variable set of social constructions and seeks to demonstrate how constructions of reality make certain actions possible and others prohibited (Bradley & Morss, 2002; Burr, 1995; Gergen K. , 1999; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). “Constructionism proposes that the most important aspect of social life is what people do together because in their joint actions they create a world that values certain beliefs and practices” (McNamee, 2003, p. 23). In other words, the meaning given to particular representations of people, objects and phenomena informs our experience of these people, objects and phenomena which are then shared through a shared language that aids the construction of reality (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004; Valsiner, 2006; van Sant, 1989). The centrality of this assumption to Appreciative Inquiry is what drives the need for inclusivity in the process (Lewis & van Tiem, 2004). By excluding a participant group, we lose a portion of the reality that constitutes the social programme. This principle of inclusivity describes why Appreciative Inquiry is cooperative and co-evolutionary (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Jacobsgaard, 2003). As each participant contributes what they value about the organisation the collective story of the organisation evolves to accommodate this latest contribution to its history and everyday life.

The roots of Appreciative Inquiry lie in organisational development and as such one of the aims of Appreciative Inquiry is to generate sustainable, positive change within the programme. McNamee (in Reed, 2007) states that Appreciative Inquiry positions itself as applied research which is aimed at helping programmes be more effective in their worlds. Organisational development practitioners, such as David Cooperrider, were concerned with the performance and sustained improvement of programmes in their contexts.

Cooperrider noticed that by asking questions about what people valued in their organisation they spoke in an unrestricted manner that provided greater insight into the assumptions and beliefs that underlie everyday practice. By focusing on the positive aspects of the programme, the assumption is that positive development of the programme will be built on what works in the organisation. This is described as the positive-focussed development model. Positive focused development is described as the process through which the strengths of a programme are exposed and the circumstances in which these strengths are displayed are understood and a plan of action is developed to build on these strengths (Reed, 2007). This can be contrasted with the deficit-focused model of development which is the core of more orthodox developmental strategies. The deficit-focussed model of development begins with the assumption that the programme has a problem that needs to be fixed or that the programme is not working as well as it should be (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Patton, 2003). This approach may imply that the programme is unsatisfactory, inadequate or underperforming without taking into consideration the context in which the programme operates. To borrow from Community Psychology theory, what may seem like inadequate programme performance or poor programme implementation may simply be organic adaptation to the needs and circumstances of the individuals that the programme services.

Boyd and Bright (2007) discuss the contrast between these approaches on a continuum which is subject to what they term normative forces. In this depiction the underlying assumption is that all programmes will strive to revert to a state of “normal” which is neither positively nor negatively deviant (see Figure 2.4). Within this continuum the deficit-focused approaches form part of the dynamics of reaction and restoration which are enacted to fix problems within the programme in order to shift it away from negative deviance to “ordinary” (Boyd & Bright, 2007). On the other hand positive-focused approaches, such as Appreciative Inquiry, seek to move the programme from ordinary to positive deviance through the dynamics of pro-action and extension that aim to elevate strengths within the programme (Boyd & Bright, 2007). As mentioned, both of these processes are subject to what is termed normative momentum which is the drive toward the “normal” (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Grant & Humphries, 2006). The implication is that unless a positive change is accepted systematically and integrated into the everyday life of a programme, the programme will inevitably revert back to a state of normality where the exceptional remains the exception. What Appreciative Inquiry strives to do is to shift the entire system so that what is

extraordinary or positively deviant, becomes the new standard for ordinary. The distinction between Appreciative Inquiry and other positive-driven approaches is that Appreciative Inquiry is not just about the positive (Bushe, 2007). According to Bushe (2007) the focus of Appreciative Inquiry is generativity which aims to give new ways of viewing, understanding and constructing social structures and institutions to provide new options for action.

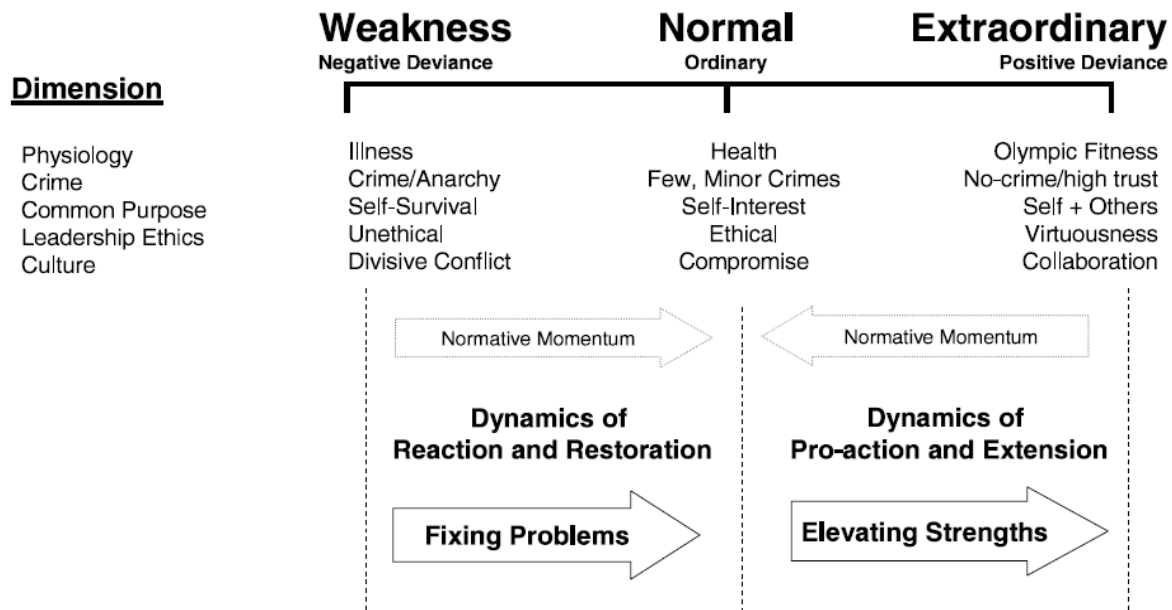


Figure 2.4 Depiction of the normative momentum in organisational development (Boyd & Bright, 2007)

The Appreciative Inquiry approach is underpinned by a number of principles and assumptions that guide the effective implementation of the approach.

The principles and assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

Coghlan *et al.* (2003) describe Appreciative Inquiry as “both a philosophy and a worldview with particular principles and assumptions and a structured set of core processes” (p. 6). The principles and assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry provide the framework in which implementation of the approach can take place in a number of settings and contexts. The principles make links between theoretical developments across a range of disciplines and while abstract, provide the guidelines for practice. The assumptions underlying Appreciative Inquiry provide the basis from which

Appreciative Inquiry can start. The assumptions are the principles translated into clarifying statements that explicitly state the position of the researcher in the context to facilitate the process (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Reed, 2007). The assumptions behind Appreciative Inquiry are stated as a definitive result of the history and development of the discipline and are presented as the collective lessons learnt by the field (Reed, 2007). The presentation of the assumptions as definitive does not imply that these assumptions are unquestioned and accepted uncritically by Appreciative Inquiry practitioners. Rather, these assumptions should be perceived as part of a reflexive conversation between practitioners as well as between participants and practitioners in the field of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The five principles of AI are based on the original work of David Cooperrider (1986) and have been expanded by practitioners over the years (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). The principles listed below are mainly described by Reed (2007) but do contain references from the authors listed where variations or crucial nuances to the principle are described.

The Constructivist Principle: This principle is related to social constructionist theory (Gergen, in Reed, 2007). This principle refers to the idea that our thoughts about the world are developed through interpretation and construction, rather than merely the simple recording of phenomena. What this means is that as different people interpret the world, there are different stories to describe the same event. The pursuit of one objective truth, neglects the value that each of these stories may hold (Moore, 2008). This principle is especially valuable in the South African context where we have a number of cultures, each with their own world view, existing alongside each other. Appreciative Inquiry pays attention to the processes of construction and the way these stories have the power to shape and reflect the way people think and act. Embedded within this principle are the key principles of Social Constructionism which include a critical stance toward common place phenomena and taken for granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, the belief that knowledge is constructed and sustained through social processes and that knowledge production is inextricably linked to social action.

A critical stance toward everyday knowledge entails making the familiar unfamiliar by taking a critical stance to experiences, expressions, social interactions, rituals and symbols that are common in the lived world in which the research study takes place (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). This stance places the researcher in a dynamic role that shifts between engaged participant and objectively distanced researcher with the aim of examining the context as a source of data. This stance is based on the rationale behind Constructionism that states that much of the understanding we have of the world is a reflection of our perceptions of it (Gergen, 1999). This view fits in with the epistemology of the Qualitative paradigm, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, which posits that reality is not a separate, stable phenomenon that can be objectively studied. Appreciative Inquiry therefore encourages practitioners to ask questions and challenge assumptions about how things work within the programme.

Historical and cultural specificity refers to the fact that the way we understand the world is not universal and that our understandings of the world are bound to very specific cultural and historic contexts (Reed, 2007). This principle acknowledges that there exists different types of knowledge and that each type of knowledge is of equal value. Appreciative Inquiry practitioners therefore have to be aware of these differences and strive to collaboratively create a platform which has the capacity to effectively accommodate the various types of knowledge present within a programme.

The belief that knowledge is created and sustained through social processes emphasises the importance of social processes in the construction and dissemination of knowledge (Gergen, 1999). This principle highlights the need to allow space for participants to communicate during the research process to facilitate the construction of a representative knowledge base (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). This principle also highlights the fact that social processes, such as skewed power dynamics directly impact on the nature of the knowledge constructed during a given interaction (Moore, 2008). Appreciative Inquiry practitioners therefore have to ensure that the research process is transparent, accessible and that it does not simply acknowledge the loudest or most powerful voices in the room. Conversely the research process should not over emphasise the voices of the marginalised over those considered to be more powerful. Rather, the Appreciative Inquiry process should be one where all voices are heard equally so that

stakeholders can construct a working picture of the programme based on the knowledge of the entire structure and not just that of the decision-makers or disempowered.

The understanding that knowledge and social action are inextricably interlinked describes a position that demonstrates the influence of Participatory Action Research on Appreciative Inquiry. This principle highlights the epistemological stance of Constructivism that by studying and changing our understanding of the world, we change the way we act and behave (Reed, 2007). This principle takes the position that by changing the way individuals perceive their world, we can change the way they interact with it. The Appreciative Inquiry approach takes this position a step further by stating that by changing the perceptions in a positive manner, we can generate more positive interaction between individuals and the world they live in (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The Constructionist and Critical theory principles discussed above are present in all of the principles that inform Appreciative Inquiry to a greater or lesser degree and will not be discussed in great depth with each of the principles that follow. Rather, each principle should be carefully examined for overlap with these theories as the discussion progresses.

The Principle of Simultaneity: This principle highlights the need to acknowledge that inquiry and change are simultaneous (Dunlap, 2008). They cannot be seen as separate and sequential stages in development. By conducting an inquiry we stimulate reflection and thought that may lead to different ways of thinking and doing. By acknowledging this process throughout the Appreciative Inquiry we can manage the change taking place as it happens. This principle acknowledges the Qualitative position that research inevitably affects the context that it aims to observe and that research and change are inextricably linked (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Appreciative Inquiry practitioners should be aware that the nature of research and intervention in this approach falls firmly within the realm of the critical, action research paradigm. Within this paradigm consultation, research and intervention happen simultaneously and researchers are also expected to act as activists, project managers, consultants, lobbyists and policy analysts at various phases of the research project.

The Poetic Principle: This principle emphasises the way that people author their world continually (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). They will choose the parts of their story that

they are most interested in, or that they are most invested in at the time and experiment with different story lines. The process of Appreciative Inquiry needs to support people through this individual and collective process to ensure that they remain engaged by taking them through the authoring process in a way that makes it accessible to all (Bushe G. R., 2007). This principle primarily emphasises the ability of the individual to author their own story without censorship from the larger group or outside influences. This is in contrast to the Constructivist principle which emphasises the collective authoring of stories which may result in the censorship of individual stories.

The Anticipatory Principle: This principle suggests that the way people think about the future will define the way they move toward it. If they believe that the future is filled with opportunity, they will move toward these opportunities and invest energy in reaching them. Conversely, if they believe that the future is bleak and hopeless, they will feel that there is no value in investing energy in moving toward it.

The Positive Principle: This principle states that a focus on asking positive questions engages people more deeply and for a longer time. This is based on the belief that people naturally turn toward ideas and images that provide nourishment and energy (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004). Appreciative Inquiry incorporates this principle in the way it asks questions.

The five principles were later expanded by a number of practitioners (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Preskill & Catsambas, 2006; Watkins & Mohr, 2001) in the field with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the practice of Appreciative Inquiry as a whole. The additional principles include the wholeness principle, the enactment principle and the free choice principle.

The Wholeness principle: This principle works from the belief that an ecological perspective is crucial to ensuring that the whole story is told and that implementation is only effective when the whole system engages with the context (Reed, 2007).

The Enactment principle: This principle places the responsibility on stakeholders to enact the change they want to see in the programme. This principle holds each individual accountable as a role model of the ideal future shared by the programme and creates the expectation that each

individual must act as though this ideal is being reached through each action and interaction between individuals (Datta, 2007).

The Free Choice principle: This principle works from the belief that people perform better when they have the freedom to choose how and what they contribute to the programme. Free choice stimulates individual creativity, responsibility and ownership. It also iteratively develops capacity as each individual grows and learns in the process of making their contribution to the collective.

The importance of the principles in the Appreciative Inquiry process cannot be emphasised enough. However, they are quite abstract and may be difficult to apply, especially for new practitioners. It is for this reason that Appreciative Inquiry practitioners have developed assumptions, which are the principles translated into statements, to assist Appreciative Inquiry practitioners to clarify the process of Appreciative Inquiry (Patton, 2003; Reed, 2007). The following assumptions inform the practice of Appreciative Inquiry:

In every society, organisation, or group, something works. This assumption is the start of the Appreciative Inquiry process. It can involve acknowledging even the most basic of processes within the organisation. Only if this assumption is met, can the Appreciative Inquiry process continue.

What we focus on becomes our reality. By choosing to focus on what works participants create a sense of possibility rather than a sense of limitation. By drawing attention to what people have achieved, they experience a reality where things can be achieved.

Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities. This assumption is based on the poetic principle that draws attention to the Appreciative Inquiry process of acknowledging multiple realities within one context. This allows for each participant to author the process that is most meaningful for them.

The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way. This assumption is based on the principle of simultaneity and suggests that the act of asking questions is the beginnings of change. This principle explicitly reflects the position of the Constructivist principle that knowledge and social action are inextricably linked. The very act of asking

questions changes the way stakeholders reflect on the programme and can change their understanding, perception and behaviour.

People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past. This assumption acknowledges that doing new things is a process that arouses fear and anxiety. This can be counterproductive to the Appreciative Inquiry process. To address this, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners should explore and build on past successes to facilitate a process that has a firm foundation of success.

If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past. This assumption builds on the previous one. It simply emphasises that if we seek to carry the past into the future, it is most beneficial to carry the parts of the past that will allow for movement in the positive direction.

It is important to value difference. This assumption places great emphasis on the value that differences can bring into the Appreciative Inquiry process.

The language we use creates our reality. This assumption draws from social constructionist thought which emphasises the importance of language in the process of constructing reality.

Together the principles and assumptions of the Appreciative Inquiry provide the infrastructure which houses the dynamic implementation process of the 4-D process as it walks participants through the Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny phases or the theory development process of the 4-I process as it takes participants through the Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate phases. The Appreciative Inquiry phases and their purposes are discussed in the section below which positions the Appreciative Inquiry process within research frameworks.

Appreciative Inquiry and research frameworks

Appreciative Inquiry cannot easily be placed into either the Quantitative or Qualitative approaches (Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry, like the use-oriented Evaluation approach, follows a pragmatist philosophy that selects a set of techniques best suited to the context in which the research takes place. This should not imply that Appreciative Inquiry practitioners simply cherry pick research techniques to suit the desired

results. Rather, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners follow a clearly delineated process of inquiry that guides the implementation of the principles and assumptions of the approach. The Appreciative Inquiry process places the power of collective story-telling at the centre of its theory and practice and therefore leans more toward the Qualitative end of the research continuum. The open-ended nature of Appreciative Inquiry story gathering makes it possible to transcend units of analysis (Patton, 2003). When participants are asked for their input, they are not limited to a pre-defined assessment of what is valuable to the organisation but are allowed to express their experience of the organisation from within their worldview. This allows the study to adopt a reflexive design that incorporates the input from participants organically and in real time so that the programme receives feedback that is immediately relevant to its current situation. This does not preclude the use of Quantitative methods as a means of triangulation for indices that can be generalised across the various levels of the programme (Patton, 2003; Rogers & Fraser, 2003).

The discussion of Appreciative Inquiry thus far constructs the approach as one geared toward informing the implementation of a programme and less concerned with the theoretical aspects concerning the implementation of the programme or the Appreciative Inquiry approach. Appreciative Inquiry, like Evaluation theory and practice, has the core techniques required for building its theoretical knowledge embedded into all aspects of the implementation process (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). The reflective nature of the Appreciative Inquiry process allows participants to constantly and consistently reflect on whether the research/implementation process is meeting their needs and, because the process places the focus of the study in their hands, to adjust the focus of the study during the data gathering phases of the approach (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The typical implementation process for the Appreciative Inquiry process is through the “Appreciative Inquiry summit” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The summit is a whole-system event where all the stakeholders of a programme are gathered over a period of four days to work through the various phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process. By placing all stakeholders in the same room the process of building relationships that are geared toward achieving the new objectives of the programme can begin. As mentioned previously, Appreciative Inquiry is not about asking positive questions but rather about asking generative questions aimed at reframing

the reality of individuals within the programme (Bushe, 2007). The aim of these generative questions is to generate novelty and surprise among stakeholders about the programme they all know about by sharing stories about the programme they may not have been aware of (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004; Patton, 2003). These questions are also aimed at engaging participants at more than just the intellectual level. By engaging participants' hearts and spirits the Appreciative Inquiry approach aims to generate more buy-in into the programme by aligning the goals and objectives of the programme with the passions of the stakeholders (Bushe, 2007). The aims of generative questions are depicted in Figure 2.5 and are not placed in any particular order as the various objectives transcend the entire Appreciative Inquiry process.

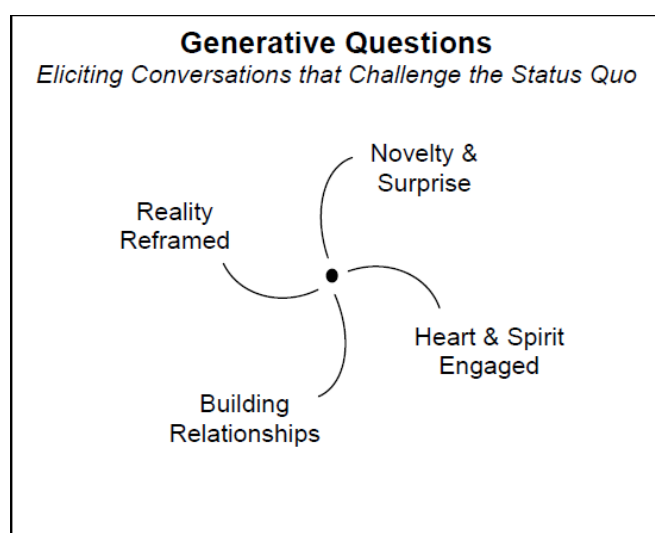


Figure 2.5 The underlying processes of the Appreciative Inquiry process (Bushe, 2007)

The summit is structured around the 4-D or the 4-I processes that provide the overarching framework for all interactions that take place during the summit.

The 4-D process:

The 4-D process (see Figure 2.6) is the most often used process in the Appreciative Inquiry approach (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). This process is often perceived to be the more action-oriented of the two processes as it takes place during the implementation of the programme and the last phase of this process continues indefinitely into the implementation of

the programme. The 4-D process or cycle has for distinct stages that are named Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.

The Discovery phase of the 4-D process aims to appreciate what gives life to the programme (Reed, 2007). This is the opening step in the process and is often participants' first exposure to the approach. In this phase the aim is to discover what stakeholders value about the programme and what they perceive as the strengths of the programme. It is during this phase that the most crucial decision in the Appreciative Inquiry process takes place: The topic choice (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The topic choice provides the core focus of all four of the phases in both the 4-D and 4-I processes. The information generated in the Discovery phase provides the foundation for the implementation planning that takes place during the Destiny phase which essentially means that the seeds of the future successes of the programme are planted during the Discovery phase (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The topic choice is always "home-grown" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) which means that it is carefully selected by the participants in the summit.

The Dream phase of the 4-D process aims to encourage participants to envision what might be (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The Dream phase is where participants work together to develop ideas of what the future might or could be. Participants are encouraged to think creatively and to let go of the constraints the programme currently faces. The rationale behind dreaming big is that it provides a long term goal to collectively strive toward. This phase builds on the positive aspects of the programme identified during the Discovery phase.

The Design phase aims to determine what will be and brings participants closer to the real world of the programme (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The Design phase is where participants work together to craft plans for the future by developing provocative propositions which are statements about what the programme wants to achieve (Reed, 2007). These provocative statements are essentially collectively designed values and objectives put forward by the stakeholders of the programme and represent a commitment to achieving them. "These statements are set out as unequivocal ambitions with no caveats or conditions" (Reed, 2007, p. 33).

The Destiny or Delivery phase entails planning what will be and is the phase where the energy moves towards implementation planning (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). This phase requires participants to work out specific steps that need to happen for the programme to realise the commitments made in the previous phase. This stage draws on all of the previous stages, especially on the Discovery phase which highlights past successes that can contribute to the future success of the programme.

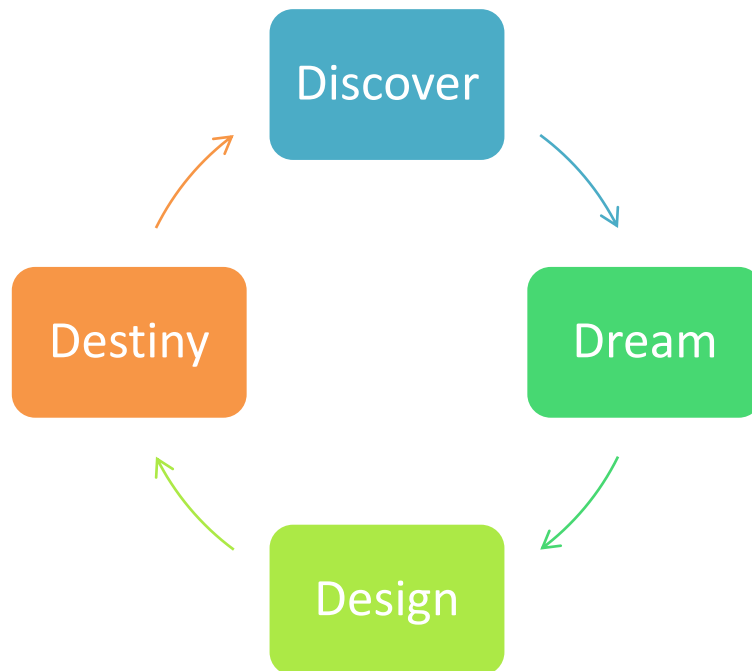


Figure 2.6The 4-D process

The 4-I process:

The 4-I process (see Figure 2.7) focuses more on the planning and preparation for Appreciative Inquiry work and is ideally suited for situations where the facilitators aim to share ideas rather than concentrating on action (Reed, 2007). This process provides the ideal mechanism for developing or generating theory of practice for the programme. The 4-I process has four distinct phases, namely, Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

The Initiate phase is where participants are introduced to the concept and key ideas of Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). During this phase the researcher and participants collaboratively develop the basic structure for the Appreciative Inquiry process and decide what should be explored and what resources will be required.

The Inquiry phase is where the process of inquiry is refined iteratively (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). During this phase the initial discussions and interviews take place to develop the agenda for the Appreciative Inquiry process. The questions are tested and refined through a number of revisions to ensure that they are asked correctly and that they get the correct information (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003).

The Imagine phase is where the data are gathered, collated and themes identified (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). This process involves as many participants as possible and provocative propositions are developed collaboratively and validated with as many members of the team as possible. This process takes participants through process of reality testing which is aimed at determining what is actually going on in the programme (Patton, 2003). Here participants are guided by the researcher to think critically about the empirical approaches that would yield the best results for the programme.

The Innovate phase is where the Appreciative Inquiry plans are implemented and reviewed according to a pre-planned schedule (Reed, 2007). This process follows a long term infinite loop that forms part of the implementation of the programme as the process undergoes further adaptation and debate.

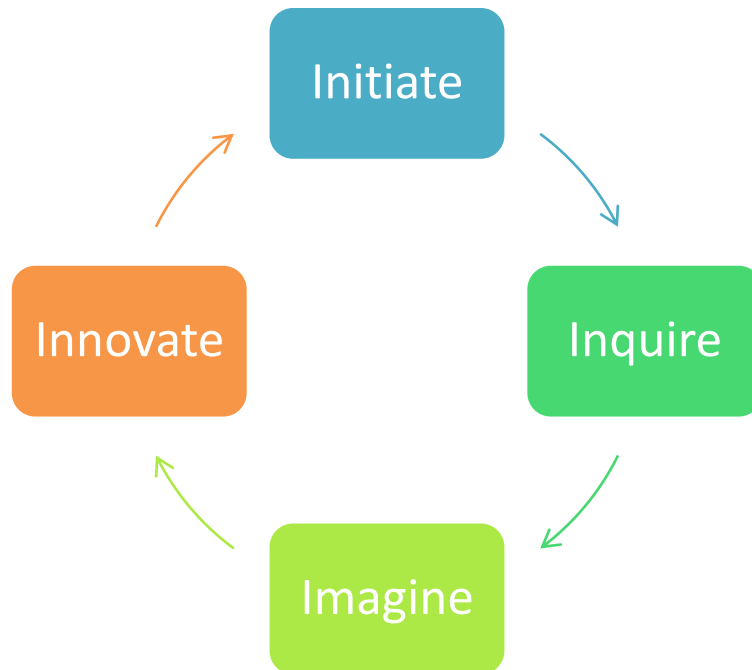


Figure 2.7The 4-I process

Criticisms of Appreciative Inquiry

The primary criticism of Appreciative Inquiry by evaluators is that it is a simple bait and switch strategy employed by researchers to alleviate the anxiety and tension that is associated with an evaluation of a programme (Patton, 2003). Proponents of this stance argue that Appreciative Inquiry is used as a method of deceiving stakeholders into participating in a typical evaluation. As discussed earlier in this chapter, evaluation is a highly political activity and as such power dynamics play a significant role in the process. Evaluation also has the negative connotations of being judged and assessed, often with the implication that non-performance or non-compliance will be penalised. The Appreciative Inquiry approach has been criticised for being co-opted as a strategy for engaging participants who would not participate in a typical evaluation by emphasising the positive, appreciative nature of the approach without ensuring that the principles of the approach are applied during implementation (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

Appreciative Inquiry has been criticised for its unbalanced, uncritical, almost biased focus on the positive (Patton, 2003; Reed, 2007). When applied uncritically the application of the emphasis on the positive can be seen to discourage constructive criticism. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Appreciative Inquiry is not just about the positive. Criticisms and weaknesses emerge as

part of the narrative in which the positive is highlighted (Reed, 2007). The crucial difference is that when the weaknesses are brought to the fore as part of a positive narrative they do not dominate the narrative and provide the stakeholders with a positive foundation on which future endeavours can be built. Encountering negative feedback or criticism within an environment that emphasises an appreciative approach can facilitate the integration of this negative feedback easier for individuals (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

The approach has also been criticised for the delay between the intervention, often in the form of the Appreciative Inquiry summit and the observable effects of the intervention (Reed, 2007). This is due to the fact that Appreciative Inquiry aims to bring about sustained change within a programme and places the responsibility for this change in the hands of the stakeholders. The implication of this is that stakeholders may work on a deadline that does not correspond with the schedule of those conducting the impact assessment. A second reason is that each programme is unique and change within these organisations will take place at varying rates (Reed, 2007). In addition the change within these organisations may not be to the explicate system in terms of the procedures, policies, protocols and results but rather to the implicit system that consists of the relations, interactions and perceptions of the individuals within the programme. The latter would be hard to discern if an evaluator was not explicitly searching for these changes within the programme.

The applicability of Appreciative Inquiry to this study

Appreciative Inquiry is about generativity and transformational interventions which lead to change. This objective is shared with the discipline of Community Psychology. While ameliorative interventions are crucial to improving the quality of life of those individuals and communities who are already affected by a particular social problem, they do not provide for long term, sustainable interventions which ultimately eliminate the social problem. Appreciative Inquiry operates on the principle of systemic empowerment where all individuals within an organisation, programme or community are given the authority and responsibility for authoring the successes in which they were involved and carrying these successes into the future to strengthen the collective. Community Psychology, especially when enacted through Participatory Action Research, shares the need to empower all stakeholders in the programme and the

philosophical stance that all stakeholders have the capability to contribute to improving the quality of life and well-being of the programme they belong to.

Appreciative Inquiry is described as social construction in action and as such places great emphasis on the process of making meaning and on language as a mechanism for delivering and constructing meaning. This embeds Appreciative Inquiry firmly within the Qualitative paradigm as it seeks to generate thick, contextually bound descriptions of individual experiences to construct a mosaic of experiences and practices that define the programme. The emphasis on the stakeholders as producers of knowledge places the stakeholders in control of the data gathering and analysis processes as the researcher has to consistently and constantly ensure that clear and accessible feedback loops exist in the research process that allow participants to confirm the validity of the results at various stages of the research process. Appreciative Inquiry, like the Qualitative approaches, places the researcher in a central position within the research process as the instrument for data collection and analysis but the position is not reserved exclusively for the researcher and all stakeholders are invited to participate in this crucial role.

Appreciative Inquiry seeks to enact deep connections between researcher and participants as well as between the various stakeholders in the programme. As discussed earlier, one of the objectives of the Appreciative Inquiry approach is to facilitate connections between the various stakeholders. This is based on the belief that change can only be implemented and sustained through collective action and that a common connection is necessary to establish common goals. This should not imply that the Appreciative Inquiry approach assumes that these connections do not exist prior to the Appreciative Inquiry process taking place. Rather, the Appreciative Inquiry approach assumes that it is essential to re-establish and re-affirm existing connections within the programme so that they facilitate the achievement of the new collective goals. Within the context of the ERF the Appreciative Inquiry approach provides an ideal platform for all participants to effectively engage with each other and the research process. Chapter 1 described the various stakeholders and their specific roles and briefly mentioned that the roles of certain stakeholders did not facilitate contact with the larger organisation that is the ERF. Through the Appreciative Inquiry process the various stakeholders would be able to share their experiences, concerns and achievements with other stakeholders in a safe environment and in a manner that is purposeful and culturally acceptable.

Appreciative Inquiry has roots in Organisational Development and still holds as one of its key objectives the improvement and development of organisations at all levels. As such Appreciative Inquiry is frequently used as an evaluative technique (Dunlap, 2008). The Appreciative Inquiry approach fits in with the purpose and objectives associated with developmental or Formative evaluations. It provides a method of ascertaining what is working in the ERF and rapidly disseminating this information through the programme with the aim of building on what works for the ERF. The Appreciative Inquiry approach allows the stakeholders to set the agenda of what is valued and should therefore receive greater investment of the resources within the organisation.

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the underpinning theories, values and beliefs that shaped this study. The chapter discussed how the Community Psychology, Qualitative, Evaluation and Appreciative Inquiry theories, practices, values, assumptions and beliefs informed the various aspects of the study. These theories were arranged into a pyramid with Community Psychology and Qualitative Research as the cornerstones of the theoretical framework. Evaluation theory and practice was depicted as the centre piece of the pyramid as it played a central role in defining and developing the study outcomes. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was placed at the apex of the pyramid because it is the most explicit theory applied in this study.

Community Psychology provided the baseline values, principles and belief set that informed the attitude behind this study. Just as Community Psychology acts as the conscience to Mainstream Psychology, it also provided this study with the critical-reflexive perspective required to produce a study that can be applied to the context of the research participants in a sustainable manner.

The Qualitative Methods embedded in this study was discussed in very brief detail. The rationale for this abridged discussion of the second cornerstone theory of this study was that general descriptions of Qualitative Research are common knowledge and a repetition of these would be redundant. That said; a detailed discussion of Social Construction as it was applied within the AI context is provided in chapter 4 as part of the description of the method. Qualitative Research methods are described as the second cornerstone because they provide the technical foundation for the study. The discussion of Qualitative Methods in this chapter focused strongly on gaining access in the research context and the impact this has on data gathering because this was a crucial aspect of the study.

The Evaluation theories and practice were the binding body of work between the two cornerstones and the research approach applied. The motivation for this study is firmly embedded within the evaluation theoretical framework. This framework of theories and practice provided the necessary bridge for this study to enter the context of the ERF and guided the study's aims in the face of the various challenges faced. This framework strongly influenced the

I had a number of debates with one of my supervisors about the structure and relevance of this chapter. We often disagreed on how to position the theories within the framework. I was predominantly guided by my personal development as a researcher as well as the pragmatic needs of the study, while my supervisor was guided by a meta perspective of the research process. In his view the AI, Evaluation theory and Qualitative research all predominantly focus on epistemological issues (i.e., how can things be known), whereas community psych is more ontological (i.e., focusing on the nature of what can be known) and pragmatic (focusing on how interventions can be structured) (Terre Blanche, 2011). These debates often left me frustrated because I wanted a clear answer from him on what the answer was. Reflecting back on the experience, I find that these discussions was where my theoretical framework was put together.

selection of the AI approach as the technique to be applied to the study.

The AI approach was the apex stone of the pyramid because it was the approach applied to obtain the research results. The AI approach was the method visible to research participants and could be seen as the primary theory informing this study. This would be incorrect because, as

described in this chapter, the AI implementation in this study was informed by all of the research approaches described above.

In the next chapter I discuss the specific context and history of the ERF as well as the assumptions, theories and beliefs that informed its conceptualisation and development.

CHAPTER 3 : DOWN MEMORY LANE: THE CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE ERF

I thoroughly enjoyed writing this chapter! I have an intense interest in utilising community resources for improving education and learning about the various NGOs and classes of education was an exciting experience. I believe strongly in the notion that it is the responsibility of the nation to educate the next generation and have been on a personal quest of sorts to find like minded individuals. This chapter continues the metaphor of my journey in my dissertation with a trip down the ERFs' memory lane. This chapter is also representative of the first time I met the ERF and the individuals who are part of it.

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the specific context in which the Educhange and Research Foundation operates. The rationale behind this is to fill in the background in which the study took place in greater detail. If the study is compared to a painting, then Chapter 1 is the canvas, Chapter 2 the frame and this Chapter the background in which the rest of the study stands.

The Chapter discusses the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) context in South Africa and South African education. This discussion should be viewed as an extension of the general introduction provided in Chapter 1 on the socio-politico-economic context of South Africa. This brief discussion aims to position the ERF concretely within the NGO and education contexts.

The ERF is then discussed as a context within itself. This section highlights the values and assumptions behind the founding of the ERF. It then goes on to discuss the practical considerations made during the process of constituting the ERF. The discussion then goes into a detailed account of the first year of implementation of the ERF which highlights the manner in which the various components of the programme were implemented.

In many ways this chapter can be viewed as the preliminary study of the ERF where the evaluability assessment of the organisation took place. The evaluability assessment determines which stage of implementation a programme is, whether the goals and objectives of a programme are defined clearly enough to be measurable, whether the logic behind the

intervention is defined in a manner that can be tested, the internal accountability structures and whether the organisation has the capacity to act on evaluation findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This assessment significantly influenced the nature of the evaluation that was ultimately conducted as it provided a base from which the research team could develop a study that met the specific needs of the ERF and its stakeholders during the time period in which the evaluation took place. At this point in time the research team consisted of M, my dissertation supervisor and board member, and me. Later, we enlisted the aid of the ERF Executive Director who became the third member of the research team.

This Chapter provides insight into the various levels of the ecology of the ERF and applies the principle of analysis in context. This Chapter provides the base layer on which the results in Chapter 5 are discussed.

The Chapter closes with a brief discussion of the methodological decisions that arose from the results of this preliminary assessment as a link to the next Chapter which discusses the actual method employed during the course of the study.

The Non Governmental Organisation context

The aim of this section is to briefly describe the NGO context in which the ERF is positioned. The discussion begins with a general but brief definition of what an NGO is and the purpose they serve. The discussion then highlights the potential roles NGOs can play in the field of education. The section then wraps with a brief summary that links to the history and development of the ERF.

NGOs can be defined as a grouping of people who have a common aim to address a particular need or social issue that is not formed or controlled by the government (UNICEF, 2009). NGOs are typically formed to meet an urgent social need that is not being addressed or acknowledged by the government-driven or formal social support structures (Alaimo, 2008; Wilson, 2000). The lack of government or formal support may be due to political or economic reasons. Political reasons can include oppression of marginalised groups, such as the non-white race groups during apartheid, which are deliberately excluded from benefitting from social structures or are given an inferior quality of service from these structures (Mazibuko, 2009). Economic reasons can be

illustrated in terms of the current economic crises facing the world. NGOs are dependent on communities, both private and business, as well as from government institutions and donor organisations aimed at improving the quality of life for all (UNICEF, 2009). The current economic crisis has led to governments in general but particularly in Africa reducing budget allocations for the social sector with a marked decrease in discretionary funds for activities in critical social services such as education (Baldeh, 2010). Baldeh (2010) goes on to state that many households and individuals were pushed below the poverty line and this has led to a subsequent rise in demand for free critical social services. Another characteristic of NGOs is that they work at the community level and can thus affect social change (where other institutions cannot) by acting as a catalyst for civil society, a key ingredient for sustainable change and development (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002; Romi & Schmida, 2009).

As part of the move toward utilising community (mentioned in Chapter 1) as a vehicle for addressing social issues there has been an increasing trend toward utilising NGOs to implement development programmes (Romi & Schmida, 2009). This trend has led to a symbiotic relationship between international donors and NGOs. Donors are increasingly channelling funding to NGOs in all sectors and NGOs in turn increasingly become more reliant on donor funding (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002). The critical role of NGOs in achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Education for All (EFA) by providing universal and equitable quality of education, was recently recognised and acknowledged in summits held in Johannesburg and Dakar (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002).

NGOs can take a variety of forms but typically take on a quasi business structure and remain dependent on donor aid for income and on communities/interest groups for human resources (Rose, 2006). The primary strength of NGOs is the flexibility of the approaches they employ in seeking to address a particular social problem (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002). This should not imply that there is no similarity between the strategies employed by NGOs. According to Rose (2006) there are a number of 'standard packages' of NGO services available that are iteratively developed to fit the particular context of the community the NGO is based within. In addition, NGOs are significantly shaped by the local and international socio-political context in which they operate and often their strategies are determined by multiple stakeholders, giving rise to a variety of strategies, objectives and approaches employed (Rose, 2006). The

economic and political stability of a country or region directly affect the visibility and capacity of the NGO sector by providing a supportive policy environment and resources to the sector. Political will also affects which social issues receive emphasis at any given time and this can either place the work of a NGO at the core of the programmes developed by the formal sector or on the periphery of society.

NGOs are often associated with philanthropic, non-profit aims (Rose, 2006). Motivations for starting an NGO also include gaining access to donor aid in areas where there is little or no formal government support (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002). This is especially true in South Africa where the informal social development sector provides an alternative career path for individuals who do not have access to formal employment. For these individuals the NGO context provides a platform on which they can develop marketable skills and experience before entering the workplace. Other potential benefits include preferential salaries and other pecuniary benefits compared to those in the formal education system (Rose, 2006).

NGOs play a variety of roles in supporting education service delivery (Rose, 2006). The types of interventions typically implemented by NGOs in the education sector can be divided into two distinct but interlinked categories. The first category is aimed at school improvement at the various levels and includes interventions aimed at improving the infrastructure, school management practices, capacity building for teaching staff, curriculum reform and policy development. NGOs are also involved in lobbying and advocating for educational reform by working individually or through networks to participate in policy dialog with government (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002).

The second category is direct education provision which focuses on providing education to children traditionally excluded from the education system (Rose, 2006). In other words, this form of intervention by NGOs places emphasis on providing education to hard-to-reach populations of children who, for reasons concerning ethnicity, citizenship status, socio-economic status or disability, are not accommodated by the formal education system. The NGOs in this category can be said to provide non-formal or alternative education measures. In this role NGOs are described as providing Non-Formal education. Formal Education is described as learning that takes place in the structured environment of the classroom setting in the presence of the teacher (Eshach,

2007; Rose, 2006). The definition provided here is simplistic and not intended as a comprehensive, definitive description of formal education; however, the definition is sufficient for the sake of the argument. Non-Formal education is an equally contentious issue to define but can be described, at its most basic, as any organised and sustained activities that take place both within and outside educational institutions and that caters to persons of all ages with a focus on holistic education that has differing durations and may or may not have certification of learning achieved (UNESCO, 1997). Rose (2006) provides a brief overview of the perceptions associated with formal and non-formal education in Table 3.1 below. The table below primarily reflects on the role of NGOs as education providers and the perceptions of the initiatives implemented by the NGO sector seems to be positively skewed. An interesting characteristic of Non-formal education is that while it is viewed more positively than Formal education, it remains in a complementary or supportive role to the Formal education system (Nishimuko, 2009). The perception mentioned here is a recent one and it is important to note that the precedence of non-formal education and the provision thereof by NGOs has waxed and waned over time. The relative importance and variation in roles of NGOs and non-formal approaches are illustrated by Rose (2006), Nishimuko (2009) as well as Harvey and Peacock (2001).

Table 3.1 Perceptions associated with Formal and Non-Formal Education (Rose, 2006)

Formal	Non-Formal
State provided	NGO provided
Conventional	Alternative/Complementary
Mainstream	Compensatory/Supplementary
Accountable to Ministry of Education	Accountable to civil society/community
Teacher-centred	Child-centred
Homogenous	Heterogeneous
Rigid	Flexible/Participatory
Top-down	Bottom-up
Over-crowded curriculum	Accelerated learning
Curriculum associated with modernisation	Locally relevant curriculum
Hidden curriculum promotes silent exclusion	Girl-friendly
Exam-driven	On-going, formative assessment
Large class sizes	Small class sizes
Centrally recruited teachers	Locally recruited teachers
Inefficient	Cost-effective

The ERF seems to fit in with the education support stream of NGO interventions; however, they provide non-formal education that focuses on holistic development of individual learners. The modus operandi of the ERF is to work in schools that are considered as under-performing but not delinquent. The rationale behind this is that the majority of South African schools fall within this category and a successful intervention in this area could be adapted to other schools.

The life and times of the ERF

At the time that the Appreciative Inquiry took place the ERF was in the second year of its implementation. The first year was one of many new experiences, both for the ERF as an organisation and for all its stakeholders. As part of a Community Engagement project, the research team conducted a study to document the process of constituting the ERF. The need to document the process that is the ERF stems from the need to know the past. By having the past at our fingertips the organisation can know where it has come from and benchmark where it is against this. In addition, documenting the growth and development of the ERF ensures that they will always have the initial principles and assumptions that informed the formation of this organisation beyond the lifespan of individual involvement.

Objectives and aims

The primary objective of this study is to document the growth and development of the ERF and to provide a preliminary assessment of the ERF's evaluability. This section is developed with a number of specific aims that are expected to ensure that the research ultimately conducted on behalf of the organisation is appropriate to the context, relevant to the needs of the ERF and the stakeholders in the programme and that the research results would be geared toward improving the practice of the ERF and providing guidelines for organisations seeking to deliver a similar form of intervention in South African schools.

The specific aims of this section are to:

- highlight the motivation for the development of the ERF
- discuss the formation of the ERF
- discuss the motivation for the selection of the identified high school as the pilot site

- discuss the consultation processes followed prior to the implementation of the programme
- discuss the implementation of the programme in pilot site
- highlight the observed effects of the programme
- discuss the challenges faced
- highlight the lessons learnt during this phase of implementation

This chapter was quite tricky to place due to the traditional structure of a dissertation. Strictly speaking this chapter should follow the method chapter to avoid the messiness experienced below. The difficulty in placing this chapter primarily lies in the fact that the process described here was the key factor in defining the design and implementation of the study. In other words, because of this interview, we decided to use the AI approach. As such this chapter is a further contextualisation of the AI that is the focus of this dissertation. This does force me to improvise and produce a chapter that is an extension of the contextualising done in Chapters 1 and 2 as well as the methodological description that will take place in Chapter 4.

Data Sources

The method for this research process was qualitative and entailed an in-depth interview with the Executive Director of the ERF and M in her capacity as a founding board member. The rationale behind the selection of the Executive Director as the sole source of information was that she is the only individual with knowledge of the assumptions and practical considerations that informed the formation and development of the ERF. The Executive Director is also the only individual in the ERF who is involved in all the aspects of the intervention at a grassroots level as well as at all of the strategic decision making processes taking place at board level. The primary drawback of having only the Executive Director and M as participants was that we (the research team) could not get a holistic account of the development of the organisation from all of the board members.

The data analysis method applied to this study is qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a general method for analysing transcripts or other text data sources qualitatively. Qualitative Thematic analysis has three distinct stages or levels which are conducted sequentially. The first level of the analysis process entails identifying meaning units in the text. A meaning unit is described as a single thought unit expressed by a participant. The second step in the thematic

analysis process is to identify patterns of recurring meaning in the meaning units and to group these together. The third step in this process entails generating theme statements that encapsulate the threads of meaning that run through the meaning units in the group. A detailed discussion of this analysis method is provided in the next Chapter.

The structure of this discussion will be guided by a number of categories formed during the analysis process. There are two “categories of coding”. The first category will group themes into the Phase of intervention they occurred in. Within each phase of the intervention the Main themes will then be identified and discussed and, where relevant, sub-themes of this main theme will be identified and elaborated on, e.g., Pre-entry – motivation for starting ERF – Intrinsic Motivation Factors. The second category of coding is the themes that run through all the phases of the ERF. These themes are named the Observed Effects of the programme, Setting Boundaries, Lessons Learnt, Challenges in implementing the programme and Volunteering in the ERF (see Figure 3.1).

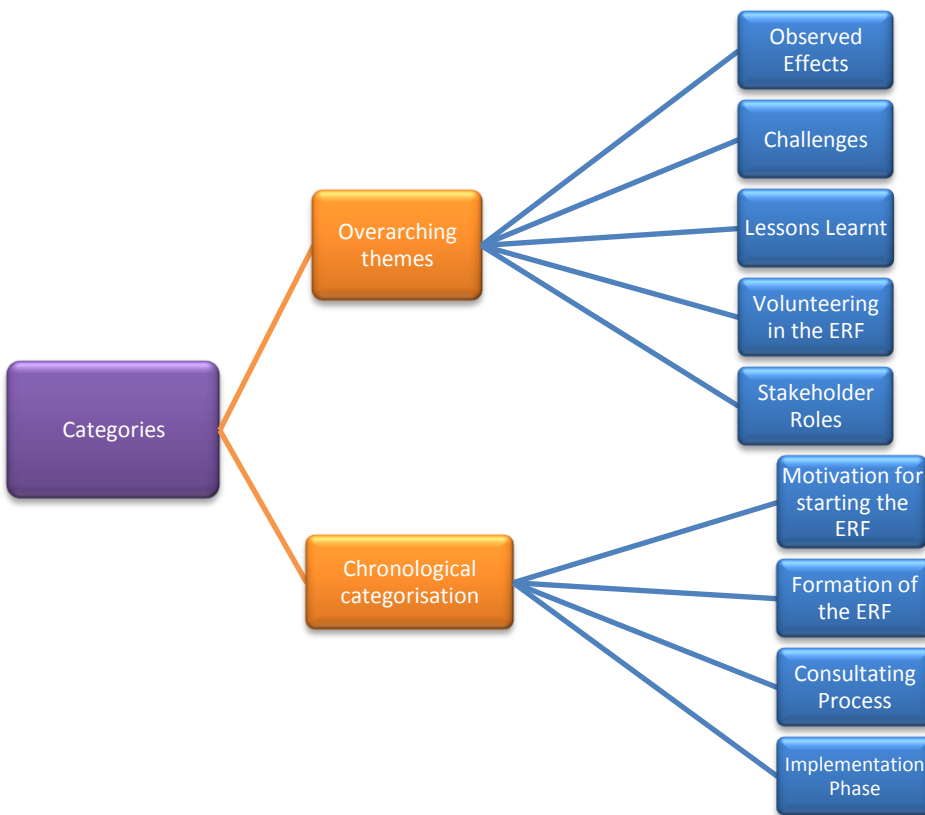


Figure 3.1 Structure of coding scheme

Each theme starts with a summary statement and then has the transcripts from the interview. Where necessary, the interviewer's inputs have been kept to eliminate ambiguity.

At the time of data gathering I was the research assistant to M, our Chair of Department. She invited me to be a part of the ERF so that we could assist the organisation with research and development. The first task I had was to conduct a needs assessment at the school to see what the ERF needed to change in their approach. To do the needs assessment I had to get an understanding of the ERF and to do that I had to meet T, the Executive Director. M and T were university friends and had a close relationship, which set me at ease because T was an intimidating personality. Quick witted and perceptive, she had a way of setting down clearly where you stand with her. I quickly learnt that her passion for improving education, like her laugh, was infectious. During the interview the words and ideas would tumble out of her faster than either M or I could write. If you notice a distinct lack of biographical information about T, it's because there's never really time to talk about her, there's always another project more pressing or interesting to hear about.

Conceptualisation Phase

The conceptualisation phase documents the process involved in forming the ERF before it entered the school in which it intervenes.

Motivation for starting ERF

The motivation for starting the ERF can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that led to the founder of the ERF establishing the organisation. The intrinsic motivating factors include the educational background, beliefs and values intrinsic to the founder of the ERF. The extrinsic motivating factors include the state of the education system and the socio-economic conditions that exist in South Africa. While the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors is conceptually distinct, it is crucial to note that they should be viewed as part of a dynamic interaction where the factors interact to impact on the overall action.

Intrinsic motivation

The intrinsic motivation factors are those factors that are inherent in the founder of the ERF. These are the personal traits and experiences, beliefs and values that informed the decision to found the ERF. These are possibly the most important component of the ERF as they acted as the catalyst for the formation of the organisation. The values and beliefs of the founder are essentially the values and beliefs of the organisation as they inform the actions of the founder when conceptualising and developing the organisation. These values shaped the nature of the interventions employed by the ERF and acted as the common bond between the individuals who would later contribute to the success of the intervention programme.

The primary belief that underpinned the formation of the ERF was the belief in the inherent positive features of human nature that human beings will continue to strive and grow and that this growth will be positive if the environment is supportive and nurturing.

This belief held by the ERF founder is apparent in the approach that the organisation utilises in its intervention. The ERF specifically focuses on schools in the Townships which are perceived to be under resourced and who operate within adverse conditions.

The education and professional background of the ERF director and founder affected the composition and focus of the ERF which makes it a crucial component to the creation of the organisation. With training in policy analysis, training provision in the NGO sector, involvement in the empowerment of women and psychological training, the ERF director and founder is uniquely placed to address the holistic intervention in the education sector that she envisions. Her background gives her the macro policy perspective as well as the insight into the complexities of the individual psycho-social well-being necessary to achieve the ERF's goal of developing an evidence-based method of intervention that can inform policy and practice at a broader level.

Linked to the education and professional background of the founder is her belief in an evidence-based approach to intervening. The experience attained while working in the NGO sector, both as part of an NGO seeking funding and as part of an organisation that funded NGOs, lead to the insight that funders are more willing to support an organisation that can provide evidence of the

efficacy of its method of intervention. This insight also informed the belief that the changes to policy that the ERF wants to effect can only be done if the approaches and innovations developed by the ERF are proven to work. The founder also realised that achieving these objectives would mean “working at the coalface” and entering the communities and schools that the organisation would intervene in and working within the context of these communities and schools. This is in contrast to the “ivory tower” approach that would imply selecting individual learners and placing them in better performing schools in the more affluent neighbourhoods.

The nature of the intervention was also influenced by the background of the founder. Her experiences in empowering marginalised groups and in the social sciences lead to the insight that a holistic approach would be required to sustain the changes to academic performance that the ERF aims to achieve. When asked how these experiences influenced her conceptualisation of the ERF the founder replied:

In a big way. In a big way and I think at some point I kind of got frustrated in the sense that when I looked at the impact that I would make if I practised solely from the psychological angle in a township setup, I would be very frustrated because there are so many problems that are much broader and if you only focussed on the psychological well-being of the child you begin realising that there is this school element, then there's this community element and then there's this and it all points to the bigger picture; which I thought that we need a structure that can be able to address the bigger picture.

The belief in the use of education as a tool for empowerment is evident in the objectives set for the ERF which seeks to transform education in South Africa. The way this will be achieved is by increasing the level of literacy in black communities; by normalising the learning and teaching environment in township schools and by generating innovative ideas, frameworks and tools for improving the quality of education in South African schools. While the objective is to improve education as a whole in South Africa, these objectives have a very clear emphasis on the development and improvement of education and literacy levels in black communities and township schools which are generally perceived to be areas that fall within the lower end of the socio-economic scale. The assumption behind intervening in these areas is that by improving the

education service to individuals within these areas, the communities within they live within can participate effectively within the job market and economic development of the country.

Extrinsic motivating factors

The extrinsic motivating factors that lead to the development of the ERF are those factors external to the founder. The extrinsic motivating factors mainly revolve around the state of South African education system.

In the previous section we established that the founder of the ERF sought to make a difference to the society in which she lived and that this was driven by the belief that all human beings are geared toward positive development given a supportive and nurturing environment. In this section we will examine the perceptions that lead to the focus on improving education.

South Africa, like many developing countries, is characterised by a large socio-economic divide. This divide is characterised by access to basic services and amenities. The affluent, smaller portion of the population has access to quality schooling, healthcare, nutrition and recreation while the larger, poorer portion of the population lives in relative and sometimes absolute poverty which is characterised by a lack of access to quality schooling, healthcare, nutrition and recreation. This socio-economic divide has its roots in the apartheid system and has been perpetuated by a value system that holds the accumulation of material wealth and individual autonomy as the pinnacle of human development. This divide is one of the factors that contribute to the high rates of HIV, crime and poverty.

As discussed in the previous section, the focus on improving the quality of education in the townships was informed by the belief that education is a tool for empowering individuals and communities. When considering the state of education within township schools the founder expressed concern at the quality of the service being delivered as she believed it to be crucial in addressing some of the broader issues experienced by South African society.

[I]t was more concern about service delivery which at a personal level ... it's always that concern that either things are happening or things are happening slow or things are not happening the way that they should happen, especially in the area of education which is very key for the general development of the country and for poverty alleviation.

The founder then acknowledged that the literacy rates, and by extension the quality of education among Black communities, are historically very low and that the state of the education system is not a new development. She expressed a hope that the change in dispensation would bring about improved education services within these communities but was disappointed by the perception that the focus of the new government education system was on producing a large quantity of high school graduates at the expense of a quality education for all.

Coz sometimes it would disappoint when you hear government talking about numbers of matriculants that have passed but when you actually interrogate what that pass means...like in one school they tell you it's a 96% pass rate. When you look at 96% only, assuming the school has maybe fifty children, only four have exemptions. That's a good pass.

The difficulties facing the education system are well-documented in the media, academic texts and in social interactions between members of society. The most obvious, and most crippling of these problems is that at the levels of human resource, infrastructure and ethos the South African education system is unequally distributed (Liebowitz, 2000). The quality of service delivery in the education system, like most of the services available in South Africa, is directly proportionate to the socio-economic status of the individual receiving it. While there have been attempts to redress this imbalance by the South African government, these initiatives are often driven from a policy, top-down perspective. In a sector that suffers from a lack of cohesion and inequality, these approaches cannot be truly effective. This perception is shared by the founder of the ERF who stated that:

... And it's not things that we don't know: we know that these kids are not passing Maths; we know that the teachers are not highly motivated; we know that the children are equally not highly motivated; we know that the parents are not fully involved; and then the schools are generally not governed well by the school governing bodies. Having realised that the problems around education is a general problem that a lot of people have noted, I felt that I'd rather come up with an instrument that can inform policy but at the same time get involved in practice so that we get a full understanding of what the problems are on the ground.

The perceived gap between practice and policy development was another factor that shaped the formation of the ERF. The founder expressed the perception that there was no proactive method of communicating the difficulties experienced in practice within the existing structure of the education system. This led the founder to the conclusion that there is a gap between education practitioners and policymakers which led to the formation of the ERF as an instrument for informing policy by developing an evidence-based model of practice that takes steps toward addressing problems identified.

Formation of the ERF

The formation of the ERF describes the process of conceptualising the ERF and putting in place the mechanisms to support the programme. This included developing the conceptualisation of the ERF and defining its focus. The formation of the ERF also focuses on the process of registering the ERF as an NPO and identifying the key skills required during the initiation of the ERF which influenced the composition of the board.

Having identified the need, the next step in the development of the ERF was the conceptualisation of the organisation. An important realisation to be had at this phase of the development of an NGO is that it can and should operate on basic business principles if it aims to be sustainable. Here sustainability means the propensity to survive in the complex financial and social environment in which the NGO seeks to intervene while remaining competitive. The first, and possibly the most important step in forming the organisation, is conceptualising the organisation.

There are a number of ways of conceptualising an organisation or developing a business plan. It can be done individually, where the founder sits on their own and envisions the final identity of the organisation and shapes it according to their own values, beliefs and objectives. A consultant who is skilled at business development can be contacted to facilitate the conceptualisation process. Another option is to identify a number of individuals who share a common interest or objective and collectively conceptualise the organisation.

The ERF founder chose to conceptualise the organisation on her own so as to crystallise her thinking and have a consolidated plan to present to potential partners, schools and funders. She

also believed that this approach would speed up the process of conceptualising the organisation due to the fact that each individual brought into the process brings their own agenda and priorities.

...I thought that I don't want to spend the whole year trying to get individuals – 'coz you know how consultation sometimes gets to be. You invite five people and the five people start thinking about so many other things and you start talking about problems in math and technology and this and that. And then you spend the whole time trying to figure out who else should be in the process

After conceptualising the focus, objectives, target population group, method of intervention and human resources required, the next step was to register the organisation with the Registrar of Companies. By formally registering the organisation it legitimises the organisation in the eyes of other organisations and creates a sense of permanence. It also facilitates the growth of the organisation as it will aid in securing funding in future.

So on that basis I developed the concept and then I approached a company of auditors or whatever to help with the registration of ERF. You know you go through the basic names and then they reject that name and then finally we registered as a Non-profit organisation and in the document made room for a board. 'Coz I think that as much as it was good to think about this as an individual but then for an instrument or organisation like this, for it to reach or make the impact that I had in mind then it should function properly.

The provision made for a board in the conceptualisation of the organisation is an acknowledgement by the founder of the power of collective action. Like any business, the organisation would require specialised expertise to deliver its services in an effective manner. The selection of the board members was determined by prior relationships between the founder and the individual board members. While the relationship with the founder was an important consideration, the primary criterion for the selection of the board members was the field in which they were involved in and by extension their professional skills and experience. A secondary consideration was the life skills and abilities each board member held. Due to the fact that the ERF seeks to intervene at the psycho-social level, the presence of a Clinical Psychologist was

deemed necessary. The legal framework in which the ERF would operate is extremely complex and the need for a Lawyer was identified. The ERF seeks to ultimately form a collaborative partnership with the Department of Education and it was deemed important to have a representative from this department on the board to ensure that the ERF will intervene in ways consistent with the policy and curriculum framework of the Department of Education. The work that the ERF engages in falls within the sphere of community development and as such it is necessary to have a board member with the necessary experience and networks to ensure that the necessary infrastructure to run the programme can be put into place. Due to the political nature of education in South Africa, it was also deemed necessary to have a board member who was actively engaged with and understands the political landscape. It was anticipated that many of the learners would experience difficulty in presenting and expressing themselves publically and would require extensive mentoring to overcome this. This motivated the inclusion of a professional actor as a board member. In addition to the mentoring that this board member would provide, they could also raise the profile of the ERF in the media at pertinent times.

As important as the skills brought by each board member was the relationship and shared values between the board members. It was imperative that the board members all share the same vision and goals as the founder of the ERF as this greatly strengthens the focus of the organisation.

The motivation for the selection of pilot site

The motivation for the selection of the pilot school describes the rationale for selecting this school. The factors that emerged here were a pre-existing relationship between the school and the ERF founder and *Executive Director*, the willingness of the private sector to support the school, the profile of the school and its status with the Department of Education, the need of the school and the extent to which this aligned with the mandate of the ERF, the socio-economic profile of the area and the perceived impact that the ERF could make in the school.

The ERF aims to affect education on a national scale by producing innovative teaching techniques and methods and addressing the structural inequities present within the system by effectively engaging community resources in assisting schools at risk. To do so, however, requires a streamlined and tested operational plan. To test the plan developed by the founder and refined by the board members, it was essential to select a pilot school. This would allow the ERF

the opportunity to test whether their approach would work without overstressing their limited resources.

The pilot phase of any intervention is a crucial first step in establishing a large scale, effective intervention programme. It allows time to observe the effects of your approach on a smaller scale that allows for direct involvement of the organisation in the various phases of the intervention. It is during the pilot phase that minimum standards are developed for future interventions, that the procedural requirements of the programme become apparent and that the organisation learns of the goodness of fit between the programme of intervention, in this case the ERF scholarship programme, and the identified need.

The selection of the pilot site for the intervention is therefore a critical choice in the life of the organisation. The pilot site must have the characteristics identified for the target population to ensure that the correct group is being assisted by the intervention. In addition to this, the pilot site must be of such a size and nature that it does not deplete the resources of the organisation. In many ways the pilot site would be the “ideal” intervention context so as to test the effect of the intervention.

When considering the pilot site for the ERF, the founder chose a site that she was familiar with. The site was part of a tour that the founder ran through Soweto. During these site visits the founder became familiar with the circumstances of the school and with the Principal. Another factor that influenced the selection of the pilot site was that at the time of investigation a corporate investor was funding the school for infrastructure upgrades. The presence of a corporate investor implied that the school was a good site for investment and that the school was perceived to be a central point for the region. When the relationship between the school and the investor was investigated, it was found that the relationship between the two was amicable and that progress was being made. The additional support provided by the corporate investor also meant that some of the needs of the school, especially those beyond the focus and mandate of the ERF, would be addressed. The school was checked against the Department of Education records for performance and compliance issues which would indicate extreme, negative conditions which would be considered beyond the scope of the ERF at that stage. The final and possibly most important consideration was the profile of the learners at the school and whether they would

benefit from participating in the scholarship programme. The socio-economic profile of the surrounding community, and by extension the learners, was investigated to determine whether they fit the criterion for financial support. The performance of the learners was taken into consideration.

The founder also held preliminary discussions with the principal to gauge whether he, and by extension the school, would be open to receiving assistance. The response by the Principal was positive as he could see the benefit his school would derive from this form of intervention. It is important to note that at the time that the offer of the programme of intervention was made the school was in a position of relatively strong academic performance with a matric pass rate of 92%. This consideration implies that the Principal was not desperate for aid and that he was not coerced into accepting aid by adverse circumstances. This discussion with the Principal was the beginning of the consultation phase of the intervention programme.

Consultation processes prior to school entry

This is the phase of intervention where support and buy-in for the programme is secured and interest is generated amongst the target population for the programme. In discussing this theme the Executive Director described what the process of consultation is within this context, the identification of stakeholders and how the information was shared. When focussing on consultation the discussing centred on the method in which the relevant information was shared with the stakeholders identified in the programme. Issues explored in this theme included when it was relevant to share information, whether it was better to share all information with all the stakeholders from the outset or whether it was more expedient to approach key gatekeepers once there was a proof of concept available to sustain your request of support.

Defining consultation within the ERF

The term Consultation has many variations but the core definition remains the same. For the ERF consultation entailed holding a discussion where all parties are acknowledged as experts within their own contexts and where the emphasis was on collaboratively developing a plan of action that drew on the resources available to individual stakeholders. The aim of the consultation was to generate ownership among the stakeholders of the scholarship programme.

Before approaching any of the stakeholders it was important that the ERF decide on the process it would employ when consulting the various stakeholder groups. This would entail making a decision on the degree of openness the consultation process would allow for stakeholders to shape and refine the programme designed by the ERF board.

Allowing stakeholders to have full input into the design of the programme would ensure that the interests of the various stakeholders are reflected in the final product. This would greatly ensure the buy-in of the stakeholders and create a sense of ownership of the programme. The difficulty with this process is that it can be incredibly time consuming as each stakeholder group will have different, and in some cases, competing priorities and objectives. The mediation process necessary to integrate these views, interests and objectives can consume a large amount of time and energy.

An alternative approach is to design a programme and present it to the stakeholder groups and request their input on whether they would be willing to participate in the intervention or whether it does not meet their needs. The benefit of this approach is that it allows the organisation designing the intervention to clearly match the programme to their objectives and resources. However, while this approach can potentially save time and energy it runs a great risk of not gathering any support from the stakeholders. If the priorities of the target population differ from that of the programme, the support from the target population will not be forthcoming and all the time and effort put into designing the programme will have been in vain.

The ERF adopted the latter approach to consulting the stakeholders of the programme but opened the consultative process to allow constructive criticism of the programme. The rationale behind employing this approach was that by allowing the stakeholders to critique the programme, the ERF would still gain an insight into the priorities and needs of the stakeholder groups. However, by retaining control over the identity and focus of the programme, the ERF would be able to ensure that the organisation's objectives would still be achieved while ensuring that the programme is representative of the most urgent needs of the stakeholders.

Because my worry is that when you go with programmes like this, which have potential to challenge people like teachers, and then if you start saying: "here's a programme what do you think?" You'll spend the whole year trying to refine. You say "here's a

programme”, you implement and then you create space for them for engagement so that even if there were issues that they would have raised in the beginning, they will still have a platform. Like now they are making suggestions which require restructuring from our side and it makes sense and it makes impact and that’s perfect. I think where you suspect that there could be resistance then go with the ERF initial approach. And then where you think that there is openness and there won’t be resistance then in that way you can go with the programme and say to people “what do you think?” And you’ll know that you will still make progress in that way and know that you will achieve your primary objective. ‘Coz sometimes with what you think you might end up not achieving...or what your initial...or what you are in essence all about.

The first step in the consultation process is identifying the stakeholders who should be involved or informed of the intervention programme. A stakeholder can be defined as any individual who has an impact on the performance of the programme, who stands to benefit from or be negatively affected by the programme or who sponsors or invests in the programme. In this context the stakeholders identified were the ERF board members, whose recruitment we discussed in the previous section, the school management team, the educators in the school, the corporate sponsors of the programme, the mentors, who we will discuss in the next section, the parents of the learners who are selected as part of the scholarship programme, the learners selected into the programme and the learners in the school generally. These stakeholders were identified by the board of the ERF with the assistance of the Principal of the school.

There are general protocols for communicating the launch of a new project within a community of stakeholders. The typical communication route followed from the perspective of the government departments would be to notify the district and obtain their consent before consulting the school management team, then the School Governing Body, the parents and the learner body (see Figure 3.2). This formal process would ensure that the correct authorities are duly notified of your intent and gaining their permission would impose credibility on the programme being implemented.

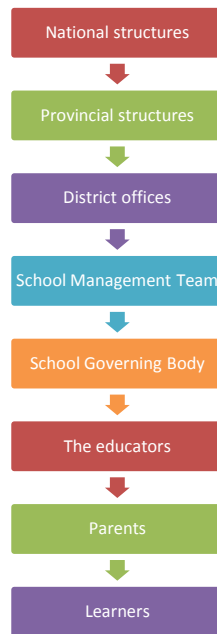


Figure 3.2The typical communication protocol in the education system (South African Department of Education, 2008)

However, it is important to note that there are often inter group dynamics between stakeholders, in particular in cases such as this where there is an unequal distribution of power between stakeholders and insufficient mechanisms for communication to redress the power distribution. It is therefore imperative that the context of the community and stakeholder group be taken into careful consideration from the outset of the consultation phase to ensure buy-in.

The process described above and illustrated in Figure 3.2 is a top-down process and the support provided by the district can alienate stakeholders who do not hold enough authority to question or oppose decisions made at a district level. This can create the perception that the programme is imposed on the other stakeholders by the organisation in collaboration with the district which would greatly hamper the consultative process which is intended as an open and communicative forum.

The process employed by the ERF was aimed at not only generating buy-in and acceptance of the programme but to also create a sense of ownership of the programme, particularly among those stakeholders most directly affected by the programme, the School Management Team, Parents, Educators and Learners.

I thought that in terms of process it was better to start from below than to go to district, get an understanding of district and then go to [the school] because I didn't want them to see it as a district initiative. I want them to see it as an initiative with and from a school. Then we could, together, inform the district about the programme

Toward this end the process of consultation followed was a bottom-up approach where the Principal of the school was brought into the consulting process as an expert participant (see Figure 3.3). The Principal was a key gatekeeper in this context as he provided a link to all the other stakeholders and was one of the few stakeholders with the direct authority to implement decisions taken. Through him meetings were arranged with the various stakeholder groups. Although this process proved to be time consuming, it was a crucial step in setting the foundation for creating ownership among the stakeholders. By electing a spokesperson from within the context, the ERF ensured that the growth and development of the programme and its subsequent successes would be viewed as a collaborative achievement which was in line with the philosophy of empowerment that the ERF subscribed to. His role was to ensure the buy-in of the various stakeholder groups by informing them of the ERF's scholarship programme and checking expectations among these groups.

So the principal in this instance was very keen to inform the other stakeholders. I felt that if we don't win him from day one then um...if he's shaky he was going to be a stumbling block. So I thought the best thing was to make sure that he understands the programme. And then we get his buy-in which is what happened.

The ideal forum for checking expectations is one where all the stakeholders are placed within a consultative summit and expectations are collectively shared. This process allows for transparency and provides a more diverse set of expectations and objectives. It also provides a forum for managing expectations by the organisation where the stakeholders are clearly informed of the scope of practice and focus that the intervention will have.

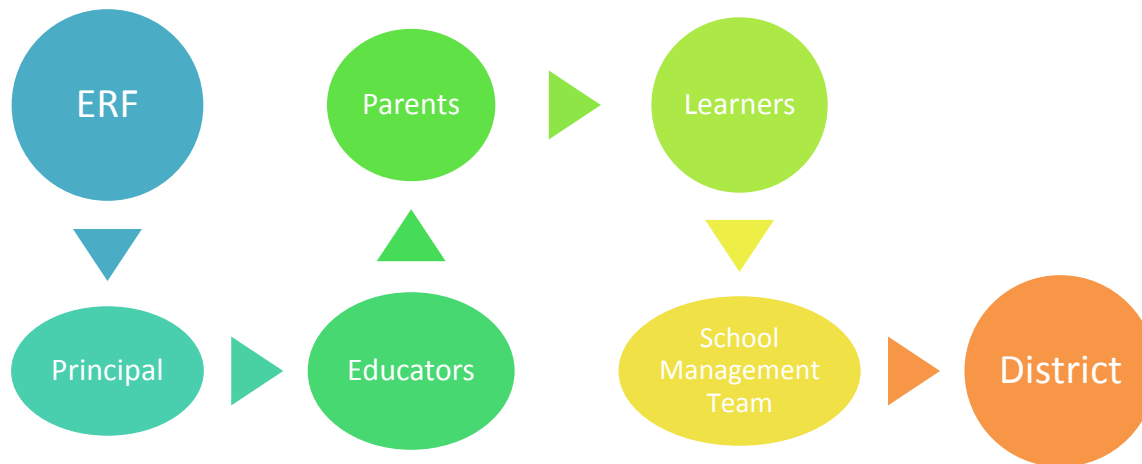


Figure 3.3The ERF’s consultation approach

The ideal outlined above is often difficult to achieve due to the logistics it entails. Synchronising the schedules and availability of all stakeholders is an exceptionally difficult task. The ERF opted for a pragmatic approach which entailed separate consultations with the various stakeholder groups but ensured transparency by inviting representatives from each group to every meeting.

The ERF, through the Principal, approached the Parents, the School Governing Body, the Educators and the Learners. This process brought in the stakeholders who were most directly affected by the programme from the beginning and ensured that they were given a platform to give voice to their opinions and concerns regarding the programme. The ERF also created a platform for informal consultation with stakeholders by encouraging them to participate in the programme at various levels. This allows the stakeholders to see the programme in action and to provide their input from their experience of the programme.

Implementation phase of the Programme

The implementation phase documents the process involved in the implementation of the programme at the school after all the relevant consultations had taken place. This is the phase during which the ERF began implementing the programme in the pilot school and during which the programme approach was refined. The implementation phase of an intervention is when the procedural protocols are established and the methods of good practice established.

Application and selection

This section documents the process of application as it occurred in the first year of the ERF. It describes the difficulties experienced in communicating and marketing the programme in the initial weeks of entering the school. It highlights how the ERF had to restructure the selection criteria to ensure that the programme had enough learners to run the programme without compromising the principle of empowerment which the programme advocates. The theme then discusses how the ERF created two categories of student to achieve the objectives without compromising the principles of the organisation.

The ERF had two sets of criteria for the learners who wish to be part of the scholarship programme. The first set of criteria is the application criteria. The learners were required to fill in an application form supplied by the ERF, obtain a letter of recommendation from each of the following groups: the educators, a community member and a personal acquaintance. The letters of recommendation would provide a testimony to the character of the learner. The learners also had to write a letter motivating why they should be selected into the programme and how they envision the programme assisting them in achieving their ambitions.

The first step in implementing the programme was informing the Principal and educators at the school of the application process. These stakeholders were critical in ensuring that the details of the application process would be communicated to the learners. The rationale behind engaging the Principal and educators was that having the message conveyed by individuals familiar with the learners would aid in establishing the credibility of the programme. The educators also have frequent contact with the learners and as such can consistently remind them of the application

process. A further advantage of using the educators is that they are familiar with the learners and can easily identify those who would most benefit from a programme of this nature.

We doubted whether... if we would simply have to announce that there's this organisation and people who are interested should apply...whether the learners would apply.

The application process was open to all learners who were interested in applying and each learner in the school was supplied with an application form. The application process was announced during an assembly by the Principal and the educators discussed the process in further detail in the classrooms. The application process was intended to be the start of the collaborative partnership between the ERF and the pilot school where co-ownership was taken for the success of the programme. Toward this end the ERF left the application process fully in the hands of the Principal and educators and depended on them to ensure that as many learners applied as possible. The deadline passed without many applications received from the learners which placed the ERF in a difficult position in terms of achieving their objectives. The ERF founder briefly reflects on the anxiety experienced at this point:

So what happened was initially the principal announced the scholarship application process at assembly and then the teachers helped in classrooms to talk about applications. But they didn't meet the deadline; the learners didn't meet the deadline. Come the closing date most of them had not submitted applications. So at that point I went in to address the learners about this thing. I think at that point my approach was to give them the space as the school 'coz they are promising to inform the children and so on. So don't immediately rush in to say no I can't [wait any longer]. Let it be, let them do it and then we see what happens. And that's what happened. Which kind of said at some point that they were not very organised and firm because in my view when I reflected with the principal there's a point when I said you announce and motivate and there's a point where you say 'how far are you?' and there's a point where you say 'bring everything'.

At that point the ERF had to step in and take over the application process from the school to ensure that they meet their targets for applications. Once all the applications were received the task was then to select learners who qualified for entry into the programme. At this point the

ERF had the crucial realisation that their selection criterion of a 50% mark in all subjects was too high a standard for many of the learners in the school. The ERF then had to make the crucial decision on whether to outright reject all learners below this criterion and risk alienating the target population for the intervention or whether to compromise their standards for the sake of implementing the intervention.

The ERF board decided that they could not compromise on their standards without negatively affecting the objectives of the programme. To adapt to the circumstances without compromising the standards or sending contradictory messages; the ERF selected learners who had not achieved the required 50% but who showed potential to develop into high performing learners under the guidance of the programme. The selected learners were then divided into two distinct groups: The first group were the learners who had achieved the selection criterion of 50% and who would receive the full benefit of being a part of the programme. The second group of learners selected did not have the subminimum of 50% and would not receive any financial support, in other words, they would not receive new uniforms, school bags and stationery. Both groups would receive the psycho-social and academic support offered by the programme. In total the board selected fourteen learners for the first year of intervention. Of these five learners received the full scholarship with financial assistance.

Mentorship

This section discusses the various processes involved in setting up and delivering the mentorship component of the ERF. The mentorship component is the core programme in the ERF's intervention approach. It entails the recruitment of young professionals, university students or entrepreneurs who are willing to volunteer their time and skills in tutoring the learners selected into the scholarship programme. The mentors provide the learners with personal attention while assisting them in the development of their aptitude in English, Mathematics, Accounting, Biology (or Natural Sciences) and the Physical Sciences. While the tuition role is critical, it is not the only role the mentors play in the life of the learners. The mentors are also required to teach the learners study skills, aid them in developing learning strategies and provide them with general social support. The mentors are meant to be positive role models for the learners and are expected to always display professional, moral and empathic behaviour toward the learners and

each other. Through the mentorship programme the ERF aims to demonstrate to the learners that it is possible to overcome socio-economic circumstances to achieve success.

Once the learners had been selected it was time to recruit the mentors who would tutor them during the course of the year. As described above, the mentors are the core of the scholarship programme. The initial contact with the mentors was through an individual known to the founder. This individual, who later became one of the first mentors, had an interest in youth development from an educational stand point. The founder shared the objectives of the programme and recruited this individual into the ERF. He then went on to recruit other individuals from his place of work who shared the same passion for youth development. While the majority of the mentors were recruited through the personal network of the individual discussed above, not all the mentors were recruited in this manner. The founder of the ERF also recruited university students through a presentation done at the University of Johannesburg where she shared the ERF and its mission with an audience. In total there were seven mentors recruited for the first year of implementation.

The criteria set for the selection of these mentors was that they should be young, which in this case ranged from the ages of twenty two to thirty years of age, but more importantly that they should be able to relate to the learners who are selected in the programme. The mentors had to have an understanding of youth culture and of the current culture within the education system. This would allow the mentors and learners to relate to each other on a level that would aid the formation of a social bond. This connection would form the basis for the role modelling that the ERF hoped would aid the learners in adopting behaviours that would lead to success academically and professionally. Additional criteria were that the mentors must have passed matric and have obtained university exemption as this is what they are encouraging the learners to achieve. The mentors must have experience or proficiency in the subjects that they tutor. The mentors must display moral and socially appropriate behaviour at all times, in particular in their interactions with the learners. The last and possibly most important criterion was that the mentors must be fully committed to the cause of the ERF. The rationale behind the strong emphasis on this last criterion is that the relationship between the mentor and the learner they tutor is crucial to the identification of the learner with the mentor. If the mentor attends the sessions inconsistently or is not present during periods of crisis, such as exam periods, then the

learner loses the essential support network that the ERF offers. The mentors were also made aware of the fact that their involvement with the organisation was on a purely voluntary basis and that no form of remuneration would be made to them. While the socio-economic background of the mentors was not a criterion for selection, it was discovered that the mentors who shared the same childhood circumstances as the learners were able to use these experiences to motivate the learners effectively. The examples used to illustrate this by the ERF founder are the following:

...even though where that happened, it played...it contributed positively. For example there's a student at UJ who is an orphan. She went to one of the worst performing high schools in Soweto and she did very, very well. She came – we wanted her to come and motivate them. So she spoke to them and gave them her background and they were really shocked that despite her circumstances she was able to do really well. And she got like five distinctions for her Matric and she told them that despite the fact that she didn't have parents and the struggles that she had to go through she made it. There was also another student who was at UJ who also had difficult circumstances in the sense that his mother was a domestic worker, his father was a gardener and he told them that sometimes he would go to school without food but there he was. So I think for the learners it was important for them to realise that yes, you may have problems but you don't have to be stuck there, you know? And to see the importance of education in all that.

Once the mentors were recruited and inducted into the ERF the next phase of the intervention was to introduce the mentors to the learners. This was done by hosting a day long workshop where the mentors and learners were allowed time to get to know each other. The purpose of this first workshop was also to establish a working relationship between the mentors and learners by establishing a memorandum of understanding. The learners took the opportunity to set down the conditions for their participation which included respect, confidentiality, empathy and patience. The mentors took the opportunity to contract for the learners to take ownership of their own learning, that they would honour the dates and times set aside for mentorship sessions and that they would respect the position of the mentors.

The mentorship sessions were then implemented once a month on a Saturday for the entire day. During this time the learners would be taken through the subjects that were highlighted as needing attention. The mentorship sessions were mini lectures delivered by the mentors to a group of learners followed by one on one work in specific subjects. The curriculum followed by the mentors is the same as that being done in the classroom. The purpose of this is to avoid duplication or the incorrect level of work being provided to learners. The learners would be given ‘homework’ to complete in between each mentorship session which would require self-study. The learners were also expected to write continuous assessment tests which consistently tested the progress of the learners against the learning objectives of each subject.

The mentorship sessions soon revealed that there were ‘knowledge gaps’ among the learners. The learners did not have the necessary subject knowledge or exposure needed from previous grades to perform well in their current grade. This gap was evident among the grade 12 learners in particular. The implication of this was that the mentors had to perform remedial teaching to cover the gaps in knowledge and could not give sufficient attention to adequately preparing the learners for the examinations to complete their current grade. The presence of these gaps was communicated to the educators during staff meetings that the ERF founder was invited to participate in. The founder perceived the feedback during these meetings as uninterested and, in her view; the educators were unwilling to acknowledge that there was a problem with these learners. However, when speaking to individual educators in private, the founder perceived the feedback to be more direct in acknowledging the presence of a problem and in expressing a sense of frustration at having to repeat basic concepts from previous grades at the expense of the current syllabus. When asked to speculate on the educator’s reactions during staff meetings the founder expressed the belief that acknowledging the presence of the problem by an individual would imply accepting responsibility for causing it. This in turn could negatively affect the perception of the capabilities of individual educators which in turn could adversely affect the job security of these individuals.

Workshops

In addition to the weekly subject-focussed sessions with mentors, the ERF also presented a series of “personal empowerment” workshops that focussed on learners’ “soft skills”. The subjects

dealt with during the workshops include: Goal Setting, Self Awareness, Stress Management, Being a Teenager, Problem Solving and Public Speaking. Each of these workshops was aimed at developing skills critical to successfully coping with the difficulties faced by learners in their current phase of development.

The majority of the workshops were run by ERF board members and this provided the necessary experience for the ERF to reach a position where it could begin recruiting presenters from the outside. The primary benefit of the ERF board members acting as workshop facilitators was that the board members were clear on the outcomes that the ERF wanted to achieve with the workshops. The learners valued the patience and affirming approach applied by the board members who were workshop presenters. In their view, this encouraged the learners to participate and ask questions. The founder then reflected on the educators and the need to communicate the need of the learners for displays of deep empathy without violating their professional space.

I suppose it's a deeper sense of caring. It's not like when we meet them – we don't meet them that often but they still feel that within the programme they are being cared for. They feel they are being loved, they are being recognised. And maybe the teachers have empathy but how that is communicated or expressed is something that should be looked into.

Stakeholder roles

This section explores the involvement of the various stakeholders in the ERF. The ERF has a variety of stakeholders, each of whom holds a unique role that they should, and in most cases do play. Without the support and involvement of these stakeholders, the ERF would not be able to achieve their objectives. The stakeholders discussed below are not as crucial to the existence of the ERF as the board, mentors and learners but their support aids the ERF in providing a holistic and sustainable service. The discussion below will only discuss the stakeholder groups identified by the ERF Executive Director as key supporters of the programme.

Parental involvement

The parents' initial involvement in the programme was limited to being informed of the programme during a general parents' meeting which was then followed up by a notification to those parents whose children had been selected into the programme. The communication with the parents during the selection phase was entirely telephonic and the purpose of these conversations was to inform the parents and not to engage them in the programme. This was attributed to the fast pace at which the programme was developing at that stage. As a result the expectations of the parents were not sought at this early phase in the implementation of the programme. The parents of the selected learners were only formally introduced to the ERF two months into the implementation of the programme at the pilot school. A second general session was held with the entire parent body halfway during the year to inform them of the progress of the learners and to raise awareness of emerging issues in the school.

The ideal relationship between the ERF and the parent body, which includes those parents whose children who were not selected, should be one of close collaboration. The role that could be played by the parents is to actively advocate for the improvement of the conditions in the school and to volunteer their skills in upgrading the infrastructure at the school. The parents of the learners involved in the programme should ideally work closely with the educators and mentors to provide a structured learning environment for the learners.

The parents should be engaged at the outset of the selection process to check and manage expectations and to establish a working relationship with the ERF.

Educator involvement

The educators are a key partner in ensuring the academic success of the learners in the ERF programme. The educators still retain the primary responsibility for delivering the syllabus to the learners in a manner that will ensure a good pass rate in the school. The role of the mentors was to augment the work already done by the educators, not replace them in the education system. The mentors and educators never met during the course of the first year of implementation and, as a result, did not check expectations or communicate the distinction in the roles between these stakeholder groups. This lack of clarity led to resistance from the educators as a group to the

programme due to the perception that the mentors were somehow superior to them in the system. The communication between the mentors and educators primarily took place through the ERF founder who acted as the representative for the organisation at the pilot school. It should be noted that there were numerous attempts to introduce the educators to the mentors but that these attempts failed largely due to the reluctance by the educators to return to the school on a Saturday when the mentorship sessions were held. The mentors all held full time jobs or were full time students and were thus unavailable during the week when the educators were present at the school. It is possible that the fact that the educators were expected to adapt to the mentor's schedule reinforced the perception that the mentors were somehow considered superior in the school system.

All of the above resulted in no comprehensive learning plan being developed that would ensure that the learners in the scholarship programme learn in a structured learning environment. A coordinated learning plan between the educators and mentors could have aided in the mentors retaining their original function which was to focus on specific topics in each subject. The educators could have aided the mentors in identifying the key areas with each learner that required attention, while the mentors could have ensured that the educators are provided with the homework each learner has to complete in between mentorship sessions. This could have facilitated the cross-pollination of ideas between these stakeholder groups.

While the educator group as a whole seemed to be resistant to working with the ERF, it should be noted that there were individual educators who provided the ERF with crucial assistance. The Principal of the school championed the cause of the ERF during staff meetings and actively encouraged staff members to participate in the programme. He also ensured that the mentorship sessions were catered and aided in the logistical arrangements on mentorship days. The Deputy Principal also aided in the tasks undertaken by the Principal when necessary. In addition to these individuals was an educator who worked closely with the mentors to ensure that they received all the curriculum related materials required to conduct the mentorship sessions. He also ensured that the mentors were supplied with the assessment schedules for each learner. Yet another educator assisted the Principal in ensuring that the ERF had access to the classrooms in which to conduct the mentorship sessions. He also assisted in organising the learners whenever there were field trips away from the school.

The primary mechanism for communicating with the educators was through the ERF founder during staff meetings. She was provided with a slot in the agenda during which she could raise concerns or provide feedback from workshops and mentorship sessions. One of the other mechanisms used for communicating with the educators was the special events, such as the Grade 9 festival and the Annual Luncheon, that the ERF would host. During these events the ERF would communicate progress made to date and reward students who had performed well. The attention that these events generated within the community resulted in educators taking the programme more seriously and caused some of the educators to participate more actively.

Observed effect of the programme

This section explores the observed effects of the programme on the various levels and stakeholders. These observations are made by the ERF *Executive Director* and founder who is closely involved with the day to day operation of the ERF and who has extensive contact with all the stakeholder groups.

On learners

The primary observed effect on the learners is a marked growth in confidence and the application of life skills. This growth was attributed to the affirmative and empowering approach of the ERF which aims to provide the learners with unconditional positive support. By displaying faith in the abilities of the learners to empower themselves by learning new skills and applying these skills in their everyday lives, the ERF aimed to encourage the learners to grow and learn. Failure is viewed as a lesson from which experience is gained to inform future attempts at a task and not as a reason for punishing the individual. This approach encourages the learners to attempt difficult tasks in the face of the fear of failure. This approach is particularly relevant when dealing with learners who are at the developmental phase where the perception of their peers is a strong factor in motivating behaviour. By removing the risk of humiliation and ridicule for failing or admitting ignorance, the learners are provided with a safe space in which to openly examine shortcomings and to take steps to address them in an environment that provides constructive feedback that does not threaten their developing identity. This support is not limited to the academic support that the learners receive but extends to a form of more general social support in which the well-being of the learner is of equal importance to the ERF. The learners are encouraged to speak to the

mentors and ERF representatives at the school about any problems they may have in their lives. While the ERF does not supply therapeutic interventions for the learners, they do provide empathic support. This support has had a buffering effect on the dropout rate of learners in the programme who received this support.

The growth observed in the learners was also attributed to the fact that the scholarship programme provides the learners with a platform to display and exercise their abilities within a structured environment. The learners were actively encouraged to participate in the development of their life skills. The workshops would provide the basic theory and guide learners through the application of these skills in the safety of the workshop environment. The learners were then required to apply these skills in their everyday environment to develop these skills further. It is this experiential learning approach that is credited with providing the learners with the opportunity to grow and learn. These skills and the learners' aptitude for them may have gone unnoticed in the traditional school context, especially one where there are limited extra curricula activities.

I mean we saw changes last year – even now we can see – but from the beginning of the year until end of the year the...some – the learners showed progress during the course of the year where if they didn't have that platform they wouldn't be recognised – they, probably even themselves – wouldn't be so conscious of their potential.

Another prominent theme identified by the Executive Director concerned the provision of the platform that the ERF provides for the learners to showcase their abilities which may have gone unnoticed in a different context. Illustrative of this dynamic was the case of a learner who was faced with the loss of both her parents in a short space of time. This learner was supported by the ERF during this time and even though she dropped out of the programme, she remained in contact with individuals in the ERF and she remained in school in the face of a number of obstacles.

On academic standards

The observed effects on the academic standards were perceived to come about as a result of the emphasis placed on achieving a higher standard by the ERF. The learners in the ERF are

expected achieve 50% minimum to pass as opposed to the 30% expected in the classrooms. The rationale behind the 50% pass mark is that learners are required to achieve this level of understanding in all areas of work in the Matric phase of their schooling career. By teaching learners to adhere to this standard from an early age, the ERF hopes to lessen the impact of the learning curve experienced by learners during their Matric year. Currently learners are doubly disadvantaged by the lowered standards. When they reach the Matric year of their schooling career they are expected to undertake an increased workload that they are not accustomed to in addition to increasing their level of performance. The second disadvantage of this approach is that all Further and Higher Education institutions expect a **minimum** of 50% for entrance into their institutions. Professional degrees and diplomas often hold a minimum standard of 60%. Many learners who complete their schooling career find themselves unable to pursue their careers of choice due to underperformance in High School. By enforcing the 50% standard at the High School level in lower grades, the ERF hopes to find more learners qualifying for Further and Higher Education careers. The perceived effect of the implementation of this higher standard is that the learners in the programme have internalised this level of performance and strive to achieve it.

Challenges in implementing the programme

This section discusses the challenges the ERF faced in implementing the programme. The discussion will focus on the challenges each stakeholder brought to the programme. This is in contrast to the benefits that each stakeholder brought to the programme. It is the nature of community interventions that your greatest ally is often your greatest obstacle to achieving the success in the intervention. This is due to the fact that the success of the intervention is dependent on their support and buy-in to the process. Managing these relationships is the key challenge to running a successful intervention programme.

Educators

The founder pointed to a lack of support from educators as a key challenge for the ERF, speculating that the ERF may represent a threat to them. The possible causes of this centred on the threat that the ERF may represent to the identity of the educators as competent professionals. The possibility of the teachers perceiving the involvement of the ERF as an invasion of their

professional space was also explored. The second reason for the difficulty experienced in generating buy-in among educators was that the *Executive Director*, who represents the ERF at the school, did not have a relationship with many of the educators. This made generating buy-in among the educators extremely difficult and hindered the implementation of the scholarship programme, especially during the recruiting phase of the implementation.

Teachers were, in my view, not as involved as they could have been. Then I think I was also quick to say to myself that it's the first year and to think that these teachers are going to be on ball the way we expect them to be could be expecting the impossible because the programme has to do with the classroom where the teachers belong and the chances of them being sensitive to that are very high.

School leadership

The school leadership was also identified as a challenge in the implementation of the programme. While the school management supported the ERF, the manner in which the school was managed made it difficult at times to turn the support into tangible benefits for the ERF. The reasons for this that were explored were that the educators at the school did not buy into the current management's agenda and therefore the support of the school management did not translate in to the support of all the educators for the ERF.

Whether, if we explore the issue of relationship and kind of understanding with who, whether we'd be able to make a breakthrough. Even to observe the relationship between the principal and the teachers – which I did for some time – and I think I realised that the teachers were also demoralised by the leadership. Even though in my view I always argue that if you have a problem with your manager, if you want to be productive, you will find a way of being productive even with that manager. You just have to find a way to manage your manager.

The ERF board

The ERF board's distance from the implementation of the programme was considered another challenge. The board's primary contact with the school was through the *Executive Director* and one or two other board members who were involved in the day to day implementation of the

programme. The communication process with the board was described as open and consultative which allowed them to influence the pace and nature of the intervention. The board expressed frustration at the pace with which implementation was being executed and as a result placed greater pressure on the *Executive Director* and board members who were involved in the implementation of the programme to achieve results at the expense of observing process needs in the school. The reflections on the causes for this frustration revolved around managing the expectations of the board of the school. The recommendation was that the board gain a greater understanding of community development processes.

They were so frustrated with the teachers and I would be the one – you know the person who needed the support is the person who would want to persuade them to say “hang on, let’s give the teachers a chance and see when the process unfolds what happens. We need to understand that we are threatening people’s comfort zones.

Culture of disorganisation

This theme reflected on the perceived culture of disorganisation at the school. This culture was perceived to permeate through the school at all levels, from the school management, to the educators, the parents of the learners and the learners themselves. The culture manifested in educators not submitting mark schedules in time; in learners not completing assigned tasks for mentorship, not applying for the scholarship in time and punctuality; in parents not following up with learners on the work they are required to do for mentorship.

..And then the other issue that we picked up was that the learners were not organised. I think they are used to the culture of disorganisation. You know, simple things like punctuality, being up to date with your work, submitting things on time – which we saw with the application process; it runs across the board. I was even worried that I would have to be very creative in getting kids highly organised with applications because in that setup if you come up with a mechanism and think that things will happen, it won’t happen. I mean you see it with the teachers. They take time to come up with schedules, you know, marks. Class teachers when you ask them for a schedule, they will tell you that “I’m still waiting, other people haven’t finished marking”. So if teachers can’t also adhere to deadlines, then what about the kids?

All of this led to confusion and delays during the mentorship which in turn impacts on the amount of work covered. The discussion focused on the mechanisms put in place to compensate for the effects of this culture which included calling learners ahead of each mentorship session to encourage them to complete their assigned tasks and to attend the mentorship sessions, regular follow up sessions with the educators to ensure that the necessary learner information was obtained in time to ensure the smooth running of the mentorship sessions and feedback sessions to the parent body where the difficulties experienced were openly discussed. To illustrate this point the Executive Director gave an example of how the ERF had to take disciplinary action to ensure that the learners in the programme learnt that they would not be “spoon fed”.

And that was very frustrating. I remember one mentorship session a grade 12 – it was not far from exams – a grade 12 came, he was supposed to do an exemplar question paper. He was asked to go and work out all that and the mentor had the memorandum. So they would come and work on the answers. This student came there and he hadn't done anything. So I said “you know what? We are not an ag shame type of programme here.” So I went and spoke to him and then I said “send him home”. We sent him home. And we said “You know what, go home. And next session – if you seriously want to pass your matric – then go and work hard and come back. Next session if you are not prepared, don't come.” And then we had to let everybody know why he was sent home which sent a signal to all of them that you know what: if you are not jacked up, forget it.

The recommendations put forward to address this problem included developing an academic calendar in collaboration with the educators that would be distributed to the learners, parents and mentors to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of the crucial dates and deadlines in the scholarship programme.

The impact of differing developmental stages between learners

The learners in the programme during the ERF's' first year of implementation were selected from across a number of grades. This difference in age and developmental phase was discussed as part of the observed dynamics between the learners, from different age groups and therefore differing developmental stages, during workshops. The interactions between learners when

addressing developmental issues such as romantic relationships was observed as challenge because the younger learners would withdraw in the company of the older learners.

And for example, when you talk about issues...teenage issues like boyfriends, girlfriends...these young ones would giggle and be embarrassed and look up and whatever. Meanwhile these other ones would be excited and they'd want to talk about it. And then you can't push these ones because the levels are different but I guess if they were in a comfort group then they would talk about these issues at a level that is comfortable for them.

The reasons given for this by both M and the Executive Director could be that the learners are in different developmental phases and do not relate equally to the subject matter being addressed. The theme then highlighted that when placed in their peer groups, the younger learners would open up and share personal experiences. The tension between peer-group learning between the different age groups was another theme that emerged during this discussion. For older learners, it was believed that interaction with the younger learners would raise their awareness of the effect their behaviour has on others and help them learn to role model behaviour. For the younger learners, having older peers to model behaviour from could ease the anxiety of the developmental process.

...it's more about wondering whether at some point we would have made that distinction then would they benefit very well but within their level. And at the same time it's also good that they interface because then the young ones can also learn from these other ones and the bigger ones can also be conscientised to being sensitive to the young ones, especially at school because they are the role models because they are seniors

Finally, the reflections focussed on the importance of maintaining 'informal' relationships with the learners as the ERF representative as this allows for a more open communication channel through which learners could share information that does not fit within the formal structure of the workshops and mentorship sessions.

But when you talk to them individually, they would talk. Based on the fact that they would have observed us to be more open compared to their parents and maybe other adults in

their lives. So informally they open up but in a bigger group – especially younger ones...it could be issues of respect but also I think that some of them at home they don't have anyone to talk to about these kind of issues.

Volunteering in the ERF

This theme explored the nature of volunteerism in the ERF. The ERF is built on the services of volunteers. All of the stakeholders involved with the organisation are volunteers and perform their functions out of a sense of duty to others. There is a shared belief in the efficacy of education as a tool for empowering individuals and communities, a shared belief in the power of unconditional positive support and the belief that all humans have the ability to grow given a supportive and nurturing environment. The stakeholders are interdependent on each other to achieve the shared objectives housed within the ERF and the relationship between these groups and individuals is of the utmost importance. It is of crucial importance to the ERF to maintain and strengthen these relationships between individual stakeholders to ensure long term sustainability. While the decision to volunteer in a particular field of work is dependent on individual characteristics such as culture, religious beliefs, personal values, resources and abilities, maintaining involvement in an organisation is a collective effort.

The culture of positive support is not reserved solely for the benefit of the learners and is extended to all stakeholders in the ERF. This is one of the keys to the success of the organisation. By ensuring that all stakeholders feel valued and empowered to make decisions, the ERF firmly engages their support, knowledge and resources in achieving its objectives.

Setting boundaries

This theme ran throughout the intervention process. It explored the tensions and dynamics of setting and maintaining boundaries in the implementation process. The boundaries define the scope of the programme and are intended to clearly delineate the extent to which the ERF is willing to get involved. In a country where there is widespread poverty, high crime rates, high prevalence of HIV infection and high levels of unemployment, there are many needs, each a priority, to address within any community. When an intervention in a community with a large number of socio-economic issues shows signs of success, it is not uncommon for the community

to respond by attempting to utilise the organisation delivering the intervention as a resource for dealing with other issues. To avoid dissipating the focus, and by extension the functionality of the ERF, it was essential to maintain clear and firm boundaries when conducting the intervention.

As much as it is necessary for the organisation to become a part of the community that it intervenes in, it is equally important that the organisation maintains its identity, values and objectives. This entails creating a clear distinction between the community needs that the organisation shares a vested interest in and the community needs that are acknowledged as important and urgent but are beyond the scope and objectives of the organisation. This is a continuous process that has to be implemented from the consultation phase of the intervention and maintained throughout the intervention. The process of maintaining boundaries entails a constant reassessment of the priority of the identified needs in the community. The primary consideration that the organisation must make is whether addressing the identified need would further the progress toward the overall objectives of the programme. Equally important is deciding when not to intervene as this could alienate key stakeholders in the intervention process. If a refusal to intervene is perceived to be a lack of empathy on the part of the organisation for the community, it may cause stakeholders to believe that the organisation is only looking out for its own interests.

At some stage she was smuggling in her [The chairperson of the SGB]own need because she was telling me about her daughter who needed a scholarship but I had to remind her about the processes – that unfortunately she would have to apply and that we wouldn't bend the rules because it was her daughter as the chairperson. So at least she knows that the process is fair and we stick to it.

A secondary level of boundary setting is in the interaction with the learners. It is essential that the learners be treated by all members of the ERF with respect and dignity as these are the behaviours that the organisation aims to instil in the learners. This entails maintaining an awareness of the developmental phase of the learners and responding with language that is appropriate and informative. This level of setting boundaries is particularly important for the mentors who are expected to model appropriate behaviour for the learners.

...the issue of social behaviour and moral ethics it is very important that we don't have mentors who cannot define boundaries. If you drink, you drink there and you don't come and talk about your drinking there so that kids can define themselves and your role within the bounds of the programme.

A further consideration to be made when intervening in a community is the boundary between the professional and personal for the individual acting as the representative of the organisation. Each individual who represents the organisation brings into their work their personal beliefs, fears, values and objectives. So while a particular need identified in the community may not be within the mandate of the organisation to address, it may be an issue that is important to the organisation's representative. In this case the boundary is often hard to define as the representative is in many ways perceived to be the organisation itself, particularly in the case of the ERF where the founder of the organisation is also the representative of the organisation in the school. The individual themselves may come to share this perception and act on a personal principle that is in conflict with the overall objective of the organisation. However, it is important that representative feel that they can and should intervene in situations that hold a personal importance to them during the course of the intervention as long as the personal intervention is clearly distinguished from the professional intervention of the organisation.

And then we had this mentor for example who wanted to apply for residential accommodation at U.J. [University of Johannesburg]. and he didn't have money and he communicated with us that he was in this situation. You know you now pause and say "Gee! This is a need but now is it ERF or whatever?" so I had to say strategically to him "I'll talk to my friends and I'm sure they'll be able to help you". Then that's what I did. So the deposit slip, I realised that it was going to have my name, so I told him that my friends gave me the money and then I deposited the money to the university because he gave me all the details.

Lessons learnt

This section highlights the lessons learnt during the first year of implementation of the ERF. The first lesson put on the table include a longer consultation process of approximately a year where the relevant stakeholders are given an opportunity to define the programme according to their

needs. It is envisaged that this period could then be contrasted with the engagement process of the schools with which the ERF is already involved and a comparison could be made of the level of buy-in these approaches generate. Linked to a longer consultation phase is the recommendation that the parents of the learners be brought into the programme at an earlier phase. During the current year the parents were only formally introduced to the programme in March. By meeting and involving the parents earlier in the year the ERF can actively engage them in structuring the learning environment for the learners. Consistent parental involvement is one of the biggest predictors of academic performance. It is therefore important to convey to parents the crucial role they can play in ensuring that the learners perform their assigned 'homework' and in reminding them to attend mentorship sessions. The parents can also be given calendars with the most important dates relating to the ERF marked for their attention.

The second lesson learnt was that the research component of the implementation phase should be more firmly negotiated at an earlier phase of consultation. The resistance from certain stakeholders at the presentation of research projects warranted further renegotiation of the engagement between the ERF and the school. This cost the ERF time and energy which could have been channelled in a more effective manner. The objective of the ERF to influence policy can only be achieved if there is evidence to support the outcomes of the programme. It is therefore important that all future engagements with the ERF have the participation in the research process as one of the conditions. While this blanket approval will be negotiated with the various stakeholder groups, individuals will still be allowed to refuse participation in the research study in adherence with standard ethical practice. During these negotiations the stakeholders should be allowed to express their concerns at being researched and should be informed of the purpose and approach of the research. By addressing these concerns in an open and friendly manner, the ERF hopes to garner greater participation in future research projects.

Discussion

The interview with M and T (the Executive Director) was an enlightening experience for me. Despite my interest in evaluation and Community Psychology I knew nothing about how NGOs started, what gave them life and what type of people were the social pioneers of our time. Listening to the process of how they put the organisation together was fascinating. Even more fascinating was the way they put together an intervention, tested it, took it apart, tried a different method, etc. The “black box” of NGOs is a little clearer to me now...

Community interventions are messy. There are a number of authors and disciplines dedicated to developing the science of community interventions. However, while there are formal theories and approaches to developing and implementing a successful community intervention programme, the complexity and scope of the work involved in delivering a community intervention on a day to day basis can never be fully documented. This study cannot truly capture the essence of what the ERF is but it can provide a history of the organisation that provides a comprehensive background against which the results of Chapter 5 can be discussed.

Trying to determine the scale of as well as whether NGO interventions are successful is a complex issue facing funders, evaluators, governments and civil society (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002; Rose, 2006). The data available on NGO service provision and project impact are not often collected in a systematic way that translates beyond the individual evaluative frameworks or accountability structures within each NGO or funder. The reasons provided for this state of affairs has been attributed to the limited capacity of NGOs to conduct reflexive research with specific reference to human, financial and time constraints (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2010). Patton (2003; 2008) attributes this to the complex task of developing indicators that realistically and accurately reflect the practice of the intervention implemented by the NGO. Patton (2003) cautions evaluators to carefully consider the unanticipated effects of the programme and to collaboratively and iteratively develop indicators that are reliable and valid. Rose (2006) on the other hand argues that the complexity in assessing NGOs lies in the political context in which these organisations operate. According to Rose (2006) more emphasis is placed on documenting the positive experiences within the NGO than the challenges. The political difficulties inherent in

criticising NGO service provision lies in the possibility that researchers may also criticise governments or funders with whom the NGOs are partnered and consequently endangering the resources available – not only to the NGO under scrutiny but potentially all NGOs within that sector (Hourton, 1999; Rose, 2006). To secure and maintain funding NGOs must show positive results despite the challenging contexts in which they operate. The limited data available to NGOs and those tasked with evaluating their activities pose a direct threat to the continued establishment and development of NGOs. Evaluators need to take cognisance of the entire context in which NGOs operate and should place a particular emphasis on the indirect or non-economic benefits in addition to the direct benefits derived from the intervention (Rose, 2006).

The information gathered in the course of this preliminary study provided the research team with a number of methodological considerations. The evaluability assessment of the ERF also revealed that the ERF was in a phase of development where the objectives and aims were not defined clearly enough to facilitate summative assessment methods. Rather, the phase of implementation in which the ERF is in at the time of the study dictates that the type of evaluation is a formative evaluation based on the principles of improvement-oriented evaluation. The early implementation stage of the ERF also meant that a number of the mechanisms employed by the organisation were still being iteratively developed. The communication protocol followed by the ERF provided a method of communicating the purpose of the research and gaining consent from the various stakeholders in the school and the ERF. The difficulties experienced by the ERF in gaining buy-in from the educator body meant that the research team would have to carefully consider the research approach and place great emphasis on carefully communicating the objectives, aims and anticipated repercussions of the research study. The acknowledgement by the founder of the various role players aided the research team in ensuring that the relevant individuals would be included in the Appreciative Inquiry summit. The preliminary study assisted the research team in deciding on a research approach that would encourage open communication with an appreciative message. During this evaluability assessment, the research team, along with the ERF Executive Director to utilise Appreciative Inquiry as the research method for the study.

The next Chapter goes on to discuss the method employed by the research team in detail and highlights the challenges and successes experienced during the course of the research study.

CHAPTER 4 : THE ITINERARY – RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview of the Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research method employed to conduct an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) of the ERF programme and to engage in participant observation of the AI process. The chapter focuses on an overview of the research approach employed before moving on to describe the technicalities of the design such as the sample, the data gathering method, and the interview schedule which was used to guide the research team in conducting the focus group workshops and the one-on-one interviews held with key stakeholders. The data gathering section also discusses the development of a qualitative questionnaire aimed at incorporating the views of participants who could not attend the workshops. The data analysis strategy is discussed and motivated in the context of the AI analysis structure (Figure 4.1). The chapter then provides a brief overview of how the various themes uncovered during the course of the study were distilled into the final categories presented in the next chapter. The chapter progresses with a brief discussion of the ethical issues encountered by the research wraps up with a brief summary.



Figure 4.1 The AI analysis structure of the study

This method chapter provides a conventional description of the research design and procedure; however, due to the intricate nature of Qualitative research, and specifically the AI approach, the research process described in sections below should be viewed as part of the results. In other words, the description of the research process should be viewed not only as the immediate context in which the results occurred, but also as important data in its own right. The research process as data is an integral part of the Qualitative Research process and serves to inform the interpretation of results in this type of study.

Overview and motivation of the research approach

Overview of the research approach

The research method is primarily participative research and sought to obtain rich descriptions of the context and experiences of the participants within the study with the goal of describing to obtain empathic understanding (*Verstehen*) (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). This can be contrasted with the quantitative aims of explanation and prediction of human behaviour. This study seeks to embody key participatory ideas such as participatory involvement, action, dialectic dialogue and change (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). What these principles mean in practice is that the researcher is placed as a participant within the system being researched and that the participants in the study hold as much power to shape and contribute to the knowledge being generated as the researcher. In this paradigm the researcher's position can be described as the depowered expert (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This describes a state of being where the researcher remains an expert in research and theoretical expertise but is only part of a larger team of collaborators, each individual with a particular area of expertise. The primary benefits of this approach is that it enhances deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied, greatly aids the generation of buy-in into interventions and facilitates sustainable change. The danger inherent in this approach is that the study fails to rise above the subjective, common-sense understandings of the researcher and the other participants.

As discussed in Chapter 2 the study is influenced by a number of theoretical paradigms, but will primarily be based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI aims to explore ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they do (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Reed, 2007). It aims to work in ways that build on the strengths of what people have achieved in their organisation,

rather than concentrating on their problems. By focusing on the shared strengths and achievements of the organisation, the AI framework posits that individuals within the organisation will come to realise what has been achieved and their role in these achievements, and will build on these achievements rather than becoming bogged down in perceived problems and failures (Bushe G. R., 2007; Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

A key feature of the AI approach is that it is based on the principles of Social Constructionism which seeks to analyse how social institutions, signs, images, identities and our experience of these are constructed through a system of meanings and practices to create what we experience as reality (Burr, 1995; Denzin, 2001; Maxwell, 2005; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

One of the key features of Social Constructionism is the principle that knowledge is created and sustained by social processes (Bradley & Morss, 2002; Bryman, 2007; Burr, 1995; Liebrucks, 2001). In contrast to positivist beliefs about knowledge production, Social Constructionism posits that knowledge cannot be produced objectively as an outsider (Bradley & Morss, 2002). AI is seen as “Social Construction in action” (McNamee, 2003), and this is enacted by bringing participants together to share what has worked with each other to develop knowledge that can shape social interactions in the organisation in future (Reed, 2007). Implicit in this enactment of Social Construction is the principle that knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995). In other words developing an understanding of the world changes the way we think, act and behave, which in turn changes the way that others act, think and behave around us, which theoretically changes an entire organisation or social institution if this knock on effect is maintained (Reed, 2007).

Within the conception of Social Constructionism described above, the act of research is a social act and involves a discursive construction of what constitutes research practice (Liebrucks, 2001). According to Liebrucks (2001) the discretion exercised by researchers in determining the research question, type of instrument, population, sample, methods of analysis and the reporting of results is part of a social negotiation process. In practice this means that researchers are constantly in a state of dialogue with other experts in the field, previous research conducted, research participants, funders, gate keepers, journal editors and their own value base. This means that while researchers can provide all the scientific procedures followed, true replication of a

study is not possible as the negotiation process changes for each individual researcher. This should not imply that social research has no rational basis and that all results are accidental. The argument being made here is that the process through which scientific knowledge is constructed does not rely solely on the mental capacity of individuals, but is a result of social interaction (Liebrucks, 2001). In short, Constructionism posits that it is in a relational space built on shared values and objectives that humans work and achieve, and the construction of these relational spaces shapes how people interact with each other and the constructed institution. Following this principle the AI framework posits that the construction of a positive, capable organisation that manages to achieve success despite the challenges faced every day should lead to the organisation becoming successful because the individuals within it will act in a manner that reinforces the reality of this construction.

At a meta level of analysis the discursive process referred to in the discussion on Constructionism above refers to the researcher maintaining an awareness of himself as instrument of the research process. This conceptualisation of the researcher as instrument is a staple of Qualitative research methodology (Patton, 1999) but should not be taken for granted and must be unpacked in the context of each study. The researcher in each study is the point where two forms of experience are synthesised and integrated into a theoretical framework to manufacture factual knowledge (Valsiner, 2006). The two forms of experience synthesised are introspective and extrospective, as described by Morgan (1894), which tasks the researcher with the responsibility of focusing on empirical evidence while maintaining a strong emphasis on guided introspection to highlight the subjective bias of the researcher which often implicitly guides the focus on empirical evidence (Valsiner, 2006). This meta reflection on the subjective reflections of the researcher and the impact that these may have are the rationale for the text boxes strewn throughout this dissertation and for the generation of data from the research process based on the observations and reflections of the research team.

Motivation for the use of the research approach

The selection of Appreciative Inquiry as the research approach was motivated by the context in which the research is conducted. Public perceptions of South African townships are predominantly negative. These contexts are associated with a lack of infrastructure, poverty,

unemployment, high crime rates and failed social intervention programmes. The application of Appreciative Inquiry in this context is appropriate for two reasons. The first is that focussing on the positive would highlight the successes that have occurred in the ERF scholarship programme in the face of what are perceived to be difficult circumstances. The anticipated effect of this is that the stakeholders would realise that they do have the capability and capacity to achieve success despite the challenges they face. This links to the second reason for selecting Appreciative Inquiry as the research approach.

The second reason for utilising Appreciative Inquiry as a research approach was that Appreciative Inquiry has proven to be an excellent method for changing the circumstances in an organisation by encouraging positive communication and collaboration strategies (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995). Prior to conducting the data gathering workshops with the stakeholders, the research team, as described in chapter one, was contacted by the ERF coordinator to conduct a needs assessment of the various stakeholders. The instrument was designed and disseminated to participants at a meeting scheduled to inform the stakeholders of the purpose of the needs assessment and to clarify any uncertainty. The needs assessment failed to materialise as the stakeholders did not return a single questionnaire. It was then brought to the research team's attention that there were a number of concerns among the various stakeholder groups which were described in chapters one and three. The common thread between the stakeholder groups was that each grouping was suspicious of the motives of the others. The stakeholders also highlighted the fact that there had been no formal consultation process where all groups were present or represented. According to informal feedback given to the ERF coordinator based at the school, the needs assessment was seen as an attempt to "catch out" those who did not support the ERF. The research team then consulted with the ERF coordinator and the supervising academics at Unisa before proposing Appreciative Inquiry as a data gathering method. The Appreciative Inquiry emphasis on inclusivity and consultation directly addressed the expressed needs of the stakeholder groups. I believed that the non-punitive and positive nature of the inquiry would facilitate communication between stakeholder groups. By including all the stakeholder groups in one setting I aimed to facilitate the initial contact between these groups where the terms of engagement could be determined to aid them in creating communication protocols for future collaboration. Effecting change in the course of conducting research is one of the principles and benefits of Action Research. As part of the data gathering

workshops, I aimed to expose the critical role each stakeholder group played in the success of ERF and what the circumstances are in which they play this role. This, I believed, would aid the negotiation process by ensuring that each group was aware of their reliance on each other for the successful implementation of the ERF scholarship programme.

Time as a resource and as a deciding factor played a role throughout the study. The multiple objectives of the study as described above require an intensive investment of energy and effort by all stakeholders for an extended period of time. However, due to the academic calendar for all South African schools, the personal and professional commitments of the various stakeholders, the backlog caused by educator strikes and the limited human resources available to the study, the prime window of opportunity in which the study could be conducted was from the period of September to the end of October 2010. This limited time frame heavily influenced the decision to utilise the AI approach as it allowed the research team to meet all of the objectives described above without compromising the quality and quantity of data available while ensuring that stakeholders would have the space available to effectively engage with each other.

Research Aims

The research first established whether the ERF meets the basic criteria for an evaluation.

The primary objective of the evaluation was to assess the processes of the ERF scholarship programme in the pilot site.

The secondary aim of the evaluation was to identify the strengths of the ERF scholarship programme to enable the ERF to expand the programme into neighbouring schools in the district.

The evaluation collaboratively developed objectives for the future development of the ERF based on the needs of stakeholders.

The evaluation also considered areas of development within the ERF scholarship programme and will explore collective solutions to strengthening these areas.

The final objective of the research was to reflexively investigate the implementation of the AI process and identify means of improving the process in future.

Research questions

The research team first interviewed the ERF founding members to explore and unpack the initial assumptions, beliefs, values and motives for the establishment of the ERF. This allowed the research team to establish whether the ERF met the basic criteria for an evaluation. As discussed in Chapter 2, an evaluability assessment of an organisation essentially aims to establish whether the objectives and aims of an organisation are developed in a manner that facilitates effective monitoring and evaluation of activities (Chen, 2005).

The research questions that guided this phase of the research were:

- What motivated the formation of the ERF?
- What are the intrinsic factors that affected the motivation to start the ERF?
- What was the procedure followed in constituting the ERF?
- What are the objectives of the ERF?

The study then moved on to conduct the formative evaluation of the ERF by taking cognisance of the information supplied during the pre-evaluation and by applying the Appreciative Inquiry technique. The research questions were guided by the objectives of the various phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The four phases of the Appreciative Inquiry method are Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (Figure 4.2). The Discovery Phase is aimed at discovering what works in the organisation. The Dream Phase is aimed at extracting the expectations and hopes for the organisation from the various stakeholders. The Design Phase draws on the collective expertise of the stakeholders to design measures aimed at achieving the dreams identified in the previous phase. The Destiny Phase is the phase where the organisation implements the plans developed during the Design phase and monitors progress toward attaining the dreams (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Patton, 2008). These phases are discussed in greater detail below. The research questions that guided this study included the following:

In the context of the ERF's second year of intervention:

- What were the peak experiences for stakeholders in the ERF?
- What were the aspects of the ERF's intervention approach that stakeholders appreciated the most?

When thinking of the future of the ERF:

- What are the most immediate perceived needs of stakeholders in the ERF?
- How would participants wish to see the ERF develop?

How do you think that you could collectively achieve the dreams you set out to achieve?

- What are the resources perceived to be available to achieve the envisioned development of the ERF?
- How could the ERF effectively access these resources?
- What are the conditions that need to be in place to achieve these dreams?
- When would these dreams begin to materialise?

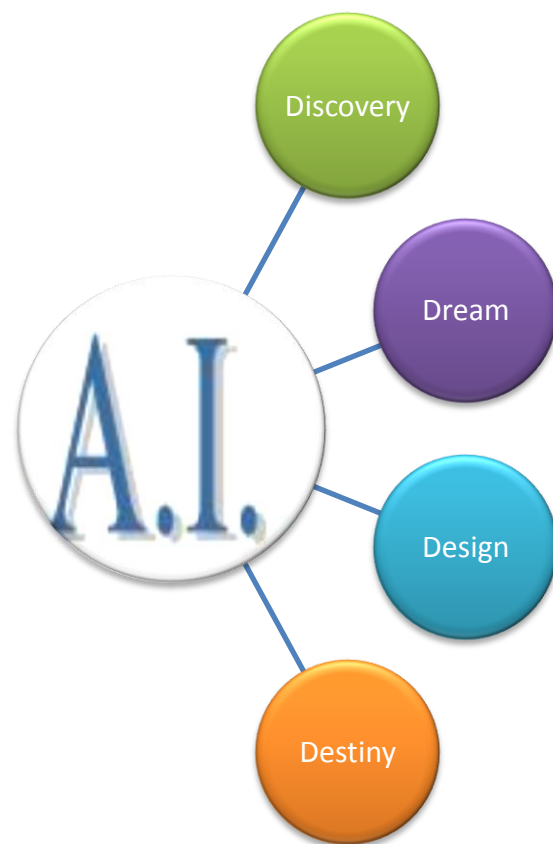


Figure 4.2 The presentation of the themes according to the AI process

The research questions to guide the destiny phase had to be collaboratively developed with the stakeholders as needed to ensure that identified indicators are relevant to their needs, the context and to the available resources. Most importantly, by collaboratively designing the questions in this phase I close this cycle of Appreciative Inquiry with the control firmly in the hands of the

stakeholders and not as the expert who has the power to praise or punish the organisation when progress is tracked against set objectives.

Below I briefly discuss the study sample and sampling methods employed by the research team.

Population and Study Sample

The study sample for the evaluability assessment consisted of only two individuals: the ERF Executive Director and the ERF Research Coordinator. The sampling procedure utilised during this phase of the research was purposive sampling; however due to the fact that the various ERF board members could not avail themselves for the evaluability assessment the resultant sample was one of convenience. The Executive Director was the most crucial member of the sample as she could speak about the history of the ERF from before the organisation was formally constituted. She was also the only member of the ERF who had direct exposure to all levels of operation of the ERF. The ERF Research Coordinator was the second participant in the evaluability assessment and was crucial in ensuring that the study met the needs of the ERF while ensuring that research protocol was followed to produce empirically sound results.

The population for the study itself were the learners who were selected to participate in the ERF scholarship programme, the parents of the selected learners, the School Governing Body (SGB) members, interested members of the educator body, the mentors who represent the ERF scholarship programme and members of the ERF board.

The learners who were selected to participate in the ERF scholarship programme form part of a larger group of learners at a school that was identified as a viable location for intervention. The learners span a variety of grades from Grade 9 to Grade 11 and essentially form a pre-selected sample for this study. The learners are all from Soweto in Johannesburg which is a predominantly black township, and as such the learners are all of the same race. The selection of these learners as a sample unit is motivated by the fact that they are the group most directly affected by the ERF scholarship programme and they are the group whom the ERF scholarship programme's objectives are designed for. This group could provide insight into the deep change, if any, generated by the ERF's scholarship programme.

The parents of the learners are a crucial stakeholder group who can provide valuable insight into the lives of the learners in social settings outside of the school. The inclusion of this stakeholder group was intended to assist the research team in developing a well-rounded understanding of the impact the programme could have. Understanding behavioural change outside of the school setting is crucial to determining whether the values and skills the learners glean from participating in the scholarship programme have been internalised. This is because the behaviour will be enacted outside of the regulatory and structured environment of the school. The parents are also a crucial group whose support and buy-in could provide the ERF with the leverage necessary to negotiate with the education system. This is due to the fact that the parents are ultimately the body who hold the system accountable for the provision of quality education. The power this group has comes from their ability to simply remove a learner from the school and place them in another if they are dissatisfied with the service delivery. The ability of the parent group to enact this power is affected by a number of socio economic variables that form the context of this study which are discussed in Chapter 5.

The SGB is a regulatory body appointed in terms of the National Education Act (No. 27 of 1996) (South African Department of Education, 1998).by parents and educators to oversee the management and administration of the school. The SGB is comprised of educators, parents and other relevant stakeholders (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002).The SGB acts as both an advisory committee and auditor of the School Management Team (SMT). The rationale behind the inclusion of the SGB was that they could potentially provide the perspective of stakeholders who understand the needs of parents, educators, learners and the SMT. This stakeholder group could potentially provide insight into whether the ERF is meeting the broader community needs through their scholarship programme.

The inclusion of the educator body as a stakeholder group was motivated by the fact that they have the longest standing relationship with the learners within the education system. This stakeholder group could provide valuable insight into the lives of the learners within the school setting. This stakeholder group can potentially most accurately observe whether the intervention approaches of the ERF are meeting the needs of the learners and of themselves as educators. This group could also potentially strengthen the ERF's approach to academic support by providing suggestions or recommendations for the organisation to implement.

The mentors who volunteer to provide academic and personal guidance to the learners of the ERF programme are the stakeholder group who are most closely linked with the intervention strategies employed by the ERF and as such are critical in the evaluation of these strategies. This group also aims to develop a close bond with the learners during the course of the intervention and are critical in documenting the observed changes in the learners and highlighting difficulties experienced in delivering the intervention strategies. In addition, the mentors could provide critical insight into the experience of being a mentor in the ERF and aid in forming recruitment strategies for additional mentors.

The ERF board is the stakeholder group responsible for the oversight of the ERF's activities, which includes the scholarship programme. This group consists of the founding members of the ERF and as such have an understanding of the initial assumptions, objectives, values and approaches that facilitated the formation of the ERF and shaped the nature of its interventions. This group is critical to establishing whether the ERF is meeting the expectations that were set out when the organisation was constituted. The board is also the stakeholder group that will primarily execute the Destiny phase of the intervention which entails the ongoing monitoring and formative evaluation of the programme on a day to day basis. For this reason it is crucial that they collaborate in developing and refining strategies that are in the best interests of all the stakeholder groups above and more importantly that they believe they can attain and sustain the aims of the organisation.

As this study is an evaluation of the ERF scholarship programme, it is important to include all stakeholders in the process. This entails consultation with the entire population of the study as described above. A large consultation summit which hosts all of the stakeholders is the standard method of conducting and Appreciative Inquiry. The various stakeholder groups were contacted with the assistance of the ERF Executive Director and the principal of the school. The invitations were written and verbal and emphasised the non-threatening environment in which the evaluation took place; the important role that each stakeholder group plays in the ERF and its continued development. The verbal invitations were delivered through forums such as parent meetings, staff meetings, telephone calls to specific individuals. A sound research design and recruitment strategy does not guarantee a one hundred percent attendance rate and the sample

will therefore consist of those individuals from the various stakeholder groups who attend the workshop in effect making this a purposive, convenience sampling.

Sources of Data

The first phases of the study required an evaluability assessment of the ERF through interviews with the founding members of the organisations. Only two of the founding members were available for this phase of the study and as a result only the ERF Executive Director – who is the individual who conceptualised and constituted the ERF – and the head of research for the ERF were interviewed as a pre-evaluation analysis. The purpose of these interviews was to discover and unpack the initial assumptions, beliefs, values and motives for establishing the ERF. These interviews therefore provided the background information necessary to establish whether the ERF is at a phase in its development that allows for evaluation. These interviews also provided the historic context of the ERF to aid holistic analysis of the data.

For the Appreciative Inquiry, the sources of data included transcripts from the workshop focus groups, the documented ideas generated by workshop participants and field notes made by the research team. The participants were placed in smaller work groups in which they will document their discussions on flip charts which were collected after the workshop. In addition to this the research team made process notes to highlight group dynamics at various phases of the data gathering process. These process notes aided the research team in establishing a richer context in which the data could be interpreted.

A third source of data was meant to demonstrate the effect on student performance by the programme of intervention. This data was meant to be appraised by obtaining the academic records of the students who were selected to participate in the ERF scholarship programme. This data was excluded as a source due to the fact that the various stakeholders in the ERF were unable to agree on whether it served as an accurate indicator of the development of the learners. This dynamic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Collection of Data

Development of and motivation for the instrument

As stated above the evaluability assessment data collection involved interviewing two of the founding members of the ERF. The data collection for the Appreciative Inquiry primarily took place at the various AI workshops designed to include all the stakeholders of the ERF scholarship programme. In both instances the data collection technique was the interview. The interviewing technique utilised in the evaluability assessment was one-on-one interviewing while the AI process utilised the focus group technique of interviewing. Below I will briefly discuss the suitability of these techniques to each phase of the research and briefly highlight the limitations in terms of the literature and relate the literature to the experience of implementing these techniques.

The interview is considered to be the staple of the Qualitative Research process (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Aronson, 1994; Patton, 2002a). According to Bryman (2007) “the style of interview preferred by Qualitative researchers tends to be more open-ended, flexible and unprompted than the style of interview common in Quantitative Research, such as the survey interview” (p. 33). This open-ended flexibility gives Qualitative researchers the necessary freedom to adapt to the unique communication styles, world views and environment of research participants. It also provides a stable base from which researchers can safely explore concepts and topics that emerge during the research process in real time as opposed to adapting the structured questionnaire at the end of the research process. Chapter 2 provided a brief discussion on the various types of interviews and the opportunities that each presents to a researcher. The primary challenge when conducting an interview is that interviewers have to maintain an awareness of the content of the interview and the interview process simultaneously (Denzin, 2001; Peshkin, 1988). Another challenge when it comes to conducting an interview is that researchers are not always aware of their own subjectivity while probing, nor of the power asymmetries that can occur during the process of conducting the interview (Bryman, 2007). One of the ways of dealing with this is to create space halfway through the interview where the participant and interviewer reflect on the interview process so far and collaboratively determine

whether the discussion is comprehensive and nuanced enough to cover the topic under discussion (Bryman, 2007; Datta, 2003).

In this study the primary difficulty in conducting the interview was the multiple identities held by the various members of the research team. The ERF Executive Director was the primary participant for the evaluability assessment but later became a key member of the research team who managed most of the logistical arrangements throughout the study. The Research Coordinator for the ERF was also a co-researcher in the research process who managed the research process and ensured that the process was always within the ethical, procedural and methodological limits for a Qualitative Research study. Both of these participants, together with the primary researcher, conducted the interviews for the evaluability assessment by repeatedly switching roles between participant and interviewer during the data gathering process. These multiple roles required the research team to create boundaries for each role that were clearly defined but fluid to allow a member of the research team to move between them as the research process dictated. A detailed discussion of these roles is provided in Chapter 5. The acknowledgement of the identity of the interviewers as a part of the research process is an accepted part of Qualitative Inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and provides a richer context in which the data can be positioned. The primary risk taken with the one-on-one interview approach to the evaluability assessment is that it provides a one-sided description of the ERF and its development.

The evaluability assessment can be said to only reflect the ideas and observations of the Executive Director and, to a lesser extent, those of the Research Coordinator. These criticisms hold true to an extent. The difficulties in obtaining access to all of the board members of the ERF were briefly described as the primary reason for the final sample taken for this phase of the study. It could be argued that the importance of an evaluability assessment warrants delaying the full evaluation until a thorough assessment is conducted. The time available to conduct the study played a role in the decision to utilise the one-on-one approach as it was deemed to be the most efficient method of obtaining a nuanced and detailed understanding of the conception, growth and development of the ERF. Some validation of the data gathered through interviewing the Executive Director and Research Coordinator took place during the AI workshops when the findings of this assessment were used as a means of orienting participants to the objectives and

purpose of the AI and participants had an opportunity to contribute their perspectives on what the objectives and purpose are.

Focus groups as an interview technique are a means of better understanding how a group of individuals, who are identified as the core stakeholders in a particular issue, feel or think about the issue and the related service around it (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). According to de Vos *et al.* (2005) “the group is ‘focused’ in that it involves some kind of collective activity”. The activity can be a shared social problem or experiences of an intervention which are explored in an environment that encourages participants to share perceptions, opinions, beliefs, concerns and wishes without fear of exclusion, punishment or pressure to reach consensus (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Bradley & Morss, 2002; McIntyre, 2008). Focus groups allow researchers to investigate a number of perceptions in a defined area of interest (Nyamathi & Shuler, 1990 in de Vos *et al.*, 2005). Focus groups are particularly useful when multiple responses are needed on a specific topic (Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000).

Focus groups are an intersection between three areas of communication, namely, between the participants; between the facilitator and the participants; and between the world of the researcher and the participants (Bradley & Morss, 2002). This means that focus groups are a constant process of communication at multiple levels and that both researchers and facilitators need to be aware of what participants are saying and, equally importantly, how they are saying it. Nyamathi and Shuler (1990) (in de Vos *et al.*, 2005) identify three main approaches to focus groups, namely, the exploratory approach which is often used for generating theoretical hypotheses or pilot testing operational aspects of research; the clinical approach which uses the clinical judgement of a trained professional to obtain in-depth information about the inner experiences of participants; and the phenomenological approach which is used to understand the everyday experience of the participants (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). The focus group approach followed in this study is an open ended discussion with an emphasis on creating a process of sharing and comparing among the participants which is in-line with the traditional use of the focus group and with the objectives and principles of AI (Dunlap, 2008; Rogers & Fraser, 2003). Focus groups require facilitators skilled in group facilitation. Facilitators must be open to multiple realities and have empathy and unconditional positive regard for the participants to ensure that a safe space is created in which all views can be discussed and examined without

undue destructive criticism being levelled at a particular participant or stakeholder group (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). In the context of an AI study, the facilitation skills required are of a particularly high level as the facilitator has to ensure that the focus remains on the positive without silencing those who wish to examine the difficulties or negative experiences within the organisation. An AI facilitator must place a particular emphasis on the process of co-creation which requires full engagement from each participant because the AI process is more than a data collection strategy, it is also a form of action research which aims to galvanise participants to reform and reshape the organisation to their needs.

The research team was new to the AI approach and, while having read the key articles in this approach, did not have a clear indication of how it works in practice. To compensate for this, the team spent an extensive amount of time on the AI commons website which aims to share the experiences, advice and questionnaires developed by other AI practitioners. Drawing questions from the AI commons provided the research team with a resource base that had been field tested and greatly aided the questionnaire development for this study. It also provided inspiration and practical guidelines for each of the other phases of the study.

In a typical AI process all the stakeholders are brought together in one large consultative summit which takes place over a period of four days. The rationale for this large consultative summit is that AI process aim to provide a platform that allows for the sharing of ideas across the strata and barriers that often exist in an organisation (Bushe G. R., 2007; Lewis & van Tiem, 2004; Reed, 2007). The stakeholders would be placed in working groups that represent each of the interest groups and working structures inside the organisation to ensure the dissemination of viewpoints and opinions (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Patton, 2003). This is the ideal process which is theoretically sound when considering the objectives of AI (Cooperider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). In practice this process is riddled with logistical difficulties in that very few organisations can afford to have their entire workforce involved in one process to the exclusion of all others. In addition, it is exceedingly difficult to gather all stakeholders who work for organisations unrelated to the organisation under evaluation. This is due to conflicts of interest among stakeholders related to private and professional responsibilities.

While the research team intended to follow the archetype for an AI process, the stakeholder groups were unable to reach consensus on dates for the workshop. The research team decided to adopt a flexible approach by scheduling four separate workshops that would allow each stakeholder group to participate in the research at a time that they deemed optimal. This decision was informed by the belief that part of allowing research participants to own the research process is allowing them to shape the process to their needs while as far as possible maintaining the integrity of the research process.

The structure of the workshops emphasised and facilitated the process of communication between the various stakeholder groups. What this means in practical terms is that the workshops focused on generating conversations between the stakeholder groups as opposed to presenting an idea with the aim of obtaining buy-in or eliciting information through the use of predetermined questions. These conversations were facilitated by the research team to ensure that they remain focussed on the overall objective of the Appreciative Inquiry process but no limitations were placed on the nature of the conversations.

The data collection primarily took place at the four workshops designed to include all the stakeholders of the ERF scholarship programme. The research team used voice recorders, notes taken on flip charts to aid the collective authoring of the AI process, and private notes taken by the research team aimed at describing observations and group dynamics taking place during the workshops. Collective authoring is a process where participants are divided into groups and asked to share their stories within each group. The group then discusses each story and distils it into a statement that describes the shared group perception of the organisation. Each shared perception is a thread in the larger group's story that ultimately makes up the tapestry of the implicit organisation, or the relational space in which the organisation operates. The research team based the process of collective authoring on the Nominal Group Technique or the Delphi Technique as described in Reed (2007).

To compensate for the deviation from the ideal AI process the research team made attempts to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible from each group were present at each workshop. However, this attempt at populating the workshops with diverse views partially failed due to a teacher strike which erupted during the research process. The research team, concerned for the

safety of the stakeholders, decided to host the first workshop away from the school premises and to withhold notification of the research workshop from the teacher stakeholder group. As a result, the first workshop consisted of the mentors and the learners.

During the workshop the following process issues emerged which the research team had to take into consideration to ensure that all participants could engage effectively with each other and with the research topic. The mentors tended to ‘overpower’ the learners during the contracting phases of the workshop. The mentors conducted feedback sessions as training exercises in public speaking and coached the learners when they had to provide feedback to the larger group. The research team realised that this interaction is an extension of the traditional relationship between these stakeholder groups and that it was a necessary dynamic to maintain a relational space where learning and teaching could occur between the mentor and learner. However, this dynamic prevented the learners from giving voice to their own concerns and desires. The research team decided that while it was important for the learners to feel that they have equal voice in the workshops, it was of importance that the mentor/learner relationship is respected. The research team then separated the two groups between two venues to allow for more open discussions.

The second major process adjustment came during the Dream phase where the research team realised that the learners were experiencing great difficulty in articulating their dreams for the ERF. The research team decided to turn the Dream phase into an individual, written exercise for the learners where the facilitator would carefully guide the learners through what was required on an individual basis. This workshop was a watershed for the research team as it was the first time that the AI approach was put into practice and we for the first time realised that we would have to creatively adapt the process to our particular situation. While it was difficult working in two different venues, seemingly in isolation of each other, the positive feedback from participants after the workshop on the research process reassured the research team that the appropriate method had been selected for this particular study.

The second workshop took place after the end of the teacher strike and was held on the same day as the ERF’s annual student award ceremony which is held on the school premises. The workshop was composed of the parents of the learners who were in the programme and members of the School Management Team. There were sixteen participants present in this workshop. The

day of the workshop was the ERF's annual prize giving and quarterly progress update with the parents of the learners. The parents and learners received the performance reports of each learner from the mentors. The overall performance of the learners at this point, while better than their classmates, was considered to be poorer than expected. As a result the parents participating in the workshop were initially subdued and withdrawn. It took longer than expected to orient the parents to the objectives and approach utilised by the research team. The research team had to carefully explain that the purpose of the workshop was to provide the participants with a space to explore what works for them in the ERF and to shape the future development of the ERF toward their needs as long as it remained within the scope of the ERF.

The third workshop consisted of the ERF board (hereafter referred to as the board). The board was a difficult stakeholder group to secure due to the busy work schedules of the professionals who are involved. As described in Chapter 1, the board consists of a number of professional volunteers who provide strategic oversight for the ERF. The board also plays a crucial role in iteratively developing the workshops presented by the ERF and in ensuring that the research component of the ERF is aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation. The research team ultimately secured a portion of the time allocated to the monthly board meetings for the research workshop. Four board members were present as two others had work commitments and the remaining board member had a family emergency. The board was familiar with the process of the AI approach through the feedback from the Executive Director and the Research Coordinator. As mentioned earlier, the Executive Director and Research Coordinator were part of the research team but played an additional role as participants in this workshop. This transition between the boundaries around the various roles that individuals can play in the research process was highlighted in the discussion of the evaluability assessment and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The fourth and final workshop consisted of the teachers. This group proved to be the most difficult group to secure a workshop date with. The teachers refused to attend any workshops held on weekends and claimed that their working day schedules were fully booked. The research team, through the ERF Executive Director, had to negotiate with the school management team to cancel a scheduled staff meeting to allow the research team access to the teachers during the week. The research team was only allowed ninety minutes to complete the workshop and were

informed by the teachers that the end time was not negotiable. There were fourteen teachers present, but the workshop started an hour late due to none of the teachers not arriving on time. The research team then attempted to renegotiate with the teachers for more time but were firmly informed that the end time of the workshop was not negotiable. As a result the workshop had to be conducted within thirty minutes. The research team made the decision to maintain an amicable relationship with the participants despite the events leading up to this workshop. The contracting and orientation phases typically followed in the previous workshops were omitted in an attempt to cover the essential parts of the workshop. The teachers were surprisingly cooperative once the workshop started and spoke openly about the ERF and how they perceived it to work. Once the Discovery process was underway a number of the educators suggested that the workshop be extended to fully discuss the various aspects; however, the research team could not accommodate this request due to the logistical arrangements made for transportation from the venue. Looking back at the educators' participation in the research process, their lack of participation was a clear indication that they were not ready to buy into the ERF and, by extension, the research process. Their participation in the workshop could be seen as an indication that their underlying need was for a platform to communicate with the ERF.

Data Management and analysis

As mentioned above the data was collected in the form of recordings, process notes and flipcharts utilised by the group to note their discussions. The flip charts and recordings were collected by the research team after each workshop and stored in a secured office which was accessible only by the research team. The data was transcribed and cross-checked by the research team before analysis.

AI is often referred to as “Social Construction in action” and that it aims to facilitate a space where stakeholders in an organisation can collectively identify issues deemed crucial to the continued existence and improved performance of the organisation. When synthesising information collected through AI, researchers should look for the ideas, expressed or evident that will help address the issues faced by the organisation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Reed, 2007). “The purpose of making sense of information in AI is to organise it in ways that will help people

understand what it is they feel they have achieved and how this might happen again” (Reed, 2007, p. 139).

The data analysis method applied to this study to reduce the various sources of information to component parts is qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis places emphasis on identifying patterns of living and/or behaviour (Aronson, 1994). In other words, thematic analysis is a general method for analysing transcripts or other text data sources qualitatively. The thematic analysis of the data does not study the discursive practices through which the participants construct their worlds and themselves, but rather seeks to uncover the various meanings, implicit or explicit, derived from the experience of a shared phenomenon, in this case the ERF. This form of analysis, rather than discourse analysis (which is typically associated with social constructionist work), is commonly used in AI studies. It can therefore be argued that AI is strongly social constructionist at the macro level (in that data is generated and collectively analysed to produce socially shared understandings), but less strongly so at the micro level (the details of how realities are constructed in language).

Qualitative thematic analysis has three distinct stages or levels which are conducted sequentially. The first level of the analysis process entails identifying meaning units in the text. A meaning unit is described as a single thought unit expressed by a participant (Aronson, 1994). The second step in the thematic analysis process is to identify patterns of recurring meaning in the meaning units and to group these together. The third step in this process entails generating theme statements that encapsulate the threads of meaning that run through the meaning units in the group (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The terms and process described above are particular to a form of thematic analysis associated with phenomenological studies. The process followed in this study is a more generic form of thematic analysis that has become more prevalent recently. There are a great variety of highly intricate qualitative analysis techniques but that recent years has seen a resurgence, and systematisation, of thematic analysis as a fundamental technique that underlies most of these (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis in AI takes place in Context and has a Development focus. Context in AI has a number of dimensions, namely: Where the study takes place; the function of the context; the resources available; the activities that take place in the context; and the systems that exist in the

context (Reed, 2007). AI analysis also has a Development focus on chronological development which has the following distinct phases: A starting point; the Intervention; the Change process; and the Outcomes (Reed, 2007). Both the Context and Development dimensions of AI underpin the entire process and cannot be clearly divided into distinct phases, or dissertation chapters. The analysis of the data in this study should always be viewed against the appropriate dimension when seeking to make sense of a particular unit of data. To this end, a brief illustration of the various dimensions of AI is presented below to orient the reader to the overarching structure of this study, and by extension, this dissertation (Figure 4.1).

The location of the study is described in Chapter 1 where I briefly described the broader and immediate socio-cultural setting in which the study took place. The location of the study also positioned the study within the South African education system and unpacked the history and underpinning assumptions behind the various manifestations of the education system. Chapter 1 also described the function of the education system. The resources, while never directly addressed and catalogued, were indirectly discussed in the same discussion. The activities that take place in the education system were also discussed in relation to Christie's (1999) theory of the culture of learning as a co-construction between a number of role players that include the learners, the educators, the school management structures, the community and the education system. The interlocking systems that provide the context for the study were highlighted in Chapter 1 as well as in Chapter 2. Chapter 1 focused on the political, social and economic systems that influenced this study directly or indirectly. Chapter 2 discussed the various theoretical and the associated political systems that play a role in this study. The study can be viewed as an intersection between the education system, social systems in South Africa in general and Soweto specifically; economic systems; and academic and research systems and cultures. A smaller system that is embedded in these larger systems is that of the ERF which was discussed in great detail in Chapter 3.

The starting point of the Development of the organisation in which the AI takes place overlaps strongly with the context. This is because the motivation for the intervention is often tied to the context of the organisation, especially in social programmes. The starting point for this study is discussed in Chapter 1 when I highlighted the objectives of the ERF and is unpacked in great detail in Chapter 3 which describes the initial assumptions that gave rise to the ERF. Chapter 3

also describes the intervention and its implementation in detail with the aim of providing a solid base on which the constructions of the ERF by the various stakeholders could be built. Chapter 3 also describes the change process which involves the way the intervention was implemented and the strategies employed to overcome various obstacles that arose during the implementation of the intervention. The outcomes are described in Chapter 5 where the discussions and suggestions made by the various stakeholders in the ERF. Chapter 5 presents the crystallisation of these discussions and suggestions and presents them in relation to the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Chapter 5 also presents the findings of these workshops in relation to the relevant theories related to the intervention.

A third overarching analytic theme, which is not usually explicitly flagged as a part of AI but which is central to this dissertation, is the idea of the research process as data. This theme entails the discussion and interpretation of a number of sub-themes arising from the implementation of the research process. These sub-themes are discussed in relation to AI theory and best practice. The sub-themes that will be discussed include the group dynamics that arose during each of the workshops and the process of defining what constitutes data as shaped by the group dynamics and power relations between the various stakeholders. The need to establish and maintain boundaries within the intervention and research process and the multiple identities these boundaries force researchers to take at various stages of the study is another sub-theme discussed as part of the research process as data. Lastly, the distinction between participants and co-researchers is explored.

As mentioned in the objectives section of this study, the purpose of this evaluation was to highlight the strengths of ERF and to elicit and foreground the collective dreams of all the stakeholders so that they can inform planning processes. In line with these objectives it is essential that the participants' construction of what is effective in the ERF and what the future of the ERF could be should be systematically identified and described. These themes will be unpacked in chapter 6 within the AI framework of Discovery and Dream as is demonstrated in Figure 4.2.

The AI stages provide a framework with distinct stages that facilitate the easy presentation of data derived from the research process. By placing the data from the workshops within each

phase, the research team can easily define what is working within the organisation according to participants. The dream phase aimed to elicit the desires and needs that stakeholders have that they believe the ERF could address. The presentation of these results in the next chapter is within the outcomes of the development theme described above and represents the concrete or explicit outcomes of the research process. Due to the limited time available for each workshop, the research team could not reach the Design and Destiny phases of the AI process. Consequently there is no data for these phases of the research and only the Discovery and Dream phases are discussed and presented.

Ethical considerations

Ethics clearance for the study was obtained from the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa. While the research team did not foresee any direct negative consequences for participants of the study, they nonetheless put in place the following measures to reduce the exposure of participants to negative consequences.

The participants in the study were informed of their right to refuse to participate in the study with no negative consequences. In addition, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without fear of negative consequences. This was done in writing through the invitation to participate in the workshops and again by the facilitator of the workshops at the beginning of each workshop.

Participants involved in the management of the ERF, such as the Executive Director and the board, provided consent by commissioning the study and in their continued interaction with the research team over an extended period. Other participants' verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of each workshop. Participants were requested to sign a form consenting to participate when they signed the attendance register at the first workshop. However, due to the consternation this caused among parents in particular, the research team decided not to include this in subsequent workshops and instead, placed greater emphasis on the participants' rights to informed consent at the beginning of each workshop. The parents sent the message that they were uncomfortable signing "official looking" forms that they did not understand. The requested that we simply accept their participation as consent, which we did. In the interests of consistency, we did not use consent forms in the remaining workshops and simply accepted participation as

consent. The attendance register is for the sole use of the research team and will not be distributed to any participants in the study. The attendance register is to assist the research team in following up on information where necessary.

While anonymity cannot be assured, the participants were engaged in a process where the terms of engagement for the workshop were outlined to ensure that each individual could participate in the workshop without fear of any negative consequences or judgment from fellow participants. The participants were requested to provide no information they believed could jeopardise their careers but were requested to be as open and honest as possible. In addition, the research team emphasised the principles of AI which entail a mutual respect for the opinions and positions of other participants. The research team also highlighted the shared responsibility of the participants and the research team in ensuring that confidentiality and respect is maintained at all times.

No participants chose to withdraw from the workshops and participants who could not attend the workshops but who still wanted to participate were sent an open-ended questionnaire to complete. This ensured that their opinions and perceptions were reflected.

For underage participants, the research team obtained permission from the parents or guardians of the participants and the participants themselves. This process proved to be surprisingly complex. At the time of the workshop involving the learners there was a country wide educator strike which included the staff at the pilot site. In some areas of the country the strike turned violent and consequently most schools were closed completely. The pilot site was no exception. The research team decided that it would be too risky to have the workshop at the school premises and, primarily with the assistance of the ERF Executive Director, arranged for an alternative venue through a local business. This entailed arranging transportation for the learners from Soweto to the business premises. Getting permission from the parents and guardians of the learners entailed individual phone calls by the ERF Executive Director to each set of parents or guardians.

In summary, as with other aspects of the study, the implementation of ethics guidelines proved more complex in practice than might be anticipated from the ‘ethics chapter’ in most methodology textbooks. Not only did logistical hurdles arise, but it also became clear that there is a gulf between ensuring that the necessary ‘ethics paperwork’ is in place and truly ensuring

that participants truly knew what they were letting themselves in for and were adequately protected from possible harm. Ultimately, we were satisfied that we followed the technical requirements regarding ethics to the furthest extent possible in the circumstances and that we invested considerable effort in ensuring that our research practice was also ethical in terms of the way we actually engaged with participants. We do, however, recognise that where group processes are at play (as was the case here) the core principles of ethical research conduct (especially voluntary participation and protection from harm) cannot be absolutely guaranteed but has to be assiduously strived for.

The primary beneficiary of the research is the ERF; however, the benefit is carried over to the school and scholarship holders through improving the ERF scholarship programme.

Summary

The purpose of this Chapter was to discuss the research process followed for this study. The Chapter provided an overview of the research approach, Appreciative Inquiry, followed by this study. The discussion of the appropriateness of AI for this study was coupled with a brief discussion of Social Constructionism as a research approach. The AI approach leans heavily on Social Constructionism as a data gathering and analysis framework as well as an approach for generating collective action (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995; Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004).

The AI approach puts great emphasis on creating or hosting generative discussions aimed at building on the positive energy within an organisation (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). This is done by focussing on what works in an organisation by drawing on participants' experiences of what the organisation is like at its best (Rogers & Fraser, 2003). These peak experiences are unpacked and examined for lessons that can be transferred to other contexts within the organisation (Moore, 2008). AI also provides space for individuals in an organisation to become aware of and acknowledge the contribution of individuals to the organisation, often leading to unrecognised resources being discovered (Boyd & Bright, 2007).

In the context of a community organisation such as the ERF, AI can play a key role in further developing the relationship between the organisation, beneficiaries and community stakeholders

(Boyd & Bright, 2007). The AI process also creates the space for the beneficiaries and stakeholders to shape the intervention to their needs by encouraging the organisation to continue doing what works while aiding the conceptualisation of new ways of improving the organisation (Bush, 2007). This is especially true of a developmental evaluation which is aimed at identifying means of improving the implementation of the intervention (Jaycox, *et al.*, 2006; Patton, 1994).

The selection of the AI approach for this study was based on the reasons discussed in the paragraphs above, among others. It was also selected because it provided a solid framework for analysis which could be used to inform AI theory and research praxis (Chapter 5) as well as improve the intervention approach used by the ERF (Chapter 6).

The chapter that follows focuses mainly on the research process, and outlines the intricacies of research implementation against the ideal approaches described in the literature on AI.

CHAPTER 5 : BY PLANE AND TRAIN: THE RESEARCH PROCESS AS DATA

Overview

The results section of this study is divided into two distinct chapters, namely, the research process as data and the results of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This chapter specifically deals with the research process as data. The aim is to describe the research process in detail to position the analyses and interpretation of these results (as reported in Chapter 6) within the context of how they were generated. As importantly, the chapter aims to contribute to the literature on Appreciative Inquiry – providing empirical information (and interpretation) on how an actual AI process unfolded in practice, as opposed to how, in theory, it is supposed to transpire. As depicted in Figure 5.1, the research process as data has three sub themes, namely, the *process* of each workshop, data suppression and the role of boundaries in the research process. The incorporation of the research process as data also provides the basis on which recommendations for future studies and new approaches to AI can be based.

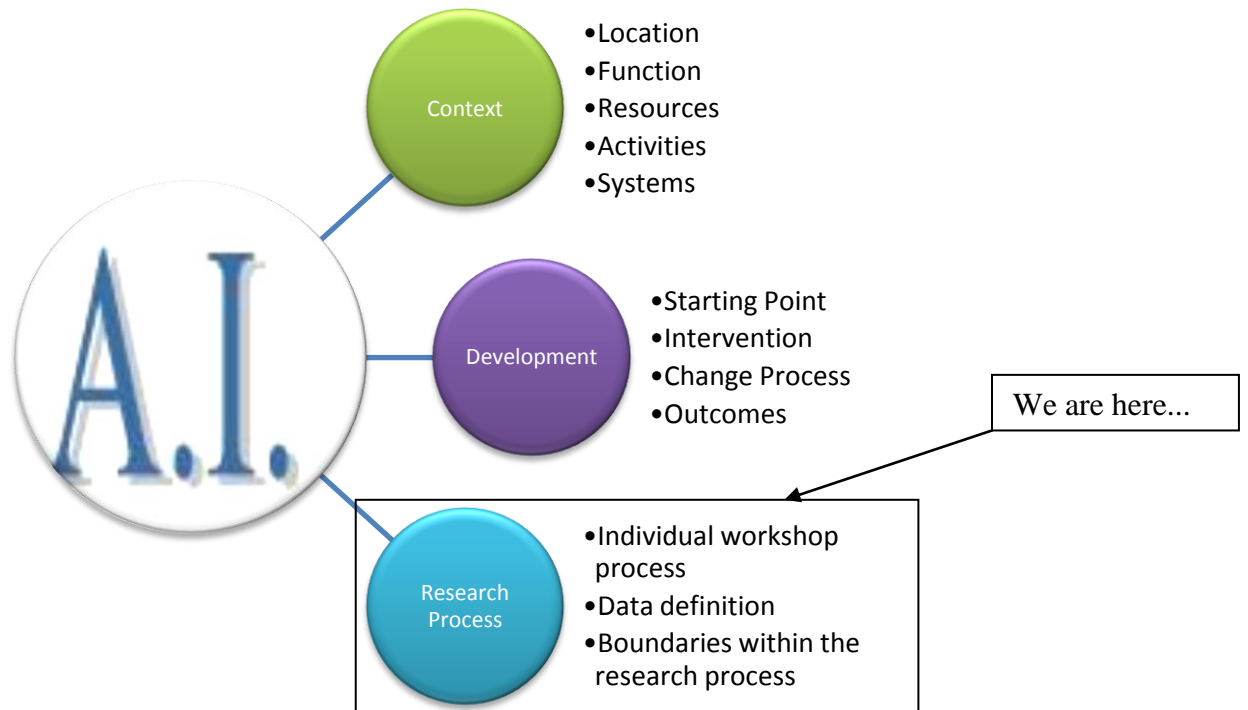


Figure 5.1 Graphic depiction of this chapter in context

I describe and discuss the process involved in each workshop with an emphasis on the unique circumstances leading up to the workshop, how the data was gathered, the concerns of the research team, the nuances of the group dynamics in each workshop, the evolution of the relationship between the research team and the research approach and the participants' perceptions of the research process.

I then discuss the process through which the scope of the study was defined which affected what would be considered as 'valid' data for the study and what would be "parked" as issues to be addressed in a different forum. The inclusion of this theme is strongly motivated by the principle of transparency in Qualitative research. By indicating what was deliberately left out and why, the reader could gain a better understanding of the results that were included. As part of the discussion around data suppression, I discuss the politics of evaluation and how these further define the boundaries of the research process.

When discussing the role of boundaries in the research process, I aim to describe the interpersonal dynamics that played a key role during the research process. It is crucial to understand the role that each individual in the research process played as this shaped the data gathering process and, by implication, the data collected. When examining these roles it is important to examine them not only in terms of the organogram, which indicates the official roles and functions of each individual, but also the organic gram of the research process which describes the unofficial roles that each individual adopted as part of the organic process that is collective action.

The presentation and interpretation of results in Qualitative studies is often a single process (Norum, Wells, Hoadley, Geary, & Thompson, 2004; van Sant, 1989) and can be integrated to tell the "story" of the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The intention behind this chapter is to tell the story of the data; of how it was gathered, interpreted, what understanding was gained from it and how it applies to the world of the ERF and their stakeholders. The following chapter discusses some of the underpinning themes that came from the various stakeholders. These underpinning themes can be viewed as the golden threads that run between the various stakeholders in the ERF.

A key feature of this chapter, and the next, is that the textboxes in which my meta narrative was contained are now integrated into the general text. I will directly refer to my thoughts and feelings as they arose at the time under discussion. The rationale for this is that during the data collection and analysis phases of this study my personal world intersected with the world of the ERF and that of the discipline of psychological research. This study is an evaluation of how participants experience the ERF and why, and also of how an AI process unfolded in that context. By stepping into the world of the ERF I became a participant who experienced the ERF and therefore my own phenomenological account of this experience should be included into the narrative to ensure greater transparency and authenticity.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the results of this study are interpreted in the context of the various theoretical and value frameworks that underpin the study. In other words, the data analysis process invokes theory as a means for understanding what the findings of the study mean in the broader context.

The research process as a relational process

I start by describing the research process in detail, treating the entire research process as a reflexive dialogue between the various role-players involved in the research. It was through this dialogue that the results in the next chapter were generated. The process is described as a dialogue because the engaged participation of each individual contributed to or altered the manner in which other individuals participated. The process is also described as reflexive because each “conversation” altered the research process in a significant manner which is in line with the iterative nature of qualitative methods (Bryman, 2007). I struggled to understand how the research team would generate buy-in from the other stakeholders into the research approach so that we could gather thick data. After conducting the evaluability assessment with the ERF Executive Director and founder (T), my supervisor (M) and I decided to incorporate her into the research team and discussed the approach with her. We realised that the best approach available to us was to simply allow participants the space to define the research as their own with little or no censorship from the research team. This point proved to be crucial to the success of each of the AI workshops as some participants could not fit into the AI process from the outset because they had difficulty adjusting to the approach. By allowing space for participants to bring in

stories that were seemingly unrelated, ask questions about what should be done from other participants and allowing participants to dictate the direction of conversation, the participants were able to create the relational space that facilitated sharing and active dialogues about their experiences of the ERF.

What follows is a description of each workshop extracted from transcriptions, field notes and the collectively authored pages generated by the various groups of participants. For the sake of clarity I describe each workshop separately and as a distinct event; however, it is important to bear in mind that the workshops should be viewed as one process that took place over an extended period of time. No attempt was made to keep participants from the various workshops from communicating with each other or to keep the data generated from each workshop a secret. On the contrary, the research team encouraged participants to share their experience in these workshops with other stakeholders in the ERF who may not have been a part of these workshops. The aim of this was to build on the excitement and interest generated in each workshop to increase the likelihood that the participants would act on what they have learnt from each other in the workshops. The research team also ensured that there was an overlap of participants and conversations between workshops so that participants knew what took place at the preceding workshops. This is in line with the AI objective of generating and co-creating a positive future that becomes embedded within the lived experience of the various stakeholders in the ERF. The flaw in this approach is that not all participants were equally exposed to the AI process and to the information from the workshops that they could not attend. These participants only received feedback informally through other participants and through the final research report when it was submitted for comments.

Lastly, the relationship between the research team and the ERF; the ERF and the school; the various participants and the ERF; the research team and the research approach are discussed. These relationships are the relational spaces that allowed for the work to be done and while I make an attempt to explicitly discuss as many of these as possible, some instances may be missed.

The first workshop: butterflies and watershed moments

The first workshop was both a data gathering event and a test of the research approach.

The research team was unfamiliar with each other and the research approach. Theoretically we were grounded but had no practical experience of the AI approach. In an attempt to bolster confidence in the method the team consulted with individuals who had experience in applying the AI approach. A second source of assistance leading up to the first workshop was the AI commons (www.case.edu). The AI commons is a collective resource where practitioners openly share their experiences of using the approach in various contexts. The AI commons also has the actual questionnaires and resource materials used by practitioners as open resources which can be freely used as long as the source is acknowledged. Reading through the reflections and questionnaires in the AI commons provided the research team with practical insight into the process of conducting an AI workshop.

Time was a constant source of frustration, but also a spur for creativity, during the data gathering process. The AI process typically takes place over a period of four days (Reed, 2007) with a day dedicated to each phase of the AI process. The research team had to conduct all of the AI workshops in less than five hours and in one case, thirty minutes. Three of the workshops took place on Saturdays which cut into the free time of the participants and placed further pressure on the team to complete the workshops within the agreed times. The only workshop that took place during the week was the final workshop with the educators and was the shortest of the four workshops.

The workshop was the first time that I met the mentors. I was surprised at how young they were, even though T and M told me that the age of the mentors was an important criterion. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the ERF Executive Director said that they selected young people as mentors because they believed that this made the experience of these individuals more accessible to the learners in the programme. This knowledge did not prepare me for the shock of meeting these self-assured young people. While the demographic data of the mentors was not included as part of the “official” data, I learned that they mostly were engineers, with one studying to be a teacher and another studying psychology. Their age ranged from as young as 20 to 32. In the previous chapters I mentioned that the educators were on a nationwide strike at the time of the first workshop and that because this strike had turned violent in places we decided to move the workshop to a sponsored venue to ensure the safety of the participants. The venue was attached to a casino and this meant that nobody under the age of 25 could walk around unaccompanied by

an adult. Those under the age limit were issued with a conspicuous red tag to be worn at all times. These red tags brought home the fact that a few of these mentors were younger than I am. As mentioned in Chapter 3, only one learner could not attend the workshop because of a family tragedy. The learners and mentors were relaxed and seemed to be familiar with the venue and each other. I took this as an indication that facilitating the workshop would be easier and more efficient as we would not be required to go through the process of allowing the participants' time to get to know each other to break the ice.

When the time came to begin the workshop I was suddenly unsure of whether we had made the correct decision in our choice of research approach. The quote from my research diary most accurately describes my thoughts after the first workshop:

The first workshop got off to a shaky start with both me and M struggling to find a rhythm in facilitating the workshop. I think part of it was my unfamiliarity with the approach. I've decided to follow the advice I was given this week: set the questions and trust the process.

Trusting the process here amounted to letting go of the need to tightly control the flow of discussion during the workshop through various group facilitation techniques and allowing participants to control the direction and pace of the workshop. We decided to let the participants dictate the direction of the workshop and put this decision into practice by checking the expectations of everyone present. As seen in Figure 5.2 the underlying need of the participants was to gain a shared clarity on what the collective experience was for the year, understand where the ERF was going and to develop plans to achieve these objectives. My first impression when hearing these expectations was that the ERF needed to have a strategic planning session or, at the very least, an information session where all the participants and stakeholders in the ERF are present. This need for communication came through regularly during the course of the workshop.

Expectations

- Clarity on today's [the workshops] activities
- More information on the ERF & it's future
- Exploration of the absence or withdrawal of mentors on mentees
- Effectiveness of mentorship programme on mentees
- Food
- Honesty
- Recap of year's activities and feedback from mentors & mentees
- Acknowledge learning areas & come up with improvements
- Mentees to communicate in English all day

Figure 5.2 A snapshot of the expectations as written by the workshop participants

During the 'terms of engagement' activity, a process through which workshop participants can set the terms under which they would feel most comfortable and contribute most actively, the mentors firmly established control over the role that the mentees would play. Participants were divided into two groups, each group consisting of both mentors and mentees, to discuss the terms of engagement before giving feedback to the larger group. Mentees were 'volunteered' to act as the spokesperson for the groups and were given clear instructions on how to present the feedback to the larger group. The initial impression gleaned from the feedback process was that the AI workshop was another forum in which the learning of the mentees could be enhanced. When reflecting on this dynamic, M and I realised that it may be that the mentors were attempting to make up for time lost due to the teacher strike. We also realised that this dynamic was as a result of the mentor/mentee relationship formed during the year and that we could potentially damage this relationship if we imposed our need to hear the authentic voice of the mentees over the existing relationship between these individuals. After a brief consultation we decided that it would be best if we separated the mentors and mentees to allow them the space to participate comfortably, even though this decision went against the traditional practice of AI summits. As the contracting process came to an end, we were surprised and excited when one of the mentors proposed that the mentees be treated as equals for the day. This had the almost instant effect of increasing the mentees' participation when they made their first contribution of the day by requesting that no one should laugh at anybody for making a contribution. This request is normal

when considering the fact that the mentees are at a development stage where peer group approval plays a significant role in moderating behaviour. The final contract that would underpin the workshop is represented in the snapshot of the collectively authored terms of engagement (Figure 5.3).

What is not reflected in this contract or in the expectations above are the topics that were moved to the “parking lot”. The parking lot was our attempt to address the perception that the AI process is intended to muzzle those who have a negative opinion or perception. We became aware of the negative perception of AI while reading through the reflections of other AI practitioners. This community of practice proved to be an asset at various points during the data collection process, but this was the most significant assistance we received as it provided an accepted outlet for individuals to express ideas and opinions that were negative without fear of direct censorship. I say ‘direct censorship’ because there were degrees of censorship throughout the AI process. This dynamic is discussed in greater detail under the theme labelled ‘data definition’ and where the various processes through which participants were silenced by the research approach are described, as well as ways in which the researchers were silenced by participants and how this shaped the findings of the study.

Terms of Engagement (Contract)

- **Commitment from all**
 - **Participate actively**
- **Make eye contact when speaking**
- **Honesty**
- **Everyone to communicate in English for the rest of the day**
- **Monitor time in a polite way**
 - **Keep input concise and relevant**
 - **Be polite in the way you ask someone to be brief**
- **Stick to allocated times**
- **Participation**
 - **Encourage everyone to talk**
 - **Ask questions**
 - **Any question is important**
- **Respect**
- **Let us treat each other as equals**
 - **The mentors are not superior to the mentees today**
 - **Mentors can't boss mentees around today**
 - **We speak as equals**
- **No laughing at each other for questions or input**

Figure 5.3 The contract between mentors and mentees

Following the expectations and “terms of engagement” exercises, the research team split the two groups to preserve the relationship between mentors and mentees. M and T facilitated the mentees group and I facilitated the mentors group. The split meant that I would only experience half of the process of the workshop and lose what I saw as the stabilising influence of T and M. I realised that I would have to hand over control of the workshop completely to the mentors as they had the contextual knowledge and experience of the ERF necessary to guide the discussion into areas of focus they deem useful for the ERF.

The mentors approached the session with an open mind but made it clear that they expected a tangible outcome from the workshop. Even though the AI process was explained and the ultimate outcome was made clear, the mentors decided that they would use the session as a brainstorming session to plan for the remaining months of the year. At this point I negotiated with them to follow and trust the process and in return we could work on a guidebook for the

selection of mentors for the next year. I then defined my role as the scribe and facilitator for the group who would be responsible for capturing the information and synthesising it where they deemed necessary. Their role would be to generate the information and place it into context so that other stakeholders in the ERF could understand and draw value from their experiences.

This was the point where the social construction of what works in the ERF was first documented with the aim of informing future practice. I say that it was first documented here and not that it began here because social construction is a continual process (Gergen K. , 1999; Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004) and the participants in the ERF were engaged in this process long before the study was conceptualised.

I fell back on the experience of other AI practitioners and used the following question as my generative question: *What was your peak experience as part of the ERF?* Generative questions are aimed at sparking a discursive dialogue that generates new ideas and perceptions to transform the organisation positively (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004). The first response from a mentor was the following:

I was teaching a student maths...I don't know when...I was teaching this student maths and they solved the problem...I saw the light go on in his eyes

The theme of broadening horizons and opening the eyes of the learners was consistent among the peak experiences highlighted by the mentors. This theme may emerge from the fact that these individuals are volunteers in the organisation who came in with the aim of improving the circumstances of the learners by aiding them in successfully completing their schooling career. This common experience ignited a stream of conversation that focussed on the various moments during the course of the year that the mentors valued. It was at this point that I realised that the literature was correct and that the strength of the AI approach was these shared stories derived from positive experiences. Although literature describes the strength of AI as derived from the use powerful, positive imagery to stimulate and direct organisational action in a positive way (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003), it also draws on the positive aspects of the past to illustrate the strength of the organisation by highlighting ways in which it already works well. AI places great emphasis on the relational spaces created in organisations – between individuals – that facilitate the successful achievement of shared goals (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998). It therefore

follows that reflections on positive experiences of individuals which reflect when and how they were successful within the organisation contributes to creating or increasing the positive perceptions of other individuals in the organisation of the individual, the working relationship and ultimately the organisation itself. It was an amazing experience watching the mentors share these experiences with each other and understanding how the group contributed to the success of each individual.

The peak experience discussion gained so much momentum that we almost filled the entire 5 hour workshop just discussing these experiences. More than one mentor commented on how they never realised how important it was to have a session where they sat as a group to reflect on what was working and to share helpful tips with each other in mentoring and teaching the learners. We then reflected on the fact that the problem solving approach had become embedded as part of organisational culture to the extent that we naturally made space to seek the deficits in the course of everyday practice and had to reserve special occasions for appreciating what works (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004).

At this point the workshop shifted away from the focus on AI and we honoured the agreement to develop a practical outcome for the day, the mentor selection guide. The mentors collectively created a set of criteria for the selection of additional mentors for the ERF based on their experiences. The guidebook was aimed at informing the ERF board and assisting current mentors in recruiting other young professionals as mentors. While the exercise did divert from the intended AI process it set the foundation for the Dream phase discussion.

The Dream phase discussion was yet another source of anxiety for me as I was unsure of how to guide the participants through it. I had read the accounts of a number of AI practitioners who experienced some difficulty in facilitating this phase of the AI process because participants find it hard to let go of the challenges they face every day to dream of an ideal image for the organisation. Once again I drew from the collective expertise of the AI commons to invoke a discussion that would lead to provocative propositions that would guide the growth of the ERF (Cooperrider D. L., 1990). In an attempt to get the mentors to think as widely as possible I used the “magic wand” question: *If you had a magic wand and could make three things happen for the ERF, what would they be?* The aim of the question is to encourage participants to think beyond

the current limitations experienced within the organisation and to build on the positive experiences highlighted during the Discovery phase. This question, especially when posed as part of a formative evaluation, could assist in refining the vision and mission of an organisation to more accurately reflect the needs and desires of the various stakeholders.

The workshop wrapped up before either set of participants could get to the Design phase of the AI process. On reflection, going through the Design phase with the fragmented approach we employed may not have been as effective as it would as part of an AI summit. We therefore decided to exclude this phase from the agenda of the remaining data gathering workshops. As a consequence, none of the workshops that followed included a Design phase which contributed to a sense of incompleteness or lack of closure on the process as described by various authors (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Patton, 2003; Reed, 2007).

While the mentors and I explored the processes described above, M was working with the learners. Based on my post-workshop discussions with M, the following processes came to light. Like me, M struggled with the unfamiliar AI approach. She incorporated the AI process into her existing knowledge of group facilitation and focus group interviewing in both the clinical and research contexts and created a more structured, more directed AI process than the one I employed with the mentors. When considering the fact that M was an ERF board member, a workshop presenter, an elder and a psychologist to the learners, this structured, more formal approach is more appropriate for preserving the boundaries that exist in her multiple relationships with the learners. I was surprised to find how easily the AI approach can be adapted to fit multiple approaches so that it can fit the exact situation that the researchers are in. This realisation was a great relief to the entire research team because it meant that we had selected an approach most appropriate to the needs of the ERF and its stakeholders.

The peak experiences of the learners primarily centred on academic achievement and the development of social skills, greater confidence in class and individual attention and affirmation from the mentors. The process of how this information was elicited is unknown to me even though M and I had a detailed debriefing session. The reason for this may be that many decisions are made during the process of the workshop that cannot be recalled later, after the process has

closed. The learners struggled to understand the Dream phase and what was expected of them during this phase. M decided to make the Dream phase an individual exercise where the learners reflected on the past year and described their dreams. While not the original intention for the Dream phase, this shift in approach yielded interesting data on the personal aspirations of the learners. These aspirations are crucial for the ERF to gain an understanding of how the learners measure success and what they need to achieve this success.

The closure of the workshop was a heartening experience because I saw the caring relationship between the mentors and the learners clearly for the first time. When asked to reflect on the process and to share some of their peak experiences as part of the mixed group, both the mentors and learners expressed a deep appreciation and respect for the other group. Some learners took the opportunity to express their thanks to a mentor that played a particularly significant role in their lives during the year. This process further affirmed the relationship building power of the AI process for me.

The second workshop: Meet the parents

In any relationship “meeting the parents” is an anxiety laden event and this was no exception. Based on the pre-evaluation assessment conducted with the ERF founder and the objectives of the ERF I knew that the buy-in from the parents was a crucial factor in ensuring that the ERF reaches its goals in the long term. At the time I also believed that the parents were our key demographic, the group who had the power to firmly embed the ERF within the school and the community. I believed that their buy-in could signal easier access to community resources for the ERF and that the parents could play a crucial role in assisting the learners in integrating the knowledge that the ERF aimed to grow within them.

We approached this workshop with a better understanding of the AI process and were confident that the workshop would build on the success of the previous one. However, during the preparations for the workshop we learnt that our attempts at building credibility with the participants, the parents in particular, were misdirected. When we approached the parents for consent to transport the learners and to have the learners participate in the first workshop, we developed a detailed informed consent form which clearly explained the nature, purpose and outcomes of the research process. The development of consent forms is a part of the normal

rhythm of the research process. It is aimed at adhering to the ethical principal of informed consent and written informed consent seemingly provides a more concrete indication that this process was followed (and how). The development of consent forms could be constructed as a credibility building exercise because researchers use the process of gaining consent to present their credentials, the credentials of the study and of the institution which oversees the entire research process. Once you have established this credibility, and convinced people that you are trading their time for a chance to alleviate a need you experience, people agree to give you that time and you get access to participants. What went wrong with our credibility building exercise is that the consent forms were experienced as alienating and we were asked by the workshop participants, through T, whether we would simply accept each participant's verbal consent. While it may seem like a simple decision to accept verbal consent and building trust into the relationship between us, the researchers, and the participants from the outset, it did reorganise the power balance in the relationship between us and the participants. Without written proof of consent we would be hard pressed to prove to the academic and legal worlds that we adhered to the 'correct' way of doing research. In the end, we chose to trust.

Another concern experienced in the run up to the workshop was the language in which the workshop would be facilitated. Most of the participants were Sotho speakers and neither M nor I had sufficient command of the language to facilitate a technical discussion in the home language of the participants. To compensate for this we recruited a board member who was fluent in the language to assist us during the workshop. We spent time with her during the week leading up to the workshop teaching her the nuances of the AI approach. Recruiting the board member did not automatically solve our problem and it brought new issues to consider as is explained in the extract from the research diary:

I've been carrying the concern of how to design this workshop for weeks now. How do I address the language barrier? Do I allow the risk of being excluded from nuances in conversation by conducting the language I'm not proficient in? How do I ensure that I get a true sense of what is being said if I facilitate through someone else?

As the researchers we were responsible for synthesising the information from the various workshops. Data capturing and analysis was my primary responsibility within the research team

and not being part of the process of a workshop would hinder my ability to interpret the data. On the other hand, simply forcing the participants to speak in English would undermine the longer term goal of building a relational space between the various stakeholders in the ERF by expecting them to communicate with each other in a language not common to all so that the researchers – who are short term guests – feel comfortable.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the day of the workshop with the parents was also the day that the ERF held its internal awards ceremony to reward learners who were performing well in the programme. It also provided an interactive space where the mentors, parents, guardians and learners could meet to discuss the progress of the learners and to incorporate the parents and guardians into the team. A few members of the School Governing Body (SGB) were also present to support the ERF and participate in the workshop. My role during this workshop was to co-facilitate with M and the board member who volunteered to assist us. T helped arrange the logistics but did not actively participate in the workshop, much as she did in the first. Her presence played a dual role: she was the bridge between the previous workshop with the mentors and she was a familiar face to all of the participants and provided an explicit link between the research team and the ERF.

The academic performance of the learners was lower than expected and most of the parents and guardians were somewhat subdued after the awards ceremony. We attributed this to their concern about the performance of the learners. At the start of the workshop there was not much speaking and each individual seemed to be reflecting on the information they received. In an attempt to break the ice M and I decided to begin by checking the expectations of the workshop participants of the research process. As is illustrated in Figure 5.4 the perception of the participants was that this workshop would achieve very specific process objectives for the ERF, namely, to gain greater buy-in from parents in general to support the scholarship programme so that more learners can be assisted through the ERF. The expectations also showed a need within the ERF to create a link between the mentors and educators who play the most crucial role in the education of the learners. The last three bullet points on the expectation list were from the research team. These points were placed there to create a safe space in which the participants could contribute and to emphasise the crucial role that each participant can play in the process.

As we discussed these expectations it became apparent that most of the individuals present did not have a clear idea of the scope of the ERF and that this would hinder the information gathering process. As a result we decided to take time to explain and discuss the various functions of the ERF to the participants with a particular emphasis on the scope of the ERF.

Expectations

- Try to stand together to support the children
- Better communication between mentors and educators to address the gap between mentors & educators
- A meeting between educators between ERF
 - Through ERF executive director & School Management Team
- The educators can use learners from ERF to make presentations to those learners who are not in ERF
- Commitment from parents whose children are part of ERF, also from SGB members.
 - Especially considering that not all are here today
 - Also from the rest of the school
- Gaining a better understanding of the ERF
- Seeing the impact of ERF on the school
- Understand that you are a very important role player in the ERF
- There is no right or wrong answer
- To hear things from how you see them

Terms of Engagement

- Keep time
- Respect each other

Figure 5.4 The expectations and Terms of Engagement set for the second workshop

When it came to setting the boundaries or Terms of Engagement for this workshop the participants firmly reminded the research team that we had to keep to the allocated time slot. This firm reminder was hard to accept because we had three hours to do what typically takes four days. We were informed that most of the participants had to leave early to do shopping, washing, etc. because Sundays were dedicated to church activities. The contracting process in this workshop went smoother and faster than the first workshop.

During the discussion of peak experiences a shift in the centre of power occurred in the workshop. The facilitation process organically shifted to the group and away from M and me when two of the participants started reflecting on the process taking place on the day. The first participant who changed the dynamic of the workshop was a grandparent of one of the learners. At first he seemed to be rambling about unrelated information such as where he came from and his childhood, but I soon realised that he was setting a life history in which he could make his

point. He spoke about how he was unsure of the ERF and their motives and that he believed that they had come to take away his granddaughter. Here he was referring to the typical scholarship programmes that run in the townships which identify talented and academically successful learners and place them in the better private or model C schools away from their homes. Parents and guardians are often powerless to stop these scholarships because they want their children to have the better life that comes with a higher quality education. Once the participant realised that the ERF sought to assist his granddaughter in improving her school performance while keeping her at home, he was extremely grateful. As a result of this, he was the strongest advocate for collectively working together to assist the ERF and, by extension, the learners in the school.

The second participant who guided the process during the workshop was the vice principal of the school who was appreciative of the work done by the ERF but remained critical of the fact that it was limited to a select few learners. He consistently pushed for ideas on how the influence of the ERF can be expanded to include more learners without necessarily putting them in the scholarship programme. His support was based on his observations of the scholarship learners in his classes.

Both of these participants illustrated the underlying principle of the AI process to me which was that the researcher or facilitator is simply the catalyst in the process, and while key, is not the central pillar on which the entire process rests. Both of these individuals were appreciative of the ERF long before the research process had begun and were now using the research process to convey their reasons for buying into the ERF and to gain support for their vision of the ERF. Both individuals unwittingly created generative conversations that elicited excitement from other participants and geared the conversation toward action.

This workshop was a major learning curve for me as a facilitator and researcher. The first lesson learnt during this workshop was that the most important step in facilitating an AI workshop is, ironically, a step back. Stepping back allows the participants to deeply engage with each other and to develop or build onto an existing relational space to achieve a shared goal. Stepping back also allows participants the space to contribute in a way that is consistent with who they are, which may aid the development of connections with other stakeholders that are more sustainable. A second learning curve for me was that I gained insight into the lived experience of the

participants in the workshops, the learners, educators and the SGB which included parents and guardians of the learners. The stories shared about the pride they felt at these learners who continued to pursue an education in the face of adversity changed the way I saw my education career and created a shift in my value system. I realised how fortunate I was and also re-learned what my prejudices were and how they blinded me to certain things in the context I was in. Despite my values, training in Community Psychology and my belief in the ability of individuals to change their circumstances, I still went into the learners' context focussing on the deficits and what was lacking, and with the aim of fixing this mess so that these "poor" learners could get a decent education.

My main regret following this workshop was that we did not have the AI summit where this interaction could have impacted on a much broader audience. Even though we had T there as part of our domino conversation plan, it would not replace the firsthand experience of the powerful stories shared in this workshop and those following or preceding it.

The third workshop: AI process boarded

When the study was first conceptualised we hoped to host one large summit where all of the participants in the ERF would be present and interacting, sharing and collectively building the ERF. One of the reasons for this approach was that the founding member of the ERF indicated that some of the board members lacked exposure to the day to day intricacies of running and managing the ERF. When we realised that the summit was not feasible, we hoped to host the board workshop as the final one so that the experiences of the various participant groups in the ERF could inform the decision making process of the board. The intention was to ensure that the workshop with the board would seamlessly enter into the Design phase which focuses on detailed, strategic planning based on the information provided during the Discovery and Dream phases.

We approached this workshop with the belief that it would be the easiest to facilitate and organise because the board was the one stakeholder group who truly understood the need for the AI and who would give full support to the process. As it turned out, only four of the seven board members were available on the day of the workshop. This was disappointing because once again we would not be getting the experiences and insight of the full board which meant that the

narrative of the ERF from the ERF would be incomplete. The four board members present were all female and were all intricately involved in the day to day operation of the ERF. M and T were part of this group which meant that once again I was facilitating on my own, but this time with M and T as participants. This shift was somewhat unsettling because my resource base as a researcher was unavailable to me in a sense. I could not expect M and T to alternate between the roles of participants who are actively creating a relational space with others and to simultaneously facilitate the creation of this space. At first glance this statement seems to contradict the key features of Participatory Action Research which states that the researcher is both a participant and an observer (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005). It is important to remember that these roles are difficult to sustain simultaneously, especially in the AI context where the evaluation of the organisation is performed simultaneously with the development of the organisation. Individuals participating in this process would have to embed themselves psychologically in their day to day experiences to effectively translate their experiences into a form that others can utilise. The facilitator has the responsibility of maintaining a meta-perspective on the process so that the experiences of all individuals in an organisation are accurately reflected and synthesised in a manner that has meaning and utility for the organisation.

The workshop with the board was more difficult than I believed it would be. I went into the workshop with the assumption that this group was the most dedicated and invested. I was very disappointed to find that a number of the board members didn't pitch (I had lost a relative; two others had urgent work commitments). The group that did show up was the most enthusiastic so far...the information they generated here is exciting, I understand why this thing got off the ground now.

The above extract is from the research diary on the same day that the workshop took place and reflects my disillusionment and excitement. These contradictory emotions sum up my experience of that time in the research process. The disillusionment was born from the assumption that the ERF board would be the ideal participant group to work with in this whole process. They were the group with whom I believed I would be most comfortable and would receive the most information from. This assumption was also based on the fact that these individuals were placed at the top of the hierarchy of the ERF model and are therefore in possession of the most

information, knowledge, experience, insight and commitment. In my mind this equated to the entire board being present on the day, equipped with the information that would give me insight into the ERF and allow me to see into the inner workings of the intervention so that I could accurately diagnose the issues the organisation was facing. My thinking at this time was much less about the ERF and more about how I could fix the ERF. This hubris is reflected in the fact that we did not set out expectations or terms of engagement as was done in the previous workshops. I later discovered that the expectations linked strongly to the dreams of individuals for the ERF and often indicated an unvoiced need that existed in the group at present.

The excitement that I felt was generated by the energy and commitment shown by the board members present. Their insights into the ERF described the broader socio-political context in which the ERF operated and highlighted the important roles played by key members. The 'discovery' of these key individuals led to the insight that the explicit organisation and the implicit organisation of the ERF are two distinct entities. The explicit organisation of the ERF includes the organogram with the specified roles of each position, the documented objectives, values, mission and vision as well as the published guidelines and procedures. The implicit organisation is the relational spaces that individuals create within the ERF to achieve those objectives that they value most. The implicit organisation of the ERF describes how individuals in the organisation play roles that are in addition to their designated roles indicated on the organogram. Mapping out this organic process of getting things done could greatly aid understanding of how and why the ERF works. This organic process is mapped out in the next chapter as part of the results of the AI process.

My excitement was also generated by the manner in which the board members engaged with each other and the research process. They interacted with each other at a level of understanding and with an openness that was engaging. I was aware that this engagement existed before the AI process began and once more regretted not being able to host the summit so that this energy could be shared with the entire ERF organisation. At the same time I was aware of the difficulty we experienced in trying to get this small group together and the fact that we still had not managed to schedule time with the educators.

The fourth workshop: The analysis of resistance

The educators were the most difficult group to secure a workshop date with. The process leading up to the workshop was filled with difficult negotiations between T and the school. The educators refused to attend a workshop held on a weekend and claimed that they had no time available during the week to attend workshops. The principal, who is a key role player in the ERF, played a crucial role in arranging a date for this workshop. The workshop took place on a Wednesday when a staff meeting had been called and time dedicated to the research process was provided. The educators agreed to a ninety minute session which placed us under extreme pressure to complete the AI process in any depth. We were not hopeful of getting active participation from the educators because of the manner in which this workshop had to be secured, which is briefly highlighted in the extract from my research diary:

Finally, after months of postponements and withdrawals we have a date with the educators! T had to twist arms and break skulls to get this date. We are concerned about the circumstances under which this workshop is taking place. However, we decided to push ahead. Biased data is better than none.

When the time came to meet the educators they showed up an hour late and would not renegotiate the end time of the workshop. This meant that we had to complete the workshop in thirty minutes. As mentioned earlier, the AI process typically takes four days to complete to gain useful information and to build a connection with each other. During the data gathering process we consistently had less than five hours to complete the AI process. This workshop was the most extreme case.

From the previous workshops we were very aware of the value of the expectations exercise in uncovering the underlying needs of the different participant groups. With that in mind we decided to take the time to conduct the process of checking expectations with the group despite the tight timeframe we were under. The underlying need that was apparent among the educators was for a closer working relationship with the mentors (see Figure 5.5). The group strongly urged the ERF, through the research team, to put measures in place to facilitate communication so that the mentors and educators could work together more efficiently. This need implies that the educators recognise the value of the mentors as partners in the education of the learners. The

need communicated by the teachers is born from a lack of communication between the various aspects of the ERF, a need that ran through all of the workshops, with the possible exception of the workshop with the board members where expectations were not checked. This need for open communication and cooperation is in stark contrast with the resistance and reluctant participation that we experienced in dealing with the educators. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the educators were surveyed earlier in the year to check their needs and expectations of the ERF. None of the questionnaires sent out to educators were returned. This lack of response was the primary reason for the shift to a more inclusive, dialogical research approach.

Expectations

- That for next year we would work together more closely
 - The educators and the ERF
- Improved communication between educators and the mentors
 - That is results driven
 - For the mentors this can be beneficial in terms of getting resources from educators such as course work material and the emphasis the educator will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment
 - For the educators this can be beneficial in terms of getting the emphasis the mentor will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment
 - Work programmes can be shared and discussed to ensure that the subject matter is being covered sufficiently (Sharing work programmes is especially important at the beginning of the year to ensure that the mentors are aware of what is in the syllabus)
 - I understand that the commitments of educators and mentors are difficult
 - We communicate through Tumelo but it is like running two programmes
 - Right now we don't have a problem contacting the ERF, we see T all the time
- Report on learner behaviour and performance from both the school and the ERF
- Parental involvement
 - That will support the learners in terms of their work
 - That will encourage learners to join the programme
- Follow up with previous learners so that we can see how best it/we can help them (most learners drop out between grade 9 & 10)
 - Both those who progress in the programme and those who don't (for e.g. holding a one session follow up with individual learners who have withdrawn or failed to be re-selected into the programme)
 - This must be done so that we can develop a plan of action around them

Figure 5.5 The expectations of the educators

It is crucial that the above construction of the educators as the unwilling, resistant participant group be viewed in the broader socio-political context at the time. The workshop with the educators took place not long after the educator strike which saw the formal South African education system come to a complete standstill. During this strike the educators were constructed as a group that was uncommitted, selfish, violent, destructive, unmotivated and incompetent, among other things. The alternative construction of educators at this time was that they were to be pitied for working under a dysfunctional bureaucratic system that was burdened with the

deficits of the apartheid education system in a society where violence, criminal behaviour and resistance against authority was the norm. Against this backdrop the resistance the ERF was experiencing from the educators could be viewed as an extension of the resistance the educators were experiencing as a shared professional identity with all of the negative and positive connotations associated with it. This understanding of how the broader socio-political context impacted on the research process only came after the completion of the research process. During the process my subjective interpretation of the behaviour of the educators was that they were simply confirming the negative perceptions I held about them.

Despite my feelings about the educators as a group, I decided to follow the AI process for the sake of consistency and in the hope of finding useful data. Once again I was surprised at the effectiveness of the AI process in drawing individuals into the process of sharing and appreciating what works. The Discovery phase began with educators who were part of the workshop with the SGB sharing their positive experiences of the ERF, which encouraged a similar trend among those educators with whom we had no contact with at the time. A critical shift in the process occurred when one of the educators shared his appreciation for the ERF but then expressed a desire to see the positive effects of the ERF sustained in learners who have dropped out of the programme or who were not selected for the programme. This was the first time that this hidden population of beneficiaries of the ERF were placed at the centre of the research focus. The ERF ultimately aims to assist all learners within struggling schools but focuses on a small core as it develops and improves its programmes. While part of the ethos of the ERF has been to actively encourage learners to share what they have learnt as part of the programme to bring about a transformative change, the educators strongly emphasised the need for greater focus on the ameliorative approach.

Due to the time limitations, the workshop had to stop at the point where the generative discussions around how to best integrate learners who were not officially included in the ERF were just starting. This forced halt to the process left us with a sense of frustration at the fact that we could have gained so much from the educators and in turn, them from us.

Data Definition

Qualitative research examines what is not there as much as it studies what is there (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). This is also true for evaluation research in general. By looking for what is *not* there we can understand what *is* there in context.

The theme of data definition seeks to describe and examine the process through which data was defined as valid or as part of the scope of the research. The rationale behind this theme is that the often hidden process of data definition shapes the study in significant ways and neglecting to describe this process can skew the way in which the data is interpreted. In qualitative research this skewed interpretation can be an incomplete or one-sided story that does not reflect the experiences or shared understanding of the participants.

Data definition or deciding what is or is not data is a discursive dialogue between the researcher, the underpinning theories, the contracting organisation, the research population, the broader academic context and the prevailing social norms. In other words, data is socially constructed. The construction of what constitutes data is a constant discursive process that is mediated by the rules of research on the one hand and the individual preferences, beliefs, values, needs, desires and objectives of the various people who form part of the research process.

The most obvious risk in defining data as part of the AI process is the exclusion of challenges, criticism, negative perceptions and obstacles from the inquiry process. The exclusion of any negative feedback may not be actively encouraged by the AI facilitator but can be internalised by participants who want the process to work and do not want to violate the “rules” by focussing on the negative.

The “parking lot” was a technique borrowed from group facilitation techniques and theory. Essentially, the parking lot is a space created within a group setting to “park” issues or subjects that are related to the topic under discussion but are not directly or immediately relevant. This technique is used to keep the discussion focused on the matter at hand without alienating individuals or losing valuable input. The parking lot is typically represented by a blank sheet on which individuals can write the issue they want to raise. The facilitator then has the

responsibility for ensuring that the group has time available to discuss each of the subjects listed in the parking lot before the group closes the discussions.

In this study we utilised the parking lot to contain the issues that were either beyond our power to address as part of the research process or that were better suited to being addressed in a different forum but were too valuable to risk forgetting. As a process the parking lot was intended to provide individuals participating in the workshops with the relational space to raise issues that were not necessarily appreciative or evaluative in nature without fear of censorship from the facilitators or the group. The parking lot was intended as a means of enabling open communication between the participants and between the participants and the facilitators. In practice the parking lot became a space to communicate with the ERF. Issues that could not be addressed in the workshop or that required direct action by the ERF to address were placed in the parking lot with an explanation of why it was raised. Similar to the expectations, the parking lot became a means of assessing the underlying needs of a particular group when it came to the ERF.

Exclusion of learners' marks as an indicator of performance during the evaluation was an interesting process that ran parallel to the study. I was not included in the debate by the ERF board and was informed in the early phases of the evaluation that this indicator would not be considered during the investigation. The rationale provided for the exclusion was that the board could not agree on whether the marks achieved were a valid indication of a learner's potential.

The exclusion of the marks as a performance indicator was also based on an assessment by a number of board members of the education system and socio-economic circumstances of the learners selected into the programme. The assertion was made that by using the marks as an indicator, the ERF would be perpetuating the discrimination against these learners by the broader social structures which originally gave rise to the need for the ERF to intervene. In other words, by using the marks as a primary indicator, the ERF risked classifying these learners as underperforming and as seeing the scope of the problem as beyond the resources of the ERF to address.

A number of strategies of incorporating the marks as a means of assessing one of the aspects of the learner's performance were put forward but none were accepted by the majority of the board

members. As a result the most obvious indicator of whether the ERF was having an impact on the learners' performance was not included in the evaluation.

It should be noted that at the time of the evaluation the ERF was pilot testing a standardised assessment based on the prescribed curriculum set by the Gauteng Department of Education and based on the tutoring system of the ERF. This system was implemented in 2011 at the time that this dissertation was written and will be included in future assessments of the ERF.

Boundaries in the research process

Linked to the theme of defining the data is the theme of boundaries in the research process. This is presented as a separate theme because it involves the relational processes that shaped the data and not just the process of considering what data should be.

Defining the boundary between evaluating the ERF and evaluating the school was crucial. The decision held many pragmatic and ethical considerations and was not arrived at via a simple process. The study took place at time of great upheaval in the South African education system. The education sector was under intense scrutiny by the South African lawmakers and the general public. Various accounts by the media and researchers on the education system had created an image of a dysfunctional, underperforming sector that is struggling to meet the most basic functions it was designed to serve. In Chapter 1 I discussed the broader socio-political context of South African education and highlighted the history of the sector and how this impacts the nature of the sector today. During this meta analysis of the education system I gradually became aware of the numerous pitfalls we faced at a process level.

Research requires trust between the participants and the researchers for it to be relevant, immediate and beneficial to the participants. We realised that it would be difficult to build a relationship of trust with the educators and school management team if we approached their context as yet another information seeker aiming to persecute. At the same time we could not ignore the realities of the dysfunctional schooling system and the impact this had on the quality of education. In Chapter 3 I briefly highlighted the fact that social issues give rise to social interventions. What this means in practice is that if the system were functional, the need for educational support services and the ERF would not exist. By virtue of its existence, the ERF

represents a criticism of the education system, and by implication, of the educators and management teams of the schools in which they intervene.

It was crucial that the distinction between evaluating the ERF and evaluating the school be made clear to all participants from the outset as this affected the composition of the stakeholder group. An evaluation of the school would have required the permission of the provincial department of education to ensure that the learners, the school and the community were not being put at risk by the manner in which the research is conducted and disseminated. One of the risks posed to the school by negative research findings is that it could further erode the construction of the learning process as described by Christie (1999) by undermining what was working in the school in the face of a larger dysfunctional social system characterised by unfair distribution of power and resources.

The second crucial boundary that needed to be defined was the boundary between the various roles played by the research team. As mentioned earlier, the research team had to play multiple roles during the process of conducting the study. One of the rationales behind these multiple identities is the need to become part of the community one is researching. The way in which access is gained is as important as gaining access at all, as it significantly influences the nature of the data gathered (Gray, 2005).

It was important that I be seen as representative of the ERF because the research was done on behalf of them and to expedite my entry into the context. In a sense I was riding the coattails of the ERF into the context of the school and its stakeholders without needing to establish my credibility with individual stakeholders. Becoming part of the ERF involved “acts of access” as described in Gray’s (2005) work on the research process. Acts of access sometimes included washing dishes after a workshop or joining the board members at a planning session to gain a better understanding of how the ERF operated on a day to day basis.

Other acts of access included taking time to inform the SGB and educators about the various aspects of the ERF and clarifying any confusion about the scope of the organisation. While this did not directly contribute to the research data, it did contribute to gaining their buy-in into the ERF and indirectly, into the research process.

The benefit of this process of joining the community of the ERF was that it allowed me to obtain an insider's perspective of the organisation when it was not under scrutiny. By becoming a part of the ERF, albeit temporarily, I was able to view how the various stakeholders interacted with each other on a day to day basis and to view the context in which they operated at first hand. This all served to deepen insights into the results of the AI process.

At the same time it was important that the research be perceived as an independent and objective process where individuals could express their opinions freely. It was also crucial that the research process be perceived as a process that aimed to include the opinions, perceptions, understandings and needs of all the stakeholders and not just as pushing the agenda of the ERF. This boundary was particularly difficult to establish because all of the logistics were arranged through the ERF and two of the three members of the research team were also members of the intervention team. Establishing this boundary involved patient but firm reminders that the research process was a related but separate undertaking by the ERF to improve the quality of service delivered to the school and community.

At the individual level each member of the research team played a unique role during the research process to ensure that the objectives of the research were met. For example, T would play a central role in recruiting participants, securing venues, arranging catering and negotiating access to the various contexts on behalf of the research team but would then withdraw once the workshops were underway to allow M and myself to engage in the AI process. As the youngest and least experienced member of the research team, I would often take on the less palatable roles and tasks such as transcription and data capturing. This was done to further my own learning of the research process and to ensure that we could run the research on a shoe string budget. Another shift in roles would be when M and I attended the board meetings where T sits as the chair. In this context we were no longer the expert researchers in charge but part of the team that operated under her direction as part of the larger ERF organisation.

The boundary between what is considered data and what is not was described in the previous section. It is worth mentioning that the distinction between the data and the "parking lot" only existed because of the agreement between the research team and the participants that was established during the contracting phases of the workshops.

The various boundaries in the research process must be firmly established and maintained during the research process to avoid role confusion or overlap as well as prevent accidental misrepresentation by the researcher. The development of these boundaries is a relational process and is therefore a continuous process that the various participants in the research are constantly engaged in. It is crucial to remember that these boundaries are created by the relationship between the individuals and the organisations involved in the research and not the other way around. This will ensure that the process of establishing boundaries remains an open dialogue which facilitates positive growth and sustainable change in these relationships rather than constricting or containing them to prevent harm. In other words, the boundaries should be clear but not impassable to allow for the dynamic interaction that characterises an active participation between role players in the research process.

Discussion and Conclusion

This section of the chapter aims to integrate the discussion of the various themes that emerged from the research process. The integration of the results in this section will invoke the theories discussed in Chapter 2 to provide a holistic interpretation of the research process.

As mentioned earlier an analysis of the research process is crucial in developing a body of work that is reflexive and that provides a critical lens through which the approach utilised can be evaluated and iteratively improved. In this sense a critical examination of the research process as data is as important as a critical examination of the results of the research question. This is especially true of qualitative research because of the unique nature of each study. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research requires deep inquiry that is closely tied to the context in which the research takes place. This makes the application of fixed research recipes exceedingly difficult and requires adaptive application of theoretical frameworks.

In Chapter 2 we discussed the underpinning theories, values and beliefs that guided this study (see Figure 5.6). These theories interlace to form a coherent picture of the research process and, by extension, the research results. While the overall picture may be a coherent whole, these theories do not amalgamate into a new theory, at least, not in this study. Therefore, the boundaries between the various research approaches remain firm and the individual identities of these theories are still considered distinct entities. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the various

theories that inform this study should be viewed as part of a mosaic where each piece is distinct and complete on its own but that form a different picture when viewed from a meta perspective. For the sake of consistency, the discussion below will follow a similar thread to the one utilised in Chapter 2 and I will begin the examination with the corner stones, Community Psychology and Qualitative Research Methodology.

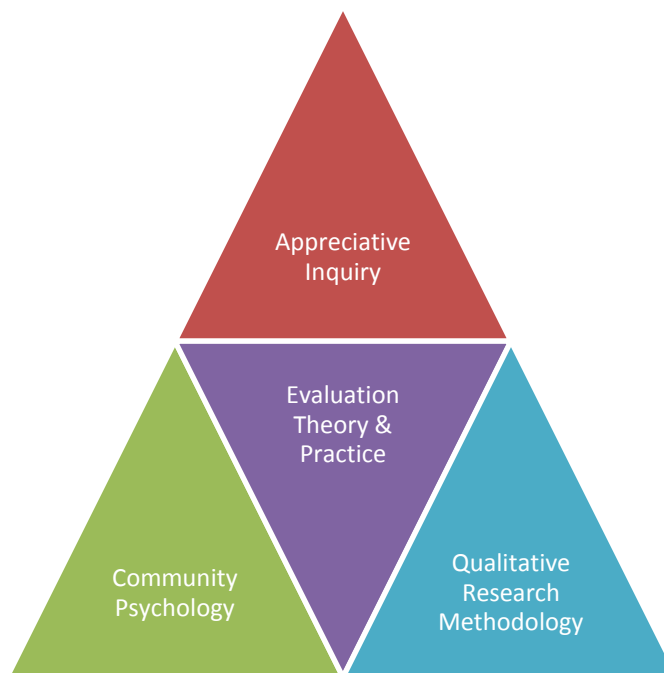


Figure 5.6 Graphical Depiction of the Theoretical Structure of this dissertation

Community psychology perspective:

Leaning on each other for greater leverage:

From a Community Psychology perspective the primary finding about the research process is that it is a case study in Community Psychology. This bold claim is based on the fact that the study can be viewed as incorporating the basic tenets of the discipline. Firstly, the study played a role in widening access to psychological knowledge through the application of research to develop and refine a psycho-social intervention aimed at improving the quality of schooling for learners perceived to come from under privileged communities and schools. The study aimed to

leverage the psychological and research expertise of the research team by openly sharing the approach with all the participants involved in the study and allowing them to shape the study to their collective needs. In exchange, the role players in the ERF provided their time and personal experiences which can be combined with the psychological knowledge to assist a larger number of individuals than would have been possible on the efforts of the psychologists alone.

Embedded within the AI approach are the Community Psychology principles of empowerment, equal participation, ecological interpretation and seeking prevention over cure. The open approach to facilitating the research workshops as well as the emphasis on participant driven research were direct attempts by the research team to incorporate the principles of empowerment embedded in the AI process. Tied to the principle of empowerment is that of equal participation which entails creating a facilitative environment in which all participants are free to speak and, equally important, are heard by the research process. Often this process entailed depowering the researchers (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) as opposed to empowering the participants. As a process, these principles are reciprocal because empowerment of the participant often requires the researcher to depower and trust the participant to follow the process.

The principle of ecological interpretation of the data is embedded in this chapter which describes the environment which gave birth to the data. From a research perspective this concept is crucial due to the idea of qualitative evaluations. The reliability of the qualitative evaluation lies not within the ability of the researcher to replicate the results (Patton, 1987), which would be difficult considering that the organisation and its context are consistently evolving, but to replicate the process through which the data was obtained. The ecological approach is also embedded within the emphasis on providing participants information that aids them in better accessing resources within the ERF, as is the case with the parents and educators; as well as cycling resources as is the case when parents, educators, mentors and community members offer resources which are not highly valued at an individual level but are crucial to the continued operation of the ERF.

The art of role play:

Community psychology places great emphasis on the role of the psychologist as agent of change. The specific actions and activities that this role entails are often not highlighted due to the broad

application of the discipline, especially community and research psychology. An analysis of the research process described above revealed that the research team played multiple roles in the course of data gathering. The team were interchangeably producers of knowledge, scribes, a communication conduit between various parts of the organisation, insiders, outside witnesses, activists and psychological experts. As the team moved between these roles, other individuals in the ERF and the school were playing roles that either aided or hindered the research process. The multiple roles expected of a Community Psychologist are often defined relationally and the effectiveness of a role is both time and space bound. It is for this reason that the emphasis on developing collaborative relationships is placed at the core of Community Psychology.

Lastly, in terms of the Community Health Model, the levels at which the NGO under evaluation operates directly affects the levels at which the research findings will be implemented. In this case the research findings aim to contribute to developing the ERF's secondary and tertiary prevention strategies in the education sector. The research team hold an additional responsibility to ensure that the information is disseminated to the broader academic context to aid tertiary prevention strategies in general. Toward this end, a critical examination of the application of the research method in context can contribute to the body of knowledge that forms the foundation of the discipline.

Qualitative methods perspective

Qualitative methodology was the second cornerstone of the research approach and informed much of the data gathering and analysis process. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Qualitative approach shares many values and principles with the Community Psychology paradigm. Both approaches strongly emphasise empowerment of participants and giving voice to the voiceless.

AI, with its strong emphasis on social constructionism and Participatory Action Research, places the participants firmly at the centre of the research process as both creators and consumers of knowledge. In conventional research this role is typically reserved for the researcher, with the participants portrayed as resources for the researcher to utilise.

Qualitative Research is described as the critical examination of human behaviour by developing a critical empathic understanding of the experiences of the participants. The Qualitative approach

is based on a number of principles that provide structure to the inquiry to ensure that each study conducted in the discipline can be translated from context to context.

One of the principles that Qualitative Research is based on is the emphasis on process. Qualitative Research places emphasis on process rather than on outcome (Babbie & Mouton, 2008) in that it seeks to study or discover the text between the moments when a question was asked and answered. The principle of Reflexivity links with the emphasis on process by utilising research methods that can be adapted to fit the circumstances, perceptions and limitations of the research environment. The research process described in this chapter placed great emphasis on adapting to the environment in which the study was conducted by developing a core structure on which the study was based but allowing participants and circumstances to shape how the study was executed.

The Qualitative approach acknowledges the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and places responsibility for being aware of biases and preconceptions on the researcher. The most obvious bias that faced this study was the bias toward the positive. In Chapter 3 we discussed how the context of the NGO sector impacts evaluation studies and created a bias toward the positive among participants. The reasons provided for this included the multiple impacts of a negative evaluation on an NGO (Rose, 2006). This bias toward the positive could have been further driven by the nature of the AI process which expects participants to focus on the positive. In the section that covered the data definition process I briefly highlighted how individual and group censorship may have played a role in the research process. The nature of this censorship and the potential impact of this is discussed later in this section.

Evaluation perspective

The path not taken:

In a typical evaluation, the hidden population of learners who dropped out of the ERF and who were not selected for the ERF would have held the central focus of the entire evaluation. The questions would have firmly focussed on why certain learners could not maintain the required criteria to remain in the programme and why other learners did not apply for the scholarship programme despite being eligible. Such an evaluation would also have focused more strongly on

the lack of communication between the various aspects of the ERF and highlighted how this has hamstrung the organisation. The evaluation would have had to explore the management strategies of the school, the lack of resources available in the schooling system and by extension, to the ERF. To be comprehensive the evaluation would have had to discuss the degree to which the curriculum followed by the ERF was aligned with the curriculum followed by the school. The average performance of the learners in the programme would have been contrasted with their class averages to establish whether they performed better than their peers.

What this evaluation would not have investigated is how the ERF managed to operate without formal sponsorship or quantifiable resources, how the mentors were implementing innovative teaching approaches to compensate for a lack of formal pedagogic training, the deeper changes observed in the learners' behaviour and attitudes by the various role players, the shared value system that underpinned the ERF and that provided the foundation for their collective action. It would not have highlighted the above issues in a manner that provided possible solutions generated by those directly affected by these issues; and who were in the most appropriate position to implement and refine these solutions.

Appreciative inquiry perspective

In praise of censorship:

The AI process was underpinned by the need to openly communicate about what works in the ERF. The silent partner in this process was the inadvertent censorship of negative feedback. While the research team went to great lengths to accommodate and generate a culture of respect for divergent views, a measure of censorship occurred anyway. By asking individuals to reflect only on the positive, the AI process may inadvertently cause participants to censor themselves so that they are not seen as outside of the process. This can be viewed as a form of social desirability bias.

AI and the rose-tinted glasses:

A common theme throughout the experience of facilitating the AI process is delight in how effective it seems. The apparent efficacy of the process arose, in part, from the trust I developed in the AI process which was essential to my ability to effectively implement the approach. At

various phases of the research it was necessary to advocate for the use of AI over other methods of evaluation to which individuals were accustomed to. This trust in the process may lead to practitioners developing absolute faith in the process and in the needs of the process being placed above that of the participants. The AI approach requires positive reflections to be truly effective, but sometimes participants need to work through the negative experiences and the associated emotions before they can reflect on the positive ones. It is essential that AI practitioners are aware of their own loyalty to the approach and the effect this may have on how they facilitate the process.

AI and the placebo effect:

One of the responsibilities all evaluators incur, myself included, is that of separating how much of what people believe about a programme is myth and how much is fact (Patton, 2003). One of the earliest influences on the development of AI as a science is the various studies into the placebo effect (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). Linked to the theme above (the rose-coloured glasses) the placebo effect in the AI process is a highly contested issue.

While evaluators may argue that it is the responsibility of the evaluator only to document the facts about the research process, AI practitioners will argue that the strength of the approach lies in the generative discussions that shape the understanding of the participants of what makes the organisation work. The question of whether this is true, that is whether the identified strengths are quantifiable and verifiable is a secondary consideration. The mode of verification used is the process of construction which emphasises the dialogical process which includes all participants. The assumption therefore is that if all the participants in the organisation agree that a particular aspect of the organisation is a strength they will work in a manner that is consistent with the perception which may make it a shared truth.

Final comments

The AI process is becoming increasingly popular as an organisational tool and as a research method (Grant & Humphries, 2006). The appeal of the method lies in the strength based focus which is a stark contrast to the deficit focused methods typically employed when evaluating or seeking to improve an organisation. The AI process allows individuals the space to be generous

in their appraisal of the organisation and to acknowledge successes achieved by the organisation as a whole with a focus on the specific circumstances in which the successes took place. By encouraging individuals to share their perceptions of what makes the organisation work, individuals also pass on the lessons associated with the successes achieved to others in the organisation, which is a form of experiential learning.

Despite being widely implemented, there are not many studies that critically examine the process of implementing the AI process (Grant & Humphries, 2006). This study can contribute to the knowledge around the process of implementing AI, but only with the following factors taken into consideration.

First, this study did not follow the typical timeframe or implementation structure of the AI process as is described in seminal works (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995). The context in which this study took place forced the research team to adjust the AI process to accommodate the participants' needs and availability.

A second consideration is that this study was conducted under extreme time constraints. AI is a research approach that places emphasis on the process over results. This is because the act of conducting research in AI is an intervention in and of itself and it is the process of interaction that binds participants and generates the energy needed in the organisation to develop or strengthen the way the organisation works.

Third, no follow up study was done to ascertain whether the organisation was living the reality it constructed for itself during the AI process. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether the AI approach played a role in developing the ERF.

Despite these limitations, the AI approach as a research method and organisational tool in the educational context certainly created the space for active engagement among the participants in this study. As a research method it can greatly aid buy-in from participants, especially in the South African context where there are a number of underlying social issues that can and do undermine the work of NGOs aiming to address a social problem.

Chapter 6 : THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY OF THE EDUCHANGE AND RESEARCH FOUNDATION: RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Overview

This is the chapter of the study in which I outline the outcomes of the research process and draw final conclusions. As depicted in Figure 6.1 this chapter fits within the development focus of the AI analysis process and focuses on the outcomes of the intervention approach. The developmental focus of the AI process entails taking a chronological, long-term perspective on the process. This focus allows the researcher as well as the research audience to get a holistic picture of the implementation of the intervention from the inception of the idea for the intervention, through the daily implementation process and the outcomes, which then set the stage for a new starting point.

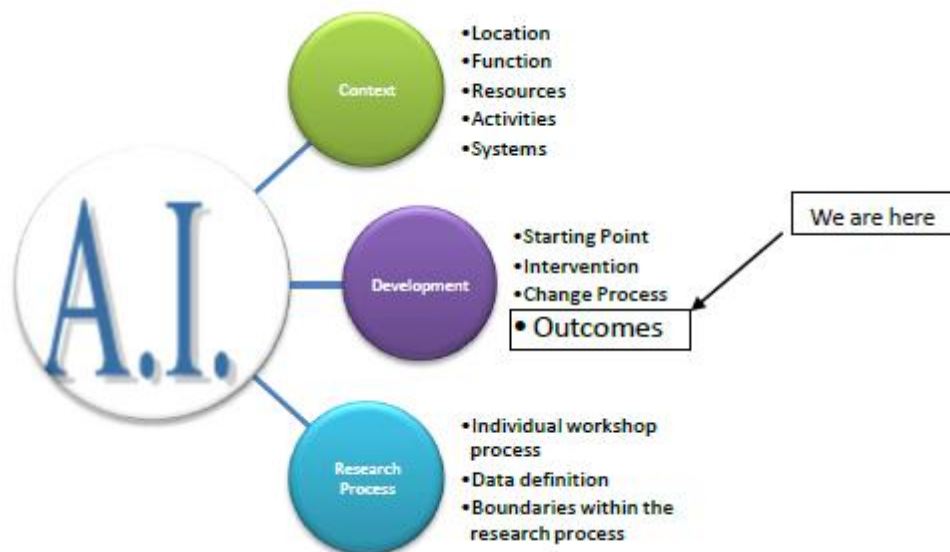


Figure 6.1 A graphic depiction of this chapter in context

As explained in the method section of this dissertation, the outcomes of the study represent the crystallised discussions held with the various stakeholders in the ERF. The process through which these discussions were facilitated was described in Chapter 5 to assist the interpretation of the information given by participants and to contribute to the methodological literature on AI. In this chapter, the feedback from participants is thematically coded through the use of

predetermined theme structure that is based on the AI process of Discovery and Dream. This is presented below in the form of integrated common themes that emerged from the various data gathering workshops. These common themes are contained in encapsulating theme statements that described all of the embedded themes housed within each item. Figure 6.2 depicts the AI phases that were covered by this study.

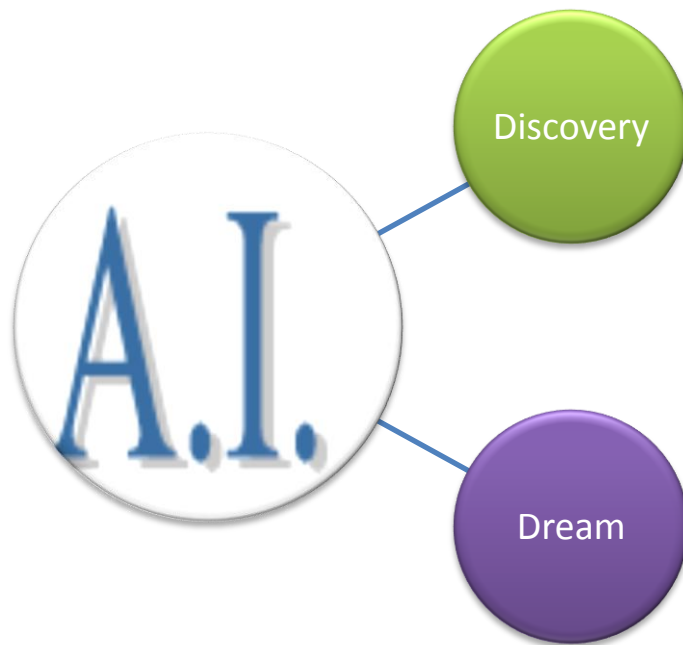


Figure 6.2 The overarching themes for this study

The chapter begins with a brief recap of the structure of the ERF as described in Chapter 3 and restructures the organisation according to the findings by including those key roles not described in the organogram of the ERF. The structure of the ERF will also be used to briefly highlight which aspects of the organisation were most valued. It then goes on to discuss the Discovery Phase results of the inquiry before moving on to discuss the Dream Phase results. I then move on to briefly discuss the limitations of this study, to make recommendations for future studies and to provide two concluding points on the research process.

The section headed “Discovery Phase” details themes that emerged from participants during the discussion of the Discovery Phase. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Discovery phase of the AI process aims to appreciate what gives life to the programme (Reed, 2007). The Discovery phase aims to discover or uncover those aspects of the programme that represent the organisation at its

peak. It seeks to unpack the circumstances, attitudes and beliefs embedded in those moments when the programme works. The Discovery phase works on the assumption that the moments where the organisation is at its peak are powerful shared experiences among certain individuals within the organisation and that by sharing these experiences with the rest of the individuals in the organisation the process around this experience can be replicated and transferred to other aspects of the organisation.

The section headed “Dream Phase” details the themes that emerged from participants during the discussion of the Dream Phase. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Dream phase of the AI process aims to encourage participants to envision what might be (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The Dream phase gives all of the stakeholders in the organisation an opportunity to imagine a vision for the organisation. This function is typically reserved for the executive board or managing directors of organisations. By including individuals at all levels of the organisation one essentially broadens the vision of the organisation and opens up possibilities that may not have been considered initially.

Each of these sections have a number of sub-headings that describe in detail what the participants constructed as the most important elements to be carried forward as part of the ERF.

Discovery Phase

The Discovery Phase is the initiating phase of the AI process. It is referred to as the initiating or catalyst phase of the AI process because this is the phase in which the positive energy within the organisation is harnessed by means of the collective sharing of success stories or peak experiences. The Discovery Phase is also the phase during which a bond is forged between the stakeholders by incorporating their shared lived experiences into a collective. The Discovery Phase focused on what the participants appreciated about the ERF scholarship programme. The experiences shared by the participants are clustered into similar themes to facilitate the discussion and exploration of the experiences shared.

The themes are structured into two super-ordinate themes that are labelled “The Nuts and Bolts” and “Re-living the Peak”. The themes constellated under the theme “Components of the programme” are mainly focussed on the components of the programme that the participants

appreciated. The three components of the ERF scholarship programme are Financial Support, Mentorship and Workshops. As the discussion will only be focused on what the participants valued in the ERF scholarship programme, not all of these components will be mentioned or discussed. The Re-living the Peak theme focuses on the observed effects of the programme on the various stakeholders. In line with the approach and method of Appreciative Inquiry, these observations are stated as what the participants appreciated in terms of the effect of the ERF scholarship programme on the various stakeholders.

The nuts and bolts: holding it together

This section discusses the various components or aspects of the programme that the participants in the AI workshops appreciated about the ERF. The responses presented and analysed in this section answer the question: Which aspects of the ERF do you most value and why? The responses of the individual participants were thematically coded and then integrated to present a coherent narrative. In Chapter 1 I highlighted the fact that the ERF has a number of aspects to their scholarship programme that are aimed at the holistic development of the learners. These aspects include life skills workshops aimed at developing the various social skills that learners need in order to attain success in the school and post-school careers. In Figure 1.4 the workshops are shown under the section entitled “Learner Empowerment”. The rationale behind the title is that the aim of these workshops is to empower learners to become better adapted individuals capable of transcending their social circumstances; in line with this empowerment emphasis the learners are expected to take what they’ve learnt and to share and teach it to their classmates through presentations in the classroom. A second aspect of the scholarship programme is Research which aims to document and analyse the efficacy of the interventions developed by the ERF so that the organisation can lobby for transformative change based on evidence. The Financial support component is aimed at providing the learners with the material resources necessary to complete their schooling. This includes text books, stationery, school uniforms, additional or remedial study materials and transportation to the various locations that the mentoring and tutoring sessions take place in. The last component is Mentorship which is aimed at providing the learners with social support and guidance during their term. The mentors are expected to act as role models for the learners and to provide social support and advice to the learners, especially at times when the learners face difficult social circumstances. The

mentorship component, like all of the other components of the ERF, has an empowerment emphasis that discourages mentors from simply helping the learners out of pity, but encourages mentors to aid the learners by guiding them through the difficult circumstances they face with unconditional positive regard and by believing in the learners' ability to develop themselves to outgrow their circumstances.

Mentorship ApPRAISEd

The mentorship component was regarded as one of the critical success factors of the ERF by the stakeholders. The dual tutoring and supportive role played by mentors in the ERF programme is described as the aspect that had the highest impact in sustaining the engagement of learners in the programme. The commitment of the mentors was reflected on extensively during the workshop with the board members who are the stakeholder group that has the most contact with the mentors (with the exception of the learners). The board reflected not only on the time that the mentors dedicate but also on the attitude of each individual. The fact that these young individuals were willing to dedicate their limited free time over weekends was already impressive to the members of the board but the passion with which they approached their tasks was described as astounding.

[At the] first Mentor workshop [the workshop where new mentors are introduced to the programme and to the learners]...Seeing them there and eager to get involved...seeing them commit to getting involved and get their colleagues involved. Their commitment is amazing considering that they are volunteers: They are so young and committed; they give up their personal time; when they are there they commit to every minute; they invest their energy and are present with learners and they show such discipline.

The above statements by a board member reflect the appreciation for the way in which the mentors give their time. The passion and dedication displayed by the mentors for the learners' education was repeatedly highlighted as a key strength of the ERF. In Chapter 3 I discussed the rationale behind including mentors in the scholarship programme. I mentioned that the mentors were expected to act as tutors to the learners, but this was a secondary function to that of acting as a role model. The mentors selected are all individuals who have completed high school and have entered higher education. The ERF aims to encourage the learners in the schools in which

they intervene to pursue a tertiary education and therefore selects mentors who act as examples in this regard. The mentors at the ERF are positioned close to the learners to aid the informal learning of life skills deemed necessary by the ERF to succeed in the post school environment. These individuals are selected because they have been successful in pursuing a tertiary education and, in some cases, making the transition from tertiary education into full time employment. The mentors are also required to display the behaviour they expect the learners to emulate such as punctuality, courtesy, respectful behaviour toward all, discipline, hard work and adhering to the spirit of the law. The mentors are expected to adhere to a higher standard of moral behaviour and to encourage this behaviour in the learners. This includes not bowing to peer pressure and displaying behaviour appropriate to the context. In a sense, the mentors are tasked with creating a healthy culture of teaching and learning as described by Christie (1999) where the social norms adhered to by all are conducive to teaching. In light of these strict requirements, the appreciation of the board of the discipline displayed by the mentors is high praise of the character of the individuals.

The provision of mentors to provide support to young people perceived as having difficulties or of being at risk according to various categories has become an important feature of interventions around schools (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009). Mentoring is typically associated with career development (Bagins & Cotton, 1999) but can also play a crucial role in modelling desired behaviours in youth to raise education standards and promote social inclusion in areas characterised by deprivation and marginalisation (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009; Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). The mentors in the ERF are meant to aid the learners in developing those skills required to enter and succeed in the higher education terrain and, by extension, the job market.

The board members also reflected on the full contribution that the mentors make to the programme and one board member stated the following:

Mentors don't only offer their skills; they also offer material support... [A mentor]: organised files, stationery and convinced his family to invest in the programme. [They are] always willing to be contacted by learners. They use their own airtime to call

learners and they cover their own expenses. Despite this they are not demanding - they don't impose their helping on us.

The mentorship was highly valued by the learners as well. When requested to elaborate on why they valued the mentoring component of the programme, the learners said that they received more explanations from the mentors than they get from the educators in class. Personal attention is acknowledged as one of the critical factors in developing learners academically (Christie, 1999). The large class sizes in schools placed in socio-economic communities that are marginalised and under-resourced make it difficult for educators to provide learners with one on one attention. On the other hand, the mentors in the ERF work with small groups of learners, which allows for the time and space to dedicate more attention to the individual. This is crucial in developing learners academically, especially when one considers findings in other studies that indicate that parents in lower socio-economic groups do not have the time, resources or, in some cases, the education level necessary to assist the learners (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2008; Taylor & Yu, 2009). The learners especially valued the fact that the mentors take extra time on the subjects that learners struggle with individually. This is contrasted with the educators who may become frustrated at learners who do not keep up with the rest of the class and, as a consequence, either fall behind the syllabus or prevent the entire class from completing the syllabus during the prescribed time.

In addition to the academic support, the learners also appreciated the guidance and social support provided by the mentors. This was linked to the life lessons that the mentors taught the learners implicitly during the sessions. The life lesson most appreciated by the learners was that they should not be reliant on others for their learning and that they should take responsibility for their own education. “[I] discovered that I have to work hard as one day there may be no mentors to teach me.” This statement was made by a learner during the first workshop during the written reflections exercise and is echoed in the writings of all the learners in one form or another. I chose this particular statement because it most eloquently expressed the lesson learnt.

While the relationship between the educators and the mentors was described as tenuous at best, the educators were another group who acknowledged the key role that the mentors play in the

informal learning of the learners. One of the educators observed the open communication between the mentors and the learners and made the following statement:

I appreciated that the learners could directly interact with the mentors. It shows free communication between the learners and mentors. It [also] allows learners who are not in the programme to interact with the mentors (for example when one of the scholarship students introduced their friends to the mentor and they began speaking).

The above statement reflects on a crucial aspect of the mentoring process, which is the transfer of knowledge between the mentor and mentee. To suggest or expect the teaching and learning between these individuals to be classroom and time bound would seriously limit the reach of the mentors in the lives of the mentees. By allowing mentors the freedom to interact with the mentees on various levels, the mentoring process can be more holistic. The open communication between the mentor and mentee described above can have a dual impact on the relationship. First, it serves to strengthen the relationship by validating the mentor as a resource or support system for the mentee by being available outside the classroom or tuition setting (Bagins & Cotton, 1999). Second, it encourages socially responsible behaviour in the learners by allowing them the time and space to exercise the ability to identify opportunities for improvements for others in their social network. The learners acknowledge the positive impact that the mentors have had in their lives and seek to share this with their peers. When the parameters of this sharing are negotiated between the mentor and mentee, it can provide a broader foundation on which the mentoring relationship can be built and deepens the impact of the mentoring relationship to include the social life of the mentee.

The art of giving without going dry: Volunteering in the ERF

Another aspect of the ERF that was appreciated was the culture of volunteering in the organisation. The ERF has no formal funding, offices, or staff compliment; it relies entirely on donations and volunteers to operate. As an NGO, the ERF is sustained by the services volunteered by the various members of the organisation. It almost seems superfluous to say that the volunteers in the organisation are appreciated. What is important to understand here is that it is the specific culture of volunteering in the ERF that is appreciated by the various members.

Philanthropy is typically seen as the domain of the professional and the wealthy (Everatt, Habib, Maharaj, & Nyar, 2005) with the flow of money and support moving from corporations, foundations and the wealthy elite to the marginalised and the poor. This skewed power dynamic places the wealthy in firm control of the amount, nature and scope of assistance given to those seen as poor, which is in stark contrast to the message of empowerment that many philanthropic endeavours portray (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). This undemocratic state of affairs may be a reality for a large part of the philanthropic sector but is not a comprehensive portrayal of the sector. There are a number of examples of self-help, community driven philanthropic endeavours such as stokvels and burial societies that suggest that giving in South Africa must not be conceived of in a unilinear direction (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). A study by Swilling and Russell in 2001 in (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008; Bekkers, 2005) suggests that more than half of the civil society organisations in the country were informal organisations located within and managed by the most marginalised and underresourced communities themselves. Sherraden *et al.* (2005) further argue that it is essential to conceptualise philanthropy as more than the exchange of financial resources and to include giving time and skills. The location of the ERF within the community and tapping into existing resources within the community fits within the proportion of the civil society organisations managed by the communities that it serves.

In discussing philanthropy in the context of the ERF it is important that to remember that I am speaking about the private assumptions of public responsibility (Everatt, Habib, Maharaj, & Nyar, 2005). The ERF, and similar organisations, are formed to address pressing social issues in a community, in this case, the delivery of a quality education to parts of the population who cannot afford to subsidise the education delivered by the government. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the revised national education policies place the onus on the School Governing Body to determine the school fees to charge for the delivery of education. While this seemingly places the power in the hands of those most affected by the decisions made at the school, it has led to a situation where under-resourced communities have a lower quality of education than wealthier communities because they cannot provide even the most basic resources required for quality education. Organisations such as the ERF aim to bridge the gap between these communities by bringing in additional resources while simultaneously tapping existing resources in the community system. Volunteerism is a common practice in South Africa, albeit one that goes

largely unnoticed because the poor make up the bulk of the workforce (Everatt, Habib, Maharaj, & Nyar, 2005). Volunteerism in South Africa is also distinct from the European or North American countries in that the typical South African volunteer is an individual who comes from a poor background, has a basic education and is unemployed with little or no employment history while European or North American volunteers tend to be well educated professionals from the upper socio-economic groups (Bekkers, 2005). The ERF's recruiting strategy aims to synthesise the two volunteering approaches briefly mentioned above by accepting all individuals who approach the organisation as capable and motivated individuals who are willing to contribute within their comfort zone.

The board reflected extensively on the volunteers and the culture of volunteering at the ERF which was highlighted as a key strength. The volunteering takes place at different levels, namely, at board level, with the mentors, workshop presenters and general assistance on mentorship days by a number of key individuals who are not officially part of the ERF. The following statement was made by the Executive Director about the volunteering and team spirit at the board level:

Volunteering at board level: [I] appreciate the commitment and willingness to drive the programme... [They are] professionals who give up time to make ERF successful. [At the] first board meeting I knew all of them but they did not know each other... At the end of the day I realised that this would work, that we would go a long way.

The members of the board are prominent individuals within their disciplines and communities. In her reflections, the ERF director explained how potential board members were recruited because of the discipline specific skills they possessed and for their passion for improving the schooling system in South Africa. These individuals did not know each other prior to joining the ERF but were quickly bound together by their common cause. The development of a sense of unity among the board members is crucial for the ERF to function effectively because of the nature of the organisation. The board must have a shared vision of where the organisation should go to achieve the collective desire to improve education. These individuals, along with the mentors and researchers, constitute the professional body of volunteers who contribute to the organisation. In order to ensure that no power dynamics unduly influence the implementation of the ERF's intervention strategy, the ERF constructs each function and contribution to the ERF as

equal with no individual holding more power than another. This is acknowledged in the following statement by a board member:

We have this goodwill manifesting at different levels. [The volunteering is] not always at a high level. [For example] someone helps organise the venue; an old lady helps us cook; something we would have to pay for; with the humble budget from the school we are eating well [at mentorship sessions]. People like this we need to acknowledge and include them in the programme.

The hierarchy of the ERF highlights the formal functions that the organisation performs. This hierarchy does not comprehensively represent the various roles that the ERF plays or the individuals who fulfil these roles. Figure 6.3 is a visual representation of the various roles that must be played by the ERF to achieve their objectives. Many of these roles would not immediately be associated with the objectives and aims outlined by the documentation in the organisation but are essential for ensuring that the ERF successfully fulfils its overall function. These roles are not typically in the formal organogram of the organisation. The individuals who play these various roles often volunteer to perform one of the official functions of the organisation but take on additional responsibilities in the form of one of the unofficial functions to assist the collective achievement of objectives.

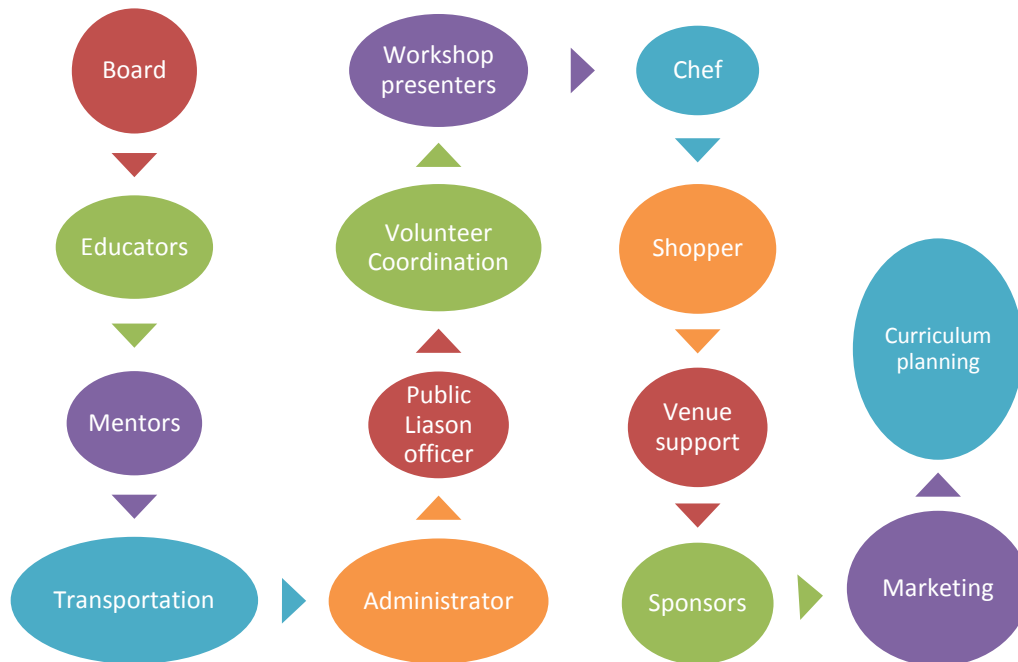


Figure 6.3 The organigram of the ERF

In many ways the volunteers are the life force behind the ERF; without them the organisation does not exist. The statements about the culture of volunteering at the ERF show that the importance of this culture is acknowledged and valued. It is important that the ERF understands that it is also the nature of this acknowledgement that contributes to the culture of volunteering at the organisation. Individuals are publically acknowledged for their individual contributions to the programme at events such as the annual luncheon where sponsors of the programme and prominent members of society are present but, more importantly, individuals are acknowledged at an interpersonal level during the day to day operation of the organisation by others who understand the nature of the sacrifice being made. The unconditional positive regard in the organisation is not just reserved for the learners but is shared among the various stakeholders during small events such as the meals shared after mentorship sessions. These meals are a good example of how the ERF’s culture of volunteering comes to life. The SGB sponsors the meals from the school budget. The principal of the school does the shopping for the meal during the week leading up to a mentorship session. A pensioner in the community prepares the meals on the day and has it delivered to the school. The Executive Director and the two board members usually present set out the meal while the mentors are busy. During the meal the role players present share and discuss their experiences of the day, plan the next mentorship session or

discuss individual students who are a matter of concern. After the meals volunteers usually clear away and clean up before everyone leaves.

The description above is a microcosm of how the larger ERF system works and can be seen as an example of the culture of volunteering that is appreciated by the stakeholders in the organisation. Such mundane acts of collaborative effort frequently underpin the work of NGOs such as the ERF, but are seldom explicitly acknowledged or interpreted as emblematic of the ethos of the organisation as a whole.

Programme Flexibility

The flexibility with which the programme responded to stakeholder needs was highlighted as a major motivating factor for the individuals who volunteer. Participants reflected on how work and family commitments often clash with the priorities of the ERF. They stated that the structure and open communication policy maintained by the Executive Director allowed them to remain engaged even though they could not always be physically present. The ERF Executive Director plays a crucial role in ensuring that the administration, marketing and volunteer coordination run smoothly. The role of volunteer coordination entails regular direct engagement with individual volunteers to understand what their needs are and to adjust the work load distribution to accommodate these needs. As one board member put it:

[She is] helping people to manage practical situations to ensure [their] engagement. [She is] managing the tensions that the individuals deal with so that they can give to the programme.

Ensuring the consistent engagement of various individuals means maintaining an awareness of volunteer attributes, individual capacity, programme attributes and institutional capacity; and balancing these to find the best fit. Volunteer attributes and individual capacity refers to the demographic and socio-economic profile of the volunteers as well as the knowledge and skills of the volunteer (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). Programme attributes refers to the programme type, mission and values of the programme and the recruitment policies of the programme (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). The institutional capacity refers to the

resources, access, incentives, information and accountability of the programme (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008).

The *Executive Director* is largely credited with the establishment and maintenance of the flexible framework of the programme. She maintains a relationship with the various individuals in the organisation that is aimed at achieving the objectives of the ERF. This role requires a meta perspective of the organisation and its mission while dealing with the daily realities that the volunteers deal with. The volunteer coordinator has to manage the relationships between volunteers and between volunteers and the ERF through consistent communication. A board member explained it as follows:

The Executive Director ensures individual engagement by flexible communication. All [this is] done to ensure that the programme is carried forward. She is crucial to ensuring the programme running smoothly. She comes up with ideas to roll out the programme that I wouldn't have. [The] process was difficult in the beginning but she kept things focussed. [She] directs us all - made us all focus on the objectives of the programme...Words to describe her are: glue, patient, focus driven, committed, passionate, creative, strategic visionary, tenacious and resourceful.

The flexibility of the programme went beyond the accommodation of individuals who volunteer in the programme. It was also used to highlight the fact that the ERF operates without an administrative office and administrative staff. Again, the *Executive Director* was credited with providing the framework for making this possible. According to one of the volunteers:

"The fact that we did not have an office and staff did not hamper us...she provides admin support under difficult circumstances - we are always organised in terms of learners' schedules, minutes [of meetings] and administration."

The primary risk with having the Executive Director as a central pillar in the organisation is that it leaves the organisation with very little depth or reserves in terms of human resources. The institutional capacity of the organisation clearly should be increased by increasing the involvement of other individuals who have the capability and experience of managing and directing the programme. While the manner in which the programme is managed is what is

primarily appreciated, it is important to increase the number of individuals who are appreciated for doing so.

Networking as an NGO

“Organisational networks can connect organisations to local and foreign partners for resources, advocacy, media work, lobbying and campaigning and other forms of empowerment” (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008, p. 403). Organisational networking is crucial for the ERF to leverage access to resources they would not otherwise have access to. The ERF aims to create sustainable change in the education system by influencing policy and practice in the education system. In order to achieve this it is essential that the organisation broker vertical partnerships with companies, policy makers and universities (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). Brokering these partnerships will aid the ERF in expanding their circle of influence beyond the schools they intervene in and beyond the volunteers already in the organisation. Horizontal networks between local people, organisations and foundations can support the ERF in expanding the type of services they deliver to the schools in which they intervene by combining resources, experience and expertise (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008).

The ERF has a number of methods through which it creates and maintains its networks. These network opportunities were one of the aspects of the ERF that were appreciated by the stakeholders. The research component of the ERF, the general parents meeting and the launch of the programme were highlighted as key networking opportunities for the ERF.

General parents’ meeting as a consultation method for engagement

The general parent’s meeting was highlighted as a method of engaging and consulting all the parents in the school. The general parent’s meeting provides the ERF with the appropriate platform to inform and market itself to the parents directly. In the typical course of business the ERF only has contact with the parents of the learners who are selected as part of the scholarship programme. Being part of the general parents meeting also acts as validation of the ERF as part of the school community and is an indication of the fact that the organisation is accepted by the school as a partner. The general parents’ meeting is also a great opportunity to market the scholarship programme and to recruit parents into the organisation.

Launch of the programme

The launch of the programme was a theme that resonated strongly with the members of the board as an aspect that was appreciated. The launch was held a year into the programme and was an acknowledgement of the progress made since the inception of the programme. Board members reflected that it was the culmination of the year's work and that allowed them to reflect on what has been achieved and to showcase this success.

[At the] Launch of the programme...seeing the change in the learners [how they] changed from shy and not assertive...seeing the improvement in them...Seeing all stakeholders in the same room [who] acknowledge the existence of the programme.

The learner presentations during the launch of the programme were also highlighted as a theme that evoked quite a strong sense of achievement as it provided a tangible reflection of the changes that the learners were undergoing as part of the programme. It also served to showcase the work of the organisation

[My] 'AHA' was at the Launch during the learner presentations. Seeing their confidence, when expressing their true feelings and what they've learnt...knowing that the learners have progressed to a point where this could happen.

For others it was the manner in which the launch was contextualised within the broader educational framework. This was enhanced by the keynote speaker chosen for the day. The participants reflected the following on this: "The kind of keynote speaker chosen [was] someone who looks critically at educational policy. I was motivated by his interest in the programme. [He] raised issues: Pointed out the challenges and pockets of excellence in education. I was hoping that this would help the audience to see the importance of the ERF."

A similar experience was shared by members of the board who participated in the Grade 9 festival which was described by the participant as: "...An exciting moment...a culmination of a process. Seeing the teachers supporting us in numbers...they were excited and participated actively. [This] gave me hope that we can impact in the development at school level. It showed that with more in-depth buy-in there is so much more that can be achieved."

The Grade 9 festival was an event held to celebrate the Soccer World Cup with the Grade 9 learners aimed at encouraging the learners to learn about other cultures. The event was marketed with all of the educators in an attempt to encourage them to duplicate the event with the other grades in the school. The support received from the educators was an indication that the ERF could have a positive impact on the school and that the educators were slowly buying into the presence of the ERF as a partner in the learning and teaching at the school.

When appraising the ERF scholarship programme, it is important that one maintains a systemic perspective of the organisation and that the context in which it works is always considered as a factor. The AI process seeks to highlight the strengths of an organisation; this does not automatically imply that other aspects of the programme are weaknesses. Rather, the process of highlighting the strengths of an organisation is aimed at creating generative discussions (Bushe, 2007) that are aimed at changing the way people think about social structures and the pursuit of new ideas, theories and models that liberate our collective aspirations by opening new avenues of action (Cooperider & Srivastva, 1987). The purpose of these generative conversations is to change the way individuals in an organisation think about and, by implication, act on the way the organisation works. When successful, this process can generate spontaneous, un-facilitated action toward a better future for the organisation (Bushe, 2007).

The Research component

In the view of some board members, the manner in which the research component was conducted brought the stakeholders together in attempts to gather feedback which would improve the scholarship programme. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data gathering workshops also provided a platform for the stakeholders to learn more about the ERF and to understand how they fit into the organisation. The data gathering workshops acted as a platform for the stakeholders to communicate their most immediate needs to the ERF board members. Although the stakeholders could not all gather in one workshop, all of them contributed meaningfully towards providing ERF with the information that was required for the organisation to conduct an informed strategic planning session.

In line with AI theory, the aspects highlighted above often integrated a number of the underlying values, assumptions and beliefs of the ERF. The AI process aims to highlight those aspects of an

organisation that give life to the organisation by discussing specific experiences and highlighting specific aspects of the programme that they believe best illustrates what the organisation is capable of (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Patton, 2003; Reed, 2007). Sharing these experiences in a collective space allows for participants to recognise and acknowledge the contribution of individuals in the organisation. This serves to encourage continued participation and engagement and facilitates the transfer of knowledge between sections of an organisation (Reed, 2007).

Re-living the Peak

The “peak experience” in an AI process is a moment where a participant felt the vision, mission and objectives of the programme come to life (Rogers & Fraser, 2003). AI is based on the “heliotropic principle” which states that people and organisations move toward those things that give them energy and life (Cooperrider D. L., 1990; Datta, 2007; Jacobsgaard, 2003; Rogers & Fraser, 2003). The peak experiences of individuals are a good indicator of what individuals perceive as the life giving experiences of the organisation. These experiences are often those achievements that most closely match the individual motivations and objectives of the various stakeholders (Patton, 2003). Listening to and understanding the peak experiences of the various stakeholders in an organisation can provide programme managers and directors with an indication of what stakeholders expect from the programme and what they see as the value of the programme for the broader society they wish to serve (Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for change*, 2007).

Growth, Development and Motivation of learners

All the stakeholders who participated in the study highlighted the growth, development and motivation seen in the learners who were selected for the scholarship. The general description of the learners was that they grew from shy and reserved to confident individuals who are able to present in public spaces such as the launch of the programme.

Reflections from the educators on the learners were mainly around their behaviour during school hours. The educators are the stakeholder group who have had the longest history with the learners. This stakeholder group is uniquely positioned to observe the learners’ behaviour in the

school environment. The educators commented that the learners appeared to be more motivated and that their behaviour appeared to be more disciplined. The educators went on to state that the learners took more ownership of their work and took initiative in performing a variety of tasks.

The learners are personally motivated. Most of the time the work allocated is done. Their level of engagement is increased. For example, when I gave them a task on research the learners took the work and made it their own...they could quote from sources and found other sources not identified by me.

This statement was echoed by another educator who said:

The ERF is having a good effect on the learners' behaviour: they show more discipline. They are always on time. They are always in uniform and neat in appearance and it is as if they group themselves as the scholarship students. They are like a unit as if they realised that they are good people and associate with each other. Not associate with so called problematic children. They won't change to associate with these learners. It is up to these problematic learners to change to fit the ERF group, to behave better and show discipline.

The above statements seem to comment on a change in attitude in the learners toward their education. The primary difference seems to be a shift from passive, somewhat reluctant recipients of knowledge to active, interested participants who take ownership for their learning. This is a shift away from the deficit based dialogue about incompetent teachers and unmanageable learners to a culture of teaching and learning that is more conducive to learning (Chetty, 1992; Christie, 1998). A second change observed by the educators is that the learners have altered their peer group to fit their new outlook on their education to seek those who support them in their journey.

Some of the educators reflected on the learners who were retained in the ERF programme and the effect this has had on them.

The learners who are retained are more confident, have initiative, display good, disciplined behaviour and their performance [has] improved

Learners are required to apply for the programme each year, regardless of whether they were selected the year before. The consequence of this is that some learners do not perform well enough to be retained in the programme and are replaced by other learners who were not part of the programme but who increased their level of performance enough to get selected. While the statement above reflects positively on what the ERF does for the learners who are retained in the programme, the educators also reflected on the phenomenon of a gradual relapse to the norm in learners who were not retained. The educators described how some learners' marks revert to the class standard over time when they failed to re-enter the ERF programme. This raised much concern among the educators and the board members as it was perceived as indicative of a lack of sustainability in the change process employed by the ERF. Some of the participants believed that learners who are not retained may also not retain their peer group from the ERF and return to the normative group; that it is no surprise that their school performance will return to that of their peer group.

The parents of the learners reflected on the changes observed in the learners' behaviour within the home environment. The learners were described as more conscious of their appearance, and showing more pride in their physical appearance. The reflections of the parents also highlighted how involvement in the ERF has assisted the learners in developing resilience in the face of pressure, as is shown in the following statement by one of the parents:

The biggest impact for me is the growth of the child, not educational only but socially as our child. Responsively (sic) in to the social life inclusively to deal with other forms of pressure.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the context in which the ERF intervenes is one characterised by a lack of access to resources and a lack of community, and in some cases, family cohesion. The additional social support provided by the ERF intervention programme contributes to building a more positive social environment for the learners which can complement the role of the parents in mitigating the impact of negative peer pressure. Another of the guardians reflected that:

As a sister of a learner I can see that it worked for him. He never used to play sport or socialise until a mentor encouraged him to do things in the community to help his

bursary applications. The activities in the ERF gave him the spirit to speak in front of others. He has grown and can present himself in front of other people. The ERF gives them enough work to stay busy, keeps them off the street and away from trouble.

The mentors are the stakeholder group who have the most contact with the learners in the programme next to the educators. They are introduced to the learners at the beginning of the year and guide them in their journey through the year. The mentors provide a role model, a social support pillar and an academic guide in terms of learning styles and subject knowledge. The reflection from the mentors closely matched that of the educators with the emphasis on observations that highlighted increased confidence in the learners: more frequent displays of disciplined behaviour, and greater engagement with school work. When discussing a learner who had recently lost her parents, the mentors remarked that they expected the student's performance to decline markedly and that they expected her to drop out of the programme. However, they realised that the learner had adapted to the loss of her parents to some extent by drawing on her relationship with the ERF Executive Director and her mentor. The mentors discussed how they consistently tried to ensure that this particular learner received more time and attention because they were sympathetic to her situation. They then commented on the fact that her performance in class and the programme remained steady and that she remained in the programme. While these reflections do not prove any causal relationship between the support given by the ERF and the learner's performance, the narrative is consistent with findings on the mitigating effects of social support on traumatic life changes on school performance (Malecki & Demaray, 2006).

The growth and development of learners was also noted by the learners themselves who acknowledged the difficulties they faced during the year in learning to present themselves to others. The learners reflected on how they struggled to attain clarity in the classroom because of fear of speaking in a public space. The learners reflected that after their training in presenting and being assigned class presentations they were more aware of the positive impact they could have on their classmates and peers. These reflections demonstrate a self awareness of the empowering transformation learners had undergone during the course of the year. During the closing of the data gathering workshop a learner closed the proceedings with the following statement:

At the beginning of the year I would not look any of you in the eye and I would not speak. Now I can speak to you and I want to thank [my mentor] for her help.

The board members are the stakeholder group responsible for the design and the day to day implementation of the programme in the school. The board members present at the data gathering workshop reflected on their initial contact with the learners and contrasted this with their experience of the learners at the first annual luncheon of the ERF which coincided with the formal launch of the programme. The Executive Director reflected on the growth in the learners:

Having seen learners before the programme [with their] communication and confidence difficulties; seeing them after the workshop standing in front of colleagues confidently was outstanding...seeing them reporting after having read [when they come from] no/little culture of reading; the learners picking up a book and reporting on it was outstanding... [Also] seeing the learners working in a team.

The observed effects of the programme on the learners primarily focused on the observable changes in behaviour of the learners. The participants, including the learners themselves, reflected that the most common peak experience was seeing increased confidence and self esteem in the learners. Often this increased confidence was related to the fact that the learners were able to present themselves in a public space without fear. Another common peak experience was observing the learners taking more responsibility for their school work and their social lives. The common themes described here are not surprising when one considers that the ERF is primarily driven by volunteers who are concerned with the quality of schooling in the township and that they share the objective of preparing the learners for entering the tertiary and work contexts. The learners are at the central reason why these individuals volunteered for the programme, and positive change in the learners would validate the decision to volunteer in the programme.

Higher academic standards

Another theme that emerged from the data gathering workshops was that the learners appeared to be internalising a higher standard of excellence. The current pass mark in the South African

school system is 30% on some subjects and 50% on others (South African Department of Education, 2008). This standard is set by the Department of Education. However, once learners reach Grade 12 they are expected to attain a 50% minimum as a pass mark to prepare them for the rigors of Tertiary Education. This adjustment is often extremely difficult for the learners to make and can lead to disinvestment from the education process and a lowered sense of self-esteem. The ERF's continuous assessment process maintains a 50% pass rate from Grade 9 to acclimatise the learners in the programme to the expected norm from an early age. This has led to learners aspiring to a higher minimum norm than their classmates who are based on the Department of Education's minimum standard. This internalisation is demonstrated in the following reflection by an educator:

The learners are setting high standards for themselves in the classroom. For example I had a learner who passed a test but did not achieve 50%. She said to me "I know that you say this is a pass but it is a fail. I will study so that I can pass the 50%". This creates competition in the classroom because the other learners want to keep up.

Positive impact on mentors

The learners were not the only beneficiaries who benefited from participating in the programme. The positive experiences for the mentors were mainly derived from the growth they witnessed in the learners. The mentors indicated that they attained a sense of personal satisfaction from being a part of this process as well as experiencing a dual learning process with the learners.

Personal sense of satisfaction

The mentors expressed a sense of personal satisfaction with the role they play in the lives of the mentees. This satisfaction was mainly derived from the impact the mentors believed they were having on the lives of the mentees. The mentors valued those experiences where they believed that they were broadening the horizons of the mentees and opening up avenues of opportunity previously unknown to the mentees.

When I get them thinking about their futures. When I get to expand their horizons and show them that there is more to life.

The mentors also experienced a sense of empowerment as is demonstrated by the following statement made by a mentor: *“For me it was realising that **I am impactful.**”* This sense of empowerment was born of the realisation that as an individual, the mentors can and do change the lives of other people. The perceived impact on the lives of the learners provides a sense of accomplishment for the mentors who volunteer to assist the learners in developing the skills necessary to make a successful transition from school to the tertiary education and work environments. The mentors also reflected on how their own attitudes affected the learners and their learning.

...Realising that your enthusiasm helps them enjoy learning...Enjoy what you do and they will enjoy learning from you.

The above statement also reflected an understanding of the fact that just being there or just showing up was not enough to get the learners to buy into the mentorship experience. The mentors reflected on the impact that their attitude had on the learners' experience of the mentoring sessions. The realisation also contributed to the personal sense of satisfaction of the mentors.

Volunteering: A life long learning process

The learning experience involved in the mentorship process was not a one-way interaction or transfer of knowledge. The mentors reflected on how they learnt from the experiences of the learners and expressed admiration for the learners' determination in pursuit of their education.

We are learning from the learners. They are an inspiration to us. [We]Realise that they have difficult lives and they still get up and come to school – that is an achievement in itself. They may forget their books which is frustrating but they still come to mentorship.

The above quote illustrates the esteem with which the mentors view the learners in the programme. The life circumstances of the learners are acknowledged and the resilience of the learners are highlighted and appreciated by the mentors. This admiration is further demonstrated by the following statement:

For me I appreciate the fact that these kids aren't just kids. They have serious issues: some of them experience abuse, others are neglected and have no parental or teacher support. For me the fact that these learners still come to school is an achievement.

The learning curve for the mentors was not isolated to learning from the learners but included the learning curve associated with learning pedagogy. Some of the mentors reflected on the challenge of teaching the learners and expressed a sense of empathy with the educators in the school. The empathy for the educators is a result of the mentors facing the challenges of trying to teach learners in adverse circumstances where the social context and the dysfunctional education system undermines the teaching environment. The mentors discussed how the learners need to trust the mentors to re-engage with the education system. They also reflected on how difficult it was to gain the trust of the learners, especially the older learners.

I appreciate the younger students. They have more respect for you as a mentor and they are more receptive to teaching. Older students are more motivated by money and prestige. The first question they ask is: How much do you make? Where do you work? And you can see them take their calculator out and check (laughter)...they also seem resigned to the fact that they can't learn, especially the Matrics....After experiencing how difficult it is to teach, I now appreciate the teacher's positions. [I] Empathise with the Teachers.

While the mentors did acknowledge the difficulties they face in the course of providing academic assistance to the learners, they also reflected on methods that facilitate the tuition of the learners. The mentors reflected on the power of the narrative in building the interest and participation of the learners. The life stories of the mentors were specifically mentioned as a method for building a relationship with the learners. By sharing their personal journeys with the learners the mentors are teaching the learners through experience.

For me right now it was realising how your story contributes to broadening the learners' horizons. It makes you a real person in their eyes...you get to tell them that you have your challenges that you've faced, that you made it anyway. This way they don't see you as the ready-made person you are today- that you just showed up successful. That you can achieve in the face of difficulty – that helps you to understand where they come from.

The power of the narrative was also explored as a teaching technique for making the text in work books come to life. By showing the learners how the work they do in the classroom applies in real life, the mentors hoped to encourage the learners to be curious about the environment and how it relates to what they learn.

For me it was the realisation that we make the teaching real. I was telling the students about forces and how they move things as big as sky-scrapers. At first they did not believe me but I brought in a friend who told them how the cooling towers we build move when you stand at the top. We show how learning translates into real life. The teachers limit what's in the textbook to the textbook.

Dream Phase

The Dream Phase is aimed at collectively imagining the future of the ERF. The Dream phase is a mechanism that ensures that all the stakeholders' needs and views are reflected in the planning that will carry all into the future. The Dream Phase is based strongly on the assumption that people will author the narrative with the most meaning and worth for them personally. By placing these narratives within the planning, an organisation can ensure the buy-in of the individuals who own their narrative and are invested in seeing it become true. The dreams highlighted by the participants are often reflective of a need that they believe the ERF can meet.

Collaboration

The need for closer collaboration between the mentors and the educators came through clearly. All the stakeholders from the various workshops reflected this in one form or another. This theme was also prominent in the expectations of the various workshops. The underlying need behind this theme is to consolidate the collective resources of what has become the community of teaching which the ERF has joined. It is an acknowledgment by the educators of the key role that the mentors are playing and could play in the teaching and learning at the school. As stated by one of the educators, they wish:

That for next year we would work together more closely - the educators and the ERF... [That] improved communication between educators and the mentors will take place that is results driven. For the mentors this can be beneficial in terms of getting resources from

educators such as course work material and the emphasis the educator will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment. For the educators this can be beneficial in terms of getting the emphasis the mentor will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment. Work programmes can be shared and discussed to ensure that the subject matter is being covered sufficiently. Sharing work programmes is especially important at the beginning of the year to ensure that the mentors are aware of what is in the syllabus.

This wish was echoed by a member of the School Governing Body who expressed the wish for: “*Better communication between mentors and educators to address the gap between mentors and educators.*” The suggestion generated by the participants in the workshop was that this meeting could be facilitated through the ERF Executive Director and the school management team.

The statements above all describe a need for a more open communication structure between the ERF and the educators. The communication between these groups can only take place if the relationship between these parties is one that facilitates collaboration. When asked to reflect on what they most desire for the ERF at the moment the mentors unanimously stated that they would like to see more buy in from the educators. One of the mentors expressed the wish in this way:

For teachers to be more receptive to the programme. For the teachers to be less threatened by the programme...For them to see us as partners...For the mentor role to be more consolidation of learning as opposed to foundation teaching...To integrate the learning with real life experience and to not have to fill in the gaps left by the previous grades.

The mentors expressed the wish that the ERF examine other contexts to learn how these contexts integrate multi-disciplinary teams. The example given was the organisation known as the South African Depression and Anxiety support Group. This need for inter-sector collaboration was further expanded on when a mentor suggested that relationships be established with social workers to give learners assistance with personal life and social problems without placing an additional burden on the resources within the ERF.

The mentors are the stakeholders who are most directly involved in the implementation of the ERF's scholarship programme. They are faced with the practicalities of achieving the ERF's objectives of providing integrated support to improve the academic performance of the learners. It is therefore not surprising that the mentors would be the stakeholder group calling for more support from the community in assisting the learners to achieve the objective of improving the quality of education in the township. Likewise, the call from the educators for greater collaboration with the mentors could be underpinned by the same desire to assist the learners in creating a successful schooling career. The call for collaboration from the ERF and its stakeholders extended to include the parents and the community. The ERF acknowledges that the parents are a cornerstone in their intervention strategy and go to great lengths to ensure that the parents are informed of the progress of the programme and are aware of the key role that they can play in the programme. There is a need for greater support from the parents in managing the work and study loads of the learners and to encourage the learners. The parents were seen as key partners in gaining and sustaining greater buy-in from the school structures which includes the SGB.

The call from the ERF to the broader community was mainly for more mentors to support the programme. The stakeholders in all the workshops expressed a wish for more active and committed mentors. The reason for this is that currently tutoring only takes place once a month and not all planned work gets covered in that one day. The wish is to host more than one tutoring session a month without overstressing the current mentors who are already actively engaged in the programme.

Becoming a powerhouse

The wish at the board level is to see the ERF become a "*powerhouse*" in changing the South African educational landscape and to become one of the top five role players in South Africa. The dream is to create a platform for innovation in education while intervening in identified schools. Mentors and other stakeholders are strongly encouraged to come up with innovative, low-cost and sustainable ways of teaching. The suggestion was to identify individuals and to send them to technological institutes for study and fundraising opportunities. The board also expressed a wish to plant the seeds for South Africa to become a true Open Society through

facilitating the use of new technology to teach and encourage learners to research and search for new knowledge. The board also envisions the ERF moving toward a virtual/remote method of working through facilitating the use of technology.

ERF as a Model for volunteerism

There was a strong need at the level of the board to build a model of volunteerism that is based on the evidence provided by the ERF practice. This wish ties in with the wish to influence policy and practice. The model of volunteerism will be a method of affecting wide spread change in the education sector by assisting schools in securing more skilled and trained human resource in their communities. It is described by one of the board members as “implementing social responsibility”. The board member suggested that the method involved in achieving this will entail stepping back and “*looking at what drives us [as board members] so that we look at how to include others.*” The design of this model must hold at its core the understanding that “*we are dealing with real people with real issues*”. It is this compassion that led to the ERF taking on the social component of its operation that has been described as a major strength of the programme in the section above.

Starting a dedicated school

One of the wishes expressed by the various workshop participants was to establish a school for learners in the districts in which the ERF intervenes. This school would take learners from the Grade 8 to the Grade 12 level and would apply the principles and approaches of the ERF in their operation. The suggestion was to identify “feeder schools” at the primary education level. The idea is that the board would maintain the selection criteria for the learners as well as the educators whom they employ. The study materials and teaching aides developed at this school would be reproduced for dissemination to other schools in the district.

Improving the ERF infrastructure

The wish to improve the infrastructure of the ERF came from all the participants in all the workshops. One of the wishes in this theme was that the ERF website should be up and running by the end of 2011.

There was a need expressed by the educators for the ERF to sit down with educators to identify learners who have potential.

There are learners with better grades who are not in the programme. We need to know whether they are aware of the programme and encourage them to apply for the programme. A meeting with the educators could solve this.

This statement exposes a potential flaw in the ERF system of marketing and recruitment. The educators not only identified the flaw in the recruitment system but also offered to assist the ERF in correcting this by identifying and encouraging students in their classrooms who qualify for the scholarship programme. The educators also expressed a wish to develop a plan to integrate learners who meet the criteria for the ERF, who join the school after selections have taken place.

The mentors expressed a wish for an open day where the students could be exposed to different careers. This could be done by bringing organisations to the school to speak to the students about different careers.

Other wishes expressed by the mentors were that there should be more resources available to them such as teaching aids, projectors, computers, and internet access for students.

Affecting more learners

The wish that the ERF should seek methods of affecting more learners resonated strongly with all the stakeholder groups involved in the research process.

One mentor suggested taking more learners into the ERF scholarship programme: *“Currently the small group of learners is having a positive effect on the other learners in their classrooms, if we can get more learners in the programme, we can have more influence on other learners.”* The mentors also expressed the wish that the project should be extended to other schools. Other suggestions included extending the involvement of the ERF to include Grades 8, 11 and 12. The wish from the SGB was that the learners selected in the programme should not have to reapply and should be kept in the programme from Grade 9 to 12 to provide learners with a sense of continuity.

The educators also expressed the wish to use learners from ERF to make presentations to those learners who are not in ERF.

Influencing policy

The board expressed a wish that the ERF would begin engaging in evidence-based policy advocacy. Toward this end the board members suggested that by 2012 the ERF should have produced two to three documents which could be presented to key role players in the education sector. The need is to begin engaging the education sector with clear evidence of what has happened. In addition, the ERF should explore avenues of linking with the Educational Policy Unit in the Department of Education.

Seeing the learners become successful

There was a strong need among the mentors to see the learners becoming successful and returning to the programme to give back. The mentors expressed the desire to see the students act as ambassadors for the programme and to showcase what the programme is capable of producing.

One mentor expressed the following wish:

To see our students getting bursaries to study in private institutions – high schools. I know that we will lose them out of the ERF but it is best for the students. The long term goal is to make the schools they are in as good, if not better than these private high schools but for now this is the reality – that the education is better at these schools.

Expectations

It emerged during the workshops that the various stakeholder groups held a very clear, shared understanding that the data gathering workshops were a platform for general engagement with the ERF. This understanding emerged despite the fact that the research team provided a written briefing on the purpose and process of the workshops beforehand and reiterated this message on the day of the workshop. During the process of facilitating the expectations of each grouping it emerged that the expectations were reflective of the need for engagement with the ERF. The

research team therefore decided to incorporate this process into the data analysis and to provide this feedback to the ERF. What follows are the themes that emerged from the process of exploring the expectations of the participants of the various workshops.

Communication and collaboration

One of the most prominent themes that emerged was that of communication and collaboration. The research team was aware that ERF had been intervening in the chosen secondary school for approximately eighteen months at the time of the workshops. The research team was also aware that there was a lack of communication between the educators at the school and the ERF mentors. This dynamic surfaced during the workshop with mentors when they expressed the desire to communicate with the educators and was echoed in the workshop with the educators when they repeatedly requested more communication with the mentors to clarify tuition objectives and share work programmes. The educators also expressed a need to collaborate with the mentors to ensure that there was alignment in the subject emphasis brought to the mentorship sessions. As stated by one of the participants:

[We expect] Improved communication between educators and the mentors that is results driven. For the mentors this can be beneficial in terms of getting resources from educators such as course work material and the emphasis the educator will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment. For the educators this can be beneficial in terms of getting the emphasis the mentor will be placing on work in class to ensure greater alignment.

The difficulty in arranging a meeting between the mentors and the educators was acknowledged by participants who were aware of the work commitments of these parties - “*I understand that the commitments of educators and mentors are difficult*”- but the need for communication to facilitate collaboration between educators and mentors to address the gaps came through strongly in the expectations phase.

Understanding the ERF better

The ERF has a number of components that operate independently of each other but that are inextricably linked to achieve the overall objective of empowering the learners. The research

team noted that the various stakeholders involved in the ERF are not necessarily aware of the components of the ERF that they are not personally involved in. This lack of clarity of the overall structure of the ERF led to a need to gain a better understanding of the ERF. This need was extended by the mentor grouping to include a need for more information on the ERF and its future.

Summary

Overall, the outcomes of the AI process point to considerable appreciation of and buy-in into the ERF's project, together with a keen awareness of its shortcomings and a willingness to imagine a brighter and better future. The ERF is seen to provide a space for learners to grow and develop skills crucial to successful academic performance. The stakeholders also appreciated the change that the ERF effects in the learners social development by providing positive role models and guidance on how to deal with the realities facing adolescents today.

While the ERF is praised for the effect it has on the learner's behaviour and self-esteem, there are still concerns about the academic performance of the learners in the scholarship programme. Some stakeholders believe that not all the learners in the scholarship programme are showing significant improvements in performance. Another concern raised is that the positive change in performance that the ERF does achieve is not sustained in learners who do not qualify for successive years in the programme.

The research process was considered a means of creating space for greater engagement between the ERF and its stakeholders even though the process was not executed in the manner traditionally used by AI practitioners. In general the participants felt that the research approach gave a platform for them to meaningfully contribute to the development of the ERF. The research process was also seen as a means of gaining information on what the ERF is and how it works. In light of these comments it may be easier to gain buy-in into the research process in future now that participants see the value in active participation.

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, this is considered in more detail, and the broader implications of the study are discussed.

Chapter 7 : THE JOURNEY'S CONCLUSION

The Appreciative Inquiry of the ERF described in this dissertation was a process aimed at uncovering the strengths of the programme and highlighting the dreams or future plans that each stakeholder has for the ERF to inform future planning.

The main findings from this study were that the programme seems to have positively affected learners' performance both academically and behaviourally; the programme was perceived to have raised the general standard of academic performance at the school – all learners (even those outside of the programme) are motivated to perform to the best of their ability; the effect on learners outside of the programme was that they appeared to compete with the higher standards set by the group of learners in the ERF; and participants from all the stakeholder groups valued the fact that the learners have grown in confidence and are now able to present in public spaces.

The role of the mentors in developing the confidence of the learners was highlighted as a critical success factor by participants. The role of the mentors should be explicitly stated and clarified to avoid uncertainty in role definition and role boundaries (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009). The lack of clarity on the role definition can lead to mentors struggling with their professional identity within the school and consequently make it difficult to gain appropriate recognition from teachers (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009). In the context of the ERF, clarifying the roles of the mentors can move the organisation away from the ameliorative emphasis that the programme currently has toward the transformative agenda set in their vision and mission. The role clarification can also assist the mentors in developing a more collaborative relationship with the educators where the mentors take primary responsibility for the informal learning that places emphasis on developing those skills needed to succeed in the post-school career and where educators remain responsible for the formal, classroom bound learning.

The mentors are expected to model and transfer social norms that emphasise discipline, self control, hard work, respect, accountability and honesty to the learners. The primary risk here is that the approach could portray learners' current social norms as deviant, insufficient, inappropriate and ineffective at facilitating access to a tertiary education and a competitive career (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009; Wilson, 2000). This stance could alienate the learners from the community and their families. It could also create resistance in the community to the programme.

While it appears that this is not the case with the ERF, it is important to acknowledge that the potential for a skewed perception of the learners and their social circumstances can exist. It is therefore important that the mentoring aspect of the ERF be linked to an intensive effort to acknowledge and appreciate the ways in which the learners are adapting to their environment and to accept that, in some cases, the individuals are doing the best with what they have.

The crucial coordinating role played by the Executive Director was also pointed out as a factor in the success of the ERF. While this does mean that the Executive Director has the necessary grassroots experience of what the organisation goes through, it also makes her the most over utilised resource in the organisation. To ensure sustainability, the ERF cannot rely on any one individual to maintain its level of functioning. The various roles that the Executive Director currently plays in the organisation must be assigned to other individuals in order to grow the institutional capacity of the ERF. Furthermore these functions should be crystallised into documents that are revised regularly and that are committed into the institutional memory of the organisation to aid knowledge transfer beyond the current generation of ERF stakeholders.

The flexibility of the programme in responding to the needs of the various volunteers was described as a factor that promoted the culture of unconditional giving. The old adage that charity begins at home applies within organisations that aim to aid those in need who are marginalised. These organisations are driven by a person-centred ethos that seeks social justice and this should extend to those who serve the organisation as much as it extends to those the organisation serves. It is crucial that the ERF acknowledges the value of their own staff members and continue to take care of their needs within the scope and boundaries of the organisation to ensure sustainable engagement.

The learners in the programme highlighted the empathic, affirmative approach of the mentors as a motivating factor which corresponds to the literature on mentorship which describes the approach as person-centred and based on unconditional positive regard (Jones, Doveston, & Rose, 2009). Some of the recommendations made by participants were that measures should be put into place to facilitate communication between the mentors and the educators to align the outcomes of the mentorship sessions with the processes in the classroom and that it is important

for ERF (through the mentors) to collaborate with the teachers in order to impact maximally on learners' academic performance.

The ERF aims to operate at the secondary and tertiary level of Caplan's (1964) Community Health model in that it aims to identify the problems facing educators and learners and to collaboratively develop measures for improving school performance before matriculation to increase the chances of the learners to successfully enter the work and tertiary education context. On a tertiary level the ERF aims to generate a sustainable change in the culture of teaching and learning that facilitates improved performance in learners. It also seeks to change the environment in which the teaching and learning takes place by informing policy with evidence based suggestions. At the moment the anecdotal evidence suggests that the ERF is functioning at the primary level of the model by focussing on providing remedial measures to address the gaps in knowledge of the learners. The ERF is also involved in putting in place measures to improve the quality of teaching in an attempt to reduce the tuition workload on the mentors. From the narratives and the official communication material of the ERF it is evident that it is necessary to put in place remedial measures to address shortcomings in the system for the ERF to achieve its objectives. However, it is essential that the organisation consider whether this warrants committing the bulk of its resources to intervention at the primary level or whether it needs to redefine its approach to target the secondary and tertiary levels of intervention more directly.

The AI approach implemented in this study works on the community psychology principle of making the familiar unfamiliar by asking participants to examine every day experiences from a fresh perspective by searching for the success in what they do (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This critical reflection on practice is aimed at further embedding a culture of reflexive intervention in the ERF. Whether the study achieved this objective is unclear and would require a follow up study to ascertain whether the ERF has incorporated the collective constructions of the organisation into their practice.

A further limitation of the study was that the traditional AI process was not followed in that an AI summit with all the stakeholders in one room was not held. This was due to resource constraints and the tight time schedule that the research was forced into. The implication of this was that the summit was divided into a series of data gathering workshops where ERF

stakeholders were consulted in smaller groups. As a result, the intra-organisational transfer of knowledge was not as comprehensive as it could have been and the collective authoring of the organisation's future was fragmented and had to be integrated by the research team as opposed to the ERF stakeholders.

While the value of the AI summit is apparent, the reliance of this method on a large event involving the entire organisation makes the AI approach cumbersome to implement in a context where there are few resources and where the organisation cannot afford to commit all of its members to a week of brainstorming. The stage of development that the ERF is in leaves it with little resources available for any activity beyond the scope of everyday practice.

Future studies on the ERF should consider conducting an evaluation based on the specific outcomes and objectives of the organisation. To do so, it is essential that the organisation conduct a consultative planning session where the specific outcomes for the organisation are mapped in measurable and attainable outcomes. This would entail that the researcher take on the additional responsibility of ensuring that the organisation is facilitated through this process to ensure that the evaluation criteria fit the culture, values, objectives and resources of the organisation and can be translated into the everyday experiences of those in the organisation.

Finally, there is a need to conduct reflexive research on the implementation of AI internationally, and specifically in the South African NGO context. It would be of particular interest to see whether the challenges experienced in this study are common to other contexts. It would also be of interest to see whether the AI process is successful in changing the underlying discourses of dysfunction, deficit and deprivation in the South African context of rapid transformation and development.

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