



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  

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**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING  
SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS  
IN A RURAL ECOLOGY**

by

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DOCTOR F. P. KHANARE**

**2019**

## DECLARATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a paucity of collective structures that enhance quality learning for those learners who reside within the rural ecologies and who are perceived as being vulnerable. This study aims to propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. It is located within the critical paradigm and it employed a qualitative approach. Participatory Action Research methodology was used to involve those parties within the community who displayed an interest in the study and thus they participated in activities or actions which led to the emancipation of the communities who eradicated the problems which plagued the local learning ecology. Purposive, as well as snowballing sampling techniques, were used to select a diverse group of co-researchers which comprised of learners, teachers, parents, a nurse, a priest, a police officer, a social worker and a traditional healer. The co-researchers were of various ages, cultural and religious backgrounds, economic and educational statuses. In order to generate data, collages, focus group discussions, free writing reflections and field notes were used. The amalgamation of the Asset Based Approach and Collaboration formed the theoretical framework which guided the study. To analyse generated data, the content analysis method was utilised. Through content analysis, raw generated data was dissected thoroughly and categorised into labelled segments of thematic codes. Thereafter, patterns were observed, while repetitions were eliminated; finally, the patterns were grouped into themes. These themes formed a structure for a collaborative framework which was used to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. The four pillars that underpinned the collaborative framework included promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possess a positive mentality, intensifying the existing forms of care and support, inspiring collaborations, and connecting with the curriculum. While the study recommended that researches of a similar nature could be employed to mitigate other societal ills in rural sectors either than the disruption of learning for vulnerable learners such as unemployment, hate crime, woman abuse and others. The study could also be conducted in other rural ecologies and involve a wider category of co-researchers such as unemployed graduates, medical practitioners and psychiatrists. The study concluded that converting frameworks into actions is a complex activity which requires collaborators to be mindful of the threats to the operationalisation of the initiative, to monitor the implementation process and to be continuously corporative while they share a common goal and a strong desire for liberation.

## **KEYWORDS**

Collaborative

Framework

Sustainable learning

Vulnerable learners

Rural ecology

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my late mother, the beloved Thandazile Nicholene MaBloose Mbambo.

Thank you, Ma, for always supporting me and making me believe that I can achieve anything that I put my mind to. Thank you for the sacrifices you made for the benefit of myself and my brothers.

Ngiyabonga, Ndelu, Shinga, Mseleku, Noncengwa, Duma, Madiba.

You will be remembered for always inspiring us, especially through trying times.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANA	Annual National Assessments
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FWR	Free Writing Reflections
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LST	Learners Support Team
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NELI	Norkitt Education Leadership Initiative
NSNP	National School Nutrition programme
NPO	Non-Profit Organisations
OVCs	Orphaned, Vulnerable Children in schools
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PFP	Partners for Possibility
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SDT	Staff Development Team
SWAAGA	Swaziland Woman Action Against Group Against Abuse
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SASESC	South African Extraordinary School Coalition
UNICEF	United Nations International Childrens' Emergency Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE OVERVIEW OF A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

*Nine-year-old Thandi's classroom is overcrowded. Concentrating is hard enough without hunger pangs and the irritating cough she has had for months. Her grandmother, who has cared for Thandi and her little brothers since their mother died, cannot afford the taxi fare to the nearest clinic. Thandi's schoolwork is deteriorating thus it will be a miracle if she makes it through to the intermediate phase.*

The paragraph above reflects the real-life situation experienced by many children in most South African rural ecologies. Hence, this study forms part of an existing endeavour in the struggle to sustain quality learning for vulnerable learners nationally and internationally. As such, it seeks to propose a collaborative framework for sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology through exploiting the efforts and ideas of relevant stakeholders in the community such as the learners, teachers, nurses, social workers, police officers, priests and traditional healers. The study places relevant individuals as the key role-players (collaborative agents) in addressing and mitigating the negative learning practices that impact on vulnerable learners.

The chapter introduces issues that are investigated in this study. It provides the background to the study, followed by the rationale for the research, leading to the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. Then follows the objectives, critical questions, importance of the study, voices of the theorists (theoretical framework), overview of research design and methodology, validity and trustworthiness, ethical issues, de-limitations, overview of the study, and lastly the chapter summary.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study proposes a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning concerning vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Internationally, a growing need has been reported for learners, school personnel, parents and the community to work in collaboration towards sustaining effective learning spaces for those learners who experience various daily challenges that disrupt their learning process (Franck & Joshi, 2017). Although, in South Africa, the birth of democracy (1994) led to the beginning of developing as a free country where democratic rights are exercised, learners are still at-risk. However, most of the apartheid wounds such as poverty, high rate of unemployment, unequal distribution of resources and a general division amongst the people continue to still haunt and adversely affect many South African communities. Furthermore, these disadvantages heightened competitiveness amongst individuals for resources instead of rooting the collaborative-working approach in addressing societal challenges such as non-sustainable conditions of learning for vulnerable learners. A collaborative framework that may be used to enhance sustainable learning environments for the vulnerable learners, especially in South African rural ecologies, is therefore desired.

The prevalence of vulnerability amongst learners in South African rural ecologies increases day-by-day and it seriously impacts negatively on the learners' learning process (Motsa, 2016). Vulnerability amongst learners according to Jopling and Vincent (2015), is a term that is generally used to refer to those learners who face any kind of hardship. In elaboration, Magwa and Magwa (2016) state that vulnerable learners are those learners who are exposed to difficulties such as physical and emotional challenges, learning difficulties, poverty, lack of financial and psychosocial support, stigmatisation and discrimination of any kind. In accordance, UNICEF (2014) asserted that various forms of vulnerabilities amongst South African learners is pandemic - in the year 2014 alone it was reported that almost 4 million children in South Africa were not only orphaned, but they also faced multiple deprivations. These deprivations were inclusive of factors where only 62% of children had access to clinics or healthcare centers within two kilometers from their dwelling places, leaving the rest (38 %) vulnerable because they have little or no access to these facilities (UNICEF, 2014). Factors such as orphan hood and poverty were amongst the other factors that increased vulnerability amongst children. Since, Braithwaite (2017) averred that

approximately two million South African children were orphaned due to AIDS, whilst 460 000 children between the ages of 0-14 years were reported to being infected with HIV, making them vulnerable to stigmatization and ill-health. Similarly, Nkosi, Seeley, Ngwenya, Mchunu, Gumede, Fergusun and Doyle (2019) reported that HIV stigma, apprehensions, misconceptions about sexual and reproductive health, teenage pregnancies and child labour are amongst the causes of learner vulnerabilities in rural ecologies. To an extent that in some South African rural communities, even the birth of a new baby in the family is seen as an increase in the workload for the siblings, due to child labour (Nelson & Abuse, 2017). In addition, Zekele, Hughes, and Drozda (2019) affirmed that orphan hood contributed to vulnerability amongst children and could also be related to a report that stated that approximately 87% of children are being raised by their siblings, relatives or by single parents, thus increasing the likelihood of them not being emotionally and financially supported (UNICEF, 2014).

While the issue of vulnerable learners has been studied in various countries (developed and developing), most South African research studies concerning vulnerable learners still focus on various aspects such as the experiences of vulnerable learners, the causes of the vulnerabilities, the effects of vulnerability as well as the individualised efforts that have been placed towards mitigating vulnerability amongst learners. However, there seems to be a paucity of literature that focuses on the collaborated efforts towards the enhancement of sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners especially in rural contexts. Notably, most South African communities seemed to have forgotten to employ their indigenous means of coping, such as collaborating and tackling whatever challenges that poses as threats to the smooth functioning of their community. In the meantime, most South African communities are seen to have mimicked the Westernised ways of living which are characterised by individualistic competitiveness, while our African concepts and means such as “*Umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu*” (a person is a person because of others), are overlooked.

A large number of children in South African rural areas are vulnerable compared to those in the urban areas, as they (rural children) are excluded from vital early learning programmes and from schooling in general because of poverty and lack of service-delivery (Bartlett, Hart, Satterthwaite, De la Bara, & Missair, 2016). Furthermore, it was

reported that about 17.2% of learners in 2012 were identified as being vulnerable, owing to fact that they still experienced corporal punishment amongst other forms of victimisation within the school contexts (Dupere, Goulet, Archambaut, Leventhal, Dion, & Crosnoe, 2019). Additionally, immigration to South Africa has also been seen as a cause contributing to vulnerability amongst children in schools and in the communities, as millions of children are reported to enter the country every year unaccompanied and to being separated from their families, placing them at-risk in terms of human trafficking, child labor, and other forms of exploitation (Frankel, 2017). In addition, the South African Police Services (SAPS) reported that about 71% of children in South Africa in 2015 alone were vulnerable as they were exposed to being raped, accidents and risks because they did not have adequate safe and play- areas (Zuze, Reddy, Juan, Hannan, Visser, & Winnaar, 2016). Furthermore, 36% of learners from the ages 13-19 in one year were reported to have dropped out of school because of early pregnancy and substance abuse, which resulted in them being more vulnerable. Thus, in turn causing an increase and intensification of the disruption of their learning process (Heleta, 2016).

Despite evidence of vulnerability amongst learners in various reports (Phalane, 2016), no concerted effort to alleviate this specific situation has been sustained. Although various efforts have been initiated in an attempt to make the situation better (such as the school nutrition programmes and the orphaned vulnerable children's initiatives) these are not sustainable as collaboration of all stakeholders is ineffective (Mapesela, Hlalele, & Alexander, 2012; Fuggle, & Rabie, 2009). Khanare (2015) adds that most efforts towards mitigating vulnerability amongst learners are mostly individualised, fragmented and lack cohesion.

### **1.3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Since this study seeks to propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology, the researcher focused on two fundamental dimensions to provide the rationale for this study. The first dimension being the researcher's personal observations and experiences as an educator and as a coordinator of the learner-support committee at a school in a rural ecology. The

second dimension emanates out of South African literature that supports my personal views and thoughts.

Being an educator and coordinator of the learner-support committee at a school in a rural ecology for four years has afforded me space to work closely with those learners who are vulnerable in the school. According to Jopling and Vincent, (2015), the term *vulnerable learners* is used generally to refer to those learners who face any kind of hardship. In my school vulnerable learners included those who had inadequate access to basic needs such as nutritious food, shelter, clothing, a safe home, a supportive community that is free of abuse and exploitation. Those learners who did not receive sufficient family care and support, those who were infected or affected by illnesses, and learners who did not have the ability to take full advantage of the available educational opportunities.

In attempts to bolster the learning experiences of vulnerable learners and to alleviate those factors which may hinder the smooth flow of their learning process, I (main researcher) and other educators continuously created spaces for support structures to assist vulnerable learners by holding meetings with numerous teachers, some learners' parents, a few social workers, and on occasions I consulted with some police officers in the area. When engaging with these significant individuals from the community, I came to realise that they possess somewhat profound and noteworthy ideas which may be collaborated to form a framework that may be used to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners. Moreover, a number of traditional healers, nurses and some priests (also from this ecology) felt that they were not embraced as significant players in attempts to sustain learning for the vulnerable learners, but they are only called in to give their expertise in times of trouble in the school and to do damage control in attempts to sustain learning for these vulnerable learners.

I have also observed that, in my school and in some neighboring schools, efforts are already being instituted by various individuals and by the Departments of Health, Social Development, Land Affairs and Agriculture to support in attempts to capacitate vulnerable learners through programmes such the school feeding schemes (National School Nutrition Programme) and the OVC programmes (Orphaned, Vulnerable Children). Specifically, in my school some pastors and nurses from the ecology are

outsourced to provide free counselling and therapy for those learners in need; and sometimes a few traditional healers are called in to provide traditional advice and support. In addition, a couple of teachers donate monthly hampers of perishables and toiletries for vulnerable learners. Nonetheless, a great number of learners still do not seem to benefit from such programmes because most of them fear stigmatisation and being ridiculed by other learners for eating food provided by the Government feeding scheme or for belonging to the OVC programme. Many learners discontinued attending prayer sessions and counselling consultations provided by the priests and nurses because their peers called them names and made fun of them. For these reasons, the rationale for this study was structured around a collaborated framework that resonates with problem-solving techniques from the learners themselves, teachers, nurses, traditional healers, police officers and priests which could be designed into a blueprint that may be used as a model to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners.

Aligned to these views which emanate from my observations and experiences, is literature that places emphasis on the importance of techniques that involve various stakeholders from the community to network collaboratively towards sustaining learning as it has been raised in the ANA report, by the Minister of Basic Education (DoE, 2011). Correspondingly, Mahlomaholo, Nkoane and Ambrosio (2013) assert that sustainable learning is still one of the major challenges facing the South African education system. Magwa and Magwa (2016) also outlined many challenges that are experienced by most vulnerable learners in South Africa; the disruption of their learning process is highlighted as being one of the major challenges. In addition, several rural ecologies in South Africa have been reported to have the highest number of vulnerable learners compared to urban ecologies (Mabuza, Ortmann, Wale, & Mutenje, 2016).

My personal observations of the fragmented efforts that are currently being made in my school by specific individuals including the South African Government Departments (supported by relevant literature), indicates an urgent need for a framework that will be a collaboration of the major ideas and efforts that may be used to enhance sustainable learning in rural ecologies.



#### **1.4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The statement of the problem establishes the context of the study, highlights existing knowledge about the issue being studied, distinguishes the gap in the current literature, and states the focus of the study (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017). Appropriately, this section of the chapter focuses on the gap in knowledge on sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecologies.

Despite the efforts that are already in place which are aimed at sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in South African rural ecologies such as the feeding schemes, the OVC programs and other individualised initiatives, the challenge of sustaining learning persists concerning vulnerable learners in South Africa. In support of the later, a recent study concluded that, while caregivers are doing their best in executing their care and support strategies for vulnerable children, however the manipulation as well as the misappropriation of the inheritances from deceased parents which were meant to benefit vulnerable children are often mismanaged (Ringson, 2019). Accordingly, Russell and Nicholson (2016) argued that there are misconceptions in the annual reports that indicate an improvement in the sustainability of learning in South Africa by only highlighting a sudden increase in the matric academic results, while the massive dropout rate of learners from the poorer rural schools is ignored, downplayed or not reported. Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead and Boschee (2018) adds that more suggestions are required regarding funding early childhood development (ECD) to ensure that more learners who start school finish their matric. This is an indication that the learning process is still not sustained due to a high number of learners who drop out of school or who do not complete their matric.

Hence, in most of our South African communities, we have become so accustomed to the “fight or flee” response, to an extent that we almost ignore or we forget to exploit our indigenous means of coping - such as flocking together and supporting one another in overcoming challenges. The same concept of flocking together to resolve societal challenges could be explored in depth and considered by the individual parties to enhance sustainable learning for those learners who are vulnerable in rural ecologies. In support, Bason, (2018) posited that most South African societies are regarded as being complex and dynamic, resulting in isolated efforts seen as ineffective in overcoming most societal challenges. Hence, clear structures or

frameworks which are formed collaboratively by relevant parties towards enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in South African contexts might serve as a solution. This study discovered a paucity of literature concerning frameworks of a similar nature. In support, Kueffer, Underwood, Hirsch, Hadorn, Holderegger, Lehning, Pohl and Edwards (2012) maintained that while collaborative practices and its numerous offshoots, such as participatory problem-solving and joint ownership of challenges have been mentioned frequently nowadays as being a proper response to today's societal challenges, only limited or diminutive applicable research has been conducted on the specific subject under investigation. In addition, Gokhale (2012) conveys that the idea of collaboration remains an attractive advocacy genre as there is still a paucity of research on it.

### **1.5. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Consequently, in response to this paucity of literature, the purpose of the study is to propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning concerning vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Additionally, the findings of the study will be available for academic and research purposes. Hence, in the endeavour towards the attainment of the purpose of the study, specific objectives are outlined that make it feasible to accomplish its purpose.

### **1.6. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- i) To explore the current understanding and interpretations of using collaborative frameworks, with the intentions of proposing a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecology.
- ii) To examine the need for a collaborative framework for enhancing a sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecology.
- iii) To anticipate threats to the operationalisation of the framework.
- iv) To propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

## **1.7. THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

MAIN QUESTION:

**How can we enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology using a collaborative framework?**

SUB-QUESTIONS:

- i) How can we through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?
- ii) What is the need for a collaborative framework in enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?
- iii) What are the challenges in structuring a collaborative framework to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?
- iv) What collaborative framework(s) can be used to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?

## **1.8. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

Vulnerability amongst learners in rural ecologies is a tenacious challenge that negatively impacts on the learning process (Khanare, 2015). The study is significant and different in that it contributes to the international and national debates by providing some insights on how learners, school representatives, community individuals and other interested parties may work collaboratively towards sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecologies. It is hoped that this study generated knowledge in the form of a framework that may be useful to school communities, education officials and policymakers towards effectively sustaining learning for vulnerable learners. It is envisaged also that this framework also provided a platform for the relevant stakeholders (learners, teachers, social workers, priests, police officers, policymakers, and traditional healers) to share and strengthen innovative and effective practices towards the enhancement of sustaining learning for vulnerable learners, especially those learners in rural ecologies. Moreover, the framework brainstormed ideas and possibly created a breakthrough which may be beneficial to the Department of Education (DoE) as well as policymakers, who may amend policies to be in line with the current demands regarding the aspects of sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecologies. The study is timeous since most South African rural

societies are said to be faced with extreme poverty which perpetuates vulnerability amongst learners making it critical for stakeholders to work collaboratively (Hess, 2013; Mapesela et al., 2012).

## **1.9. THE LENS: VOICES OF THE THEORISTS**

This study is underpinned by the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach which formed the theoretical framework.

### **1.9.1 The Concept of Collaboration**

Collaboration is a promising mode of human engagement but in order not to become a passing fad, theoretical structures and frameworks are needed to guide individuals and groups towards successful collaboration (John-Steiner, 1992, p.101).

John-Steiner's statement makes it starkly apparent that working collaboratively with other individuals makes it possible to be successful in alleviating challenges. In the same light, this study is informed by the theory of collaboration towards obtaining a framework that may be used to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology.

In elaboration, collaboration is a ubiquitous term that has been defined in various ways across different fields. Thus, this study draws on information from these diverse fields in order to develop a collaborative framework for enhancing a sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Appropriately, Rubin (2009), and Gray (1989) defined collaboration as a purposeful relationship or a process in which all individuals or parties involved choose to cooperate in order to achieve a common or a shared objective. However, the concept of collaboration is said to originate from a social constructivist theory of learning from researchers such as Dewey, Bruner and Vygotsky. Moreover, the theory of collaboration is said to consider collaboration as a new way of learning and as a social process in which meaning is constructed for planning and for teaching (Fulton, 2003; John Steiner, 1992; Montiel-Overall, 2016). Notably, a group of researchers outlined that numerous notions of working together have been confused with collaboration thus they proposed three attributes: collegiality, respect and trust (John-Steiner, Weber, & Minnis, 1998). These three attributes may

be used to differentiate collaboration from other joint efforts such as cooperation and coordination (John-Steiner et al., 1998). The three attributes in turn contribute to collective activities which are referred to as the components of collaboration, such as: shared thinking, shared planning, shared creation of integrated instructions, trusting working-relationships, shared vision, shared objectives, and equal partners (John-Steiner et al.,1981; Gray, 1989; Wood & Gray,1991).

#### *Shared thinking, shared problem-solving and shared creation of integrated instruction*

Gray (1989) explains that when individuals come together to share their expertise and ideas in order to construct a new way of doing something, they are demonstrating characteristics of a fully developed collaboration. Shared thinking or joint participation in thinking about how to solve a mutually agreed upon problem is shared problem-solving (Wood & Gray, 1991). Rubin (2009) adds that coming together to think about an issue and to plan together as co-planners and co-implementers, is jointly carrying the plan to fruition. For this study this means that individuals' efforts that are currently evident in the rural ecology were combined through the process of working together and thinking about how to integrate individual ideas into a new understanding and new ideas of sustaining learning that could not have come about through individual efforts. This theoretical framework is ideal for this study as it also complements the design that the study employed; which is Participatory Action Research (PAR) as this design is based on collective participation of the researcher and the participants.

#### *Trusting, working-relationship*

Another component of the theory of collaboration is a trusting working-relationship. A broad definition of trust according to Hogg and Terry (2014) is that it is a characteristic of a person. However, within the concept of collaboration, a trusting and working relationship refers to believing that when one mutually agrees to carry out a responsibility, one will carry it out as promised (Luna-Reyes, Black, Creswell, & Pardo, 2008). This component was also related to the current study as the stakeholders who participated in creating a collaborated framework that will enhance sustainable learning engaged in a trusting working relationship with others and they also needed to be trustworthy individuals themselves who kept to their word and delivered what they promised in order for the operation to progress and become successful.

### *Shared Vision and Shared Objectives*

Having a shared vision encourages various individuals to work together (Hess, 2013). Montiel-Overall and Hernández (2012) posited that individuals or parties who collaborate, see each other as crucial to the attainment of their shared goal. Appropriately, in the current study this meant that the researcher, learners, teachers, nurses, police officers and traditional healers in this ecology depended on one another in order to attain their goal and saw one another irreplaceable. Thus, it was important as propelled participants towards the attainment of their mutual goal which was designing a framework that was used to enhance sustainable learning for those learners who are seen as vulnerable in the ecology.

### *Equal Partners*

The component of equal partners refers to those individuals participating in the collaborative efforts who are viewed as having equal roles in the decision-making processes, as well as on the work that will be executed (Dettmer, Knackendoffel, & Thurston, 2013). Partnerships in collaboration focus on shared objectives rather than power dynamics (Gray, 1989). Furthermore, Montiel-Overall (2005) asserts that collaborative relationships are highlighted by equal partners resolving their conflicts through discussion and agreement rather than in an authoritarian manner. Even the leadership roles in collaborative relationships are said to only mean leading others without force but coercion towards shared objectives (Rubin, 2009). The component of equal partners was relative to the current study since the participants in the study, together with the researcher, were equal partners – this is embedded in the fact that the study employed PAR, a kind of research that is characterised by the equal distribution of power between the participants and the researcher to an extent that some researchers engaging PAR refer to the participants as co-researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

#### **1.9.1.1. Limitation of Collaboration**

Despite the good intentions of working collaboratively, collaboration is not an easy and a natural process; it is said to be rather complicated (Gray, 1989). In addition, Chubbuck (2010) highlighted that time and administrative support have also been identified as being both enablers and inhibitors of collaboration. Accordingly, it has

been argued that, challenges of miscommunication, mistrust, competitiveness, conflict in strategies, positions and opinions often arise in working collaboratively (Raval, Ale Ebrahim, Ahmed, & Taha, 2010). Given the limitations of the collaboration theory, other theories or concepts were integrated to complement collaboration, such as the principles of the asset-based approach. Appropriately, the asset-based approach has been used as a complementary theory to the collaboration theory, hence both theories in collaboration formed the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

### **1.9.2. The Asset-based Approach**

The asset-based approach has been doubted for its lack of evidence, lack of theoretical depth and lack of consideration as it allegedly causes disempowerment (Ennis & West, 2010). The basic message that is put forward by the asset-based approach is that when we start by exploring peoples' strengths, we value them as human beings (Doling & Ronald, 2010). Moreover, when the strategies of the asset-based approach is applied to community development, it is seen as the most powerful approach in bringing about social change since it is based on the belief that all individuals have something to offer and thus all individuals are important and are needed in the society (Brandolini, Magri, & Smeeding, 2010). Furthermore, Ennis and West (2010) declare that the asset-based approach is credited for building opportunities instead of dwelling on the challenges as it is popular for eradicating power inequalities that enhances the group's progress in a respectful and productive manner leading to the group's realisation of the initial shared goals (Doling & Ronald, 2010). Consequently, the benefits of the asset-based approach were appropriate, adequate and complementary when applying the collaboration theory.

### **1.9.3. Merging Collaboration and the Asset-based Approach**

At different levels, the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach, due to their unique attributes, possess several characteristics that are imperative and appropriate towards underpinning this current study, in addition to being aligned to the research design (PAR). Basically, the collaboration theory supports collaboration with various parties as it stimulates the effective alleviation of challenges. The following conditions have to prevail for collaboration to be successful:

- the challenge in need of mitigation must be a common factor among the parties;
- the parties must share thoughts and ideas;
- the parties must be eager to solve the challenge; and
- they must respect one another and distribute power and resources evenly to engage in a trusting working-relationship (Dettmer et al., 2013; Gray, 1989; Luna-Reyes et al., 2008; Montiel-Overall & Hernández, 2012; Rubin, 2009).

However, these conditions which are conducive to collaboration are not always easily attainable as there are sometimes threats to the operationalisation of the process of collaboration, such as competitiveness among stakeholders, time constraints for collaborative planning and feedback, and miscommunication (among others). The limitations of the collaboration theory therefore calls for the support of the asset-based approach into underpinning the study as a unified theoretical framework. Asset based approach is said to advocate for the idea that, all parties are entrusted as individuals with abilities and strengths which need to be appreciated, embraced and respected. More so, since asset based is for the idea that, in order to prosper one needs to place focus on building from the opportunities instead of focusing on the challenges that are presented in the society (Brandolini, Magri, & Smeeding, 2010). Furthermore, asset-based approach is believed to offer a humanizing experience to all participants not an experience of competitiveness and marginalisation of parties (Doling, & Ronald, 2010). Therefore, this explanation is indicative of the reasons to see the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach as being the two theories which are complimentary to one another and which may be effectively used jointly as a theoretical framework that underpins this current study.

## **1.10. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative approach located within the critical paradigm to propose a collaborative framework that may be used to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology. Linked to the qualitative approach, the use of participatory-based methodologies involving significant stakeholders within the ecology, was utilised.



### **1.10.1 Research Approach**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach because it aimed to generate data by interacting extensively and closely with participants which included vulnerable learners. According to Pernecky (2016), qualitative approaches provide an opportunity to tap into the richness of children's thoughts and feelings about themselves, including their environments and the world in which they live in. In addition, Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007) maintain that qualitative methods are especially appropriate to the study of vulnerable people because they allow the participants to express their feelings and experiences in their own words.

### **1.10.2. Research Paradigm**

According to Cohen, Manion, Morrison, and Morrison (2007); Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012; and Kamal, 2019, a paradigm is a way of seeing the world shaped by the nature of reality (ontology) and the construction of knowledge (epistemology). The paradigm that guided this research study was the critical paradigm. It is regarded as critical because it challenges other paradigms, namely the post-positivist and the interpretivist paradigm, while it is also critical of the inequalities that exist in the social world (Creswell, 2014). Crucial to the critical paradigm is the belief that individuals' reality is constructed by their socio-economics, political, cultural, and other aspects within the world (Mkansi, Acheampong, & Kondadi, 2012), thus making it impossible for even the researchers to hold a neutral stance since they also hold a position in the society (Cohen et al., 2007).

The critical paradigm is characterised by its advocacy of human emancipation and deliverance from constraints (Horkheimer, 1982). Unlike the interpretive paradigm which aims to understand aspects, experiences and events in the society, the critical paradigm aims to bring about positive change into societies (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the same manner, the current study did not only aim to understand the vulnerabilities that exist among learners in the rural ecology, but it also aimed to bring about a framework that would be utilised towards enhancing learning for the vulnerable learners which will be sustainable in nature. Also, since the critical paradigm focuses on disrupting the power imbalances by bringing emancipation in societies (Asghar, 2013), it supports the idea that participants should become core-researchers in projects directed towards their community's emancipation (Horkheimer, 1982).

Consequently, the current study employed PAR as it motivated the participants to be directly involved in the research process which led to their own emancipation and improvement of their own situation in their context.

As mentioned earlier, that a paradigm is shaped by the ontological and epistemological beliefs, the critical paradigm is no different from other paradigms since it is also influenced by certain assumptions about the nature of reality as well as certain beliefs on knowledge-construction. In terms of the ontology, the critical paradigm is based on assumptions of multiple-realities which are non-stagnant, but which are influenced by several factors such as one's culture and one's environment (Wynn & Williams, 2012). On the other end, the critical paradigm's epistemological assumption is that knowledge is constructed socially during the time when individuals share ideas and thoughts based on the individual's interest (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

### **1.10.3. Research Design**

The design that the study employed was Participatory Action Research (PAR). According to this research design, the research participants, those who stand to benefit from the outcomes of the research, take on an active or a co-researcher role as they enter into a collaborative partnership with the researcher in order to generate knowledge through ongoing processes where the participants jointly implement as well as apply findings which improve practices in their contexts (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Liebenberg, 2018). Congruent to this, Dworski-Riggs and Langhout (2010) assert that PAR focuses on social justice through creating environments that encourage empowerment ensuring that all parties have a voice in the decision-making process. In accordance, Berg, Lune and Lune, (2004) state that PAR embraces the principles of participation, reflection, empowerment as well as emancipation of people and groups who are interested in improving their social situations or conditions. Hence, the participants who participated in the current study were individuals who had a common interest; that is to improve the quality of the learning process for the learners in the ecology who were vulnerable due to different reasons. The participants' shared-interest in the outcomes of the study united them thus they casted aside their individual differences and became respectful to one another's views and ideas in an attempt to resolve the challenge that is faced in their community. In the process of this endeavour,

PAR encouraged all the participants to freely express opinions and suggestions concerning the proceedings of the research study. Moreover, the initial participants involved in the study had a say as to who they wished to extend the invitation to so that other relevant role-players could also be incorporated into the group.

#### **1.10.4. Study Area**

Hall, Kaufman, and Ricketts (2006) describe rural dwellings as accommodating of population, housing and territory not included in the urban area. Township housing may also be regarded as rural dwellings. The study was conducted in a school that is situated in the area called Lindelani. For the purpose of this study, the specific area where the study was conducted is regarded as a rural ecology as most people in the area occupied with agriculture - farming their own food and rearing livestock. In support of this, researchers state that rural areas refer to the countryside where the population subsists on mainly primary production activities such as agriculture, fishing and rearing stock (Friedland, 2002; Uchida, Takemura, Fukushima, Saizen, Kwawamura, Hitokoto, & Yoshikawa, 2019).

Lindelani is situated Twelve (12) kilometres on the outskirts of the City of Durban in the province of KwaZulu Natal (South Africa). This setting is dominated by black people who belong to the working class. The form of housing in Lindelani is mostly informal. Many people are unemployed in this area. The nearby townships are Ntuzuma, KwaMashu and Inanda. Many people in these settlements also engage in farming and rearing livestock. A comprehensive description of Lindelani village is given in section 4.3.1.

The primary school where the study was conducted was given a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality to safeguard the school's and participants' information. The school is in the Lindelani area of Durban, South Africa, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal within the Metropolitan Municipality. The school is Government controlled as are most schools in the area, and it has an enrolment of 522 learners. There are 2 members of management, 18 teachers and 3 non-teaching staff members. The learner enrolment fluctuated during the past three years. All the teachers in this school are professionally qualified but their qualifications vary. The school falls under the quintile 2 school demarcation as most learners' parents are unemployed. However, there is a

Government feeding system in the school which provides one meal a day for the learners. An extensive description of the school and its conditions have been stated in section 4.3.2.

### **1.10.5. The Participants**

The main driving force of PAR is that the participants are actively involved in identifying and investigating the challenge in their community (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The set of participants who were selected were individuals who had the study's best interests at heart. Hence, the qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to purposely and deliberately select those individuals according to their knowledge, and the core-researchers were selected because they could provide the study with rich data. The participants who were chosen and their number were much more manageable to work with, at the same time they were critical-thinkers and transformation-orientated individuals. In support of this idea, Creswell (2014) posits that the purposive-participant-selection process facilitates flexibility for the researcher to deliberately select those participants and research techniques that are suitable for fulfilling the goals and purposes of the study which required the selection of a diverse group of individuals as explained below.

**The learners:** Four learners were selected from Grade 4 from the same school. The choice of including both female and male learners was deliberate to gain a diverse gender perspective of the matter under investigation. The learners from Grade 4 were selected because they were regarded as the "older" learners in the school and were more manageable to work with. Additionally, they had been learners at the school for much longer when compared to other learners from other grades. It was envisaged that such learners will be more expressive and provide deeper insights concerning the vulnerabilities that exist within their school. Furthermore, I identified learners in my life-orientation class who were known to be outspoken as well as critical-thinkers; this was beneficial as rapport already existed between the learners themselves and me as the researcher, and their teacher.

**The Educators:** Two educators were recruited from the same school. The criterion for selecting the two educators was that they formed part of the learner-support

committee, thus they were exposed to working towards supporting those learners who are regarded as vulnerable in the school. The study could have opted to include only a single educator as a participant, but to cater for any unforeseen circumstance, two educators were suitable.

**The learners' family members:** A written invitation was sent out to the homes of the learners to extend the invite to learners' family members, bearing in mind that some older siblings in the absence of their parents act as legal guardians. The reason for including the family members was that they are also exposed to the vulnerabilities that learners experience in the home environment and they are also aware of aspects to consider towards sustaining learning for vulnerable learners.

**The South African police officer:** I negotiated with the station commander at our nearest police station to assign an experienced police officer who has dealt with issues concerning school vulnerable learners and was seen as able to produce rich and relevant data on enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners from the police officers' perspective.

**The Nurse from the local clinic:** In the same manner as with the police officer, I also negotiated with the matron at the local clinic (Kwa-Mashu Polly Clinic) to allocate an experienced nurse concerning learners who are vulnerable in the community, and who was familiar with supporting quality learning processes.

**The local Social Worker:** A social worker was assigned to the school (research site) as a participant in the study, since she already had an established relationship with some of the learners and she was a resident in the ecology where the study took place. Thus, she was an expert concerning the vulnerabilities that existed amongst learners. She was also well positioned to apply appropriate strategies towards mitigating vulnerabilities amongst learners.

**The local Priest:** A priest from the Kwa-Kristo Umsindisi Catholic Church was invited to participate in the study, as I believed that he had valuable information regarding support or the enhancement of quality learning for vulnerable learners in the

community, in addition to being involved in projects of a similar nature within the church context.

**The local Traditional Healer:** An invite was also sent to a traditional healer in the community who is informative about the traditional causes and effects which are normally associated with disruption, as well as those that are supportive to the learning process of vulnerable learners.

Appropriately, the above-mentioned participants were selected because they were identified as the key stakeholders guiding the first stage of the collaboration process (Gray, 1989).

#### **1.10.6. Data Generation Method**

The study is underpinned by the collaboration theory complemented by the asset-based approach and guided by PAR. Due to a visually orientated world, a participatory art-based data generation method (collages) was used in conjunction with focus group discussions and reflective techniques (free-writing).

##### **1.10.6.1. Collages**

The participatory art-based method of generating data that was used was in the form of collages that educators and learners collaborated in creating. According to Leitch (2008), constructing a collage is a manner of combining a work of art by using different materials that are not normally brought together such as wool, paper, grass, photographs, pictures, stickers or small sticks. Specifically, the learners and educators were asked to depict (through collages) different forms of vulnerabilities and various support mechanisms that vulnerable learners are currently experiencing. The session commenced with them being taught how to construct collages. The second stage was the actual creation of collages where participants had to interpret and transcribe the contents of the collages they had created.

Brothers (2016) and Livingston (2010) assert that combining artwork such as collages into research provides an opportunity for cultivating deep thoughts, high levels of thinking, and it encourages teamwork and creativity. Thus, collage-construction was

beneficial to the study as it motivated the teachers, together with the learners, to engage in teamwork stimulating them to tap into each other's bank of knowledge which leads to new understandings by dissecting and merging ideas and thoughts.

#### **1.10.6.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)**

O'Brien and Shoveller (2017) maintain that participatory art-based data generating methods are creative methods which are ideal to use for engaging participants and are complementary to traditional methods such as FGDs. Therefore, to complement collages, FGDs were regarded as being compatible for generating data for this study. Additionally, FGDs are elucidated as semi-structured group discussions which produce qualitative data on a community level through encouraging interaction among participants (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Also, Creswell, (2014) explains that FGDs normally consist of a group of about six to ten people who are led by a skilled and astute moderator. It is vital for the group to be large enough to generate rich discussions, but at the same time the group should not be too large to an extent that some participants feel marginalised. Consequently, the current study had two FGDs which comprised of seven to eight participants in each group. The first group consisted of one educator, two learners, a teacher, the police officer, a traditional healer and the main researcher (myself). The second group was made up of myself, one educator, a priest, a social worker, another two learners and a priest. Concerning timeframes, Ince, Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson and Carlson (2014) advise that FGDs should preferably be of 45 to 90 minutes duration, as beyond this time participants become fatigued and unproductive in terms of generating data. Therefore, the time that was planned for the duration of the FGDs for this study was approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. Using FGDs was beneficial to the study since it incorporated a diverse range of individuals who might be intimidated by the presence of others. Due to FGDs, these individuals were able to interact freely and productively; and even the reticent individuals were able to recall thoughts and provide innovative ideas. Ritchie et al. (2013) asserted that, FGDs generate data elicited from views that would be less accessible without interaction found in group settings - memories and ideas are stimulated, and "reluctant" participants are encouraged to express their insights in an atmosphere of openness. Additionally, in support, Creswell (2014)

asserts that FGDs are said to facilitate interaction between participants yielding new ideas and explanations which would not have risen with individual interviews.

### **1.10.6.3. Free-writing: Reflections**

In this study, collage constructions, FGDs and free-writing were used together as the three methods of data generation. Free writing is defined as an act of writing for a set of time, approximately ten to fifteen minutes, and merely jotting down whatever comes to mind, without being concerned about which words to use and without editing whatever it is that one has written (Anzul, Downing, Ely, & Vinz, 2003; Kolbe, & Rudolph, 2018).

Pithouse-Morgan (2011) predicates that, free-writing allows participants to write about anything that comes to their mind, such as their views, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to the phenomenon that is being studied. In the current study, free-writing was used to obtain and capture the participants' thoughts and ideas that might have come to mind when they were not engaged in FGDs, and this assisted in gaining expansive and creative ideas that may have been forgotten by the participants during collage-construction and FGDs.

### **1.10.7. Data Generation Instruments**

Since the study intended appropriating collages as one of the data generating methods, an audio-recorder was used to record the participants' responses while they were constructing the collages, as this was also beneficial to the validity of the study in addition to assisting the participants to recall and account for the manner or depiction of their collages. Since the study also made use of FGDs, the discussions as well as meeting proceedings, were recorded using an audio-recorder. A camera was also used to photograph the collages as a back-up to safe-keep the collages in case they get damaged or lost before transcriptions are made. Additionally, the camera was also useful in that some of the pictures that were taken were included in the final research thesis. Even the pictures of the participants' free-writing pieces were taken using a camera, all in an attempt for safe-keeping. However, I strictly adhered to the ethical guidelines by always obtaining consent from participants to have them recorded; the faces of the learners were blurred or blocked on the pictures.



### **1.10.8. Data Analysis**

Generated data was analysed using thematic analysis, as this form of analysis is mostly used in qualitative studies. Thematic analysis entails outlining, examining and recording themes (patterns) within the data that is generated. These themes are patterns across data sets - they are empirical to the description of a phenomena as they are linked to the research questions, and they are later placed into categories for analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019). The thematic analysis is performed through a process of coding which consists of six phases: getting familiar with the data, creating first codes, formulating themes among the codes, reviewing those themes, naming the themes and producing the final report (Riggs, Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2013). I used a “code book” whereby I coded definitions for each code or group of codes, this tool ensured that the codes were applied reliably throughout the data, since the “code book” containing code definitions was developed and refined by myself. Furthermore, I went back to re- code previously coded material to make sure that data examined early in the analysis was coded in a similar manner with the same coding definitions or criteria as the data that was addressed later in the analysis.

### **1.10.9. Validity and Trustworthiness of The Study**

The transcription of data that was generated was precisely and intentionally done by me to avoid any misinterpretation or poor coding of data. Triangulation was done between the transcriptions of collages and the FGDs data to validate the data that was obtained from both data collection methods. To enhance reliability and trustworthiness, records of school meetings, profiles and community meetings containing information about the ecology and the challenges it was facing, were provided. I also returned to the participants to show them the transcribed data and how their experiences were presented from the collages and from the FGDs.

### **1.10.10. Ethical Issues**

Participants were asked for permission concerning video-recordings, and a consent form was signed. They (participants) were made aware that their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were obtained through giving participants and the school of study pseudonyms/codes. Transcriptions of collages and FGDs were kept in a safe I (the main researcher) was the only one with the key, while all records

saved electronically were password secured. All records were destroyed when they were no longer required; especially at the conclusion of the research project. Participants were given access to transcribed data to crosscheck if the transcriptions were authentic.

Permission was obtained from parents/guardians regarding children participants in the study; and a social worker was selected to accompany and to explain to those parents who were illiterate, and for those learners who were from child-headed homes. All participants were notified of the study's intentions and were given consent forms to sign prior to the study. Participants were always promised confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were promised respect and dignity and were told that they were at liberty to quit at any stage if they felt uncomfortable without being disadvantaged in any way.

Since the study was dealing with vulnerable learners, extra caution was taken not to exploit or to abuse the participants thus conducive spaces were created for them to feel safe and secure. Moreover, the study was given to the University Ethics Committee to check for infringements to the human rights of participants concerning this study. Accordingly, the ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Ethics Committee (Certificate Number: HSS/2234/017D). Lastly, but importantly, I negotiated for a counsellor to be on standby throughout the data generation process – this acted as a safeguard to any possible and inadvertent form of transgression concerning ethics of the research.

### **1.11. THE DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is specifically situated in Educational Psychology, which focuses on the holistic development of the child, and the school is seen as an enabling environment for child development and learning (Khanare, 2012). From the perspective of this discipline, the study aimed to propose a framework that will enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Although the various stakeholders within the ecology were targeted, the study does not implicate them for disrupting the learning process; they are merely hand-picked as I (the researcher) believed that they possess relevant and innovative ideas that may be formulated into a collaborative framework. Hence, participant exclusion criteria posed as one of the delimitations of the study. Other delimitations included the geographical isolation of the study area, as

it was rural. In accordance, recent studies report that, there are a lot of disparities which are faced by people in such settings, such as restricted access to quality health care, insufficient or lack of health insurance coverage, lack of public transportations, poor infrastructure, low health literacy, cultural or social differences, stigma and norms, as well as disproportionate burden of chronic disease relative to the general public ( Mutwali & Ross, 2019; Themane & Thobejane, 2019).

## **1.12. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

This study that proposes a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology comprises of seven chapters, whose outlines are presented below:

**Chapter one** set outs the introduction to the study. The chapter provides a detailed background to the study and states the problem. The purpose of the study is stated, then the personal and contextual rationale that motivated the study is also explained. In chapter one, the importance of the study is outlined. The overview of the research design and the methodology are stated, then the objectives and critical questions are listed. The review of concepts is presented as well as an account of what materialised throughout the study. Lastly, the conclusion to the chapter is presented in the form of a summary.

**Chapter two** provides a comprehensive presentation of the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The theoretical framework guiding this study is based on the collaboration as well as asset- based approaches which were used as an analytical framework for using collaboration as an enhancing tool for sustainable learning concerning vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

**Chapter three** depicts an in-depth study of literature on the current understanding and interpretation of using collaborative frameworks. The need for the development of a collaborative framework was discussed by drawing reasons from different contextual settings. The threats that are anticipated on the use of collaborative frameworks are also discussed in detail.

**Chapter four** focuses on the methodological procedure of the study. It tackles the research paradigm and the various strategic approaches which are adopted in the study. It also explains the criteria for the selection of participants and the data

generation method used, in addition to the method used to analyse data. Lastly, the chapter elucidates ethical clearance matters, limitations and delimitations of the study.

**Chapter five** centres on the presentation of results of the study using the collaborative theory and the asset-based approach respectively. The chapter also provides a thematical analysis of the data that was generated through the construction and transcription of collages, FGDs that were recorded, and free-writing reflections.

**Chapter six** presents summary of findings and discussions concerning the study's response towards the critical questions that it initially intended to explore. Additionally, the chapter elucidates the actual proposed collaborative framework to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in rural ecology through the conclusions. Later, the contributions as well as the recommendations of the study are cleared.

**Chapter Seven** presents *“A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology”*

### **1.13. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the aims and purpose of the study. The reasons that triggered interest to embark on this research study were declared. The focus of the study was outlined, and then an account of the importance of the study was explained. The objectives and critical questions guiding the study were also pointed out. The main concepts used in the study were defined and explained; and lastly an overview of the whole study was presented. The next chapter presents literature that was reviewed for the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK INFORMING A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

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### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to design a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Hence, this chapter focuses on the concept of collaboration and the asset-based approach as being the two appropriate concepts aligned to meeting the purpose of the study as stated above. The theory of collaboration and the principles of asset-based approach are discussed in-depth throughout this chapter as the two concepts that formed the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

This chapter commences with a lucid discussion of operational concepts. Then, a concise conceptualisation of the term “theoretical framework”, and what it was used for in the current study, is presented. Thereafter, a comprehensive discussion on each theory follows, which is done by focusing on the theories’ historical origins, the assumptions, the attributes, knowledge-construction according to that theory, the epistemology, as well as the roles of those involved in the study’s research process. The latter part of the chapter provides elucidations behind the reasons for the applicability of each theory concerning the current study. Finally, the illuminations on the motives for the emergence of both theories, are specified.

### 2.2. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

The defining of operational concepts in a research study is a formal academic obligation since most operational concepts usually have contested understandings. Subsequently, this part of the chapter elaborates on the definitions and discussion of operational concepts which were introduced in chapter one such as collaboration, sustainable learning, vulnerable learners and rural ecology.

### **2.2.1. Collaboration**

The term “collaboration” is rooted in the Latin words *com* and *laborer*, which in the English language means to work together (Williams, 2014). However, collaboration as a concept is very difficult to pin down. The most common definition of collaboration is that it is a process where parties who have different views about a problem put aside their differences and focus on solutions to mitigate their common challenges (Gray, 1989). While, Kukulska-Hulme (2004) refers to collaboration as a philosophy of interaction, in which there is an underlying premise of consensus-building, Briggs, Kofschoten, Gert-Jan and Douglas (2006) explain it as a process that may be used to resolve conflicts or to advance shared visions, where stakeholders see the potential advantages of working together.

The attributes of collaboration contribute towards activities such as shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction (Crook, 2018; Noam, 2001). Generally, collaboration partnerships may be placed into two categories: those that are aimed at developing and advancing shared visions, and those that focus on resolving conflicts (Neimanis, 2012). Collaboration focuses on understanding a shared purpose and then works towards a joint decision, which makes it different from cooperation which may involve common interest but may not necessarily be based on a collective articulated vision (Gray, 1989). In elaboration, Hargreaves (2000) elucidates that although the terms “cooperation” and “collaboration” are frequently used interchangeably, cooperation means working together but does not contain the complex interpretations and the necessary conditions covered by collaboration such as collegiality, respect and trust. Even though, cooperation and collaboration are often used as similar terms in policy literature, in a general sense cooperation refers to working together to a certain extent (Koliba, Meek, Zia, & Mills, 2018). However, cooperation does not include some critical conditions such as those implicit in collaboration; that is, to effectively resolve conflict or advance shared visions when the relevant stakeholders see the advantages of working together (Gray, 1989).

Pham and Tanner (2015) contend that cooperation and collaboration do in fact possess some similarities, but collaboration involves articulating a shared purpose and direction, as well as striving towards shared decisions based on a jointly articulated

aim. While cooperation involves pre-established interests and coordinating existing services (Pham & Tanner, 2015). From the above distinction, it is evident that there is no single perfect definition for collaboration. All the definitions have useful elements which help us to better understand the process of collaboration.

### **2.2.2. Sustainable Learning**

Sustainable learning is defined as that type of learning that lasts and that which engages learners intellectually, socially and emotionally (Huda, Jasmi, Alas, Qodriah, Dacholfany, & Jamsari, 2018; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2005). Sustainability on its own refers to a desired goal of development and it's a term that has been used in various disciplines and contexts ranging from social, economic or ecological perspectives (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). However, Clough, Chameau and Carmichael (2006) assert that "sustainability" is strongly dependent on the context in which it is applied, and it may also be narrowly or broadly used to refer to maintaining, securing, continuing or strengthening that desirable act or process. De Houwer, Barnes-Holmes and Moors (2013) refer to "learning" as an activity or a process of gaining knowledge and/or skills by studying, practising, being taught or merely by experimenting with something. For the purpose of this study, the expression "sustainable learning" was applied to a school educational learning. To elaborate, sustainable learning in this study's context is characterised by quality teaching and learning, the overcoming of barriers that hinder the learning process - be it within the classroom, or those societal factors such as poverty, sickness, learner pregnancy, substance abuse, orphan hood and others.

### **2.2.3. Vulnerable Learners**

Motsa and Morojele (2016) assert that there is no universally accepted definition of "vulnerability" since the notion of vulnerable individuals is usually easier to talk about than to define as a nebulous concept. Jopling and Vincent (2015) claim that the term "vulnerable learners" is generally used to refer to those learners who face any kind of hardship while Picket and Vanderloemen (2009) refer to the children who are vulnerable as those children who have developmental difficulties and those that live in dispossessed and destructive circumstances. In the South African societies though, vulnerable learners are said to be those learners who are cared for by the whole

community, since they are supported by the Government through the taxpayers' money and through other initiatives such as grants, food parcels and tuition due to them usually coming from child-headed homes, poor social economic backgrounds or parentless homes (Motsa & Morojele, 2016).

In this study, “vulnerable learners” not only referred to those learners who have no or inadequate access to basic needs such as nutritious food, shelter, clothing, safe homes, family care, and support, neither did it only refer to those learners who are infected or affected by illnesses such as HIV and Aids and those who do not have the ability to take full advantage of available education opportunities. The term vulnerable learners in the current study was also inclusive to those learners who faced devastating challenges within their communities such as stigmatisation due to being associated with poverty, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, dating older or sometimes married individuals for financial support. Also, those who were seen as strange or different by the community members, including those learners whom the community perceived as having a bad influence on their own children due to their “socially-unacceptable” lifestyles like being homophobic or substance-abusers.

#### **2.2.4. Frameworks**

Chung (2018) defines a “framework” as a structure that is used to classify, categorise or to maintain what an organisation aims to attain. In addition, Patanakul and Shenhar (2012) referred to a framework as a broad overview or an outline that consists of interlaced items which support a certain approach towards a specific goal. Furthermore, a framework aids as a monitor or as a guide that may be adapted and altered as needed by adding or by removing items (Patanakul & Shenhar, 2012). Consequently, within the context of this study, the term framework is used to refer to a logical way or a combination of strategies that may be used and followed by a school and a community towards enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners.

#### **2.2.5. Rural Ecologies**

The term “rural ecology” in policy-orientated and scholarly articles is often left undefined, since the process of defining it is challenging (Gallent & Gkartzios, 2019). However, Conlon, Caswell, Santi, Ballantyne, Meigs, Knight and Hartman (2019)



assert that the term rural ecology is used to refer to a community that is geographically located outside of towns and cities, normally with a low population density in small settlements. In the same manner, Gallent and Gkartzios (2019) affirmed that rural areas are often open country areas that have small settlements. In elaboration and in clarification, Dasgupta, Morton, Dodman, Karapinar, Meza, Rivera-Ferre and Vincent (2014) state that rural ecologies are branded by their dependence on agriculture and on natural resources, high poverty, isolation, neglect by policymakers, and inferior human development. Furthermore, Conlon, Caswell, Santi, Ballantyne, Meigs, Knight, & Hartman, (2019) argue that the distinct features that exist in the rural areas that make them more prone to vulnerabilities are caused by poverty, illiteracy, illnesses, poor education and other social challenges.

For the purpose of this study, the term rural ecology was used to refer to the area where this study took place which had a high population of subsistence and market farmers, growing crops and rearing livestock. Also, since the community is far from most economic activities, it lacks the most basic facilities such as electricity, house-installed water taps, recreation centers and adequately equipped schools. While the impact of globalisation, technology, urbanisation and basic neglect by the Government, of such areas has been blamed for creating uncondusive learning conditions in this area, people of this place also move to cities because of high violence rates that have since been reported in this context. The lack of attention by the Government in this area also results in uncondusive learning environments producing poor learner performance. There is also a lack of clean water, proper sewage systems, insufficient libraries and laboratories as well as dilapidated infrastructures of schools which directly link to poor academic performance of most learners. Furthermore, citizens like these who are marginalised are labelled by the majority as being sub-human due to their extreme impoverished living conditions, thus causing serious psychological trauma to most learners.

### **2.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

The term “theoretical framework” is made up of two words; namely, “theory” and “framework” thus it would be ideal to break down the term in order to conceptualise it clearly. Glaser and Strauss (2017) supported by Schutt (2018), define theory as a set of interrelated definitions, propositions and constructs that present a particular view of

a phenomenon; in some instances it also possesses predictive powers that can help researchers to ask appropriate research questions. A theory is further defined as a contemplative rational type of abstract or generalised thinking, or the results of such thinking (Saviano, Caputo, Formisano, & Walletzký, 2016). Whilst a framework is defined as a collection of ideas which are used to form decisions and judgements (Hult, Mena, Ferrell, & Ferrell, 2011). Collectively, the term: “theoretical framework” is defined as a pool of interrelated concepts that may be used to direct research with the aim of predicting and explaining the outcomes of the research, in addition to being used to provide the rationale for conducting research studies (Radhakrishna, Yoder, & Ewing, 2007; Ravitch, & Riggan, 2009). In educational research, however, theoretical frameworks are said to tackle a number of issues such as connecting the researcher to existing literature, providing assumptions that guide the researcher, assisting the researcher in selecting appropriate questions for the study, while guiding the researcher about the choice of research design and a suitable data generation method (Dixon-Woods, Sutton, Shaw, Miller, Smith, Young, & Jones, 2007; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

This study draws from two theories; namely, the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach. The practice of using more than one theory is known as theoretical triangulation. Chakravarthy and Alfa (2016) assert that theoretical triangulation is beneficial to research studies since it minimises the inadequacies of single-source research, as two sources complement and sometimes validate one another which reduces biasness. This also assists in uncovering the deviant dimension of a phenomenon and serves as the critical test. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation may create new ways of capturing a problem to balance with conventional data collection methods. It may also strengthen and stimulate the researchers’ confidence concerning the outcomes of their study (Hoque, Covaleski, & Gooneratne, 2013).

Initially, I had studied a few social theories, such as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, Banduras’ social learning theory, Giddens’ structuration theory and the critical emancipatory theory, with the intention of finding the most appropriate theory to frame this study. The collaboration theory and the asset based-approach proved to be the two most appropriate theories for underpinning this study’s theoretical

framework. Consequently, the succeeding section provides a thorough elucidation on the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach.

### **2.3.1. Collaboration Theory**

Since the study aims through collaboration to bring about transformation on how things are currently done towards the enhancement of sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology, a collaborative framework consisting of various efforts from the relevant stakeholders in the community, was the most appropriate. The isiZulu proverb: “*Izandla ziyagezana*” (many hands make light work), as well as a Sotho collective noun: “*Letsema*” (a group of people working together towards an objective). In agreement, both concepts bring to light the notion of how rural communities perceive collaborative efforts as significant even in raising children, as it is believed that children are raised and educated by the whole village instead of their immediate family. Accordingly, Leary (1999) argues in conformation that, as humans we do meaningful work, which becomes easier, when we work in a team or in collaboration. In discussing the origins of the collaboration process and the attributes of collaboration, it is imperative to comprehend why parties choose to collaborate and to discuss the contexts in which collaboration occurs and its importance of clarifying the ubiquitous features of collaborative procedures.

#### **2.3.1.1. Historical origins of the collaboration theory**

Collaboration may have become a 21<sup>st</sup> century trend as the need in society to think and work together on issues of critical concern has increased over the years, shifting the emphasis from individual efforts to groupwork, and from independence to communal-interactivity. However, the origins of collaborative work go a long way back, and can be traced to ancient civilisation, but it was only given lease of life in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century research showed that individuals learned faster, grasped more information and got a whole lot more done when they became partners in the process of teaching and learning instead of being passive receivers of knowledge from their educators (Lengwiler, 2008).

Ansell and Gash (2012) brought to light that collaboration is a complicated process with numerous challenges, unstated differences of opinions, and unexpected outcomes. Consequently, to mitigate the complexity and the haziness of collaborative

working, the theory of collaboration was introduced (Meaklim, 2013). In addition, Abend (2008) asserts that theories are formulated to explain, foretell and to comprehend phenomena, and in many cases to challenge and heighten existing knowledge within limits of critical bounding assumptions. Meaning that, theories are made up of assumptions and speculations. Hence like any other theory, collaboration also has critical bounding assumptions that constitute it as a theory.

### **2.3.1.2. The Assumptions of the collaboration theory**

While Jenni and Mauriel (2004) assert that there is an absence of agreement on the conceptualisation of the element of collaboration, Laudel (2001) postulates that the idea of collaboration is based on the assumptions that aspects do not necessarily have to be a zero-sum game; meaning that the theory of collaboration is not based on the concept that endorses the idea that one party wins and the other one loses, rather it assumes that if the relevant individuals are brought together in a positive and cohesive manner, they then share appropriate and experiential knowledge giving realistic ideas and advice towards mitigating their challenges (Fawcett, Wallin, Allred, Fawcett, & Magnan, 2011).

Despite the assumption of aspects not being a zero-sum game, it is also presumed that collaboration may be used to effectively resolve conflict and safeguard the delivery of services based on common visions when parties realise the importance of working together (Gray, 1989). In addition, Graesel, Fussangel and Parchmann (2006) assert that collaboration also assumes that the aspects of trust, leadership, shared purpose and organisational ownership are imperative to the success of collaborative initiatives. Vygotsky, the founder of the socio-cultural approach to cognitive development, expounded collaboration as a social course in which knowledge is created through discussions between several individuals and that which humans obtain knowledge from engaging with other people (Vygotsky, 1979). In elaboration, Vygotsky (1986) affirmed that knowledge is constructed socially by mingling more proficient individuals to guide those who are less proficient to comprehend concepts over and above their developmental level, and he referred to this as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). While the ZPD has been associated mainly with child development and the idea has been lengthened to also embrace adults as it is also related to the relationship

between individuals in the community (Moran, John-Steiner, & Sawyer, 2003). Similarly, Lincoln et al., (2011) stated that knowledge and meaning are constructed collectively, and that the individuals' surroundings must be taken into consideration. While the above section focused on highlighting the basic assumptions of the collaboration theory, there are attributes or characteristics of the collaboration theory which have been raised by various researchers, as discussed in the following sections.

### **2.3.1.3. The attributes of the collaboration theory**

As a concept, collaboration is elusive, as different theorists mention different attributes or characteristics of the concept of collaboration. The attributes of collaboration according to various researchers center on joint negotiation of common ground, conflict and collegiality, shared purpose and shared vision, shared thinking, shared problem-solving, shared creation of integrated instruction, a trusting-working relationship, equal partnership, assessing individuals' capacities, and cooperation (Saint-Onge & Armstrong, 2012; Butel, Banna, Novotny, Franck, Parker, & Stephenson, 2018; Ciutiene & Stulgiene, 2014; Huxman & Vangen, 2013; Gray, 1991; Misztal, 2013).

#### *a. Joint negotiation of common ground as an attribute of collaboration*

Gray (2000) elucidates that the initial stage of collaboration is characterised as that of problem-setting, where the relevant stakeholders and common challenges are identified, then the setting of direction is done via collaborative interpretations, and the common purpose is identified. Lastly, there is the implementation process, where shared meanings that have emerged in the domain, develops (Gray, 2000). However, this process is not always required to follow in the same sequence but it is dependent on the nature and the objective of the collaboration initiative (Wood & Gray, 1991). Similarly, Bradley and Corwyn (2002) posit that the initial attribute of collaboration is that it is an interactive process with shared trans-mutational purpose, explicit voluntary membership and joint decision-making including agreed-upon rules. Gray (2000) postulates that in the collaboration process the stakeholders are independent stakeholders who hold joint ownership of decisions and they assume collective responsibility for the ongoing direction towards the achievement of the common goal.

### *b. Conflict and collegiality as an attribute of collaboration*

Conflict as an attribute of collaboration raises different views and concerns, expectedly since collaboration is a difficult concept to explain. A functionalist by the name of Parson (1937) considered solidarity and cohesion as imperative for goal accomplishment thus he saw conflict as disruptive (Holmwood, 2005). In elaboration, according to Parson and his colleagues' explanation, conflict may be explicated as a dysfunctional, disorderly and disconnecting in communities, while the community may be a system which is made up of corresponding parts such as the values, intuition and organisations (Azhar, Parsons, & Sklar, 2013). However, Mandler (2011) disputably asserted that collaboration and conflict are not entirely opposed to each other, rather in most cases they work concurrently. Accordingly, Cottle (2006), affirms that conflict is a form of socialisation because prolific parties are often said to commonly possess more interpersonal conflicts. Ansell and Gash (2012) adds that there is generally a high correlation between the above-average levels of achievements and high levels of conflict; meaning that conflict in collaborative initiatives is viewed as a natural occurrence or circumstance which needs to be managed rather than be deemed as disruptive in the process of collaboration.

### *c. Shared purpose and shared vision as attributes of collaboration*

Huxhman and Vangen (2013) propose that having a shared purpose is crucial for accomplishing success in collaborative initiatives. Since shared purpose is reported to encourage a conducive environment for parties to encounter their commonalities, it is also believed to enable parties to resolve their shared problems (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Mattessich and Barbara (2011) agree that in order to achieve a fruitful collaboration, it is important to have a fixed and common plan, which is clear and realistic for all parties, as unshared, unclear and unrealistic purposes would tarnish the collaborative enthusiasm (Mattessich & Barbara, 2011). In elaboration, Huxhman and Vangen (2013) declare that having a shared goal is significant as it acts as the basis of identity for the collaborating parties. In the same manner, a shared goal is also said to assist in setting boundaries and to outline the scale and possibilities of

collaborative efforts, giving control against collaborative drifts while also acting as a tool for directing collaborative endeavours (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012).

Austin (2010) posits that individuals who truly collaborate find each other important to each other's core mission, or to their shared vision which brings them together to work around in the same overall plan. Thus, in the current study, shared vision means that the learners, teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders jointly develop common plans for the enhancement of sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the ecology. At a minimum, shared objectives involve a common plan towards supporting vulnerable learners in the context of the study. In support of this opinion, Emerson et al., (2012) maintained that shared purpose is seen as a self-reinforcing cycle that is made up of understanding, mutual trust, internal legitimacy and shared thinking.

*d. Shared thinking, shared problem-solving, and shared creation of integrated instruction.*

Shared problem-solving refers to shared thinking towards solving a common challenge. Thus, a true attribute of collaboration is confirmed through parties coming together and sharing their expertise and ideas with the aim of creating groundbreaking means to solve challenges (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). However, for the different stakeholders within the community, this could mean actual instruction being carried out to combine individual ideas as a new understanding that could not have arisen through individual effort (Wood & Gray, 1989). Therefore, the essence of shared creation and common direction may result in the creation of novel means of sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology.

Hence, in the current study, integrated instruction includes parents, learners, teachers and all other relevant stakeholders in shared thinking, planning and evaluation, and as collaborators they come together as partners to construct a learning experience for the learners which will enhance sustainable learning. Even though the parties are wary of aspects such as individual differences, and different developmental levels of each other's prior knowledge, the impact and effects of newly constructed knowledge is an eye-opener. It was hoped that each role-player would bring forth to the initiative unique expertise and jointly as stakeholders produce more powerful efforts in sustaining

learning for the vulnerable learners, which they may not have produced individually. For example, the traditional healer and the nurse, who as collaborators may bring forward a new way in which the disruption of the learning process through illnesses may be mitigated.

*e. A trusting-working relationship as an attribute for effective collaboration*

In a social context, trust refers to a situation where one party is willing to rely on the actions of another party, and the situation is normally directed to the future (Spears & Lawrence, 2016). In collaborative initiatives, trust refers to a certain level of subjective probability, in which one party believes that the other party will carry out a certain duty, whether they are being monitored or not (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). In elaboration, Misztal (2013) believes that trust in collaborative initiatives is of high importance as it acts as a binding element that holds together collaboration, though it not easily obtained. It could therefore be assumed that even though sustaining and continuing trust in a collaborative endeavour is an ongoing and a challenging practice, it needs commitment from all those involved in the relationship as it is believed to be an important attribute. In support of this opinion, Getha-Taylor (2012) adds that trust in collaborative initiatives is a compulsory element while mistrust may hinder collaborative initiatives. Profoundly, Luhmann (2017) states that trust allows parties to endure the unknown intentions of other parties whom they are in collaboration with. Similarly, trust is imperative as well as challenging in collaboration, as the individuals' aims within the collaborating plane may not always be completely transparent and this makes trust an important as well as a complicated factor in collaboration initiatives (Friesem, 2014).

Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan and Murnighan (2008) claimed that mutual trust does not develop instantly; parties must work together for a period, share knowledge and expertise then only they get acquainted with one another and in return mutual trust builds up (Lount et al., 2008). In elaboration, Thomson and Perry (2008) explain that trust allows individuals to go over and above their individual, institutional and sovereignty views about understanding other individuals' values and needs, while it also permits joint understanding. Emerson et al., (2012) further expounds that trustworthiness is built, and commitment to the collaborative initiative allows the basis



for parties to commit to a common ground, while lack of common ground may result in deviating prospects which may negatively impact the collaboration initiative. In accordance, Luna-Reyes (2013) affirms that in collaborative relations, trust evolves over time, as individuals establish a relationship based on ethics of caring, mutual respect and accomplishment of tasks. Furthermore, Hatak and Hyslop (2015) state that trust is a contributor to cooperation among collaborators.

While trust is continuously raised as imperative in collaborative endeavours, some risks have also been outlined about trust, which are associated with collaborative initiatives being involved in trusting working conditions, such as complete dependence on one individual (Austin, 2010). Additionally, Austin (2010) asserts that complete dependence occurs when the individuals' outcomes are totally contingent upon the actions of another party or when dependence is un-directional, and this prohibits agreement and exaggerates lack of honest communication amongst the parties. However, in some instances, shallow dependency has also been reported and is marked by extreme lack of trust amongst the involved stakeholders (Kanter, 2015). Despite this, it has also been reported that the issue of equal partnership is also a crucial attribute for successful collaboration.

#### *f. Equal partnership as an attribute for effective collaboration*

Stulgiene and Ciutiene (2014) postulated that in collaborative initiatives, participating individuals have equal roles in decision-making as well as in the work that will be carried out, meaning that the focus on partnership revolves around the shared objectives but not on the issue of power as such. Furthermore, Savage, Bunn, Gray, Xiao, Wang, Wilson and Williams (2010) asserted that when power structures are not centralised, the possibility of having more open communication is heightened and the way is opened for building consensus concerning objectives of the project. While collaborative initiatives may require some form of leadership, Bridges (2014) explains that leadership in collaborative endeavours is merely used as a means of leading others without force or coercion by moving people towards attaining the shared objective but it is not meant to detract from equal partnership or to impose authority onto the collaborative relation.

Thus, collaborators are believed to be involved in shared thinking, shared planning and the shared creation of integrated instruction when their collaborative efforts integrate content instruction and they conceptualise jointly, in addition to sharing responsibility (Bridges, 2014; Ralph & Wagner, 2018). After all, collaborators are said to be equal partners who are fixed on integrating their expertise in teaching-learning environments towards supporting students to attain their full potential (Pham & Tanner, 2015). Furthermore, equal partnership is essential for increasing mutual understanding as it validates collaborative activities as being dependable and constant with compatible and co-dependent interests for successful collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012).

*g. Assessing individuals' capacities as an attribute of collaboration*

Armstrong and Saint-Onge (2012) claim that capacity for joint action is a collection of cross-functional elements that come together to create the potential for taking effective action and serves as a link between strategy and performance. Thus, prior to parties entering a collaborative endeavour, they first need to evaluate their capacity for joint action, as this assists in assessing each other's potential and prospects which are related to collaboration. In addition, Gray (2000) warns that when parties are evaluating their capacity for joint action, they must ensure that there is strong leadership, that procedural and institutional arrangements in place, that parties possess knowledge that can be shared, and that there are sufficient resources to build the collaboration in order to ensure that the aims are attained (Gray, 2000).

Emerson et al., (2012) advise that procedural and institutional arrangements are essential for the administration and management of long-term collaboration. In elaboration, procedural and institutional arrangements (intra-organisational and in inter-organisational) are crucial as this could advance ownership of the collaborative activity. Furthermore, Ospina and Saz-Carranza (2010) state that in order for collaborative activities to function unhindered, there should be opportunities and roles of leadership present, as it is crucial that leaders possess authority in such activities, so that they may play significant roles in resolving conflicts and also ensure that the parties are acting responsibly.

Furthermore, it is seen as vital that parties consider the component of resources when they assess the capacity for collaboration; since, according to Thomson and Perry (2008) sharing of limited resources is one of the major benefits of collaborating. In line with this, Lubell, Leach and Sabatier (2009) argue that parties who engage in collaborative endeavours need to have support and enough resources. Lubell et al., (2009) further explain that adequate provision includes well-managed time, funding, support, research, governance and other elements. Gajendran and Brewer (2012) contend that impractical or unrealistic expectations may result in parties blaming one another which is detrimental to the collaboration's smooth flow.

#### *h. Cooperation as an attribute of collaboration*

Kanter (2015) asserts that cooperation involves two or more parties working jointly by mutual agreement towards a similar goal, requiring more commitment than coordination. However, cooperation is said to improve collaborations when partners exhibit individual excellence, interdependence, information integration, mutual trust and integrity (Arrigo, Kukulska-Hulme, Arnedillo-Sánchez, & Kismihok, 2013). Notably, cooperation is said not to necessarily involve deep commitment, intense communication or deep co-planning by participants (Kanter, 2015). Nonetheless, cooperation is believed to include the setting of goals and echoing a philosophy of teamwork and networking (Montiel-Overall, 2016) which suggests interdependence among the team members. Similarly, Hsiung (2012) adds that most cooperative learning involves projects which are divided into parts and then allocated to cooperating partners, with each partner playing a role and adding to the quality of the product. However, unlike collaboration, cooperation does not necessarily imply shared power, or an equitable division of authority, nor does it necessarily indicate shared thinking or shared planning (Montiel-Overall, 2016). Furthermore, the parties in cooperation may work together but they may not necessarily be involved in joint planning, thinking and evaluation. However, in most cases, cooperation involves dividing the work among the participants (Kanter, 2015). In other words, the relationship between stakeholders in cooperation activities may be unequal but there may be mutual benefits for all the stakeholders.

### *i. The researchers' reflections on the attributes of collaboration*

Gathered from the attributes of the collaboration theory noted above, the collaboration process does not necessarily require that all parties possess a similar mindset, which is naturally expected as all individuals are created as unique and diverse beings; neither does the collaboration process exactly resemble the cooperation process, even though the two concepts are often used interchangeably.

Collaboration embraces diversity wherein conflict is an inevitable reality that exists, and which will continue to be present if diversity is embraced. However, the existence of conflict on its own is viewed as an exhibition of an occurrence of real work and it does not necessarily have to be deemed as a negative attribute or a hindrance in the collaboration process. Thus, collaborative endeavours are believed to be stimulated as the various parties share a common goal. However, the attainment of the common goal is driven by the shared vision which results in various parties reaching common ground despite differing opinions and the existence of conflicts.

Moreover, the attribute of trust in collaborative endeavours, boosts and facilitates the attainment of common goals for the various parties. While, the attribute of equal partnership may be a tool for disrupting the common societal hierarchies, it is also seen as owning the capacity of empowering and granting respect to those societal groups which are usually marginalised. In turn, all individuals are empowered to equally and freely contribute towards the attainment of the shared or common goal.

#### **2.3.1.4. The nature of reality in collaboration theory**

Since the current study is qualitative in nature, it is imperative to comprehend the approaches that are adopted by qualitative researchers. Ritchie et al., (2013) asserted that the issue of how the world can be studied may raise a few philosophical questions. Some of these philosophical questions are related to what the nature of the social world is, as well as what is out there to know - this enquiry is known as the ontology (Ritchie et al., 2013). On the other end, other philosophical questions are related to

how one can learn about the social world and what is the basis of knowledge - this enquiry is referred to as the epistemology (Al-Saadi, 2014).

Ontology is centred on the nature of reality and what there is to know about the world (Ritchie et al., 2013). Thus, the main ontological questions focused on the existence of social reality that is inherent in our human conceptions and understandings (Al-Saadi, 2014). In support, Poli and Simons (2013) highlighted that the fundamental ontological enquiry is concerned with whether the social and natural world exists in comparable means or whether the social world is distinct, as it is open to individual interpretation. Generally, social sciences have been based on two key positions; namely, realism and idealism (Al-Saadi, 2014). With realism being grounded on the belief that there is an outer reality which resides independently of peoples' perceptions about the world (Joseph & Wight, 2010), meaning that an external reality exists, but it is independent of our beliefs or understandings (Ritchie et al., 2013). Poli and Simons (2013) believe that idealism is grounded on the belief that reality is solitarily comprehensible as it is socially constructed; meaning that no external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understandings (Poli & Simons, 2013).

Epistemology is focused on the means of knowing and learning about the world and it is more centred on issues such as how individuals learn about reality and what constitutes the basis of their knowledge (Blaikie, 2010). Ritchie et al., (2013) explain that numerous issues govern epistemological debates in social research, of which some relate to the way in which knowledge is acquired. While others believe in using evidence as the onset of knowledge-construction, others believe that a hypothesis is first established and only then is evidence collected to endorse or discard it (Al-Saadi, 2014). Another, fundamental epistemological concern within social research is centred on the relationship between the researcher and the researched and how this relationship inspires the correlation between what is regarded as factual and what is regarded as values (Ritchie et al., 2013). Furthermore, Blaikie (2010) reports that another set of epistemological issues is that which pertains to social research and it is based on focusing on what it means to accept certain claims as being legitimate.

This study adheres to its objective, which is to engage several stakeholders within the community towards the formulation of a framework that will aid in sustaining learning

concerning vulnerable learners in the ecology. Collaborative endeavours, according to Callon (2009), assume a critical stance that is based on the belief that knowledge is not constructed in isolation; it does not reside in some mythical, majestic world. However, knowledge is believed to reside amongst the people in the community and is created as a joint effort (Callon, 2009). In support, an African phrase, “*Ukwanda kwaliwa umthakathi*” implies (in English) that greater meaning is created through joint efforts (Chasi, 2014). Parallel to this expression, Battle (2009) argues that in African society’s knowledge and wisdom reside in the communities and it is gradually transferred to the individuals who reside within that community.

#### **2.3.1.5. Collaboration and knowledge-construction**

Turner (2017) informs us that in ancient India, the first stage of a man’s life begins after a boy goes through his thread ceremony which was around puberty. During this stage the learning process began, and the group of young men learned together under the leadership of an adult. Learning had no fixed “school” hours as the students learned about all aspects of life such personal hygiene, clothing, nutrition and friendship. These learning groups were the norm in ancient traditional societies from ancient Greece in the West to China in the East (Cajete, 1994). In traditional societies, small close-knit communities made it possible to foster learning through social interactions rather than through texts or scriptures which were later recorded for posterity (Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, & Wang, 2016).

Turner (2017) adds that the concept of collaboration began to interest educators in the West after theories of personality development, group dynamics and social cognitive mechanisms began a fresh wave of thought processes regarding learning mechanisms and classroom techniques. Jamal and Stronza (2009) maintain that even though there is no single point of origin that may be attributed to the theory of collaboration, there are several related ideas that assisted in the formation of this theory. These include attributes such as Dewey’s exploration into the social nature of learning and his advocacy of teaching through discussion and through hands-on problem-solving, Elwin’s social inter-dependence concepts and Deutsch’s ideas on cooperation and competition are early seeds of the collaborative theory (Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Piaget referred to intellectual development as being a result of social

interaction emanating out of disagreements that led to disequilibrium, ironically leading to the promotion of a further understanding of the world (Pritchard & Woollard, 2013). Lantolf and Poehner (2014) posited that the collaboration theory is deeply rooted within Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which sees learning as an integral social process that is triggered through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's belief supported the idea of learning being a social process as his socio-cultural theory suggests that individual learning takes place initially because of the interactions on the social level (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Generally, the above-mentioned ideas may be grouped under the theory of constructivism, as it serves as the foundation of the collaborative learning theory. The main idea of constructivism is that humans learn from their own experiences, that learning is an active process, and that the meaning of the world is created through what people see, feel, hear, smell and by asking questions, exploring new ideas and evaluating existing knowledge, that every time we encounter a new experience we can either add it to our existing knowledge or we can modify our perspective and gain fresh insights (Powell & Kalina, 2009). In other words, learning is a social process which is enhanced by our interpersonal relations and encounters; therefore, the collaborative learning theory is linked to constructivist theories.

However, Doloriert, Boulton and Sambrook (2017) argue that learning collaboratively is not a new concept as people have been learning in groups for many years, but most formal learning is still characterised by individual learning. However, learners especially from the higher learning institutions, are still seen holding discussion groups to support and benefit from one another (Doloriert et al., 2017).

Moreover, Vygotsky (1986) postulates that learning is entrenched within social events in the environment and that learning takes place as the child interacts with other people, objects and events in the environment. More especially, mental functions such as thinking, reasoning and problem-solving may be performed individualistically or as collaborations with groups of people (Rogoff, 2008). According to the collaboration theory, social interaction is claimed to be a pre-requisite for learning or mental functioning, as it is intertwined in socio-culturally determined factors (Doloriert et al., 2017). The collaboration theory further stipulates that working with more capable individuals is crucial for learning to occur and that learning is initially mediated on a

social level between a child and other people in the environment, and thereafter it is internalised on an individual level (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). This means that learning involves mentoring provided by a more knowledgeable person, either an adult or a peer, who engages in an activity with a less experienced person in a process of collaboration (Vygotsky, 1986). However, for individual learning from the social context to the individual to occur, language is claimed to be crucial in regulating individuals in organising functions that are critical to mental activity (Rogoff, 2008). Thus, the learning experience that is formed through collaboration engages all parties in a process that makes learning more intellectual and interesting (Gokhale, 2012). According to Barkley, Cross and Major (2014), the process of learning through collaboration is reported to allow parties to be evaluative, critical and to be creative-thinkers. In addition, (Gokhale, 2012) reports that after the educational experience is completed through the process of collaboration, parties can be reflective on what was successfully taught and learnt, and thereafter the space for future improvement is provided.

#### **2.3.1.6. The role of the researcher in collaboration**

In most research, the researcher is seen as holding the leadership role. However, Ansell and Gash (2012) postulated that in collaborative initiatives, the leadership role is taken by individuals who have charisma and who are committed. On the other hand, Toseland and Rivas (2016) argued that collaborative initiatives cannot be contingent on a single leader but on several leaders, who are unbiased and who are able to manage dissimilar points of view. Similarly, leaders in collaborative relations are said to play a key role in drawing up and maintaining the rules of engagement as they aid as promoters in enabling interchange and building trust among the stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2012; Margerum, 2011). In other words, researchers in collaborative endeavours empower, involve parties, and move them headlong collaboratively, while they maintain interpersonal relations amongst the parties by encouraging them to be courteous to one another's opinions. Lasker and Weiss (2003) posit that collaborative leaders must be competent in encouraging broad unanimity and involvement, accelerate broad-centred inspiration, and inspire fruitful groupwork.



Furthermore, Ospina and Saz-Carranza (2010) believe that it is fair to say that one of the main reasons to initiate processes of collaboration is to share knowledge. Thus, it makes sense to suggest that a collaborative leader must be knowledgeable, have political, as well as integrity skills. Since it can be argued that knowledge resides in the minds of people and guides their actions, it is imperative to be aware that knowledge has different strands (Ansell & Gash, 2012). Hence, parties who possess more knowledge, would automatically hold more power; implying that in collaborative relations, it is important that knowledge is shared to ensure that power is also distributed equally.

### **2.3.1.7. The role of the researched in collaboration**

Laudel (2001) posits that generally in collaborative activities, the participants share rudimentary characteristics like expertise about the challenge, vested interest in a problem, and they possess different access to the information about the common problem. Gray (1989) argues that since the main idea of collaborative organisations is realising the objectives of the collaborative initiative, the participants should greatly contribute by using their official and non-official contacts within and out of their cliques. Isbell (2012) adds that the participants should also be those individuals who are competent in shaping and accomplishing social relations.

According to Laudel (2001), the researcher and the researched in collaborative endeavours both become collaborators as they share attributes of teams and groups in that they identify each other's exclusive expertise, while they keep a certain level of independence, but they have common goals, and they implement them through mutual support. In addition, the researcher and the researched build trust leading to open and sincere dialogue, as they acknowledge that conflict is a normal occurrence in collaborative endeavours and they jointly participate in the decision-making processes (Gray, 2000). However, they are not like most teamwork groups as they do not rely on a sole leader or final authority for a decision or a ruling (Ansell & Gash, 2012). Moreover, Wood and Gray (1991) add that for collaboration to be effective, there must be a tie amongst the different planes of activity in collaborating initiatives. That tie can be attained through organisational ownership of the collaborative endeavour; however, this calls for full commitment from all parties (Isbell, 2012).

### **2.3.1.8. The Applicability of the theory collaboration**

Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2015) postulate that collaboration could be viewed as an essential activity by many governmental parties around the world, since the challenges of fragmented approaches towards mitigating societal challenges has been an ongoing concern. Other researchers argue in the same manner that individualism is no longer effective in dealing with diverse societal challenges as the individuals fail to respond individually to societal challenges (Mann, 2011; Thomson & Perry, 2006). Hence, Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2010) regard individualism as a challenge because sometimes duplication of activities by different parties can occur and omission is highly possible when individuals work in isolation. Thus, collaboration has emerged in contexts where individualism has failed to resolve challenges and where the scope of the challenges to be addressed is beyond that of any single-party-initiative. In agreement, Hedelin and Hjerpe (2015) contend that the demand for society to function in collaboration on issues of critical concern has widened, moving the focus from individual struggles to group efforts, and from independence to community. Accordingly, the theory of collaboration may be viewed in kaleidoscopic ways by various researchers such that it may be seen as systems, a dialogue or an innovative problem-solving technique involved in data gaining skills. In education it is viewed as a chance for school revitalisation and to engage various parties towards mitigating complex educational challenges (Austin, 2010; Grudinschi, Kaljunen, Hokkanen, Hallikas, Sintonen, & Puustinen, 2013). However, this led to discussions focusing on the relevance of collaboration in general, but it would be significant to understand the relevance of the application of the theory specifically on the current study.

### **2.3.1.9. The Relevance of the collaboration theory on the current study**

Nowadays, communities are mostly defined by a high rate of hostility, competitiveness, hierarchy and marginalisation as means of “solving” problems, but the principles of collaboration may be more effective for positive transformation in our communities. The collaboration theory is important and relevant to the current study as it expounds on why organisations choose to collaborate; it also clarifies the factors which must be considered before and during the collaboration process in order to make the initiative of collaborating fruitful. This theory has been chosen to underpin this study as it seeks to provide a framework for understanding cooperation among the multiple

stakeholders. In addition, the collaboration theory makes it possible to analyse how various parties work together to resolve common difficulties, and the conditions required for successful teamwork. Furthermore, the collaboration theory seeks to explain how and why parties choose to collaborate.

In support, Danese (2011) explains that collaborative partnerships can generally be categorised into two sections; namely, those that focus on resolving conflict, and those that aim at developing shared visions for the future. However, in both instances the process focuses on defining the issues being interrogated prior to moving on to resolutions. In the same manner, collaborative partnership in this study focused on mitigating the issue of disruptive learning processes for the vulnerable learners. Since, Danese (2011) defines collaboration as a process of communal decision-making in which all the parties who share a problem, introspectively search their variances and create a united strategy for action.

The other reason for choosing this theory is that we reside in a world which consists of diverse groups which are affected to some extent by the challenges in the community, and most importantly, who hold a certain level of accountability to act on the challenges faced by the society. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of resources compounded by highly populated localities or environments, parties or individuals fail to assign the resources equally in order to effectively solve societal challenges. Thus, parties need to prioritise and decide which social challenges are most imperative to their key interests. As a result, it is motivating to collaborate when parties realise that they are failing to attain their goals in isolation. In support of this, Jiang, Tao and Santoro (2010) asserted that parties chose to collaborate when it is not feasible to achieve objectives in isolation. However, the issue of interests is that, for any collaborative endeavour to be fruitful there must be a clear plan of the benefits for each party ensuring that they will gain from being in the relationship. As such, interest plays a role in the decision to enter a collaborative endeavour. Osula and Ng (2014) agreed that self-interest is mandatory for collaboration information. Furthermore, John-Steiner (2000) saw collaboration as a hopeful means of human involvement. However, for it to become more than a transient trend there must be a structure in place to help guide people towards effective collaboration.

### **2.3.2. Asset-based Approach**

As mentioned above, this study engages on theoretical triangulation, as it triangulates the collaboration theory with the asset-based approach. Hence, this section explains how the asset-based approach as a plan of action can be used as a second theoretical framework towards the enhancement of sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology. This section conceptualises the notion of the asset-based approach on its own as a theory and again conceptualises it within the discipline of positive psychology which the study is based within. The fundamental components as well as the two transforming phases of the asset-based approach, are then discussed. Thereafter, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is outlined. Later the reasons for selecting this theory as a second theory underpinning this study are clarified, and finally the deliberation behind the emergence of both the collaboration theory and the asset-based approach, is justified.

#### **2.3.2.1. Understanding the asset-based approach**

The asset-based approach originated from the community development work that was done by Kretzmann and McKnight in the United State of America (Macleod & Emejulu, 2014). These two researchers discovered that the old approach to community involvement usually had damaging impacts on the communities, while it initially hoped to positively transform communities through its core focus on the negatives rather than the positives (Macleod & Emejulu, 2014). The alternative, the asset-based approach, is a positively-driven initiative that recognises strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities, and it assists communities to become active and build systems that lead to sustainable development (Whiting, Kendall, & Wills, 2012).

However, the asset-based approach is said to be different from other positively driven initiatives in that firstly it focuses on the people's gifts and talents since it has an associational effect with life as it focuses on empowering communities (White, 2018). Secondly, asset-based approach is distinct in that it arose from the limitations of systems which can provide service, but they are not capable of providing care (Whiting et al., 2012). In a sense, while systems may provide care they may not necessarily genuinely care, for an example, poor or vulnerable individuals may be well-served in a community, but their lives may not necessarily be changed positively. Thus, the

option identified by the asset-based approach envisages a group of people voluntarily coming together to do some good (Macleod & Emejulu, 2014). Thirdly, the asset-based approach is different from other positive initiatives in that it strives towards instilling confidence in the residents of the community such that the residents of that community are enabled to recognise and resolve their own challenges (McLean & McNeice, 2016). In support, Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno (2019) contend that most sustainable improvements in communities take place when residents discover their own power to act and thus, they stop relying on the professionals to emancipate them from their challenges. Additionally, Ebersöhn, Eloff and Swanepoel-Oppere (2010) maintain that the asset-based approach resonates with the principle of accepting that individuals residing within rural ecologies are acquainted to their surrounding environment and that their lives are shaped by their environment. In accordance with the current study, the relevant stakeholders within the community were encouraged and supported to take advantage of the familiarity of their own context in order for them to discover and to acknowledge their strengths enabling them to become innovative and come up with their own fitting strategies of enhancing the type of learning that is of quality or that which is regarded as sustainable for those learners in the ecology who are termed as being vulnerable.

Furthermore, Kramer, Amos, Lazarus and Seedat (2012) regard the asset-based approach as a powerful tool because it is centred on realising and activating the resources that are already available in the community; it also provides the means for individuals within a community to access and gather what they have in order to build stronger and functioning communities. Metaphorically, Rose (2006) refers to the asset-based approach as a “half-full glass” approach, indicating that no community is devoid of assets and resources – there is always a “half glass full” of skills and knowledge. Correspondingly, Ammerman and Parks (1998 pp.35) also refer to the asset based-approach as the “capacity focused alternative”, which also draws on what is already available instead of what is not available. Moreover, another core trait of the asset-based approach is that, in community-initiated developments, participation is mostly created around small, strong local realities and it is often geared towards the local contexts that people can relate to, thus commitment to the plan of action from participants is imperative (Westoby, 2014). Conversely, asset-based approaches like

any other theory emanates from a certain discipline or field; hence, the asset-based approach is said to emerge from the discipline of positive psychology.

### **2.3.2.2. Asset-based approach within the positive psychology discipline**

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) define the positive psychology discipline as an umbrella for optimistic emotions, positive personality traits and a conducive environment, since it is centred on the individual's inner strength in overcoming challenges. The act of resilience is highlighted as another crucial aspect of positive psychology, which is defined as the ability to adapt to stress and to recover from hardship (Herrman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson, & Yuen, 2011).

Since the asset-based approach falls under the wide umbrella of the positive psychology discipline, the two aspects form part of the strengths-based approach as they both focus on the positives such as the available resources, gifts and talents (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). So does the collaboration theory as it is also based on the belief that societal transformation is attained through the partnership formation with other individuals in the community who share a common purpose (Gray, 1989). In accordance, Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) argued that assets, capacities and resources can only be obtained through collaboration or by forming relations and partnerships with others. Furthermore, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) emphasise that positive psychology acknowledges and believes in relying on the individual's strengths to address needs, while the asset-based approach acknowledges that assets can be used to overcome challenges (Ferreira, 2013).



**Figure 2.1:** Using Asset-Based Approaches to Address Challenges (Eloff, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Accordingly, figure 2.1 above depicts how the asset-based approach could be used to address challenges in the current study. Thus, the column on the far right refers to the vulnerabilities that exist amongst the learners such as poverty, orphan hood, child-headed homes, lack of support, malnutrition and others. While these vulnerabilities are not generally overlooked, but due to the nature of asset-based approach, the central point is purposely on the utilisation of the positives such as the available resources, existing gifts, capacities and others with the intention of managing or overcoming the challenges. While, the process of asset-based approaches has been

depicted in figure 2.1, it has also been stated that it has not remained stagnant since its discovery, but it has evolved and transformed over time.

### **2.3.2.3. The transformation of the asset-based approach**

The initial phase of the asset-based approach is centred on its challenging nature towards the needs-based model which is also known as the deficit-model. The needs-based model is based on the belief that a challenge is always conceptualised as being a failure of an individual or of a group that is challenged as opposed to a systemic failure (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). In other words, researches which are based within the needs-based model are centred on the belief that the victims are to be blamed for their institutional oppression and for their own victimisation by referring to the negative postulations regarding certain communities. Bruckner, Scheffler, Shen, Yoon, Chisholm, Morris and Saxena (2011) added that the needs-based model is a perspective that primarily focuses on the assumed weaknesses of the individuals or groups. In addition, the needs-based model is partly disputed by the asset-based approach as it regards its own perspective as being the whole and the absolute truth, while researchers (Loots, Ebersöhn, Ferreira, & Eloff, 2012) regard the view of the needs-based approach as being only part of the truth on situations faced by various societies.

The second transformation phase of the asset-based approach was also established in response to the deficit-model, explicitly stating that there is more than one truth with regards to the circumstances that prevails in underprivileged communities (Loots et al., 2012). The deficit-model was further challenged for creating unsustainable proposals (Harry & Klingner, 2007). One of the truths that is overlooked by the deficit model according to Sturgis and Allum (2004) is that all communities possess capacities such as neighbourhood institutional and individual capacities, and this should be the major force when tackling societal challenges. Chikoko and Khanare (2012) asserted that the asset-based approaches empower individuals in communities and generates ongoing efforts or attempts towards the emancipation of communities. Accordingly, in the current study, it was hoped that through the utilisation of the asset-based approach, the transformation towards the enhancement of sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the ecology would be attainable through the relevant



stakeholders in the ecology who would also initiate their transformation by making use of their already existing resources and efforts towards the achievement of their mutual goal. Furthermore, through the asset-based approach guidance of the communities' efforts and attempts were maintainable and continuous.

#### **2.3.2.4. Central aspects of the asset-based approach**

The central aspects of the asset-based approach include assets, gifts, creativity, relationships and partnerships.

##### *a. Assets*

According to the asset-based approach guidelines, the community is constructed by focusing on people's talents rather than their deficiencies (Montoya & Kent, 2011). In other words, the power of building stronger communities lies within that community's assets. The community assets in the current study are aspects such as the community library, the hall, the school and playgrounds.

##### *b. Gifts*

One of the basic beliefs of the asset-based approach is that every individual is in possession of something that they can contribute even though it may not be obvious, while every context or ecosystem also has a valuable resource even though that resource might not be yet known (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The aspects of gifts in the study would be strengths like the expertise of professionals (teachers, nurses, and the police officers). The traditional healers' and the priests' scarce gifts of preaching and healing would also be positives that may be used towards the enhancement of sustainable learning. In addition, the learners' experiences and ideas may also be positively used to help maintain the learning for the vulnerable learners in the ecology.

##### *c. Creativity*

Since asset-based approaches have been said to hold strong internal focus as its intervention mission, it is not centred on what is problematic or lacking, but it starts by focusing on what is currently available in the contexts and the capabilities of the individual in the contexts, thus the prominence of intrinsic creativity is stressed (Friedli,

2013). In the same manner, the innovative ideas that are currently being carried out in the ecology to sustain learning for those learners who are in vulnerable situations were exploited and utilised.

#### *d. Relationships and partnerships*

As a problem-solving strategy, asset-based approaches are centred on formulating and rebuilding relationships among individuals, associations and institutions although it still involves problem-identification (Bates, Marvel, Nieto- Sanchez, 2018; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). In addition, Braithwaite (2009) asserts that asset-based approaches are based on the belief of community-driven development where communities and private sector work in partnership, rather than the developments that are driven by external agencies. Even though it acknowledges that there may be disagreements between the stakeholders, there are several central aspects within the asset-based approaches which researchers identify as assets that can be extracted to reach consensus. Likewise, in the current study the relations and the partnerships such as those which exist between the teachers and the learners, the teachers and the parents, the learners and the social workers, the community and police officers, the priest and the traditional healers, would have to be strengthened or even re-built in an endeavour to sustain learning for vulnerable learners. While the asset-based approach highlighted the central aspects of its processes, other numerous methods could also be used to identify assets.

#### **2.3.2.5. Components of identifying assets and their anticipated outcomes**

The initial phase of the asset-based approach entails identifying the assets, strengths, and gifts of the individuals (Whiting et al., 2012). Within the ecology of this study, the assets may be pinpointed within some learners, the teachers, parents, nurses, social workers, police officers, priests and traditional healers and other individuals within the ecology who are willing to make use of their assets towards enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners. Basically, the methods of identifying assets focus on discovering and sharing untapped and undiscovered assets.

Consequently, Montoya and Kent (2011) explain that the process of identifying assets commences with acknowledging and effecting changes within the participants' attitudes. It is known that individuals start by concentrating on their hidden as well as undiscovered assets rather than solely focusing on their challenges (Bates et al., 2018) hoping that they will become powerful individuals and groups in the communities (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006). Moser (2010) adds that the course of identifying assets is a continuous progression that is carried out by strategies such as asset-mapping. Massingham, Massingham and Dumay (2019) assert that asset assessment allows individuals and organisations to unearth their potential as it involves connecting with people. However, this may be unusual for professionals who have been previously trained to view themselves as having a distinct task description that so far has been disregarded (Massingham et al., 2019).

Across a range of methods which can be used to support the identification of assets and resources, a few common features are noticeable. Siegel (2005) explains that these methods are based on inclusion and participation and should only be used if all agencies recognise and acknowledge the contribution of local people in the process. Professional staff have the support and capacity to fully engage with the community, and resources and investments are available to support these roles. Moser (2010) adds that the methods of identifying assets helps to engage and empower individuals to build capacity within communities. This indicates that where local people have been trained to participate in the research, the skills gained will remain in the community for future use. However, these methods of identifying assets will not fully provide a measure of effectiveness, and it may not be possible to compare the findings generated from these methods in a rigorous way (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). Nevertheless, it is also argued by Moser (2010) that the information generated from research using these methods can somewhat be brought together using other sources of information like quantitative data to provide a fuller picture of an area or community. These methods are discussed in-depth below.

#### *a. Asset-mapping*

Carter and Barrett (2006) explain that asset-mapping involves the construction of a pictorial presentation of assets, while individuals are encouraged to become aware of

their assets and resources, as well as the relations between them. In turn, this aids in supporting individuals for the mobilisation of assets as suggested in the second phase of the asset-based approach (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). Hence, various assets may be identified and depicted on a map outlining five categories: the individual's assets, relationships, partnerships, economic resources and physical resources. (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Widodo, 2018). Moser (2010) adds that the process of identifying assets into various categories makes them known to the individuals and it encourages them to start mobilising their assets.

Foot (2012) declares that asset-mapping is seen as the starting point towards transforming the way that services and communities work together, seeing it as an activity which permits individuals and communities to become aware of their available resources. Mathie and Cunningham (2008) assert that asset-mapping is one of the crucial methods of identifying assets; it is described as a procedure of building an inventory of strengths and contributions of the individuals in the community. Asset-mapping discloses the assets of the whole society and it explores the relations amongst the individuals in the community. Individuals now know how they can access these assets for community-building (McKnight, 2010). Asset-mapping also allows people to think in an optimistic manner about their contexts while transparency allows them to see how others within their community view situations (Griffin & Farris, 2010). Furthermore, the process of asset-mapping is said to involve documenting of the physical, personal, intellectual and experiential assets (Guhn, Schonert-Reichl, Gadermann, Marriot, Pedrini, Hymel, & Hertzman, 2012). As a result, in the current study's context this meant (amongst others) aspects like teaching resources, food parcels, and toiletries for the vulnerable learners. Personal assets would refer to skills, emotional support and constructive advice that may be given to the vulnerable learners. Asset-mapping may involve identifying skills, expertise, and knowledge or it may also include weighing local institutions that may be beneficial towards the mitigation of the challenge.

McKnight (2010) purported that the individual capacity inventory is carried out in order to assist individuals to contribute by empowering them through granting them space for talents to flourish. Moreover, the individual capacity inventory is regarded as important since it is centred on separating the types of skills such as information and

community skills, as well personal information from enterprising interests (McKnight, 2010). Asset-mapping according to Foot (2012), includes documenting both types of community resources; those that are tangible and those that are intangible, while encouraging citizens to positively look at their community as a context where resources can be preserved and prolonged. Foot and Hopkins (2010) add that asset-mapping involves developing an inventory which is used to connect new possibilities and relations between individuals and groups.

(i) *The anticipated outcomes of asset-mapping*

Friedli (2013) believes that asset-mapping aids in the understanding of aspects or issues that communities want to explore. Asset-mapping allows the resources held by individuals and communities to be visible, to be utilised and to be appreciated (Foot & Hopkins, 2010). The stakeholders within the community become equal partners in the activity of mapping the resources and the skills within the community. The method of asset-mapping grants information regarding observable, invisible and often discounted strengths and resources of communities and sometimes aids towards the discovery of breakthroughs from societal challenges (Foot & Hopkins, 2010). Asset-mapping can also bring a level of equilibrium to the work that is done to generate data about mitigating challenges, whilst it may also expose disparities that individuals may have as a result of individuals having varied access to resources, and it may probe unfair allocation of scarce resources (Foot, 2012). In the present study, asset-mapping is seen as a tool in identifying most fitting asset-indicators aimed at enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology. Additionally, asset-mapping may also assist in focusing on strategies that are proven to be successful in the communities, so that the stakeholders would not have to waste time investing on futile techniques.

(ii) *Participatory appraisal*

Another method of identifying assets is participatory appraisal. The main feature of participatory appraisal, according to Foot and Hopkins (2010) is that it seeks to train the community to research the views, knowledge and the experiences of their vicinity to inform their future. This method may also be used to research needs, priorities, and

to gather information about local skills, talents and resources in line with the values of the asset-based approach. Participatory appraisal is also recommended by Rakodi (2009) to increase skills, knowledge, and trust within the community. Berbes-Blazquez (2012) declares that this method aims to meaningfully engage people in the community and to ensure that their views are heard and taken into consideration. Furthermore, participatory appraisal is known to be an approach that is extensive and empowering, while aiming to encourage collective community action (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Rakodi (2014) asserts that participatory appraisal is a method that enables citizens to pinpoint their priorities and take sound decisions about their future. These citizens are trained through the participatory appraisal method to include diversity views and expertise while they scrutinise gathered information concerning their needs and their priorities (Berbés-Blazquez, 2012). It is further argued that when participatory appraisal is conducted correctly, it is inclusive of all the participants, while empowering them in a non-rigid manner (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). While participatory appraisal is said to have the ability to aid community researchers to generate knowledge that is vastly trustworthy, it is also able to assist citizens to detect and to solve even their deepest challenges faced in the community (Berbés-Blazquez, 2012).

*(iii) The anticipated outcomes of participatory appraisal*

Participatory appraisal is used when experts place value on the experiences and opinions of citizens, and when the experts are willing to provide the citizens an opportunity to take charge of the research study (Foot, 2012). It is also suggested by Foot and Hopkins (2010) that if citizens have been adequately trained to carry out participatory appraisal, this skill remains to utilise in the future. Participatory appraisal is also known for offering trustworthy mapping of knowledge and being a resourceful measure for aiding decision-making in the community (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). In the current study, participatory appraisal produced empowered participants who have the ability to examine and solve their societal challenges themselves, while strengthening their relationships amongst the citizens who are stakeholders within the study. Furthermore, this method may become an asset for the citizens within the ecology to make use of in the future when they face societal challenges and want to resolve them.

(iv) *Appreciative inquiry*

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) elucidate that the method of identifying assets is termed as appreciative inquiry as it refers to a process of appreciating assets and triumphs from the history of groups or a community, and through conversing about positivity, as opposed to the negativity within the community. Appreciative inquiry is concerned with questioning the existence of assets such as knowledge, support and passion, while it also focuses on realising and nurturing innovations through collecting optimistic outcomes and good relations (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Appreciative inquiry is said to focus on the experiences and the triumphs of the past as these are utilised to realise attainable visions for the future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In breaking down appreciative inquiry according to Preskill and Catsambas (2006), it comprises of storytelling, world café approach, and open space technology.

Storytelling is regarded as an informal appreciative method of generating knowledge regarding the individuals' own involvements in fruitful initiatives, achievements and what they wished for (Foot & Hopkins, 2010). Telling stories from the past, together with qualitative data may be regarded as proof (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). In addition, storytelling may also be regarded as a significant method for comprehending and sharing ways in which assets influence the welfare of the community. It is also seen as being a technique that is engaging, vitalising and that which could be encouraging to network between individuals from various upbringings (Bushe, 2011). The second approach is the world café approach which it uses relaxed settings for members to make discoveries using conversations in small gatherings. The central postulation of this approach is that individuals tend to feel more creative and at ease in relaxed environments, thus this interactive arrangement method resembles a café setting as it encourages more easy-going conversations to prosper (Steier, Brown, & Mesquita da Silva, 2015).

The third approach according Holman, Devane and Cady (2007) is called the "open space technology" approach and it is anchored from a belief that meetings held in a circle are a more fruitful for inspiring sincerity and fair interaction. The approach creates room for people from different backgrounds to work in accordance on hard and real-life issues in an advanced manner (Holman et al., 2007). While this approach

permits members to be familiar of the outcomes, and to be comfortable in strengthening the working relationships of individuals, it is said to be subtly controlling to the members, while it creates easy and flowing conversations amongst individuals who share a common concern (Holman et al., 2007).

(v) *The anticipated outcomes of appreciative enquiry*

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) elucidate that appreciative enquiry has five phases: discovering and appreciating positive things in a community, envisioning conceivable prospects, engaging in conversations, conversing and sharing discoveries, and generating the future through innovation and action. Appreciative inquiry is centred on what was successful in the past as it aids in delivering common goals about enhanced relations. It is expected in the current study that participatory appraisal would allow individuals with common interests within the ecology to work in collaboration by drawing on the positives of the ecology rather than the disappointments, since it is said to be centred on allowing people to be expressive about their experiences especially useful to the marginalised groups. Once assets have been identified, they need to be harnessed and be brought into service.

### **2.3.2.6. Methods of mobilising assets and their anticipated outcomes**

Daly and Westwood (2018) explain that during the phase of asset mobilising, the parties utilise their “un-identified” assets. This phase is said to heighten the efficiency and control of the asset-based approach as the motives behind the mobilisation of assets is to build partnerships and strengthen relationships that promotes the processes involved (Alevizou, Alevizou, & Zamenopoulos, 2016).

In the current study, the phase of mobilising assets was exploited as it was believed to grant the parties an opportunity to create relations to strengthen partnerships in the school as well as in the community, and it was hoped that it offered an opportunity for parties to work in collaboration while managing their assets efficiently.



### *a. Asset-based community development*

Asset-based community development is not motivated by external agencies, rather it is community driven by sustainable development that initiate locating and making an inventory of assets, skills, capacities, emerging relations, and constructing future goals (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008; McKnight, 2010). This method termed asset-based community development according to Mathie and Cunningham (2008), is centred on the principles of appreciating and mobilising individuals as well as community talents, skills and assets. It is said to be a process of self-mobilisation, strategising and transformation. It strengthens the skills of citizens and it draws upon the existing potentials to develop even stronger ones to create sustainable communities for the future (McKnight, 2010). Also, asset-based community development is believed to be an approach that produces self-development (Foot & Hopkins, 2010).

### *b. The anticipated outcomes of community development*

This approach boosts the self-belief of communities such that they own the ability to positively contribute to their communities rather than relying on outside help for development, while they also develop confidence to engage in collaborative relations with agencies (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). In addition, Foot and Hopkins (2010) stress that this method empowers communities to utilise their own resources and assets in a manner that is advantageous to them, while it also places them in a stronger position to access extra resources and to place those assets on operative and maintainable use.

### *c. Time banking*

The rudimentary belief behind time banking is that everyone has something to offer; it could be their time, talent, gifts or their resources (Dash & Sandhu, 2018; Ozanne, 2010). In essence, Marks (2012) likens time banking to the Biblical notion of “love thy neighbor”. In relation to the current study, it was hoped that time banking would permit individual parties within the ecology to gather and assist one another, while they sustain the formation of relations and systems that mould their own community.

#### *d. The anticipated outcomes of time banking*

Mathie and Cunningham (2008) explain that since time banking involves shared volunteered arrangements using time as an exchange, it will permit the participants to invest their time by giving practical assistance and support to others; while other individuals would utilise their time when they require something to be done themselves. In addition, Timlon and Figueira (2018) assert that time banks measure and appreciate all the various kinds of skills that citizens share - all individuals become both the receiver as well as giver of time. Everyone's time was equally valued irrespective of the type of skills they offer. The time broker on the other hand is expected to manage the placement of the newly involved members and to support members to recognise what they can contribute in their community endeavours (Siegel, 2005). Moreover, Timlon and Figueira, (2018) explain that time banks bind the skills and the time of the members, while they provide applicable means of assisting individuals to come up with related networks of support that result in building functional communities.

#### *e. Co-production*

Stephens, Ryan-Collins and Boyle (2008) argue that while co-production corresponds with asset-based approaches, it is also dependent on them, as co-production is based on the acknowledgement that if organisations are to fruitfully provide services, then they must have a clear understanding of the users' needs and involve them in activities of designing and delivering according to those needs. According to Needham and Carr (2009), co-production encompasses individuals who make use of the services as well as those who provide the resources. Stephens et al. (2008) state that the essential features of co-production typify the asset-based approaches' beliefs such as seeing people as assets, appreciating work differently, encouraging people so that they share and develop mutual trust, while kindling a social network. In other words, all individuals in the ecology where the study is set, were assets instead of spectators, and the focus was on building the community's readily available resources, efforts and assets, while encouraging reciprocity, mutual respect, trust and diversity. Moreover, co-production is reported to work best when working with minor populations such as the

neighbourhood or those members within the community who are affected by a certain service or service-provider (Needham & Carr, 2009).

*f. The anticipated outcomes of co-production*

Engaging with co-production means including those who are affected by service or decisions at any phase; it means that the individual's uniqueness is embraced as assets or talents and not seen as awkward or strange (Slay & Robinson, 2011). Basically, all individuals are treated as equals irrespective of their disability, education, status or beliefs. Those individuals in the ecology who are usually seen as "strange" such as the traditional healers, were embraced, respected and their efforts and opinions considered. In the same light, Stephens et al. (2008) concurs that co-production illuminates the vision and the proficiency of those who benefit from public services as it allows service-users to work in collaboration and to learn from one another as it boosts confidence, skills and ambition amongst the participants. Needham and Carr (2009) add that co-production is useful for neighborhood decision-making and for guaranteeing that public services are intended for the needs of the users.

*g. Participatory budgeting*

Harkins and Egan (2012) see participatory budgeting as being an activity of citizens agitating to efficiently meet the urgent needs of the community. Participatory budgeting is perceived as a way of directly involving citizens in the decision-making process regarding the funds that are used in their own community as it is seen as a more meaningful way instead of the usual meeting processes (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006). Participatory budgeting is regarded as an excellent technique (Sabel & Reddy, 2007) as it emphasises transparency, responsibility and social inclusion in the governmental local affairs since it is designed to suit all contextual conditions. For the current study, this mode may guarantee that citizens in the ecology have a reasonable chance to contribute and to air their thoughts. Involving citizens to have a say about their communities' spending and priorities, involves them in the process of monitoring the outcomes of alleviating societal challenges, since they were given time and they invited to participate.

#### *h. The anticipated outcomes of participatory budgeting*

Harkins and Egan (2012) argue that when participatory budgeting is correctly managed, it encourages collaborative working and democratic processes to move from elected to a directed form, since it moves the power from the Government to the actual citizens by providing a realistic instrument to mobilise assets while strengthening community empowerment. In the same light, Alsop et al. (2006) assert that participatory budgeting supports reasonable public spending, increases satisfaction of basic needs and results in increased levels of public participation. This technique has also been lauded for showing human capital benefit, such as bringing together individuals from various backgrounds, and boosting self-confidence amongst individuals to resolve their community problems with advanced consultative skills (Harkins & Egan, 2012).

#### **2.3.2.7. The relationship between the researcher and the researched according to the asset-based approach**

Since the asset-based approach is relationship-ambitious, the significance of relationship kindling is imperative as there are several conflicting aspects between individuals who have been identified for participation. Accordingly, Ebersöhn and Eloff, (2006) assert that the asset-based approach warns against participants being “used” like in most initiatives where participants have sensed that they were being subjects of study by strangers rather than being participants who act as co-researchers. Additionally, the researched according to the asset-based approach are not regarded as participants who need to be researched, but as individuals who need to be guided and liberated to take charge of their lives and become “heroes” (Vargas-Hernández & Noruzi, 2010).

Moreover, the role of the researcher involves helping the researched to appreciate and use their gifts and assets by providing them with knowledge that they do not have by helping them establish social support networks (Montoya & Kent, 2011). Haines (2018) adds that the researcher empowers participants by guiding them to gain access to funding and capacitating them to utilise the funding according to their own urgencies, while eradicating system barriers amongst people in the community. However, Stoecker (2012) argues that the relationship between the researcher and

the researched should be based on individual capabilities and gifts, but never on people's challenges or weaknesses.

### **2.3.2.8 The Relevance of the Asset-based Approach to the Current Study**

The current study is transformative in nature since one of its main objective is to bring about transformation in a rural context using the asset-based approach as an appropriate theoretical framework as a vehicle for driving change in rural communities. In support, Khanare (2009) maintains that the asset-based approach advocates that people (especially in the rural communities) should be drawing from their inherent capacities, skills and social resources to mitigate their societal challenges. Hence, the current study focuses on how the relevant stakeholders within the ecology can draw from their innate abilities, social wealth and assets within the environment to transform and augment the type of learning that is sustainable for those learners who are susceptible to adverse environments.

Loots et al., (2012) views the asset-based approach as a platform where individuals' capacities in the community (such as their talents, skills and gifts) are conducive to the development of the community members themselves. It was hoped that the emancipation of those learners who were seen as vulnerable created an opportunity for the relevant stakeholders within the community to be conscious of their own assets that may be utilised towards the enhancement of their own learning. Moreover, in the current study it was anticipated that the assets that are already possessed by the relevant stakeholders within the school and community, stimulate self-sufficiency.

In addition, Odendaal (2006) declares that central to the asset-based approach is the optimistic mind shift which is fostered via the asset-based approach that focuses on talents, associational life and societal empowerment. Thus, the asset-based approach is a relevant theory in framing the study towards enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology. Individuals within communities need to shift from their traditional means of doing things which dwells on the negatives and focus on the positive and innovative means of mitigating their situational challenges. Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon (2015) posit that the asset-based approach provides innovative, advanced and unlimited means of transforming societies. In this regard,

relative to the current study, this approach which is used as a second theoretical framework guiding the study, encouraged and enabled the relevant stakeholders to provide quality learning for the vulnerable learners. While, they came up with innovative and relevant strategies to be collaborated into a framework, regardless of them residing in a rural context which is under-serviced by Government. Whilst, the asset-based approach is popular for its indiscriminate nature (McKnight, 2010), this means that it is a method that is applicable across the board for helping professionals such as teachers, social workers and medical practitioners (Foot & Hopkins, 2012). The current study used the asset-based approach to reduce criticism of other professions such as that of the traditional healers or priests.

Further, Ferreira (2013) asserts that as a framework, the asset-based approach serves as a guide to recognise challenges and provide opportunities of transforming societies by overcoming challenges from the inside-out. This process comprises of pinpointing the assets within the community and “predicting” the possible challenges or hindrances which can be obviated by the involvement and commitment of stakeholders.

This study uses the asset-based approach as a theoretical framework to inspire the relevant stakeholders to take note of their existing talents and resources, to build on them, and take advantage of them towards bringing about positive change in mitigating their challenges, instead of waiting for external assistance. While the relevance for engaging the asset-based approach as a second theory underpinning the study is recognised, the relevance for integrating it with the collaboration theory still needs further clarification.

#### **2.3.2.9. The relevance for merging the collaboration theory with the asset-based approach**

This study seeks to understand the process of rural community transformation by focusing on the enhancement of sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners through joining forces with individuals in the community and making them aware of their readily available assets and gifts. The enhancement of sustainable learning is seen as something that could be achieved through collaboration using the asset-based approach as a joint strategy. Both these theories are not merely idyllic for maintaining

quality learning for vulnerable learners in the rural ecology, but they may also be viewed as tools in overcoming the challenges of rural communities.

Collaboration on its own as a framework (for this study) may leave individuals believing that sharing visions and working towards a common goal will solve their societal challenges, or that merely by joining forces all will fall into place. However, through the use of the collaboration theory in conjunction with the asset-based approach, practical means of attaining common goals, are more easily achieved. The idea that the community is already in possession of valuable and tangible assets which they may use collaboratively, is more readily acceptable for enhancing sustainable learning concerning vulnerable learners in the ecology.

This “merger” is further seen as significant as individuals and groups in the community regardless of their settings, strengths and capacities to withstand societal challenges, are seen as significant contributors (Mnyende, 2015). Hence, both theories connect cohesively, as collaboration is based on a belief that individuals achieve more in groups rather than as individuals, while their realisation and utilisation of their already owned assets would in fact result in them eventually attaining their goals.

Moreover, this study uses the asset-based approach as a management strategy that can enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in the rural ecology. In accordance, Myende (2015) asserts that the fundamental belief of the asset-based approach is that humans and groups in the society all have abilities and strengths to address societal challenges - if the talents of individuals are considered, then they are most likely to optimistically contribute towards the growth and emancipation of their society. Verbeij (2013) uses the concept of “half-full glass” instead of “half-empty glass” to explain hope and determination behind the asset-based approach on community development. In relation to the current study, it is hoped that a framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology will be formulated through using these theories. The recognition of the communities’ existing resources and efforts that may be collaborated into a framework which may be utilised to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology, is crucial towards alleviating challenges in the community. It was further anticipated that drawing on efforts and ideas from the various stakeholders within the

ecology, encouraged community-unanimity among the stakeholders, while it promoted community independence rather than seeking outside help (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006).

Using asset-based approaches acknowledges rural ecologies as spaces in possession of rich resources (Khanare, 2009). Thus, collaboration as a complementing theory does not only acknowledge rural dwellings as rich contexts but also guides on how to make use of the existing resources. Moreover, the individual attributes of the collaboration theory and those of the asset-based approaches allow both the theories to share common aspects which are critical in framing the study. Also, the theory advocates that conflict is not a bad occurrence as it is a sign that constructive work is being done and therefore results are anticipated (Salmon, 2007). Since conflict in communities is mostly blamed on hierarchy, asset-based approaches on the other hand, declares that community transformation is the responsibility of that community.

Furthermore, the collaboration theory and the asset-based approaches have been painted as strategies whereby the parties are equal partners. As a result, the attributes of both the theories troubles the notion of power-dynamics between the rural dwellers and the researchers. The practice of rural communities becoming significant active partners specifically towards mitigating societal challenges is emancipation in action. In support of this, Brandolini et al., (2010) claims that asset-based approaches tenaciously go against the sidelining of those individuals within the community who are disempowered and who are regarded as less important. The fundamental principle of this approach states that emancipatory initiatives should actually place the marginalised and the vulnerable individuals at the centre of the initiatives. A similar contention is highlighted within the collaboration theory which explains that when pertinent individuals are brought together and who possess adequate knowledge, they come up with meaningful and creative ideas towards alleviating their challenges, regardless of their power or position in the ecology (Salmon, 2007).

Braithwaite (2009) stresses the importance of the ability of communities to act on their difficulties to create strategies that are productive, which are not necessarily “quick fixes” but rather those that are sustainable over a long period. It is thus apparent that theoretical triangulation between the collaboration theory and the asset-based



approach was appropriate as both the theories are centred on the view that different individuals within the ecology are in possession of the ability to share common ground, and share power with the help of their existing gifts and assets to jointly innovate towards transforming their own societies.

Furthermore, the relevance of collaborating both theories also rests on their complementary nature. McKnight (2010) postulates that the asset-based approach is a bottom-up approach and it moves the focus from a service perspective towards an empowerment perspective. In addition, the fusion of the collaboration theory with the asset-based approach was an ideal framework for the study as they both provided opportunities for those individuals in the community who are not normally given a platform in educational matters such as the traditional healers. Also, the collaboration theory is central to the idea that when individuals work in collaboration, they are able to produce successful and meaningful outcomes while setting their differences aside. The isiZulu proverb “*amasongo akhala kahle uma emaningi*” (bangles make a beautiful sound when they are more than one), is appropriate here as the asset-based approach granted all relevant parties in the community control for the benefit of the community itself. In support of this Khanare (2012) claims that there is an existence of strong relations amongst the talents and resources that are deeply rooted within every human being that may be of use for the smooth functioning of the school and the community.

## **2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter collaboration theory and the asset-based approach were presented as the two theories that formed the theoretical framework which underpinned this study. Since this chapter focused on laying out the theoretical framework, it commenced with a concise explanation of what the term theoretical framework means in a research study. Thereafter, a conceptualisation of the operational concepts within the study was done. This was followed by a discussion on the theories that underpinned the study's theoretical framework, where the relevance of each theory was dissected. The chapter concluded by declaring the significance of both collaboration and the asset-based approach. The succeeding chapter (3) presents literature that was consulted regarding the objectives of the study.

# CHAPTER THREE

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter focused on exploring the concept of collaboration and that of the asset-based approach as the two idyllic theories that formed the theoretical framework which framed this study. This chapter is organised into four sections, which are directed at reviewing scholarly literature from the international, national as well as local contexts, as guided by the objectives of the study. Firstly, literature based on the situational analysis will be delved into, and this concerns current understandings of rural ecologies, the lives of vulnerable learners in such settings, highlighting their adversities and their causes. Then, the efforts which have been put in place towards rooting out these adversities in order sustain learning for the vulnerable learners will be explained. The second section of the chapter will tackle literature which points towards the necessity for a collaborative framework. This will be carried out through exploring the demands for having such a framework, the role that this framework will play, as well as the significance of having such a framework in place. Cascading from the second section of the chapter, the third section analyses literature concerning the crucial elements essential for collaborative strategies which are believed to enhance sustainable learning for learners facing adversities in rural settings. The fourth section of this chapter taps into literature that brings to light the threats that have been raised globally, which may pose as hindrances towards the proper functioning of strategic operations that alleviate adversities faced by learners. Conspicuously, the later is achieved through reconnoitring the accounts of utilising such a framework within the academic field as well as from other fields. The last section of the chapter summarises all information in this chapter.

### 3.2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN RURAL ECOLOGIES

Situational analysis in research studies is used to refer to the general state of things or a combination of circumstances occurring at a given time (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2017). Additionally, Clarke and Friese (2007) elucidate that situational analysis is used to define and interpret the state of the environment, person, situation

or organization. Hence, the situational analysis of vulnerable learners in rural ecologies will conceptualise the notion of rural ecologies, including investigating the lives of vulnerable learners in rural settings by highlighting their current adversities, the causes of these adversities as well as the interventions or efforts that have been implemented to eradicate these adversities.

### **3.2.1. The Concept of Rural Ecologies**

The concept of rural ecologies still eludes many since the concept in its totality is equivocal and it is context-subjective, hence no solid definition has been formally reached. Notably, within the context of South Africa, there are multifarious settings that exist within the country which are influenced by the diverse cultural, economic and educational factors which are to be considered as they influence the definition of rural ecology (Hall et al., 2006). While some researchers utilise the word rural ecology synonymously with terms such as villages and farms, others refer to it as solely those areas which are on the outskirts of towns (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). However, key features have been highlighted by various researchers such as Cromartie & Bucholtz (2008) and Hall et al. (2006) who explain that rural ecologies are remote from towns, they mostly have inadequate or dilapidated schools, roads, bridges clinics and other neglected community structures. In addition, they often lack or have inadequate access to information, technology, tapped-water, electricity, transportation and sanitation, which are part of the struggle in rural ecologies. Further, services such as education, tertiary, health and entertainment are often out of reach. Also, activities of political and civil society organisations are often unheard of in rural ecologies (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008).

### **3.2.2. The Lives of Vulnerable Learners in Rural Ecologies**

The concepts of rural ecologies and that of vulnerable learners is interconnected due to common prevalent challenges which impinge simultaneously on the progress of both (Pillay, 2012; Wood & Goba, 2011). Based on this situation, and for the purpose of this study, the term *vulnerable learner* is used to refer to those learners within the rural context who face any kind of adversity which may impede or disrupt their learning. Within rural South African contexts, copious socio-economic, infrastructural and other resource barriers have been reported to hinder the adequate care of children. For most

learners, when the school bell rings for going home, children of all ages are expected to take extremely long walks back home, wash their school uniform, prepare their own meals (if available) before sundown, and by the time they have to focus on their homework they are already too exhausted. In a nutshell, this sums up the daily routine of most learners in rural settings.

### **3.2.2.1. Vulnerabilities of learners which impede learning**

Adversities faced by learners from the rural contexts are reported to hold much more devastating effects on their learning due to their environment being mostly economically disadvantaged and developmentally backward (Bennard, Wilson, Ferguson, & Sliger, 2004; Milton, 2019). However, literature indicates that learners from rural contexts face many obstacles which are similar to their urban counterparts, only that the damage is much more devastating in rural sectors. Nevertheless, some of the adversities that are faced by learners who reside within the rural ecology may be categorised into parental neglect of their children's school lives, impoverishment, inadequate resources, shared time, homophobia, racism and religious inflexibilities.

#### *a. Parental neglect on learners' school lives*

Lack of parental involvement has been argued through existing literature to hold quite a serious disadvantage and exacerbates vulnerability amongst learners who reside within the rural settings (Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). In accordance, UNICEF (2015) reported that in Haiti 90% of children get enrolled in schools but more than half of them repeat grades and end up dropping out before completing primary school (Hawke, 2015). The high percentage of learner drop-out in Haiti is claimed to be connected to the lack of parental involvement (Gregoire, 2010; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Validating this, are recommendations of a study that was conducted in a number of rural homes in Haiti, which suggested that, in order to avoid learner vulnerability in schools and to enhance academic performance, parents must engage themselves in their children's school activities by monitoring and supervising school work at home, and attending parent-meetings at school (Hoffman, 2012). This lack is believed to be influenced by the parental views and cultural beliefs (Coleman, 2018). Similarly, in Asia, studies there indicated that most learners did

not complete schooling as many of their parents did not strengthen communication between themselves and their children's teachers by attending school meetings and participating in school activities (Hoskins, 2014).

The lack of parental involvement as contributory factor towards learner vulnerability obstructing academic achievement was assumed as an international problem. A study that involved a number of Zimbabwean parents in Zaka District revealed that parents did not see school education as a priority because they believed that children learned everything they needed to know about life by working in their homes as well as on the farms (Chindanya, 2011). As a result, most Zimbabwean parents in Zaka District do not prioritise school education, teaching their girl children to take care of the home, preparing for marriage and to bear children, while boys were taught specifically about working on the farm in order to support their families (Chindanya, 2011). Similarly, Muchuchuti (2016) maintained that some learners' education was disrupted as parents often pulled their children out of school so that they could help on the farm during school hours, hence they missed out on a lot of schoolwork. Furthermore, these parents were reported to offer little support regarding school-related issues, as a result there was an increasing number of learners who are becoming academically unsuccessful (Muchuchuti, 2016). In confirmation, the outcomes of another study which was conducted in the districts of Iganga and Mayuge in Uganda indicated that parents discouraged higher education learning, and this was evident in the extremely low rate of children who obtained tertiary qualification (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016).

Literature from other contexts, but conducted locally in the rural schools of Ngaka, Modiri and Molem in South Africa, North West Province, revealed that parents failed to contribute meaningfully to their children's education due to their own disadvantaged educational background (Matshe, 2014). Hence, parental non-involvement was believed to contribute towards the disruption of children's education process, and consequently their vulnerability (Matshe, 2014). In accordance, a researcher (Hamunyela, 2008) from the Free State, highlighted that parents did not involve themselves in their learners' education as they felt that the whole process was a waste of time and educational issues should be the prerogatives of professionals and must be left as such. Comparable attitudes were further reported from a study that was

conducted amongst 10 schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Mncube and Du Plessis (2011) reported that most parents in rural government schools were reluctant to participate in the decision-making processes as a result of their low academic levels and the power struggles within SGBs. This prevented the right and just decisions from being taken on behalf of the learners but instead contributed to the learners being vulnerable to unjust treatment from those who were educated and powerful in the community (Mncube & Du Plessis, 2011).

#### *b. Impoverishment*

While lack of parental involvement or neglect is discussed through existing literature as the most common type of vulnerability amongst learners residing within the rural contexts, the notion of impoverishment or poverty has also been highlighted as being a significant obstacle that hinders the smooth flow of the educational process for learners, especially those learners residing within the rural contexts.

Accordingly, literature that was drawn from Dalit, a rural community in Nepal that is amongst the least developed countries in Asia, revealed that vulnerable learners were those school children who experienced the greatest form of poverty, with limited food, lack of tapped-water and no electricity (Khanal, 2015). In addition, this type of impoverishment amongst learners is mostly accompanied by a plethora of other challenges which does not only negatively impact on the learners' academic work, but also limits their ability to participate in extramural activities as well as other general school youth entertainment activities (Khanal, 2015). Similar views of perceiving poverty as a major challenge amongst learners was indicated in Gorman's work, which stated that the excessive Cambodian learner drop-out rate to be directly linked to the high poverty rate in the area (Gorman, 2017). Also, UNICEF (2014) reported that 79 percent of the population in Cambodia is said to be living in the rural areas devastated by high poverty levels. However, with similar scenarios, a group of Pakistani parents, had academically successful children despite adverse conditions in the area. These parents accredited their children's academic resilience to be highly connected to their parents displaying positive regard and high expectations from their children (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq, & Berhanu, 2011). The Pakistani parents further explained that they could also afford to provide their children with conveniences such as books, food,

clothing as well as modern technologies which enhanced academic attainment as they were not poverty-stricken like other parents in the area (Farooq et al., 2011). In support, Dixon-Mueller (2013) contended that the cost of attending schools in rural contexts is often higher than in urban areas. At the same time, most households in the rural areas relied on children for assistance during the harvesting periods of the year (Dixon-Mueller, 2013).

Additionally, in the rural context of Mpumalanga Province, research amongst learners between the ages of 12 and 15 suggested that those who came from poor families were the same ones who were also at a grave disadvantage in terms of their ability to academically succeed (Motale, 2014). In the same light, Mchunu's study on parental involvement and academic achievement in a few schools in Johannesburg implied that no matter how much parents were involved in their children's school life, their state of poverty negatively impacted on their children's academic achievement. This according to Mchunu (2012) was due to their inability to afford the necessities that are vital in meeting the academic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and schoolbooks.

### *c. Scarcity of resources, technology and communication*

While the notion of impoverishment and that of scarcity of resources is mostly inseparable within the rural contexts (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2013), various studies indicate that most rural schools in South Africa are known for lacking in resources, technology as well as communication (Du Plessis, 2014; Mestry, 2018; Stelmach & Cowley, 2016). This shows that schools within the rural areas are associated with high numbers of vulnerable learners which is due to inadequate school resources as they are distant from towns and are known to lack access to information technology.

Moreover, teachers from rural Manila in the Philippines, complained about working with at-risk learners with very few of the necessary resources to support them (Boquet, 2017). Hence, these teachers were demotivated to support needy learners as they often had to pay out of their own meagre pockets to assist needy learners (Boquet, 2017).

In Uganda, research revealed that the socio-economic realities of rural areas created and often heightened vulnerability amongst learners from rural settings. Wood and Goba (2011) narrated that many learners in rural Uganda were known not to have access to internet in their schools as well as in the homes. Subsequently, a majority of learners in the rural areas of Singida, in Tanzania were reported to be at a disadvantage when they were compared to those learners from the urban areas as they were handicapped as far as searching for resources and academic information, exacerbated by the lack of IT networks in the areas (Lekule, 2014).

A study in Mpumalanga that aimed at exploring the rural features which contributed to academic disruption pointed towards a lack of basic infrastructure, sanitation, electricity, water, books, information and communication technology as being the major hindrances in successful academic attainment (Condy & Blease, 2014). Furthermore, Tuswa (2016) asserts that vulnerable learners in KwaZulu-Natal's rural communities lacked professional support, governance structures and learning materials essential for obtaining adequate academic support.

#### *d. Shared time*

Despite the unfortunate situation of inadequate resources in rural schools, most learners from such contexts are further victims of their contexts. In other words, many of them must share their school time with household chores including subsistence farming which is their source of survival. Regrettably, this practice of shared time places strain on their academic work in and out of school.

Similarly, a study on rural labour migration in China indicated that children were forced to do household chores at a very young age which left them exhausted to adequately complete their school-related tasks (Jingzhong & Lu, 2011). Also in rural Tanzania, learners shared their academic contact time with harvest time as learners had to be pulled out from schools to work on the farms for the survival of their families (Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba, & Stones, 2010). In other cases, learners had household chores before and after school which left them extremely fatigued to concentrate on their academic work (Wamoyi et al., 2010). Within the context of Kwazulu-Natal learners shared-time was narrated in the form of long walks as well drives to and from



schools, as most schools in rural settings were located at a distance from their dwellings (Duma, 2015). In some cases the long walks to and from home left learners vulnerable to other dangers such as rapes, being attacked by wild animals, drowning in rivers (sometimes swollen by floods) as they had to cross them to get home due to the lack of roads, attacks by crocodiles, and dangers in forests (Burdick-Will, Stein, & Grigg, 2019). In other cases, learning time was shared as rural South African communities are known for not having a supply of piped water in close proximity to their homes, which resulted in daily activities of learners being centred on the collection of water which is mostly time consuming and strenuous for the learners, who end up focusing less on school work (Moletsane, 2012).

#### *e. Social exclusion and homophobia*

The notion of social exclusion is another form of vulnerability that was reported as being common amongst learners who resided within the rural communities and which disrupted their learning process. This phenomenon mainly emanated from the stigma and discrimination against learners because of their extreme poverty which made them appear as different from most learners (Nyabanyaba, 2009). Also, Lekules' study in Singida, Tanzania exposed that in some rural and poverty stricken communities, some learners were even discriminated against because they were labelled as they received Government social grants, while the rest of the community members were struggling to make ends meet (Lekule, 2014). Further, Sukati (2013) explained that learner-social-exclusion within the community as well as in the school sector was also due to disinformation about the issue of HIV and AIDS, adding that these negative constructions rendered them susceptible to "deviant" community members which led to dropping-out from school as they feared being ridiculed and bullied.

In Swaziland, according to Nxumalo, Okeke and Mamen (2014), some high school learners who were homosexuals (as well as those who displayed queer social behaviours), were also subjected to unjust treatment because they were different from the norm; and this was due to the lack of knowledge, understanding and appreciation for these children who were oppressed by societal expectations and power hierarchies within the community; as a result such learners often felt unloved and had low self-

esteem, thus they stayed away from school as a safeguard to protect themselves, but they missed out on their schoolwork. Joyce and Logan (2018) further elucidate that, while poverty-stricken children were often isolated and seen as a burden by family members, due to their lack of financial resources, these children were further isolated and neglected in the community as they did not have proper clothing and school uniforms like the other children (Joyce & Logan, 2009). In addition, Wood and Goba's study also revealed that some children who were different due to AIDS stigmatisation, were further discriminated against by the people in the community (Wood & Goba, 2011).

#### *f. Religious inflexibilities*

The notion of religious inflexibilities was another issue which challenged the quality of learning for those residing within the rural areas (Moran, Abramson, & Moran, 2014). In elaboration, a research study that was conducted in a rural area in Kwazulu-Natal, revealed that most parents felt uneasy with their children being taught about issues which conflicted with their religious beliefs; for instance, some parents did not believe that their children should be taught about the process of human reproduction (De Reus, Hanass-Hancock, Henken, & Brakel, 2015). Other parents, according to Ngcobo and Tikly (2016), felt what was learnt at school contradicted their family religious belief (e.g. the rain was a gift from a god called Nomkhulwane and floods are as a result coming from an angry god), and geography (climatology) conflicts with traditional explanations. The same was reported for other explanations concerning evolution and biology. Such divergences between religious beliefs and scientific explanations created uncertainty, confusion and enhanced vulnerability on the part of the learner (Lederman, 2013).

#### **3.2.2.2. Contributors of vulnerabilities**

Chambers (2014) believes that vulnerabilities amongst children from the rural settings are excessively present amongst those children who attend school than those who do not. In other words, children who attend school face twice as many demands and trauma which comes from the various environments: home, school and the community. Literature highlights a myriad of vulnerabilities of learners who reside

within the rural contexts which originates mostly from the home, the community and the school sector.

*a. Hindrances to successful learning home environments*

Nelson and Christensen (2009) assert that a child's academic time does not commence when the child enters the school environment and ends when the school hours are over; it goes way beyond the child's school setting - to their home as well as to their community.

Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (2017) assert that obstacles to learning in the home environment in most rural settings often contribute towards learner vulnerability in terms of academic disruption. In addition, some learners in rural dwellings are prone to vulnerability and their quality of learning is troubled due to them being exposed to food insecurities and malnutrition (resulting in illnesses), all of which are seen as negatives impeding learners' opportunity to acquire quality learning. Also, the findings of Nelson and Christensen (2009) imply that most academically unsuccessful learners in rural settings come from home environments which are dysfunctional, characterised by disorderly behaviours such as substance and sexual abuse, domestic violence, loud music which is uncondusive to studying, drunkenness and the use of unsavoury language. In Mishra's (2015) work, it was found that some learners claimed to be sent out by their parents to beg in the streets and sometimes to sell goods in order to support the family (Mishra, 2015). Such home environments of displacement lead to uncaring and exploitative behaviour which worsens vulnerability amongst children especially robbing them of schooling opportunities.

*b. Unfavorable child-rearing practices and parents' negative influences*

In Asia, low-income settings exhibited negative child-rearing practices which perpetuated learner vulnerability. While some parents were reported to being extremely permissive (or extremely authoritative), others displayed little parental encouragement and motivation towards their children to attend school (Engle, Fernald, Alderman, Behrman, O'Gara, Yousafzai, & Iltus, 2011).

Parents in rural areas were often known for having low levels of education, thus they placed little value on education and had no reason to motivate their young ones to achieve academically (Engle et al., 2011). Parents were accused of not engaging in their learners' school life and not understanding the challenges that learners faced within the school sector, exacerbated by their parents not checking and helping with schoolwork (Wamoyi et al., 2010). Learners expressed the fact that they knew that their parents were poor hence did not expect them to support them financially, but the parents were further reported to not having time to assist their children nor showing any compassion and caring towards them which propelled them into a state of hopelessness (Wamoyi et al., 2010).

Similar scenarios of not motivating children to go to school were also shared within the South African contexts. In a study conducted in Mpumalanga, South Africa, it was exposed and profoundly claimed that the parents' illiteracy was due to the country's past apartheid system which stifled parents' access to opportunities, development and resources (Du Plessis, 2014); which had a cascading effect into present day anomalies and will most probably influence future progress of Black rural communities and their quality of education. Furthermore, Hart (2013) added that the circumstance of inadequate support and of overworking the children, contributed in the learners becoming more vulnerable, while their ability to obtain quality education becomes bleak. Hart (2013) advises that exploitation of children to perform any labour that is not supportive to their developmental rights as children such as their education, is deemed as damaging and unjust to the child; and such actions cannot be vindicated by any cultural or moral principle.

### *c. Parents' upbringing and their level of education*

Although the way children are reared has a significant impact on the quality of learning for learners residing within the rural settings, Dubow, Huesmann, Boxer, Smith, Landau, Dvir-Gvirsman and Shikaki (2019) claimed that parents' level of education and the way they have been brought up is instrumental when it comes to children's behaviour and their educational performance. Accordingly, research indicates that there are specific traits of low-income families that contribute to low performance of learners; for instance, Ayoub, Gosling, Potter, Shanahan and Roberts (2018) believe

that parents' education level is connected to whether their offspring stays in school or not. While parents who are professionals mostly have a part in their children's' successful lives, who are more likely to complete school (Ayoub et al.,2018). De Neuborgh, Borghans, Coppens and Jansen (2018) maintain that low parent education level has been found to be associated with lower levels of academic achievements in their children. In accordance, Coleman and Stern (2018) argued that the neighbourhood that the learners reside in, and their school environment impact on their ability to maintain their educational journey till matric. Furthermore, their parents' occupation, economic status and level of education were proven factors in predicting the academic achievement of learners (Coleman & Stern, 2018).

Correspondingly, a study that was conducted in Pakistan, concluded that most educated parents had encouraging attitudes towards their children's academic success. The later was achieved by parents providing their children with conveniences as well as modern technologies for enhancing their academic attainment because they could afford them and because they understood their significance for success (Farooq et al., 2011).

In Kenya, a study there made unexpected revelations; less academically qualified parents had higher expectations for their children's future, thus they showed substantial involvement in their children's academic life despite their own low education (Achola & Pillai, 2016). Another African study which was conducted in Congo, explored the influences and impacts parents' educational level on the students' academic achievement at secondary level in rural contexts, and concluded that highly educated parents to an extent had more influence on their children's will to achieve and perform well in their studies (Khan, Iqbal, & Tasneem, 2015).

In South Africa, it was reported that more than 85% of Grade R learners are not learning in their home language and this situation continues through their school journey (Fleisch, 2008) making it even harder for the illiterate parents to help their children; and the situation becomes more complicated when parents understand that the LOLT of English is beneficial if one is to become globally relevant (Crystal, 2002). Contrastingly, the outcomes of a study that was conducted in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa which investigated how rural illiterate parents support their

children's academic life even when they were illiterate did not hold university degrees to simply converse with their children and motivate them (Bantwini & Feza, 2017). Not just any talk, reported Bantwini and Feza (2017), but two-way adult conversations, as these kinds of talks are believed to be six times more effective in promoting learning. In accordance, Hart (2013) asserted that, engaging in a reciprocal fashion allowed the children from lower-economic statuses to develop into self-assured individuals who went on to succeed by following their own interests and becoming useful members of the community, the country and the world (Hart, 2013).

#### *d. Absence of biological parents*

The absence of biological parents was also reported through existing literature to perpetuate vulnerability amongst learners who resided within the rural contexts hence, disrupting their learning process. Accordingly, a South African study that was conducted by Chuong and Operario (2012) revealed that the absence of biological parents due to parents migrating to cities, AIDS-related deaths, promiscuity, and parents moving-in with current partners leaving children at home with elderly grandparents and relatives, resulted in the disruption of the learning process. Aged people were not physically and mentally healthy to assist learners with schoolwork and engaging in their school related activities and that resulted in the children being vulnerable and their school progress being interrupted (Chuong & Operario, 2012).

In another study that was conducted in Malawi, relatives were reported to being uncaring, abusive and neglectful towards children in the absence of their biological parents, and this created emotional as well as academic turmoil amongst the learners (Mkandawire, 2018). The worst cases were reported of relatives seeking legal guardianship just so that they gain foster-care-money that was due to the orphaned children (Mkandawire, 2018). In the same way, a study that was conducted in Zimbabwe reported that academic disruption was perpetuated by orphanhood and child-headed households (Majero, 2018). In elaboration, orphanhood and child-headed homes resulted in children being physically as well as emotionally devastated, since such homes mostly had non-earners (e.g. old and sickly grandparents) making household income that catered for the needs of the whole family non-existent, such that children could not get basics especially school necessities, thus perpetuating the cycle of non-access to quality education (Majero, 2018).

In Asia, even single parenting may at times perpetuate vulnerability and disruption of learning amongst children. A study that was conducted by Paulsen (2018), its findings unearthed that female-headed households heightened the chances of vulnerability and increased chances of poor-quality learning amongst learners in the rural settings. Since females (unlike men who found single fathering not so much of a struggle) are believed to be vulnerable themselves due to multiple stressors such as single-child rearing and their perceived inability to physically protect their children from the harsh rural societies, let alone their conceived inability to secure jobs in rural settings (Paulsen, 2018).

*e. Low socio-economic status*

literature does not only highlight the dynamics within the home sector which perpetuate vulnerability amongst learners, but it also highlights the dynamics within the community sector such as the low socio-economic status of members within the community.

In Rwanda, it was revealed that amongst other causes of learner vulnerability which caused learners to stay away from school, was the issue of inadequate access to primary health care services. Accordingly, Basinga, Gertler, Binagwaho, Soucat, Sturdy and Vermeersch (2011) elucidate that many people in the rural areas of Rwanda did not have adequate and easy access to medical care and this was due to the location of community dwellings. Equivalent views were shared from a study that was conducted in rural Nigeria which pointed towards inadequate access to basic needs such as water, electricity and sanitation services within the area, as being amongst the major causes which impacted on the socio-economic status of most citizens thus heightening academic hardship for learners within the area (Oluwatayo, 2009). In elucidation, Oluwatayo (2009) explained that such academic hardship was due to the rural communities being marginalised from accessing basic services.

In addition, most rural households in Swaziland were further disadvantaged by not being connected to the electricity grid, thus the families relied on other sources of energy such as wood, gas, animal dung as well as paraffin. The lack of power

prevented learners from regularly attending school as most households were reliant on wood as a source of energy, thus they had to focus on obtaining wood or dung (Kanyoka, Farolfi, & Morardet, 2008). For those learners who got the chance to attend school, they are were not able to do homework and assignments, to bath, eat or to even wash their uniforms and they opted to stay away from school instead (Kanyoka et al., 2008). On the other end, Moletsane (2012) emphasised the issue of inadequate solid waste removal from human dwellings as being detrimental towards academic attainment; and that inadequate sanitation services resulted in serious threats to human health due to the spread of infectious diseases resulting in the learners being and staying away from school (Moletsane, 2012).

#### *f. Inclement climatic conditions*

The challenge of low community socio-economic status was further heightened by the unfavourable environmental stressors such as extreme heat and earthquakes which resulted in heat strokes, homelessness, waterborne diseases and increased malnutrition (Gurung, 2019). Morton (2007) argued that such conditions increased vulnerabilities within rural communities. The outcomes of another study which was conducted in a rural area in Nigeria revealed that the farming soil was not favourable to growing nutritious food which resulted in children being malnourished and ill, as a result they spent most of their learning time away from school while nursing their illnesses (Babatunde & Qaim, 2010).

In the context of South Africa, the natural disaster phenomenon of climate changes such as veldfires as well as the droughts had been reported in recent years which heightened vulnerability amongst people who resided within the rural contexts (Kelman, Gaillard, Lewis, & Mercer, 2016). In elaboration, these conditions left many citizens vulnerable due to damage and deaths (Kelman et al., 2016). The work of Morton (2007) revealed that droughts reduced both the subsistence and commercial farming production in most South African communities leading to the rise in poverty for most South African rural communities (Morton, 2007). Bowles, Butler and Morisetti (2015) maintain that climate changes resulted in most people experiencing hazardous exposure and inflicted multiple stressors, causing people to experience further poverty, ill-health as well as unemployment. Thus, the education attaining process was



also negatively impacted. Another South African study highlighted that most rural contexts have informal settlements which are built with improper building material that offer little protection against environmental risks such as heavy rains and flooding (Douglas, Alam, Maghenda, McDonnell, Mclean, & Campbell, 2008). These types of dwellings do not only perpetuate vulnerability amongst learners physically, but emotionally as well, since they live in constant fear of their houses collapsing with all their belongings (Douglas et al., 2008). Additionally, these dwellings have limited spaces for homework and study while they posed health risks to the inhabitants due to poor ventilation inside such dwellings (Douglas et al., 2008).

#### *g. Poor basic infrastructure and communication technology*

Communities in the remote and underdeveloped rural areas struggle to access quality services. Hence, many schools in rural communities are poor, disadvantaged, lacking basic infrastructure and communication technology. Generally, the socio-economic realities of rural life place learners from the rural schools at a disadvantage. Furthermore, research indicates that schools in rural areas are associated with high numbers (crowding) of vulnerable learners due to inadequate school resources (Stelmach & Cowley, 2016; Fontanella, Hiance- Steelesmith, Philips, Bridge, Lester, Sweeney, & Campo, 2015). In support, Mama and Hennessy (2013) report that according to their study which was conducted in Cyprus, rural schools lacked access to information technology as well as other school resources such as teaching aids, furniture and infrastructure which contributed to learners being vulnerable as they were unable to meet the educational demands. Similarly, a study that was conducted in rural Manila in the Philippines revealed that several teachers complained that they worked with at-risk learners with very few of the necessary resources to support teaching-learning (Ayala, Bautista, Pajaro, Raquino, & Watts, 2016). As a result, even the caring teachers were demotivated to support at-risk learners, as they often had to pay money out of their own pockets to assist needy learners (Ayala et al., 2016).

Within the continent of Africa, in Uganda an investigation revealed that the socio-economic realities of rural areas created and sometimes heightened vulnerability amongst learners from the rural settings. Learners were expected to research information for assignments and projects, while they did not have access to books and

internet, within the school as well as the home (Wood & Goba, 2011). Similarly, most learners in the rural areas of Singida in Tanzania were reported to be unable to search for resources and for information as there was an absence of internet connectivity and library services to support their academic needs (Lekule, 2014).

Also, in Mpumalanga, South Africa, the work of Condy and Blease (2014) reported that there were many financially strapped rural schools which had to contend with inadequate facilities due to limited funding for new equipment and technology. Furthermore, in this context, most school locations did not have the high-speed delivery system that is required to make online technologies to function optimally (Condy & Blease, 2014). Besides the schools not having adequate funds to buy technological equipment, people's competency to utilise the technology skilfully was in question.

#### *h. Outdated school practices in rural settings*

Existing literature also points to corporal punishment in rural schools as being amongst the major causes of learner vulnerability. Consequently, the learner participants in a study that was conducted in Tanzania, explained that corporal punishment made them feel vulnerable and uncared for by their educators (Feinstein & Mwachombela, 2010). In addition, Nordtveit (2010) in his study which investigated schools as agencies of protection stated that, corporal punishment in Namibia and Swaziland had more damaging rather than mitigating effects, since the learner participants in his study claimed that corporal punishment made them to despise school as well as their teachers, thus they stayed away from school to avoid corporal punishment. Another study in Nigeria, revealed that learners claimed that they felt at-risk as their teachers chastised them for offences that were beyond their own control such as not being able to do homework because the candle went out at home or not having materials to do a school project as their homes were destitute (Humphreys, 2008). Additionally, the Swaziland Woman Action Group Against Abuse of 2013 (SWAAGA) brought up information that some female learners became targets of exploitation such as sexual abuse within the school setting by female as well as male teachers (Breiding, Mercy, Gulaid, Reza & Hleta-Nkambule, 2013). Thus, the fear of being targets of exploitation forced learners to drop out of schools (Breiding et al., 2013).

### *i. Rural schools' inability to attract suitable educators*

Although, the outdated practices within the rural schools (including sexual abuse) are believed to perpetuate the adversities faced by learners in such settings, other difficulties such as attracting suitable educators to rural schools were common. Sometimes unqualified and unenthusiastic teachers were sent to teach in rural schools (Jacob, 2007). Accordingly, Christie (2016) observed that attracting quality teachers is a challenge because not only are schools inadequately resourced, but also teachers are expected to teach multiple grades and subjects, in addition to adapting to life in the a rural location with its various inconveniences (Starr & White, 2008). Furthermore, Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Lash (2007) assert that the lack of funding arising out of poor and inconsistent allocation of funds by the Government, render rural schools powerless to improve the quality of teaching-learning. Hence, this has caused widespread challenges for both learner enrolment and for the teachers to commit unconditionally to teaching in rural schools (Calkins et al., 2007).

### *j. Restricted curriculum*

Another factor that contributes to vulnerability amongst learners within the rural contexts and disruption of the learning process, is the restricted curriculum. Although, the socio-economic status of rural ecologies plays a significant role in controlling the curriculum as far as choice and variety of subjects is concerned, this leaves learners with being restricted to subjects/courses which they do not prefer according to their passion and ability (Bantwini, 2010). The courses and subjects offered often do not include computer studies, arts and variety of languages (Bantwini, 2010). Accordingly, a study which involved teachers from various African countries such as those from Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and others, indicated that most schools were seen to be following a rigid schedule in terms of day lesson plans and fixed dates; this clashed with the busy harvesting periods of the agricultural calendar (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008).

### **3.2.2.3. Supporting vulnerable learners towards quality learning: turning the curve**

Literature which highlights the efforts that are already in place towards sustaining learning for the learners who are regarded as vulnerable within the rural settings, helps to give us a divergent perspective. Although there is a plethora of international, national, as well as local research concerning the efforts towards improving the quality of education for learners who reside in rural areas, for this study the researcher focused on the home-environment, the community and those efforts made by the school.

#### *a. Parental engagement and involvement*

Contemporary literature indicates that parents in the home, play a paramount role in motivating the learners and are regarded as the most crucial stakeholder(s) in education. Lewis (2015) maintains that in his study on Caribbean immigrant learners who were vulnerable but who succeeded academically, because the Caribbean parents used their own knowledge, in addition to finding outside resources for supporting their children academically – this was regarded as a high level of parent-learner support (Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, these parents were well aware of the benefits of quality education and the parental support that goes with it. This attitude and support strengthened the aim to achieve in their children which boosted their confidence and encouraged them to achieve more in their quest for a better quality of life (Puffer, Green, Chase, Sim, Zayzay, & Boone, 2015). Accordingly, similar practices were reported to be operative in some Liberian homes. As parents of vulnerable learners were reported to helping their children with homework and taking time conversing about school life at home to their children as a means of augmenting their young ones' learning experiences (Puffer et al., 2015).

Further, in Virginia, California, a study which aimed at exploring the internal and external factors found within the family sector towards the attainment of quality learning for vulnerable rural learners who were being exposed to excessive poverty revealed that, while learners tried to assist themselves by forming study groups, parents also played a dominant role towards the educational resilience of their children by spending a lot of time playing and reading to them from an early age, all in efforts

to nourish and promote a quality type of education (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Duchesne, McMaugh, Boscher and Krause (2013) affirmed that by parents attending learner-support workshops together with teachers, they gave inputs in planning supporting initiatives towards learners' needs and this led to a high-level of academic support; in addition to them being guided as to how to assist learners at home.

While, most rural settings in African countries such as Zimbabwe and Kenya are known for having astronomical rates of poverty (amongst other social ills), a number of parents there were reported not to be displaying a defeatist attitude, but they attempted to boost the quality of their children's education by actively supporting initiatives that improved performance (Pascoe, Wood, Duffee, & Kuo, 2016). Parents were portrayed to be committedly taking part in parent-teacher meetings as well as in other school activities, while they held high expectations for their children's future and their academic achievement (Liebenberg, Ungar, & Theron, 2014). This heightened resilience and had lasting effects on children who now were determined to attain better results to open doors for higher academic visions. Research evidence clearly correlates parental involvement to learners' achieving more by getting involved in the running of the school, participating in school activities, as well as contributing to positive learner cognitive and social development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Wang, & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Vally (2015) claimed that in the education sector, South Africa is amongst the lowest performing countries which has been unsuccessful in delivering quality educational services in rural contexts due to incompetent officials and a lack of will by all role-players. Contradicting this, other research studies within South Africa indicated that there are prolific initiatives which are currently taking place in some rural communities (Banatar, 2013; Katiyatiya, Muchenje, & Mushunje, 2014; Khanare, 2015). However, a number of research studies on rural schools agree that rural ecologies are characterised by high poverty, exodus of residents and other social ills that hinder quality education; in addition, ineffective leadership, geographic location, subsistence existence and poor infrastructure (roads, clinics, hospitals and transport) affect the community (Benatar, 2013; Hlalele, 2012; Kamper, 2008; Katiyatiya et al., 2014). On the other hand, their agricultural and subsistence lives may act as motivators to positively boost learners to extricate themselves from rural-poverty conditions using

education as a tool, especially if top results are achieved (Darder, 2015). This boost from parents is enacted through direct and indirect involvement in school-community affairs.

*b. Favorable child-rearing practices*

While literature has pointed towards a variety of parental inputs which contributed towards quality education environments, it also refers to healthy child-rearing practices that may also impact on the academic performance of a learner in a rural context.

A study in Bosnia, South-eastern Europe, aimed at exploring the challenges of parents in meeting the needs of learners in pre-resettlement contexts, confirmed the significant role that was played by most parents as being beneficial when providing their children with nurturing and stimulating experiences (El-Khani, 2015). Such positive interactions included activities such as conversing, playing games, and reading to their children (El-Khani, 2015). In addition, a study that was conducted in a welfare centre on exploring how orphaned children academically excelled despite being perceived as vulnerable (raised in a welfare centre), reported that welfare officials used child-rearing practices that ensured that discipline was applied consistently and that, they as welfare officers, modelled desired behaviour since they assumed the role of parental figures for the children in the welfare centre (Munthali, Mvula, & Silo, 2014). Differently, a study that was aimed towards exploring efforts that were used by parents in rural Malawi to maintain quality learning, recommended that parents provided nutritious foods and played with the children to stimulate their mental development (Gadsden, Ford, & Breiner, 2016). The same study further highlighted that showing warmth, sensitivity, equal treatment, shared book reading, talking to children and using appropriate discipline, all enhanced quality learning (Gadsden, Ford, & Breiner, 2016). Similarly, researchers in Senegal noted that favourable parental rearing practices which were prominent in higher performing schools involved parents reducing domestic chores for children, and where possible, taking on tutorship roles to support learning (Marphatia, Edge, Legault, & Archer, 2010).

Mkhize (2009) advises that in order to strengthen the learner's academic resilience while residing in adverse rural conditions, parents could rear their children in a manner

that enabled them to handle stressful situations and be capable of calming themselves down. In accordance, Jacobs (2015) maintains that instead of utilising heart-warming stories, parents shared stories that focused on intercessions which indicated hope and promise, thus building their children's self-esteem through highlighting what their children did right instead of what they did wrong, in order to drive them towards academic success and general resilience. Moreover, the recommendations from Makhonza's (2006) work asserted that parents must monitor their children's' behaviour instead of engaging in the laissez-faire style of parenting, which is nowadays common within the working-class family.

### *c. Supportive efforts of siblings*

While parental child-rearing practices are believed, through existing literature, to hold remarkable influence on the learners' academic performance, the learners' existence is a social one, since they are mostly surrounded by their siblings and other family members within the home environment (Gorard & See, 2009). The relationship between siblings is believed to be much closer than that of an individual and their parent, as it permits freer expression of influence and support (Asen, Dawson, & McHugh, 2003). Moreover, Madhavan and Townsend (2007) maintain that this relationship is known to be more intense amongst siblings who reside in adverse rural conditions.

A study that was conducted amongst a group of Cambodian learners who were also participants, revealed that older siblings were reported to support their younger siblings' academic efforts through enacting several roles such as being mediators, role models and support agents when it was necessary (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008). Spinning off this, younger siblings mimic their older siblings' actions since they looked up to them for direction and knowledge (Arzubiaga et al., 2008). Consequently, in a recent study in Bangladesh, younger siblings as well as grandparents were reported to present feelings of affection towards older siblings, thus this relationship supported both to learn social skills and to handle conflict constructively in a stable and safe home ecology (Babu, Hossain, Morales, & Vij 2017). In Batwa (Burundi), older siblings of academically successful learners in rural disadvantaged areas, often acted as a source of support in many situations, as they offered emotional support and encouragement, especially towards quality educational

attainment (Sempere, 2009). In the same study older brothers and sisters were reported to help their younger siblings with homework as well as accompanying them to school as they took long and unsafe walks to and from schools (Sempere, 2009). In support, a learner participant from Congo who had just qualified as a medical doctor explained that his decision to migrate in order to study in South Africa was based on his unstinting support that he received from his elder brother, who was already a medical doctor in Cape Town, South Africa (Chandler, 2018).

This trend was reported to be normal within the contexts of South Africa, as the results of a study that was carried out amongst a group of university students indicated that mostly older siblings served as “support-bases” as they had the opportunity to be the first ones to attend university (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). They gave their younger siblings guidance and emotional support through the enrollment process, accessing networks, guiding them on decisions concerning choice of study, strategies to attain academic success, funding institutions, and sound moral advice (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Furthermore, Smith, Cowie and Blades (2015) maintain that, since siblings are constantly in each other’s presence through shared and non-shared activities, their interaction holds an important function in preparing the individual learner for social relations outside family, such as in the school environment. Accordingly, Smith et al., (2015) explained that the relationships between siblings fulfil a variety of different roles such as being role-models, companions and antagonists, breeding proper grounds and opportunities for co-operation and companionship in academic and play activities. Similarly, in KwaZulu-Natal older siblings were believed to own the positions of facilitating and mediating through faith and resilience since they already possessed information and experiences of both the home and the school world (Moyo, 2017). The older siblings comforted their younger siblings’ when they were overwhelmed by the demands of the school environment, despite their unfavorable home living conditions and their orphan hood state, since they already established comfortable existing relationships (Moyo, 2017). While literature focused on the positive impacts which brought about positive sibling relationships in the academic sphere, it must be taken into consideration that the same sibling relationship hold the power to also be detrimental and hinder the maintenance of quality learning, such as in cases where the siblings do not set good examples (deviancy) or when they are low-achievers themselves.



#### *d. Helpful efforts of other family relatives*

While the relationship between siblings has been credited for having a positive impact on the quality of their education, relationships between extended family members which may include grandparents, aunts and uncles, have also been related to contribute to the academic success of learners in schools. Nikolayev (2015) highlights that in Bulgaria, Southern-eastern Europe, a group of former teenage parents revealed that family intactness was one of the greatest positive influences on high school graduate rates. Explaining that this is due to strong inter-generational behaviour modelling which continued even when the family income was low (Nikolayev, 2015). While, some African literature reports that many students in rural communities live in single-parent homes and have inadequate access to economic resources (Flora, 2018; Lei & South, 2016). Others indicate that despite such adverse family conditions in “blended” homes (such as having stepfamilies as part of the home-ecology), most children continued to excel academically (Mahlangu & Fraser, 2017; Miller et al., 2016; Solomon, 2013). This was believed to be due to the natural competition that exists between the siblings and step-siblings which pushes them to want to achieve exceedingly and wanting to aim for more in life by freeing themselves from their current impoverished environments (Mahlangu & Fraser, 2017; Solomon, 2013). In support, Ruiz and Silverstein (2007) maintain that adverse conditions in blended families do not always have negative effects on the child’s well-being because different parenting and socialisation patterns may stimulate performance rather than stifle it.

Locally, in Vryheid in the Zululand District of South Africa, research revealed that learners who were academically resilient were mainly those that were raised in single-parent homes or sometimes by grandparents (Makhonza, 2006). Lee and Kushner (2008) were critical of the fact that most of research on single-parent families assumed the deficit model; whereas, his study reported on experiences of academic success from learners who were raised by single-mothers, single-fathers or grandparents. Additionally, a study which was conducted in the Empangeni District of KwaZulu-Natal initially on exploring how violence impacts on learning in rural schools, highlighted that some learners were academically resilient despite the negative impacts of bullying and violence because they were supported, encouraged and helped by the extended family members such including their grandparents (Steyn & Singh, 2018). Notably,

even earlier research, unearthed that learners raised by grandparents coped better across academic, behaviour and health domains than those who were raised by a single parent (Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007).

*e. Changing the culture: “The inexorable ambition to succeed”*

Parvis (2013) defined that *culture* is the totality of everyday life which includes knowledge, norms, beliefs, values, customs, habits and skills that are embedded in a society; these basically develops the personality, character and drive of the individual. Thus, we assume that culture is the heartbeat of a society and it mostly aims to inspire productive citizens. Notably, rural contexts are believed to be ecologies of cultural traditions and culture so significant in shaping individuals’ behavior (Fetvadjev, Meiring, Van de Vijver, Nel, Sekaja, & Laher, 2018).

Despite the island of Haiti being amongst the poorest countries in the world, the people there are reported to be continuing their endeavors towards uplifting themselves and their country (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Trouillott (1994) postulates that the cultural norms in most societies in Haiti indicated education to be extremely important thus it is greatly encouraged. This is corroborated in the motto of most schools in rural Haiti which spell out that: *Learning is for life*. In elaboration, this motto embodied two main aims which referred to providing the skills and knowledge that are needed to be successful in life; these are the family and the community who prepare children to become lifelong learners. In accordance, Seraphin (2011) maintains that Haitian learners are generally socialized with the practice of overly achieving academically. Hence, Haiti’s cultural resources with reference to academic resiliency originated from its pride in being the first and only successful group (slaves) to revolt against Western imperialists, by prioritising the betterment of its people through education which uplifted the oppressed and created the urgency for change (Dash, 2001). Furthermore, Seraphin (2011) contends that Haitian learners understood very well that they possessed power as educated, young people who represented the poor masses. Even the media operating in the United States is also reported to be preaching on preserving the culture of learning for Haitian immigrants, by reminding them that they need to learn in order to survive (Seraphin, 2011). In China, the culture or philosophy that mostly shaped communities, is known as “Confucian”. The Chinese philosopher,

Confucius, spread his doctrine to form an integral part of the Chinese culture which uses some form of assessment method prior to learning experiences (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). While Nisbett et al., (2001) emphasised that Confucian values play a central role in influencing the way that Chinese learners in particular learn, these principles stress strict discipline, proper behavior, and loving devotion; while providing an explanation as to why learners rarely asked their educators questions implying the absolute acceptance of teachers' knowledge.

Accordingly, culture was an influential factor towards academic sustainability within the national context as well. Despite Zambia obtaining its independence from Britain in 1964, its education system has been known for being poorly developed (Havinden & Meredith, 2002). As it has been estimated that 68 percent of Zambians still live in poverty and the country remains as one of the poorest countries in the world thus it has a high number of vulnerable learners (Wedekind & Milingo, 2015). However, Hofstede (1986) asserts that the role played by Zambian culture in influencing learners in their learning cannot be underestimated, since it is believed to have a prodigious impact in enhancing their quality of education, especially for those learners who are perceived as being helpless. In accordance, Mushibwe (2013) alludes to the outcomes of a different study which was conducted in the Tumbuka Tribal District in the Eastern Province of Zambia which is home to several districts in Lundazi; here, it was revealed that the culture of independence, contrary to that of being colonised, influenced the development of education policies which ensured that every child had access to good quality schooling in a school of their parents' choice (Mushibwe, 2013). Moreover, Mushibwe's (2013) assertion indicated that the overall influences of culture influenced education policy in Zambia which was to provide each child with a solid intellectual, practical, and moral foundation that will aid in fulfilling life's desires for success at every endeavor (Mushibwe, 2013). In other words, this culture was entrusted to promote full and harmonious development of every child, while exploiting their potential in preparing them for adult working life (Mushibwe, 2013). Moreover, a study that included immigrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), revealed (by learner participants) that they succeeded academically because of incorporating their cultural values into their academic work and that heightened their focus on learning, thus they achieved excellent academic results (Adebanji, 2011).

While, Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) clarify that cultural beliefs define how people interact with the world and how they behave in certain situations, this can also be a combination of religious beliefs, socially accepted norms and traditions. Stephan and Stephan (2013) maintain that the same accepted norms and traditions have been highlighted to also have an impact on the learning space. The same scenario is reflective in numerous South African schools, where a culture of teaching and learning is built on discipline and rules that are laid down by bureaucratic education authorities. However, the culture of learning has not yet been entrenched in many learners, as most South African rural communities' learners are still reported to sometimes stay away from school for no apparent reason - they visit the local bars whilst they are wearing school uniforms and show a lack of interest and commitment to learning (Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, this is exacerbated by the continuous report of the high rate of child abuse, corporal punishment, sexual harassments, substance abuse and bullying within the school settings where learning is supposed to be taking place (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Research reveals that most South African communities are based on what is called the culturally responsive pedagogy, which is a way of teaching that suggests that using culturally competent services and instructions may improve the academic performance of low-income learners (Mertens, 2014). However, Banks (2015) argues that South African culture should include developing knowledge based on critical diversity, consisting of ethnic and cultural diversity in the curriculum and that which demonstrates an attitude of care and promoting learning communities which collaborate with ethnically diverse learners linked to the delivery of instruction. Further, the cultural norms and beliefs that have considerable impact on the quality of learning for the learners stem from communities, who should take responsibility if the system of education delivers poor quality of-teaching-learning (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012).

*f. Whole-community involvement*

Witte and Sheridan (2011) stated that in most rural schools, certain characteristics of a community may positively lead to learner motivation to reach higher levels of achievement. Such rural characteristics may include issues such as its centrality within the community which connects the rural community with families in multiple capacities as part of typical daily routines providing opportunities for community communication as well as participation (Witte & Sheridan, 2011). For example, this may be evident in

most rural communities as local school buildings are hubs of community pride which play a role in hosting sporting, cultural, and civic events.

While Witte and Sheridan (2011) argue that most communities do not work together due to unequal distribution of resources; voices, authority, and divisive systems reflect apartheid patterns of privilege and arrogance, which further entrench disadvantages on the underprivileged, so reminiscent of the past oppression. In contrast, other studies indicate that it is within the community where most partnerships or collaborations are formed towards enhancing the quality of learning for learners who face hardships; for example, health departments in Central and Eastern Europe were responsible in playing a significant role in sustaining learning for those learners who faced adversities such as poverty (Du Four & Eaker, 2009). Additionally, Engle et al., (2011) assert that in low-income and middle-income countries such as Albania, Georgia, Macedonia and Tajikistan, the health department officials wrote guidelines for the parents on the infant's health card. These guidelines provided appropriate strategies which are to be followed by parents in rearing children in a manner that is conducive to promote a child's academic performance (Engle et al., 2011).

Recent literature also stressed the significance of providing nutritious food for vulnerable learners in order to sustain their learning. Through a research study that was conducted in Umlazi near Durban, community members were reported to have formed consistent partnerships and cleared the community dumping site in order to farm vegetables to cater for the learners within the community's schools who were known to be struggling with poverty and who were orphaned due to AIDS (Kuo & Operario, 2011). This according to Kuo and Operario (2011), was done so all children in the community would stay in school despite their adverse home conditions. Similarly, a study that conducted in the Umgungundlovu District in KwaZulu-Natal indicated that parents in the community formed groups and provided food parcels, toiletries and formed mentorships for those children in the community who were identified to be coming from child-headed homes (Maseko, 2014). However, another research study that was also conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, revealed that vulnerable learners were temporarily assisted to remain in school, due to substance abuse, involvement in criminal activities and other social evils, some of them continued to drop out of school (Mkhize, 2009).

While various partnerships have been reported, literature has recorded discords between community efforts and the parents of vulnerable children in the rural areas. For instance, in Limpopo the community formed a coalition called Imvula Trust, and they initiated projects involving building environmentally friendly toilets as the sanitation systems there were in shambles and seemed to be the breeding grounds for illness for most community children causing them to stay away from school. However, the parents in the community were reported to have rejected the toilet-building as they assumed that these were going to be like the old pit toilets, only later to realise that it was not the same kind of toilets - but by that time the service-providers had already discontinued their work (Westoby, 2014). In another case, the parents were reported to be burning down, vandalising and stealing from several schools, when they were in conflict with the local government plans, not realising that they were disrupting the learning process of their own children (Kanyane, Pophiwa, Raseala, Mdlongwa, Viljoen, Moolman, & Rule, 2017). In one case that was exposed by Prew (2009), several disadvantaged rural schools in Soshanguve, Pretoria, were affected. Here, the collaboration consisted of parents, the NGOs, the members of the District Office as well as the teachers, whose aim was to enhance these schools' infrastructure for effective learning. While this resulted in unanimous community participation, the same partnership was also blamed for serving its own interest by manipulating its funding for personal gain or for group interest (Prew, 2009). Additionally, in most rural and low- income communities, the community members were allowed to assist the school by working as gardeners, caretakers, security guards, and cleaners to ensure that the learning process continued smoothly, receiving food in return from the Government Nutritional Programme (Hornby, 2011).

Research findings from various contexts indicated that most efforts which arose from community coalitions were successful as most schools reported an increase in the parental attendance at important governance meetings, hence there was improvement in the learners' academic achievement. These collaborations/partnerships were mostly successful, and they led to increased commitment from the community to protect and serve the school; hence, the enrolment figures as well as quality academic attainment increased.

### *g. Fragmented and collaborative efforts within the school*

While literature recorded deep harmonious relationships that were formed amongst the parents, schools and local communities, it also points to individualism and selfish group interests which exist within the school sector where efforts to sustain proper learning for those learners who are facing adversities, are thwarted.

Accordingly, Tsotetsi, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2008) observed that teachers single-handedly showed their compassion and responsiveness to the plight of the vulnerable learners by helping in various ways to uplift the state of rural schools so that learners could exploit their capabilities to reach their goals in life. Vulnerable learners were made to feel loved and welcomed by the teachers who were caring, taking interest in the learners' lives and trying to make the curriculum accessible and understandable to all (Tsotetsi et al., 2008). Since most of the vulnerable learners were abused by their extended family members, they found the school to be their only place of hope and safety, thus teachers doubled as parents. Chambers (2014) reports that partnerships with schools proved to be extremely difficult as many schools had to compete for sponsors while the local businesses were struggling to survive as the community, they were servicing was undergoing a poverty-crisis. While parents could be significant partners for the school and assist in pinpointing funding sources, parents from the rural communities chose not to get involved as they often had to deal with their own poverty issues often exacerbated by their illiteracy (Bush & Glover, 2016). On a different note, a study in San Francisco highlighted a partnership working relationship between the school leaders and the teachers. Moran et al., (2014) explained that, in this context, cooperative school leaders are believed to set high aspirations, delegate responsibilities for the educators to offer quality learning for all learners, even those who faced difficulties. Such quality learning may be achieved through enhancing the activity of feedback between the teachers and their learners, in addition to assessment results and minutes of meetings done through various forms of effective recording and dissemination of information. Locally, an approach known as the Health Promoting Schools Model was initiated to offer the best service (design) to care, protect and to support all learners who are perceived as vulnerable (Wood & Goba, 2011). Wood and Goba (2011) explained that this framework could assist schools to self-generate solutions concerning their own unique challenges and later

become responsible for producing an environment that is conducive to the mental, physical as well as social health of learners.

In most South African impoverished schools, the Department of Education (DoE) in partnership with the Department of Social Justice, attempted to increase learning access to vulnerable learners by introducing the School Nutrition Programme. Due to this initiative, most of the poorest schools in South Africa are beneficiaries of this school feeding programme (Walton, 2011). However, those who need it (nutrition) the most do not want to appear as poverty-stricken to their peers, and thus avoid participation.

Additionally, still within the context of South Africa, there are several teacher unions, such as the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU), whose initial aim for their formation was to play a significant role in supporting the teachers' needs, promoting their professionalism and developing the teachers, thus improving the quality of learning for all learners (Stronge, 2018). However, McHenry- Sober and Schafft (2015) argue that some of the unions were sometimes destructive and prejudicial towards the teaching-learning process. Unions were blamed for exercising undue influence in the school context, such as in appointments of those individuals whom they favour in promotion posts (Karanda, 2016). Also, Bush, Kiggundu, and Mooros (2011) asserted that teacher unions are to be blamed for disrupting teaching and learning by conducting many meetings during teaching time and holding protest actions at intervals; adding that, teachers are usually conflicted between their commitment to the learners and their loyalty to the union. On the other end, District Officers (DoE) were reported to be using tools of pressure to bring about change concerning the unions' actions (Naicker & Mestry, 2016). This confrontational situation only exacerbated the situation.

Some leadership-improvement-partnerships have been highlighted through South African literature: The South African Extraordinary School Coalition (SASESC), and the Partners for Possibility (PFP) - both facilitate partnerships between businesses, Government and the social sector. These partnerships, according to Kilmurray (2015), are between school principals and business leaders which fosters social cohesion



through partnerships while empowering principals to become change leaders in the schools as well as in communities. In this way they improved system performance as well as enhanced learner performance. Another partnership is the Norkitt Education Leadership Initiative (NELI) which is aimed at analysing the functionality of SGBs of those schools which are under-resourced so that they can maximize their efforts to gain resources that would best serve the learners.

### **3.3. THE NECESSITY FOR COLLABORATION**

It has been highlighted through existing literature (Schleiff, 2017; Zavella, 2018) that working in collaboration places communities at the best positions to improve their current situation by showing care and taking evasive action. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, instead approaches are flexible to fit communities' specific needs. Collaborative efforts are driven by the communities' needs to deliver according to their goals. In some situations, collaborative initiatives are not installed and that may have dire consequences on the learners as well as other collaborators. However, in situations where collaborative frameworks are given a chance to be operative, there could be outstanding improvements emanating from these frameworks.

#### **3.3.1. Deleterious Consequences of Not Having a Collaborative Framework**

The DoE has numerous stakeholders, which include individual people as well as organisations who have an interest in sustaining quality education. In elaboration, the innumerable stakeholders may include teachers, parents, SGBs, the educator unions, the NGOs, private sector as well as other relevant bodies (stakeholders) from the community. However, should their inputs not be harnessed harmoniously and cohesively together, it would be almost impossible to provide quality education for the learners, especially for those learners who reside within the rural ecology. The following will not be achieved if the stakeholders do not work in harmony and cohesion to collaborate.

##### **3.3.1.1. Potential deleterious consequences for the learners**

The learners are amongst the various stakeholders who can join in the efforts towards the attainment of quality education, being the most important stakeholders, since they are the ones who are on the receiving end of the poor education services that is

provided by the Government. However, Kolb's (2014) study implied that if there is no partnership, then the DoE on its own would struggle to satisfy the needs and expectations of learners, especially those learners from the rural areas. Generally, the needs and expectations of learners is centered on quality education, without which the learners will not be able to become knowledgeable, skilled and possibly employable. Furthermore, Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard and Van Vianen (2009) maintain that in the absence of joint partnerships, the learners will not be equipped with the essential skills and competencies to pursue their desired careers, and to get the type of education that would make them well-rounded citizens.

In accordance, Clinton (2011) suggests that political tolerance is crucial in a country; hence, the success of a country's democracy is mainly influenced by peace and prosperity, and on the sustainability of a thriving economy. In essence, Moon (2013) attests that the qualities of independent and critical thinkers coupled with solid and secure foundations on which the learners will be able to build their future careers, would be impossible to develop in a threatening and poorly resourced school environment.

### **3.3.1.2. Potential deleterious consequences for educators**

Apart from the learners, educators are generally known as the other group of stakeholders that plays a crucial role in influencing the quality of education. Since they are the ones who are in the firing-line when something goes wrong with concerning the attainment of quality education for the learners. Hence, existing research advocates that a conducive learning environment is crucial for promoting quality teaching and learning, implying that without collaborated frameworks it would be impossible to provide quality teaching-learning which should be unobtrusively facilitated to effectively foster academic excellence (Melhuish, Phan, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Additionally, Clinton (2011) asserts that should a partnership effort not be activated, the Government will continue to struggle to maintain a satisfied and a dedicated educator force. Moreover, since the Government is already struggling due to financial severities, teacher unions which will continue to serve their members' interests instead

of protecting and promoting the interests of the teaching-learning processes, are reluctant to assist stating the Government has created this untenable situation. Furthermore, Ebert (2007) warns that should the individual selfish interests in education partnerships persist, then tension between the unions and the DoE will escalate. Bush, Kiggundu and Mooros (2011) add that the SGBs in schools will not be able to work together with the teachers and the principals in the school if collaborations/partnerships wobble due to selfish and uncompromising stances by some parties. Hence, the formulation of collaborative working (practical, realistic and cohesive) strategies would enhance a teamwork-like relationship between the SGBs, the community, and the school management teams (SMTs).

### **3.3.1.3. Potential deleterious consequences for the SGBs, parents and other community individuals**

Spring (2014) contends that the NGOs in rural communities are intended to focus on various aspects of education, such as protecting the learners' and the teachers' rights, support the SGBs in communities, and assist the DoE in resolving challenges which are related to the sound provision of education. However, a study by Hart (2013) that involved young citizens in community development and environmental care, revealed that in cases where NGOs (or bodies of a similar nature) are involved in school communities, it ultimately leads to failure in the maintenance of a good working relationship, since there may be continuous differing points of interests conflicting with those of the Department.

Spring (2014) asserts that other relevant stakeholders with the potential to assist and strengthen the quality of the education for the learners, are the parents as well as other individuals or groups within the community who may have an interest in the quality of learners that are produced. For instance, the other individuals or groups in the community may be social workers, nurses, priests and even traditional healers. However, when stakeholders are not in partnership with the school then this would render themselves irrelevant to assist the learners from "dysfunctional" schools as they will not be aware of the learners' needs as well as their current efforts of obtaining quality education, in addition to being incapacitated to offer constructive criticism and suggestions (Christopher, Watts, McCormick, & Young, 2008). Since the drive for a collaborative partnership is towards quality and excellence in education, there will

always be room for improvement such that the learners in need would not get an opportunity to express their anxieties, among other concerns (Bush et al., 2011). Hence, a mutually enriching relationship would be denied if there is a non-existence of harmonious collaborations.

### **3.3.2. The Expedient Role of the Collaborative Frameworks**

Existing literature on collaborative strategies usually speak to coordinated planning, service delivery across communities, prioritising service features, as well as challenges (Ramanathan, Bentley, & Pang, 2014). Additionally, Ramanathan et al. (2014) assert that collaborative strategies are necessary in order to develop agreed upon, unified as well as matching thoughts and efforts, where such initiatives play a role in developing new means of working together in coalitions in order to improve the academic experiences of learners from the rural areas. A study that explored collaborations for learners with special needs praised the creation of opportunities for people within the community to share experiences, resources, information as well ideas on refining and cultivating the present conditions of the learners (Dettmer et al., 2013).

#### **3.3.2.1. Mitigating the challenge of rural schools' inability to attract highly effective teachers**

Since, rural schools are known for battling to attract highly qualified and effective teachers, collaborative initiatives are entrusted to assist in enhancing teaching qualitatively by bringing community-based expertise as well as indigenous knowledge into the teaching and learning experience (Sanders, 2009). This implies that the District (DoE) will allow the implementation of community educator cortication programmes that will allow for the placement of adequately knowledgeable community members in classrooms under the supervision of highly qualified teachers. Sanders (2009) further claims that collaborative strategies in rural areas may assist in the movement of parents and community volunteers into the classrooms where there is inadequate staffing, thus temporarily alleviating chronic teacher shortages.

#### **3.3.2.2. Inspiring parental and community engagement**

Culturally, rural communities are known for mostly being close-knit and thus recruiting community members to work together and be involved in their learners' lives, would

not require much persuasion. Chambers (2014) maintains that this close-knittedness of folks in the rural areas enables the process of recruiting other community members to club in smoothly volunteering their services in the community school. For instance, individuals like housewives, retirees, unemployed youth as well as other people in the community may assist with volunteer work in schools so that learners may have more time to devote to their schoolwork. Additionally, collaboration partnerships would provide multiple opportunities and varied venues for parents as well as other community members to become involved in decision-making and interact with the children in academic, social as well as cultural contexts (Epstein et al.,2015). Moreover, existing research highlights that schools are the sole institutions that are responsible for breeding strategies of reducing other vulnerabilities and adversities in the community (Epstein, 2018). Thus, coalitions between schools and communities are believed to reinforce the capacities of both entities in dealing with social ills (Bojuwoye, 2009). Significantly, not just coalition between schools and communities, but also amalgamating our old and inherited tacit knowledge with the modern teachings. This would mean that we see the significance in the tacit knowledge which was cleverly utilized by our ancestors who without any formal education still managed to induct the young into transitioning to adulthood. In support of the later, Sandoval, Lagunas, Montelongo and Diaz (2016) stresses the importance of decolonizing education and the incorporation of our ancestral knowledge together with the Westernized knowledge to better equip our learners.

### **3.3.2.3. Improving rural out-of-school-time transportation**

Since rural communities are often spread over large geographic areas, resulting in long-distance travel between the learners' homes and their schools, the collaborative framework would help to improve rural out of school time transportation as the coalitions among stakeholders would results in a devising of effective course of action. The parents, schools, community leaders as well as funders would gather to brainstorm about transportation. In sustenance of the later (Sanders, 2009) maintains that, collaborative endeavors aid to streamline the community resources such as community transportation. In order to identify new funding sources that would maximize transportation for the learners in the rural areas.

#### **3.3.2.4. Identifying possible funding sources and maximising resources**

World Bank & UNICEF, (2015) denote that one in five learners living in rural areas is vulnerable due to poverty. Among the many challenges that are associated with rurality is living in poverty and being geographically isolated from urban areas which means limited access to nutritious food, stationery, books, technology, healthcare and other social services, including fewer businesses to approach for sponsorship.

Consequently, collaborative strategies are desired as they would strengthen rural school programmes. Basically, the strategy would assist the community in accessing funding resources that will in terms of space, tutoring materials as well as technological expertise and equipment (Gibbs & Jenkins, 2014). Furthermore, this type of partnership would, according to Gibbs and Jenkins (2014), offer tips and provide a list of opportunities to apply for funding, in addition to becoming involved in programmes and projects for the benefit of the school.

#### **3.3.2.5. Enhanced learner academic attainment and social growth**

Collaborative frameworks have been known to bring about enhanced academic attainment as well as overall social growth for learners in rural sectors not just in South Africa, but in other countries as well, (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza & Giles, 2015). In support of the latter, a study that was conducted in the rural areas of Haiti reported that one of the positive outcomes of a coalition strategy that engaged districts, parents, teachers and other community stakeholders, was the increased academic performance of learners (Smith & Sobel, 2014). Similar results were reported from another coalition that was initiated in South Africa where the parents, community leaders and teachers joined forces with the intention of decreasing the high rate of learners who dropped out of schools due to teenage pregnancy. However, the coalition did not only decrease the number of such learners, but it also increased academic attainment despite the high learner enrolment (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod, & Letsoala, 2009). Panday et al., (2009) further reported an increase in learner engagement in social growth activities in the community, which resulted from them being too gainfully occupied to engage in substance abuse, crime and illicit sexual acts (pregnancies).

Learner academic excellence may be achieved through numerous influences such as having highly effective teachers who get involved in parental communities while maximising funding opportunities for the purchase of resources. However, learner academic attainment is linked to learner social growth, since such rural learners become citizens who are productive in the labour market, and who are also capable of dealing with other social adversities which exist outside of the school setting. Thus, collaborations are not only beneficial to the school, but also to the communities.

### **3.4. CRUCIAL RUDIMENTS FOR COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORKS**

There are several rudiments and commonalities that have been highlighted through literature with regards to the elements or conditions that foster effective collaboration. Some of them include, amongst many, the issue of trust, reciprocity, tolerance, communication and accountability, though many of these processes have been eroded in the struggle against apartheid education and replaced in most communities by a sense of anomie which is evident in inadequate parental engagement. Inadequate access to resources, absence of technology, debilitating poverty as well as other social ills manifest in rural societies exacerbating learner vulnerability which leads to poor academic achievement. To achieve the aims of the collaborative frameworks, the relevant stakeholders need to be committed to specific crucial principles of operation, such as those discussed below.

#### **3.4.1 Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership is ideal in collaborative initiatives, since it is seen as an imperative element for strengthening relationships between schools and their communities. Leadership is broadly defined as a process of persuasion by a sole individual or a group of people in order to safeguard sturdy school-community partnerships ensuring prompt actions towards attaining a shared goal (Diamond, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Spillane, 2012). In accordance, Diamond (2015) maintains that a fundamental element of leadership is the courage to create changes, manage defiance, and impose sanctions, if necessary. On the other hand, distributed leadership is seen as a type of leadership that unswervingly connects parties towards improving teaching and learning and creating opportunities for shared responsibility towards the achievement of common goals (Spillane, 2012). Moreover, Harris (2009),

states that when the different stakeholders within the school and the community feel that they are a part of the initiative, it becomes easier to commit and utilise their skills for the initiative to attain its goal. Saunders adds that:

*“Teachers and parents are focused on learners’ academic success, modelling genuine openness to parents and the community involvement, establishing an expectation for communication among school personnel, families, communities, learners, networking with individuals in the community to inform them of the schools’ needs and goals as well as supporting others in developing leadership in the area of family and community involvement”* (Saunders, 2009, p.41).

Saunders (2009) further maintains that distributed leadership works well in initiatives which include individuals of varying degrees and statuses but who have a shared goal. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) view distributed leadership as also being open to conversation and engagement about the challenges as well as the resolutions, such that parties involved in the initiative share information, inspire problem-solving, and participate in joint decision-making.

### **3.4.2 Shared Goal**

While stakeholders have an equal voice through shared leadership, they should also have a shared or a common goal. Existing literature advise that collaborators should have a similar goal which they all should be focusing on to achieve mutual desired benefits, rather than merely being focused on the process of collaboration, as this allowed them to have equal responsibility to initiate acts to monitor the collaboration’s progress (Porter & Kramer, 2019; O’ Leary & Vij, 2012). Recognising the mutual benefit of partnership as an essential element in collaborative initiatives, helps learners and teachers in accessing information, skills, and resources (Drew & Thomas, 2018).

### **3.4.3. Shared Responsibility**

While role-players within a collaboration are known for having a shared goal, they also share responsibility. Thus, shared responsibility becomes another crucial principle in equal accountability for the outcomes of the collaboration. In accordance, Langfield-



Smith (2008) states that although certain collaborators may distribute duties when engaged in collaborative activities, everyone is an equal partner in making the fundamental decisions about the activities that they are undertaking.

In a study which explored the lives of unemployed community members, it was disclosed that the collaborators shared resources such as time, knowledge and materials, while adhering to shared responsibilities, which enhanced a sense of ownership and parity, no matter if the outcomes were positive or negative (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 2017).

#### **3.4.4 Communication**

Effective communication is another essential element that is required for cohesive and harmonious collaboration to take place towards the attainment of a common desired goal. Generally, communication is defined as two-way act of conveying intended meaning from one entity or group to another using mutually understood signs and semiotic guidelines (Huang, Kwon, Cheng, Kamboukos, Shelley, Brotman, & Hoagwood, 2018; Ruben, 2017). Accordingly, Huang et al. (2018) adds that communication is a key instrument for empowering and strengthening the relationship between stakeholders in the community ensuring that all stakeholders cooperate and deliver. Ruben (2017) maintains that effective and efficient communication is not only essential in school-community collaborations, but in many aspects within the school to ensure that learning takes place. Significantly the findings of a study which was conducted by Singh (2014) in rural India (Escuela Nueva) revealed that amongst the factors that made the partnership between the educators and the teachers a success was that the involved parties communicated with one another. Since the next step after the partnerships were established involved the expectations and sharing of duties, clear unambiguous communication was crucial (Epstein et al., 2015). Stakeholders should communicate in such a manner that clarity is seldom asked for, as this takes into account individuals who are illiterate.

#### **3.4.5 Positive Working Relationships**

While, the foundation of an effective collaboration becomes solid with good communication, a positive working relationship is vital to function cohesively, and this

emanates from good communication techniques that generates a transparent decision-making process (Binder, 2016). Furthermore, a positive working relationship allows for the recognition of strengths, diversity of views, and openness (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 2015). Further, a positive working relationship is vital in collaborative initiatives since such initiatives involve humans who are naturally social creatures who crave friendships, positive interaction and affirmation; hence, it makes sense that when parties have good relationships, they would be happier and more productive (Naidoo, Zygmunt, & Philips, 2017). This leads to innovativeness and being creative. When individuals do not spend their energy focusing on negative relationships, they are able to be more concentrated on their common goal. However, Kleibl and Munck (2017) caution that collaborators prefer to work with parties whom they are generally in good terms with; but collaborators should not only work people who do not differ with the Collaborators should include others by practising a willingness to respect, accept and trust other fellow partners within the initiative in an atmosphere of transparency (Adams, Harris, & Jones, 2018; Reich & Reich, 2006; Nguyen & Loughland, 2018).

#### **3.4.5.1. Respect**

Respect in collaborative endeavours generally means that individuals find ways to truly value the others and let them know that their inputs are valued (Husby, Kiik, & Juul, 2018). Leonard and Leonard (2003) maintain that when partners respect each other, and each other's contributions, and regard each other as equal, then they are most likely to achieve their mutual goal. Furthermore, being respectful means practising a deeper level of awareness and thinking about one's choice of words actions towards others in the partnership (Patil & Sheelavathy, 2018).

#### **3.4.5.2 Acceptance and Appreciation of Diversity**

Positive working relationships also involve accepting co-partners as individuals, through taking time to learn about them and their diversities (Dodd & Konzal, 2016). In agreement, Tutwiler (2017) declares that building positive work relationships also involves compromising, accepting and getting to know co-workers as unique individuals who can make unique contributions to the initiative.

### **3.4.5.3 Trust**

While all relationships are based on trust, the collaborative partnership is no different. Trust is important in collaborations, and if built solidly, then all entities benefit from that relationship (Coleman & Stern, 2018; Langfield-Smith, 2008). In other words, partners need to trust one another as this helps them work more efficiently despite their diversities. In a study involving K 8 schools, community agencies as well as university partners revealed that establishing a trusting relationship is amongst the most essential consideration in partnerships, even though some economically challenged communities have had some negative experiences involving partnerships (Bosma, Sieving, Ericson, Russ, Cavender, & Bonine, 2010). Accordingly, if trust is to be totally maintained, partners need to be trustworthy and reliable by executing their duties and responsibilities promptly and accurately, as they are expected to deliver what they promised.

### **3.4.5.4 Transparency**

Transparency is another key element in a functional collaboration relationship. In support, Tutwiler (2017) stresses that there should be a notion of transparency amongst stakeholders to share information as well as ideas that will strengthen the collaborative programmes and processes. Andriof, Waddock, Husted and Rahman (2017) explain that it is hard to capture transparency within a collaboration in a single sentence or act, as it is about several factors, including sharing information, being honest and open about what actions are taken by which members and for what reason (Dodd & Konzal, 2016). Tutwiler's (2017) study which aimed at exploring teachers as collaborative partners, revealed that transparency amongst teachers and the community assisted the collaboration as it enabled all the members within the collaboration to have discussions and gain clarity in an honest open manner that created mutual understanding especially by removing barriers that prevented members from accessing knowledge that they needed. While it contributed to making the members' skills, knowledge and ideas visible and accessible to all, transparency when practised sincerely by collaborators paved the way to understand the perspectives of others (Andriof, Waddock, Husted, & Rahman, 2017). However, in cases where collaborations lacked transparency, it led to a duplication of activities,

damaging decision-making and incapacity to be innovative, thus tarnishing the collaboration's ability to meet its shared goal (Andriof et al., 2017)

### **3.4.6 Collegiality**

Collegiality is a concept derived from the word 'colleague(s)', meaning those joined by a similar goal while respecting each other's abilities and commitment to work towards that goal (Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015). Dean and Forray (2018) define collegiality as the relationship that exists amongst fellow members who are united because of a common purpose. Similarly, in collaborative initiatives collegiality is an essential element as it creates a sense of belonging amongst all parties involved in that initiative. Accordingly, a study that was carried out in New Mexico by Sanders (2016) to explore the elements of changing schools to collaborative learning communities, indicated that the schools were not successful as they lacked meaningful ways of working together (collegiality). Similarly, in Johannesburg, South Africa, collegial teaming for inclusive education was experimented on using photo-voice as a tool for generating data and suggestions that emanated from this study were directed at collegiality as being imperative when teachers and lecturers wanted inclusive education to be a success as that was their shared goal (Geduld, 2015). Individuals who possess the collegial spirit have the willingness to resolve challenges and fix things that may hinder the smooth flow of the education process (Geduld, 2015). However, this study recommends that the sense of collegiality should be strengthened and enhanced through regular communication amongst the stakeholders, as well as through celebrations of small achievements or progress that are evident right through the journey of partnership.

### **3.4.7 Joint Learning**

Keeping in mind that collaborative initiatives are mostly comprised of unique individuals with unique and diverse talents, such initiatives should provide space and opportunity where varied individuals learn from each other in a shared-joined manner. In accordance, Tutwiler (2017) argues that joint learning results in respect, acceptance and acknowledgment of all parties' involvement in the initiative. Dodd and Konzal (2016) advise that collaborators within an initiative should learn from each other, with the objective of integrating learning in order to attain their shared goal.

### **3.4.8 Commitment**

Sinkovics, Kuivalainen and Roath (2018) advise that all collaborators should be committed to the collaborative partnership to realise the goal of the initiative. Specifically, Galletta, Portghese, Carta, D'aloja and Campagna (2016) defined commitment as a set of needs to sustain a worthwhile relationship, in this case a collaborative relationship. Ning et al. (2015) explained that commitment is a mutual trust which requires effort in order to preserve a sustainable partnership, specifically arguing that commitment surfaces when the collaborators believe the relationship among the members is a valuable one. Research tells us that when collaborators are committed, they are more likely sacrifice for the sake of the partnership, and to report to the other members if more needs to be done for the collaboration to succeed (Galletta et al., 2016; Ning et al., 2015). Furthermore, the collaborators' commitment reduces the feelings of being trapped in the partnership and they are much more productive as they enjoy being in the partnership and want to see the partnership succeed (Galletta et al., 2016). Moreover, the element of commitment was considered as a motivational factor, while it led to strong community membership (Sinkovics et al., 2018). Also, Van Tulder and Keen (2018) explain that when partners are committed on an organisation, they share responsibility that increases feelings of ownership even when the collaboration faces hindrances towards goal attainment.

### **3.4.9 Complementarity**

Kim and Shin (2015) advise that effective collaborative teams should comprise of members with varied potentials, however these should also complement each other like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Burke, Feitosa, Salas and Gelfand (2017) elucidate that the complementarity of the members' skills and capabilities in an endeavour is most likely to further enhance one's skills and talents while enhancing the strengths of their colleagues. In this way, collaboration will stimulate individual growth as well as the growth of the whole initiative (Kim & Shin, 2015). In support, Dodd and Konzal (2016) elaborate that parties within a collaborative initiative ought to build upon the distinctive contributions of all the other parties within the initiative as the combined efforts of the parties bring about positive change within that current unfavourable situation.

Mendes, Plaza and Wallerstein (2016) conducted a study in New Mexico exploring the role that is played by diversity and complementarity on partnering endeavours, where the outcomes of the study highlighted, among others, that complementarity and diversity can assist to grow resilience, build some type of collective intelligence as well as enhance the likelihood of greater acceptance in partnering endeavours. Effective collaborations thus understand how complementarity can add value to the initiative without detracting from the partnership purpose. However, the main researcher of this study cautions that extreme complementarity may pose as excessive diversity amongst the stakeholders and may result in parties losing focus on the attainment of the purpose.

### **3.5 THREATS AGAINST COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES**

Nowadays, collaboration is a commonly used catchphrase or slogan in the education field. While the concept is as old as human history, the concept of collaboration has become crucial as it is often seen as advantageous to any project (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2015). However, Sawyer (2017) observes that individuals are spending more time collaborating compared to the past years, but in spite of this, collaboration is rather a 'messy' and difficult process, hence some collaborations are destined to be unsuccessful. Despite the good intentions of attaining a shared goal, collaborators sometimes become intimidated by time-consuming teamwork, arguments because of differing opinions and personalities, as well as other hindrances towards the operationalisation of a collaboration. Consequently, collaborators sometimes see a good partnership fall apart. While, literature concerning the crucial rudiments to effective collaboration has been explored above, it is also worthwhile to explore literature concerning the hindrances to effective collaboration. As crucial as it is to comprehend what has been said about how to collaborate, it is equally crucial to understand some of the ways that collaborative efforts could get derailed. Below are the some of the common hindrances to the operationalisation of collaboration.

#### **3.5.1 Lack of Planning and Time-frames**

Time for planning and reflecting has been criticised through numerous collaborative works as being wanting. Hence, it has been raised repeatedly as a major hindrance to the operationalisation of collaborative endeavours (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015; Meza,

Drahota, & Spurgeon, 2016; Young, 2017). The work of Meza, Drahota and Spurgeon (2016) which was based on community academic partnerships blamed the limitations of the organisation on the lack of time for collaborating, as well as mistrust amongst the facilitators who were the relevant stakeholders in the initiative who complained that due to the daily demands of their careers (they worked as professionals in the community), they did not get time off to meet and plan with the other stakeholders. In another study which was conducted in Toronto concerning strategies and methods for increasing teacher-parent collaboration, time-constraints as well as interpersonal conflict doomed the initiative. Teachers struggled to get time for planning with parents, as parents were not willing to alter and offer alternative times for meetings with teachers (Young, 2017). Therefore, that led to the teachers being perceived as uncaring, unreliable, undedicated and untrustworthy collaborators who were not committed in attaining the shared goal (Young, 2017). Similarly, on a collaborative enquiry on using blogging to enhance in-service teachers' professional learning and development, it was claimed that they did not have enough time to log on and to respond to their peers' posts, and that the goal of collaboratively enhancing their professional learning and development was arduous to achieve (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015).

### **3.5.2. Lack of Communication and Complete Buy-in by Stakeholders**

While having a shared goal and effective communication have been emphasised above as being amongst the crucial components for successful collaboration, in other cases inadequate communication and lack of commitment from some partners diminished the striving towards the attainment of a shared goal. Ika and Donnelly (2017) in their research on favourable conditions for developing capacity projects, explain that part of the collaboration process is being able to convince all the stakeholders on the importance of working together to attain the shared goal. Amongst the lessons and challenges that were learned from the work of developing research collaborations in academic settings, clinicians mentioned that most of them did not have a complete buy-in into the partnership (Sahs, Nicasio, Storey, Guarnaccia, & Lewis-Fernandez, 2017). Another challenge that they faced was inadequate and ineffective communication as they felt an immense need for better communication as the expectations of the partnership were not clarified (Sahs et al., 2017). Correspondingly, Armstrong (2015), through his work that was carried out in the United

Kingdom on exploring effective partnerships and collaborations for school improvement, warned against the lack of shared objectives as well as common ground for the purpose and nature of the collaborative partnership from the initiation stage.

### **3.5.3 Conflicting Agendas and Vague Objectives**

Another common hindrance to effective collaboration is conflicting agendas among the stakeholders as well as vague unclear objectives. In support, Garmston and Wellman (2016) argued that not having a clear understanding of what the collaboration is trying to attain and for what reasons, is a familiar hindrance to effective collaboration. This hindrance according to Elbakidze, Dawson, Andersson, Axelsson, Angelstam, Stjernquist and Thellbro (2015) may be aggravated by working remotely or by the lack of communication within the collaborations coupled with conflicting agendas which may originate from the individuals' economic, environmental, cultural and social expectations. Garmston and Wellman (2016) advise that individual and team objectives need to be spelled out clearly before the collaboration gets off the ground. Sporer and Windt (2018) caution that the objectives may sometimes change during the collaboration and if these changes are not made known to all the collaborators then objectives become blurred, adding that uncoordinated efforts and conflicting agendas could lead to inoperative and solitary performance teams, instead of effective and collaborative performance teams.

### **3.5.4 Fear of Voicing Different Opinions and Criticism by Colleagues**

While distributed leadership has been highlighted earlier on as being amongst the crucial factor for effective collaboration, due to feelings of inferiority, status, cross-cultural influences, age and other issues, some collaborators within the collaboration might be embarrassed or even just want to avoid a conflict, hence they may not express their opinion when it is different to the others; thus, it is crucial that all opinions are considered as valid and valuable (Powell, Hamann, Bitzer, & Baker, 2017). A model of collaboration that was designed for social psychology to obviate the embarrassment when needing assistance or when ones' advice and opinions are pushed aside by the other collaborators of the group which engenders polarisation and interpersonal disconnections (Heslop, Stojanovski, Paul, & Bailey, 2018).



### **3.5.5 Working in Silos**

Fawcett, McCarter, Fawcett, Webb and Magnan (2015) advocated that the silo effect is the greatest hindrance to purposeful collaboration. A silo may be defined as a system, a process, department or a member who wants to operate in isolation, separate from the other partners (Tight, 2014). For effective collaboration within the field of educational psychology, Muijs and Reynolds (2017) warn against working in silos and advise that it is crucial to immediately deal with the silo as soon as it surfaces as it becomes almost impossible for the other parties to operate functionally around a silo as nothing destroys a collaboration like a silo. Fawcett et al., (2015) investigated why supply chain collaboration failed, and the outcomes of their study indicated that, for the collaborations to be successful and to minimise costs they had to do away with silos and work as a solid unit. While, working in silos within a collaboration may be triggered by several reasons, it often ends up as a hindrance to the effectiveness of the collaboration (Muijs & Reynolds, 2017). A study that explored mother-to-child residential substance abuse treatment programmes, revealed that working in silos was triggered by the issue of mistrust amongst the stakeholders which later proved to be a hindrance on the functionality of the group as whole (Iachini, De Hart, McLeer, Hock, Browne, & Clone, 2015).

### **3.5.6 Incompetent Leadership**

Numerous hindrances to the collaboration activity that surfaced in one study on school partnership, included the pace of expansion and the need to manage the risks associated with the geographical spread of schools, reviewing authority arrangements to adapt to distributed leadership, the incapability to accommodate the increase in new members, and the danger of retaining existing members.

In a research study that was conducted by Bantwini (2015) on analysing the state of collaboration between the natural science school district officials and primary school science teachers, teachers complained about the incompetency on the side of the District officials who were appointed to steer the collaboration endeavour. To an extent the teacher collaborators felt that they wasted valuable teaching and learning contact time to come and have meetings with incompetent District officials (Bantwini, 2015). In that, regard incompetent leadership was perceived as a hindrance to the smooth functioning of the collaboration.

### **3.5.7 Lack of Resources**

Existing literature exposes the lack of resources to be another major hindrance to collaboration, especially in the rural contexts. Epstein (2018) explains that the resources enhance the commitment to partnership activity amongst collaborators. Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, and Navia (2016) lament the lack of resources in terms of finances as being the contributor to the failure of several collaborative projects. Funding is frequently the focus of the school-community collaborations. However, the lack of funding may compromise the collaboration as well as increase doubts regarding future collaborations (Wood & Goba, 2011). The lack of sound leadership was linked to having poor resources and not managing people during conflict situations as they had no conflict management skills.

In Nairobi (Kenya), learners who were amongst the collaborators reported challenges on an online collaborative initiative. The learners complained about the lack of feedback from their facilitators who were also collaborators (Muuro, Wagacha, Kihoro, & Oboko, 2014). The scarcity of physical resources and lack of participation from the peer collaborators, were the major hindrances. Similarly, barriers to collaborative strategies in a study concerning substance abusers in rural communities revealed challenges that included the inability of the counsellors to provide adequate mental health resources, in addition to the extreme lack of funding, inadequate transportation services to attend the meetings, and poor infrastructure (Pullen & Oser, 2014).

### **3.5.8 Absence of Training in Skills Required for Collaboration**

While incompetent leadership has been highlighted above to be amongst the issues which causes collaboration not to run smoothly, the absence of training collaborators within the partnership has been mentioned through existing literature to also be a barrier towards effective collaboration. In support, Cooper, Evans and Pybis (2016) conducted a study in which the inhibitors that were exposed were the lack of trust and mutual respect amongst the collaborators, as well as shared comprehension and training on working in a collaborative manner as stakeholders were unskilled on being collaborators which led to chaos and demotivation, since the collaborators complained of not knowing how to conduct the collaboration proceedings which was a major

challenge to the attainment of the mutual goal. Hence, one may assume that incompetent leadership blinds the need for training to obtain the skills of collaboration.

### **3.5.9 Failure to Collaborate as Equals**

Communities where partnerships take place have also been known to have existing hierarchies. Such hierarchies amongst community members may exist because of class, educational level, cultures and other factors. However, the issue of existing hierarchies in communities tends to be detrimental to the collaboration process. Forondo, McWilliams and McArthur (2016) report that egos, lack of confidence and class distinctions have negative effects in the collaborative partnerships. Also, existing community hierarchies were noted as obstacles in cases where the different professions worked collaboratively. Accordingly, a collaborative initiative that comprised of patients, families, community members and other professionals reported a strong challenge in a partnership which involved inter-professional brainstorming (Green & Johnson, 2015). This challenge was as a result of the partners not being fully informed about or aware about each other's line of profession.

## **3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed literature related to the study by exploring the lives of vulnerable learners in rural ecologies, which focused on the types of vulnerabilities, their courses as well as the forms of care and support that have been provided to such learners. It reviewed literature concerning the necessity for collaboration, the crucial rudiments for collaborative frameworks, as well as the threats that may hinder such initiatives, through reflecting on other collaborative initiatives. The next chapter (4) presents the research design and methodology adopted for this study.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY FOR DATA GENERATION

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### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter three dealt with scholarly literature concerning the collaborative framework in rural ecologies through exploring and analysing literature from international, national and local contexts. This chapter (4) focuses on the research design and the methodology utilised to conduct this study. It provides comprehensive information regarding the research approach, paradigm, design as well as the study area. In addition, this chapter presents detailed information about the way the participants were selected; and their profiles are presented. The data generation methods that were used are discussed, and a narration on how generated data was analysed is presented. Towards the latter part of the chapter, the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations are explained.

### 4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research designs are defined as layouts that explain how and when data will be generated and analysed (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Yin (2015) elucidates that research designs are the logical links between data generated and the conclusions elicited, while mindful of the main critical questions of a study.

#### 4.2.1 The Critical Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are substructures of logical assumptions that lead the researchers (Mertens, 2014; Sefotho, 2015). This study is located within the critical paradigm, it does not only intend to explore the vulnerabilities of learners in a rural ecology in addition to exposing the causes or the oppressors of these learners, but the study also strives for a social set-up that will be based on the equality of all members in the society.

The critical paradigm is archaeologically connected to the three critical theorists of the traditional Frankfurt School. Horkheimer was one of the scholars from the Frankfurt School who favoured critical paradigm and he describes it as a critical theory which pursues human emancipation from the conditions in the community which oppress them (Horkheimer, 1982). While critical paradigm challenges the status quo, it also works towards a democratic society, since it is concerned with the matters of power relations as well as the interface of class, race, financial status and other social hierarchies that may be influential in a social system (Giroux, 2017; How, 2017).

The critical paradigm is suitable since it is compatible to three traits or criteria related to the current study. The first criterion being that a study based within the critical paradigm should be explanatory or descriptive about what is posing as a challenge within the society (Asghar, 2013). Accordingly, the initial objective of this study is to describe the vulnerabilities as well as the causes of the vulnerabilities which exist amongst the learners within the rural ecologies. The second criteria according to Asghar (2013) is that the study should stipulate the action that is to be carried out by the participants to bring about change to the challenging situation. Accordingly, this study proposes collaboration amongst the relevant stakeholders who worked in cohesion to bring about meaningful change using a framework to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners. The third criteria is the study's capability to provide distinct norms for criticism and transformation. Accordingly, the current study is based on PAR which provided an opportunity for the stakeholders to plan together, put their plan into action, and reflect on their team efforts.

In addition, social researchers elucidated that paradigms help in perceiving the world using principles of ontology, which is the nature of reality (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014; Sarantakos, 2012; Burr, 2018). Paradigms are also informed by epistemology which is the relationship that we have with knowledge or knowing what we know (Ormston et al., 2014). Sarantakos (2012) also states that a paradigm is informed by axiology, which refers to the nature of value and valuation about the knowledge that we have in the world. Burr (2018) adds that paradigm is said to be informed by the methodology, which refers to the strategies that are used to obtain the knowledge. The assumptions of the critical paradigm, like any other paradigm, is

informed by ontology, epistemology, axiology as well as methodology, (Mertens, 2014), which will be detailed below.

#### **4.2.1.1 A view on the nature of reality (Ontology)**

Ontology refers to what exists and is a held view on the nature of reality (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Smith, 2004). Researchers could be realists, those who see reality as something out there as a law of nature which is just waiting to be discovered. They could also be critical realists, those who know that things or knowledge exist out there but as humans our presence as researchers influence what we trying to measure (Fitzpatrick, 2018). Researchers could also be relativists, those who believe that knowledge is a social reality, value-laden, and it only comes to light through individual interpretation (Smith, 2004).

Since this research is based within the critical paradigm, a view on the nature of reality that is held by critical theorists, is that reality is out there to be discovered and that it has multiple layers such as surface reality which is visible, as well as deep structures which are unobservable; however, theories also assist in uncovering the “deep unobservables” (Mertens, 2014). In support, Bhaskar (2010) elucidates that critical theorists believe in the nature of being, which is the nature of existence as well as what comprises reality. Furthermore, theorists who based their research on the critical paradigm principles believe that there is a myriad of realities, and the ways of accessing these realities or truths are abundant (Bhaskar, 2010; Kumar, 2019). Other researchers refer to the critical paradigm as the emancipatory paradigm as it embraces the position that while the social reality is historically embedded, it continually fluctuates to adapt to that particular society, its political regimes, its culture as well the power issues within that society (Venter & Goede, 2018; Wynn & Williams, 2012). In relation to the current study, this ontological view of critical theorists generally implies that the vulnerabilities and the causes of such vulnerabilities that are experienced by learners, may be understood by considering the perspectives of many stakeholders within the community. Further, the form of care and support for such learners in rural ecologies is not dependent solely on one individual, but also on efforts from a variety of stakeholders within the community.

#### **4.2.1.2 The perceived relationship with knowledge (Epistemology)**

Epistemology, on the other hand, refers to the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge through attempting to differentiate between what is true or adequate, and what is false or inadequate (Hatch, 2018; Stokes, 2011).

Critical theorists are of the belief that knowledge is as a result of what really interests humans and that knowledge grants humans the power to break loose from their current struggles (Mertens, 2014). Chiu, Hsu and Wang (2006) elucidated that humans construct their own knowledge from what interests them socially, and the same knowledge that they gain as humans empowers them. In relation to the current study, when the various stakeholders from the society gather and collaborate, they were able to share ideas and give inputs which will assist in emancipating themselves from their adverse conditions or vulnerabilities which impede learners from achieving quality and sustainable learning. In accordance, Wynn and Williams (2012) assert that critical theorists believe that knowledge is only factual when it possesses the ability to be converted into practice which must engender positive changes in the lives of the individuals within the community. Furthermore, Brookfield (2017) and Kolbas (2018) stated that critical theorists assume that the knowledge that is created is distributed amongst the parties in collaborative moves. Hence this disrupts power hierarchies within the society so that all individuals become equally empowered and democratised (Brookfield, 2017; Kolbas, 2018). In this study, all parties were viewed as equals since power was equally distributed amongst all parties who chose to collaborate within the initiative, regardless of their status or position in the community.

#### **4.2.1.3 Axiology (The nature of value and evaluation)**

Axiology is a branch of philosophical study which is concerned with dissecting the judgements about value and evaluation. Bourne, Crossfield and Nicholas (2017) clarify that axiology is the study of values or of one's values. In essence, what we value is bound to affect how we do research as well as what we as researchers value in the results of our research. While the notion of epistemology did not highly affect how we as researchers reflect on our own values, axiology prompts us as researchers to tap into and reflect on what we value. For example, my (the main researcher) values are based on my religion which calls for the free and responsible search for the truth and

meaning. While critical theorists generally value the promotion of radical social transformation and empowerment (Honneth, 2014). Using axiology in this research study led me to explore how my values as well as the values of other critical theorists affected what I believed to be knowledge. In addition, my reflecting on my set of values as a researcher affected how I conducted the research processes - it was very much linked to my religious beliefs, such as, that all people should be treated with respect and dignity as they are created in the image of God. Accordingly, this value (ethical standard) guaranteed that all the stakeholders who took part in the study, regardless of their economic and social status, were treated as equals, and what they had to offer as knowledge and skills, were taken into consideration appreciably.

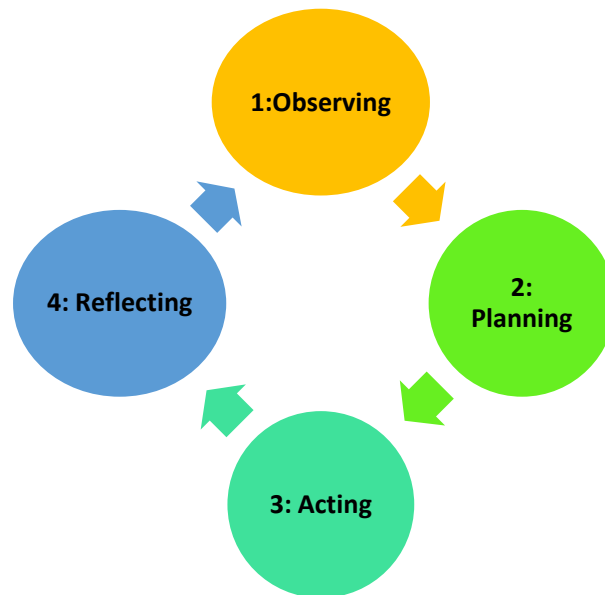
#### **4.2.1.4 Strategies that will be used to obtain the knowledge (Methodology)**

This study was based within the qualitative research methodology. Since qualitative research allowed the researcher and the co-researchers (participants) to express deep and detailed responses verbally and creatively through collage interpretations, focus group discussions, and from analysing free-writing texts. Furthermore, this methodology was preferred because it was non-numerical since this study was not concerned with numbers but qualitative data. Researchers maintain that qualitative researchers aim to make sense of peoples' perceptions, feelings, experiences and situations exactly as they happen in the natural world (Coghlan, 2019; Yin, 2015). Accordingly, the ontology, epistemology and axiology of this study's critical paradigm were in accordance with the qualitative methodology. In elaboration, the first objective of the study was to explore the lives of vulnerable learners who lived within the rural ecologies. Hence, the qualitative approach facilitated an in-depth comprehension of the vulnerabilities, the causes of vulnerability, and the existing efforts of caring for vulnerable learners. The study also aimed to assess the need for the collaborative framework (prior to the activation of the actual framework), and to analyse the threats to the operationalisation of the collaborative initiative. Accordingly, Mason (2010) observed that qualitative researchers are more concerned with details and in-depth analyses; in this study such characteristics were conducive to promoting emancipation and empowerment. Flick (2009) adds that the qualitative approach is exploratory and is used when there are no specific expectations of the outcomes of the study. Hence, this approach was appropriate for this study as it allowed the researchers to generate



rich data that conveyed a true reflection of the vulnerable learners' lives, largely through holding effective focus group discussions with the relevant stakeholders. Also, the qualitative methodology paved the way for the involvement of all those who were previously marginalised, ensuring that their views were taken into consideration as part of the emancipatory process by using PAR.

#### 4.2.2 Participation Action Research (PAR)



**Figure 4.1:** PAR: A qualitative and Collaborative Process of Planning, Acting and Reflecting.

While qualitative methodology has been perceived as a suitable method that is in line with ontology, epistemology and axiology that are based within the critical paradigm, PAR was also seen as a suitable design to base this qualitative study on. In support, Mertens (2014) adds that PAR is a qualitative research methodology which is geared towards planning and conducting research with those citizens whose community is under study. This form of research, according to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), termed as PAR originated in Colombia and India in the 1970s and is closely connected to action research; however, it uses a recurring rather than a linear course of observing, planning, acting, re-observing and reflecting. Furthermore, Mertens (2014) and Coghlan, (2019) assert that PAR is devoted to ensuring that both the researcher and the researched remain as partners throughout the research process and that participants are gainfully involved through personal or group tasks or actions. The PAR

process is a collaborative one as it involves all the individuals who are affected by the topic under research, and its stakeholders serve as a guides and facilitators. The stakeholders are responsible for planning processes and generating data for validation (Padgett, 2016). In accordance with the principles of asset-based approach the participants are seen as assets. Furthermore, PAR involves continuous action and reflection, while it consistently monitors equal distribution power (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Accordingly, Bergold and Thomas (2012) contend that PAR is used when the purpose of the study is developed as a result of the union of two standpoints (ideologies), science and practice, where both benefit from the process when it is conducted successfully.

#### **4.2.2.1. Conceptualising of PAR**

The success of the convergence of the two standpoints of science and practice is a challenging process as it involves the two spheres to meet, interact and develop an understanding for each other. Accordingly, this section outlines the key elements of the PAR method.

Mertens, (2014) states that PAR is intentionally a goal-orientated procedure and it seeks to generate data that will have a positive change on the individuals who are involved in the endeavour. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) explain that PAR is inclusive to change in the individuals as well as cultural groups, organisations or communities where the individuals belong. This denotes that a PAR-based study should bring about a positive change within the lives of participating stakeholders, the community and the institution.

While PAR is associated with having an emancipatory effect on those involved (Cusack, Cohen, Mignone, Chartier, & Lutfiyya, 2018), it is also said to be a collaborative process, as it includes all those who are affected by the phenomenon under research (Berg et al., 2004). In accordance, Padgett (2016) asserts that PAR is believed to be a robust research method on studies that involve oppressed and disenfranchised citizens in attempts to eradicate their adversities within a community, such that PAR endeavours to comprehend the world by trying to positively change it in a collaborative manner using reflection as one of its techniques.

PAR is not only a collaborative process, but a process which positions participants as facilitators who are active instead of passive. Berg et al., (2004) explain that PAR is a type of research method which stresses the collective inquiry and experimentation that is based on experiences as well as social history. In accordance, Padgett (2016) argues that PAR is a method of data generation which is goal-driven, organised and which also perceives participants as active generators of data in the research process, where the participants are regarded as active core researchers as they engage in planning, carrying out the action, observing as well as evaluating the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). In concurrence, Dold and Chapman (2012) emphasised that PAR combines systematic research with the development of a practical intervention. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that PAR was a method of data generation which researches communities while it insists on participation and action.

While PAR strives for all participants to interact in the research process, it is also said to be political in nature. In elucidation, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that PAR involves a continual critical analysis of distribution of power and the expression of resistance; and these are evident throughout the PAR process. Gay (2010) argues that PAR has the capability to disempower and disengage those who are normally perceived as most influential or dominant in the community, as it places them at the same level with those citizens in the ecology who are regarded as inferior or subservient.

In elaboration, the key aspects of PAR according to Crane and O'Regan (2010) and Wilson, Kenny and Dickson-Swift, (2018) include: observing what is happening in the chosen context, reflecting on and comprehending what is taking place, planning a system that might resolve the noted challenge in the context, acting on that system, re-observing what is happening, analysing while developing a theory, and lastly reflecting and seeking feedback.

#### **4.2.2.2 The significance of PAR to the current study**

The use of PAR is significant to the current study as it proposed to bring about a positive change within a community through a framework that is hoped to enhance care and support for those learners within the rural context who face adversities which

impede their learning process. As such, PAR has been proven to be a powerful approach when working with oppressed groups to better their condition within the society (Sen & Grown, 2013).

The use of PAR is significant in this study as it involved individuals of different statuses and walks of lives from the community such as teachers, ordinary learners' relatives, a social worker, a priest, police officers and a traditional healer. Also, PAR is a methodology that is known to empower docile individuals while it disempowers those who are normally regarded as powerful within the community so that everyone participates on an equal basis or operates within code of conduct of the initiative (Dold & Chapman, 2012). Furthermore, PAR has been highlighted as significant since it fosters the interests of the deprived and marginalised. In other words, PAR grants opportunities for those individuals within the community who are mostly excluded from decision-making to voice their opinions to eradicate adversities. Despite, the low status of the “underdogs” in the community, their inclusion may be of great importance as they may possess indigenous knowledge as well as tacit information which may enhance the effectiveness of the initiative.

#### **4.2.2.3 Application of PAR in the current study**

In applying PAR as the design of the study, this section elaborates on the steps of PAR that were followed by this study. In essence, the steps of PAR according to Delport and Fouché (2011) include the following:

- Introduction to the community
- Problem identification and statement
- Goals and objectives
- Collection of data
- Analysis of data
- Negotiation
- Planning
- Evaluation
- Report-writing
- Action plan
- Evaluation of the action

Since the initial step of PAR according to Delpont and Fouché (2011) entails introduction to the community where the study was to be carried out, the area had to be explored before the actual introduction of the problem to the community.

### **4.3 THE RESEARCH AREA**

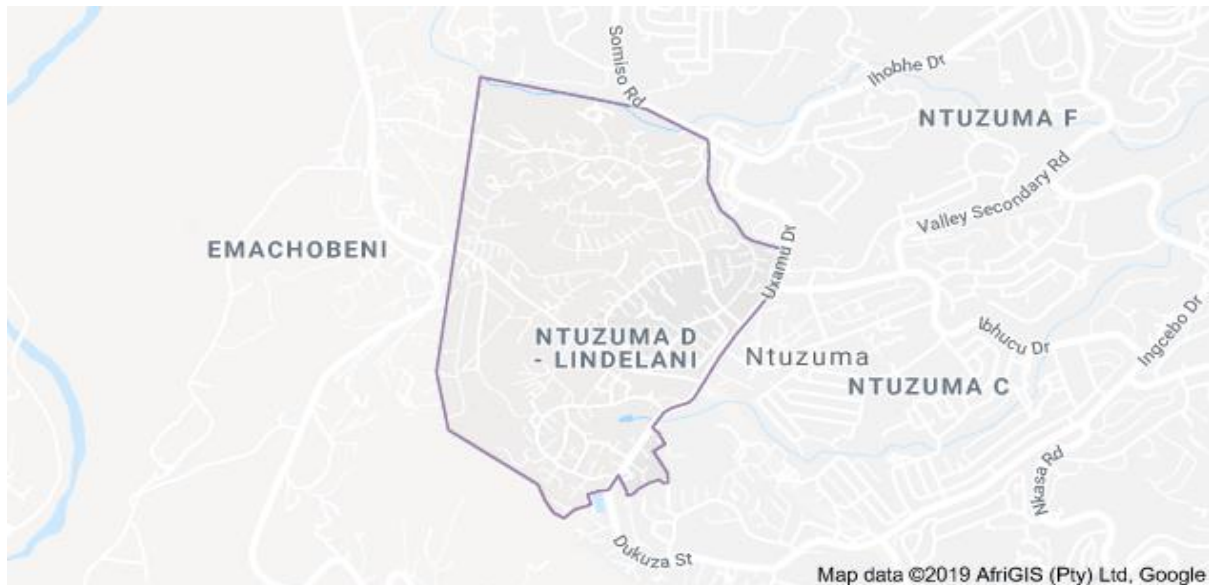
Bryman (2016) and Kumar (2019) state that a study area refers to all the categories that the research falls into, more specifically the determination of the study's exact geographical boundaries. Within the current study, the exact boundaries where the study took place was in a school in a specific community. Accordingly, the community and the school where the study took place is profiled below.

#### **4.3.1 The Community**

The study was conducted in a school that is situated in Lindelani. For the purpose of this study, the specific area where the study was conducted is regarded as a rural ecology as most people in the area engage directly with agriculture, by means of subsistence farming and rearing livestock. Marsden, Murdoch, Lowe, Munton and Flynn (2005) explain that rural areas refer to the countryside where the population engages mainly in primary production activities such as agriculture, fishing and rearing stock.

Lindelani is situated 12 kilometres from the Durban CBD in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa). Large tracts of land in this area are informally occupied due to the scarcity of houses. There are RDP housing programmes housing as well as other projects, but these are inadequate to house a large population reeling from the effects of apartheid. Lindelani mainly consists of Black people with most of them belonging to the working class. Many people residing in Lindelani are unemployed, some earn a living by doing domestic work in the nearby suburbs such of Phoenix, Umhlanga and Durban North, while some run small businesses such as tuckshops and hairdressing salons in the neighbourhood. The leading transport system in Lindelani is mini-bus taxis and buses. There are very few people in this area who work as teachers, nurses, policeman and social workers. The area is challenged by a high rate of unemployment, which leads to the people being dependent on the Government social grants. The rate of teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, crime, and orphanhood is also high in this

ecology. In Lindelani there is a community hall where the community gatherings, funerals, weddings, arts and culture performances, and some of the youths' activities are occupied.



**Photograph-4.1:** Map of Lindelani (extracted from Google Maps, <https://www.google.co.za/url>).

#### 4.3.2 The School

The school where the study was conducted is a primary school, and for the purpose of confidentiality, it was named Amandla Primary School (pseudonym). The school is in Lindelani Village, South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal Province, under the Ethekeweni Metropolitan Municipality, in the KwaMashu District. The school is Government-owned like many schools in the area. It has 37 grade R learners, 120 grade one learners, 115 grade two learners, 130 grade three learners and 120 grade four learners. The school population is made up of 522 learners, 18 teachers, one HoD and a Principal. In addition, the non-teaching staff consisted of one administrative officer, one person responsible for cooking for the learners, and one groundsman for cleaning the whole school. The learner enrolment currently indicates a decrease when compared to the past three years. Regarding teaching qualifications, most teachers in the school of study have teaching diplomas, a few have education (or other) degrees, and the grade R practitioners have certificates in Edu care. The school falls under quintile ranking 2 schools, due to the majority of the learners' parents falling below the

poverty line due to unemployment and relying on Government grants for survival. Furthermore, the quintile ranking of the school is due to the school being situated in a rural ecology that is far from urban development. There is a Government feeding scheme that provides daily lunch for the learners. The school is destitute, and its infrastructure is dilapidated, which poses as a challenge towards sustained learning. There are no computers in the school, but there is one laptop which is used by the administration officer to capture the SASAMS requirements. There is one landline which is no longer working; hence parents and other stakeholders must rely on the teachers' cell phones or use the "walk-in" approach, in order to contact the individuals within the school. There are three sets of flushing toilets; one set for the boys, one for the girls, and one for teachers.

#### **4.3.3 Problem Identification**

While the research site has been introduced as a rural ecology with numerous challenges and adversities, PAR takes the process further by identifying and then stating the problem formally (statement of the problem) as outlined in paragraph 4.2.2.3. In support, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) elucidate that the process of PAR commences in conditions where a group of people feel a compelling need to reflect critically with regards to their current challenges as well as how these challenges could be addressed in order to better their current situation. Accordingly, the main-researcher (myself) visited the elders and the *indunas* (headmen) of the ecology to discuss intentions of conducting a research study in this ecology regarding the most compelling and troubling issues within the community. Among numerous challenges that face the community, one that continually cropped up was that of the disruption of the learning process of learners due to various vulnerabilities. The ward councillor of the area said:

*"Our area as a rural place has a lot of challenges, such as crime, unemployment, high rate of deaths and substance abuse. However, our greatest concern is our youth who will also not be able to escape this adverse lifestyle of ours since their learning is disrupted severely by many factors".*

#### **4.3.4 Goals and Objectives**

While the community's troubling issue was narrated, the researcher as well as the significant stakeholders in the community came up with the plan of jointly introducing a strategy that would change the current situation but keeping to the main objective of the study (*"How can we through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for those learners who are vulnerable in the ecology"*). To achieve the main objective, there were other sub-objectives to consider, which complemented the main objective. The sub-objectives have been outlined in the first chapter of the study in (1.6). After the objectives were stipulated, the planning session commenced. This phase included negotiating how the main goal of the study was to be achieved. The planning and negotiation involved deciding which stakeholders to involve in the project, and why. Hence, the next section focused on the selection, recruitment and profiling the co-researchers.

#### **4.4. SELECTION, RECRUITMENT AND PROFILING OF THE RESEARCH TEAM**

In an attempt to achieve the goals of the study, co-researchers were selected. Significantly, the main idea of PAR is that while participants are actively involved in investigating and identifying the challenge in their community, they also need to be active rather than passive in mitigating that challenge. This implies that a set of participants who were selected and recruited were individuals who had the study's best interests at heart. This practice was also in line with the element of shared responsibility, which is one of the elements of the collaboration theory. Furthermore, the initial participants were permitted to extend invites to other participants whom they believed would also show undivided commitment. Accordingly, the qualitative nature of the study allowed the main researcher to purposely and deliberately select those individuals, who according to her knowledge, and that of other co-researchers in the community, who were seen to be capable of providing the study with rich data. In support, Creswell (2014) posits that purposive participant selection allows flexibility for the researchers to deliberately recruit participants and choose research techniques suitable for the aims of their studies. While the participants were selected because they were identified as the key stakeholders, guidance of the first stage of the collaboration process was necessary considering the diverse group of individuals (outlined below):



#### **4.4.1 The Main Researcher**

The main researcher (myself) is a 39 years old educator in a school that is situated within the rural contexts of Lindelani. She has been working at the school for 8 years and her latest academic qualification is a master's degree in educational psychology. She teaches Grade 4 learners, and her subjects included English, Life orientation as well as Social sciences. She previously worked as at a financial institution where she held various positions within the institution. She started working as an educator in 2012, teaching Mathematics, English, isiZulu and Life orientation to the Grades 3 – 4 learners. As an educator in a rural school context, she became involved in various organisations as well as committees such as the Learner Support Committee (LSC), of which she was the chairperson. She was also a lay counsellor within the school. These experiences afforded her an opportunity to work closely with learners who were vulnerable and orphaned. Furthermore, such experiences exposed her to how vulnerability within the rural sector detrimentally impeded learners' attainment of quality education. However, she was also exposed to fragmented efforts from various stakeholders aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of vulnerability amongst learners within the rural contexts towards the sustainability of learning. Hence, the study assisted the researcher to provide a platform for the various stakeholders to combine their individualised efforts into a collaborative framework that would enhance the sustainability of learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural sector.

#### **4.4.2 The Learner-participants**

Initially, all Grade 4 learners from the Amandla Primary School were invited to take part in the study. However, all the Grade four learners were advised that only the first four learners to return their completed consent forms signed by their parents, were chosen. Participation was voluntary, provided they (learners) have an existing interest in the study's topic. Both boys and girls were invited, and it was deliberately intended for gaining a diverse gender perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. The reason for choosing only grade four learners was that they were regarded as the "older" learners in the school and thus would be more manageable to work with. Additionally, participating learners had been with the school for much longer when compared to other learners from the "lower" grades. The established rapport between the learners and the researcher further paved the way for a smooth process of data

generation (they already engaged with the researcher during life orientation lessons). The learners (all pseudonyms) were profiled as follows:

**Butterfly** was the first learner participant. Butterfly was a 10-year-old girl who chose to be called “Butterfly” as she felt that her appearance depicted the beauty of a butterfly.

The second learner participant was **Angel**. Angel was also a 10-year-old girl. She chose to be named Angel as she held a strong belief in the existence of angels. Angel further claimed that she always had an angel who constantly followed her around and guided her every step.

**Sunshine** was the third learner participant. He was an 11-year-old boy who chose to be called Sunshine as he is a happy individual who chose to be happy after long suffering with depression due to losing both his parents to a serious illness.

The fourth learner participant was **Terminator** who was an 11-year-old boy. He explained that he liked his pseudonym as it was symbolic of his strong resilient character as seen in the movie character who was a human disguised as a cyber assassin.

#### **4.4.3 The Educator Participants**

Two educators were recruited from the same school. The choice of selecting the two educators was based on the fact that they formed part of the learner support committee. Hence, they were exposed to working towards supporting those learners who were regarded as vulnerable in the school. While the study could have opted for including only one educator, consideration was given to unforeseen circumstances in case one educator was not available, thus two educators were selected to participate in the study. The two educators who participated in the research study were **Miss X** (pseudonym) and **Mrs Bee** (pseudonyms).

Miss X was a 37-year-old female educator who taught Grade three learners. She had a teaching experience of eight years. She has a Bachelor of Education teaching degree and she was a member of Learners' Support Team (LST) within the school.

Mrs Bee was the second educator participant, a 43-year-old. Mrs Bee taught Grade two learners and she had a teaching experience of more than twelve years. She holds a teaching diploma and she was also a member of Learners' Support Team (LST) as well as a member of the Staff Development Team (SDT) within the school, since she is one of the senior teachers at the school.

#### **4.4.4 The Learners' Family Members**

A written invitation was sent out to the homes of the learners to extend participation to whom they regard as family members. We kept in mind that some of learners in the community are raised by their extended family members, and in some cases older siblings in the absence of parents and legal guardians. The reason for including the family members was that they were also exposed to the vulnerabilities that learners experienced in the home sector. As a result, they were aware of the aspects to consider towards sustaining learning for vulnerable learners. With the family members as well, the first three parents to voluntarily return the completed and signed consent forms were accepted to take part in the research study. The profile of the learners' relatives (all pseudonyms) follows:

**Gogo** who is the learner's maternal grandmother is unemployed but supports her family by selling "*amagwinya*" (round doughnuts) and "polony-bread" (*amakota*) to the learners during break-times, and she collects a Government grant.

**Uncle Sam** is one of the learners' biological father and a member of the School Governing Body (SGB).

**Candy** is a learner's mother. She earns a living by doing various piece jobs in the community, such as offering babysitting services since in this rural area with no crèches. She also sells paraffin and cool drinks to the community members.

#### **4.4.5 The South African Police Officer**

The researcher asked the station commander at the nearest police station to assign an experienced police officer who has dealt with issues concerning school vulnerable learners and who is able to produce rich data on enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners from the police department's perspective. The station commander recommended **Mr Thwala** (pseudonym) an inspector at the community police station. He has worked for the police force for about 19 years and has been involved in several community programmes aimed at creating awareness about substance abuse, bullying, crime, child-trafficking and other general community safety duties.

#### **4.4.6 The Nurse from the Local Clinic**

The researcher requested the clinic matron to allocate an experienced nurse who could assist in terms of issues concerning supporting learners who are vulnerable. The clinic matron permitted **Mhlengikazi** (pseudonym), a professional nurse with 11 years' experience in the nursing field. Mhlengikazi has also been working with the learners from the school (research site) thus she had an established relationship with learners and the teachers.

#### **4.4.7 The Local Social Worker**

A social worker who is assigned to the school was approached and invited to take part in the study. This was advantageous since she already had an established relationship with some vulnerable learners in the school of study. For the purpose of the research she was called **Mother Theresa** (pseudonym). Mother Theresa was a professional social worker for 5 years. She worked as an auxiliary social worker for three years prior to becoming a professional social worker.

#### **4.4.8 The Parish Priest**

The researcher invited the parish priest to participate in the study, as she believed that he had valuable information and knowledge to share regarding caring and supporting the learners in the ecology. More so, since he was already involved in a project of a similar nature where he was involved in projects which were aimed at caring and supporting children within the church and from the community at large who were

orphaned and vulnerable due to various reasons. He opted to be referred to as **Mfundisi** (pseudonym) for the duration of the research study.

#### **4.4.9 The Soup-kitchen Lady**

During the meeting with the parish priest, he recommended and referred the researcher to also include the lady who runs the church soup kitchen (her pseudonym was “**Soup-lady**”) in the research study as she worked extensively with vulnerable learners within the church context. Besides providing free soup to the vulnerable community, Soup-lady was also involved in other projects which were aimed at emancipating the community.

#### **4.4.10 The Local Traditional Healer**

An invite was also sent to a traditional healer in the community named **S'khumba** (pseudonym). S'khumba was invited as he was believed to being informative about the traditional causes and effects which were normally associated with disrupting the learning process. Additionally, S'khumba was also involved in providing care and support for vulnerable learners. While there were several traditional healers in the community, S'khumba was particularly chosen as he was a member of the SGB and that was a positive in his favour as he was familiar with the maintenance of quality learning.

### **4.5 THE DATA GENERATION PROCESS AND METHODS**

This section specifically deals with the processes that were followed in generating data, including the methods which were employed in these processes.

#### **4.5.1 Preparation for the Meeting**

The main-researcher was in possession of the all the required documents (permission letters), namely the ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Department, the permission letter from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education, the permission from the school principal of the research site, as well as all the consent letters from the co-researchers and from the parents of minors (see appendices). The date, the venue, agenda, and the time for the first meeting were then communicated to the co-researchers, as details of the notice of meeting (first one).

#### 4.5.2 The First Meeting

The co-researchers gathered on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2018, since most of them were available as it was a public holiday in celebration of the National Women's Day. The main aim of the first meeting was to break-the-ice, converse, negotiate and plan in accordance with PAR methods of data generation which were going to be employed for the study. Kumar (2019) concurs that PAR-designed studies are interactive and are intensely collaborating to all core-researchers. The collaboration theory also highlights the notion of shared responsibility and distributed leadership. Accordingly, within the current study, the researcher avoided piling co-researchers with details of the methods that were to be used for generating data. Hence, she invited an objective lecturer to conduct a workshop to develop and capacitate co-researchers regarding the proceedings of PAR and most significantly regarding the forms of data generation methods that may be employed by PAR research studies. The invited lecturer further outlined the advantages as well as the disadvantages of each data generation method to assist the stakeholders in choosing the appropriate data generation methods. The lecture session, the discussion, as well as the conclusions on which methods to use, were audio-recorded and documented as field notes. Accordingly, Carey and Asbury (2016) assert that data generation methods which can be used in studies that employ PAR included community meetings, focus group discussions, and nominal group sessions, among other methods. Towards the end of the meeting the parties concluded by opting to utilise a combination of three methods; namely, the collages, focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as the free-writing reflections - and for the benefit of the main researcher, field note-writing. The parties felt that a combination of the three mentioned methods would be suitable for a varied group such as themselves and would be beneficial for them in creating a framework or strategy that would bring about change in their community. In support, Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that data in PAR studies is generated using several methods at once. Thus, this combination of methods was used because they have been well-established in the field PAR studies (Chambers, 2007). In accordance, the element of complementarity is stressed through the elements of the collaboration theory. Furthermore, literature indicates that the use of multiple-data-generation techniques is an efficient manner of capturing group perspectives whilst generating reliable data on topics that are relevant to marginalised communities, which is one of the values or principles of PAR (Creswell

& Poth, 2017; Gill, 2014; Padgett, 2016). Given the context of the study area and extracting knowledge from similar studies, the following sub-section comprehensively conceptualises each selected method, highlights the reasons for its choice and elaborates on how each method was applied within the current study (Lowery, Damon, & Wayde-Morse, 2013).

#### **4.5.3 Data Generation Methods**

The co-researchers and the main researcher opted for integrating collages, FGDs, FWR, as well as field notes. Accordingly, the selected data generation methods were conceptualised, while their suitability to the current study was discussed. After deliberating incisively, the way the selected data generation methods should be applied in order to achieve the objectives of the study, were discussed. In other words, the collages and FGDs were used to ascertain the situational analysis of the types of vulnerabilities that existed amongst the learners who reside within a rural ecology and how such vulnerabilities hinder their quality of learning, as well as confirming the current forms of care and support that are already in place to sustain learning for vulnerable learners (Objective 1). The Collages and the FGDs were also used to generate deep or rich data regarding the necessity for a collaborative framework by exploring the gaps or the loopholes within the existing initiatives and efforts (Objective 2). The elements that are crucial for the collaborative framework to function successfully were interrogated using collages and FGDs with the participants (Objective 3). Towards the end of the data generation process, the threats to the operationalisation of the collaborative framework were also explored using the collages and FGDs (Objective 4). Thereafter, the launching of the collaborative framework became a reality through a FGD, which was inclusive of the younger as well as the older co-researchers (Main Objective). Finally, the last phase of the cycle of PAR which is “reflecting” was attained through FWRs. To our advantage, the field notes were written continuously throughout the whole data generation process.

##### **4.5.3.1 Collages: conceptualisation and suitability**

Collage is a manner of blending a work of art by utilising on a single-surface variety of materials that are not normally brought together such as wool, grass, pictures, paper, photographs, small sticks or other useful resources (Rothamel, 2008). Livingston

(2010) and Cohen-Miller (2018) state that creating collages offers an opportunity for cultivating deep thoughts and high-levels of thinking while it also encourages creativity that all is already inherent in all humans. Hence, the learners who participated in the study through the construction of collages were able to free their thoughts by merging ideas and dissecting various vulnerabilities that are experienced by learners in the rural ecologies. Furthermore, collage-making resembled the action that is highlighted through the PAR approach. In turn, this action of collage-making allowed the learners to reflect on their current situation with regards to the forms of vulnerabilities, how such vulnerabilities disrupted the quality of learning, as well as the forms of care and support that were already in place to mitigate the vulnerabilities and to sustain learning. Significantly, the method of collage-making and transcription did not only grant an opportunity for the participants to think deeply about the elements that are crucial for effective collaboration, but it also created an awareness for the participants to be wary of the hindrances which may threaten the process of collaboration or the collaborative framework. However, this method gave the participants a platform to share the strategies which they felt would be useful to sustain the learning process for the learners who are vulnerable in the rural ecology.

Livingston (2010) and Cohen-Miller (2018) contend that using artwork such as collages in research provides an opportunity for cultivating deep thoughts and high-levels of thinking while encouraging teamwork and creativity. Therefore, collage-construction was beneficial to the study as it allowed the learners to engage in teamwork, to tap into their knowledge, and to come up with new understandings by pondering and merging their ideas and thoughts together. Collage-construction was also ideal for the current study as the learner participants were engaged in action, shared responsibilities, and they had equal power while they were engaging in an activity that was hoped to bring about a change in their current lives. In accordance, Herr and Anderson (2014) add that PAR should involve action and encourage the equal distribution of power amongst those who have a common goal to better their current situation. Furthermore, researchers commonly agreed that collage-making is mostly about creativity as it is asset-based, thus it requires less costs, technology and electricity, which are usually scarce in rural ecologies (Khanare, 2015; Vincent, Potts, Fletcher, Hodges, Howels, Mitchell, & Ledger, 2017). In sum, collage-making was an



ideal method for generating data in this study which is appropriately contextualised within a rural area.

*a. Applicability of collages in the current study*

Collage-construction was utilised by the learner participants to generate data towards the attainment of the study's objectives (4.6.1). Collages were also effective in interrupting social stereotyping that learners from the rural settings are powerless individuals who needed to be pitied. However, collages in this study were empowering as they granted learners from the rural contexts an opportunity to voice their opinions. Furthermore, the use of collage-making enabled the learners to critically reflect on the type of vulnerabilities which hindered the attainment of sustained learning and to play a part in the formation of a strategy to introduce change to eradicate their adverse situations. While, the collage-construction activity with the Grade Four learners took place in the school premises, the actual creation of collages occurred in the following three stages.

*b. Guidance and coaching on collage-construction*

Initially, the word *collage* was explained to the participants, and the use of the materials for collage-making were explained and shown to the participants. Since, De Valverde, Sovet and Lubart (2017) advise that collage-construction unearths the basics and adds to new knowledge. The participants were shown samples of collages that were created for other purposes in order to guide and coach the participants on the logistics and details of collage-construction. Towards the end of this phase, the participants were encouraged to comment as well as to ask questions regarding their concerns about collage-construction. This activity was beneficial as it also acted as an "ice-breaker" while it simultaneously assisted in establishing a friendly environment which was conducive to collage-construction. Furthermore, while this activity was informative and beneficial to the participants, it was also beneficial to the researcher who now gained an incisive understanding of how much the participants actually knew about collage-making and its spin-offs, thus it led to the planning of filling in the gaps concerning collage-making among participants.

### *c. Getting started on collage-construction*

The participants were encouraged to assume roles such as that of a scribe, timekeeper, group feedback-reporter, and others, while the materials were distributed. Then, the participants were asked to firstly review and talk about the forms of learner vulnerabilities that they knew which impede on learners' learning process, in addition to analysing the causes of such vulnerabilities and the forms of care and support that are already in place to sustain learning for the vulnerable learners. Thereafter, the participants were further prompted to construct collages based on aspects which formed the situational analysis. However, three groups were encouraged to start by discussing and sharing ideas based. Their discussions were encouraged to be centred around the points and ideas that they wished to convey and deliver through their collages. The participants were allocated 45 minutes for cutting and pasting their collages, thereafter the transcriptions of their collages commenced.

### *d. Sharing and reflecting on the collages*

During this phase, the participants pinned up their collages and started taking turns explaining the contents of their collages to the other participants in a duration of 10 minutes. The other participants supported the presenter by highlighting and reminding the presenter on information that he/she was omitting while presenting. Thereafter, the other participants were given an opportunity to comment and to ask questions as well as to give feedback to the presenter-participant. Towards the end, all participants were asked to verbally reflect on the whole collage-construction process. The whole process was audio and video recorded. The same stages or phases of collage-construction were followed for the all the meetings of collage-making in order to answer the other four objectives of the study.

#### **4.5.3.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Conceptualisation and Suitability**

In attempts to complement collage construction and to use a suitable data generation method that would accommodate a diverse group of participants, the study also employed FGDs. According to Leavy (2014), FGDs are types of discussions which are carried out in small group interviews. These types of discussions are further defined

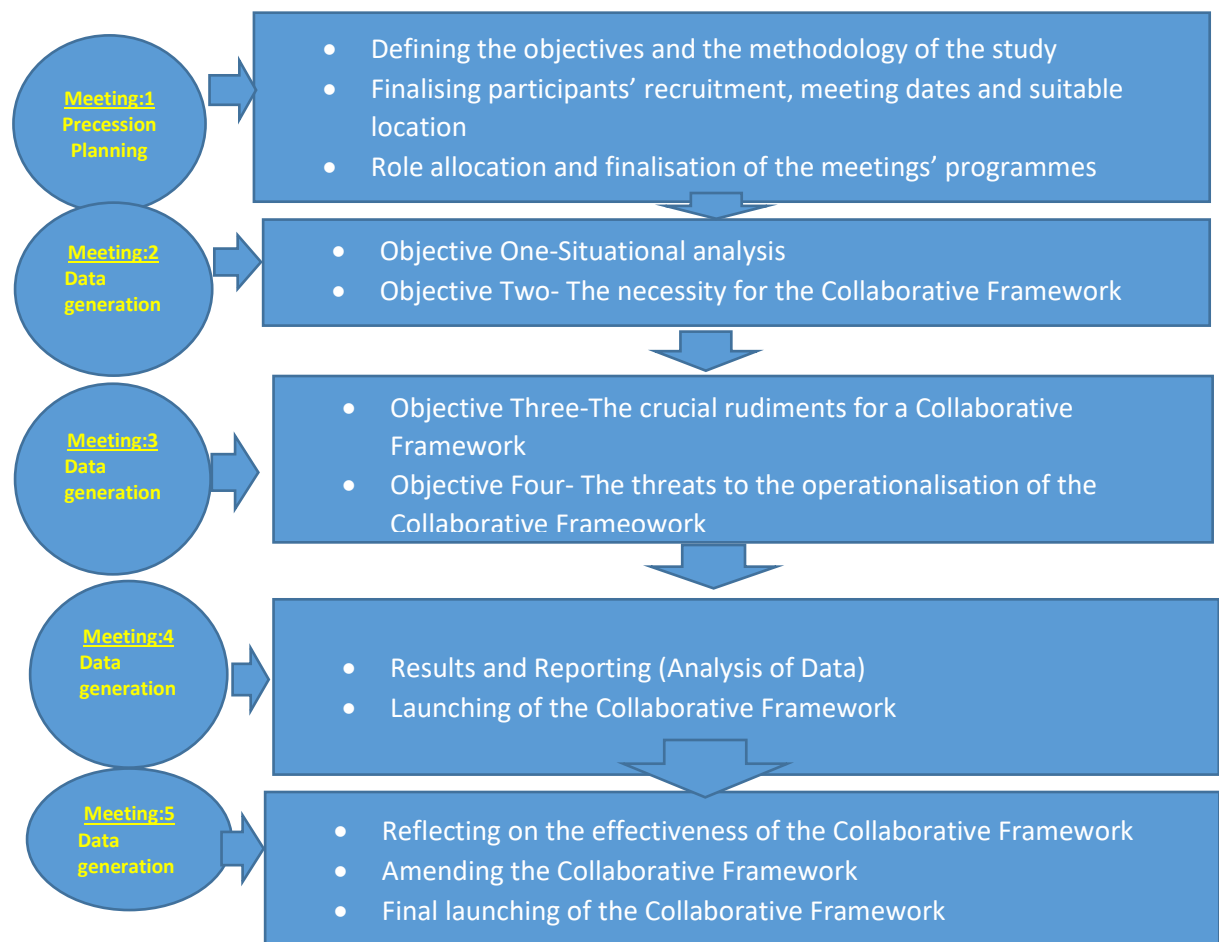
as group interviews which are held in arranged settings which brought together participants to hold discussions concerning a specific topic (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Also, FGDs are often led and guarded by a researcher who asks questions while the other group members interact (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Moreover, Mertens (2014) advises that FGDs, which mostly involve approximately six to twelve participants discussing a topic, are inextricably linked to the qualitative data generation method.

While in most cases the agenda of FGDS is often pre-planned prior to the discussion (Mertens, 2014). FGDs are also believed to be more distinct than any other data generating method as multiple participants can be interviewed at once (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Hence, in this study, FGDs assisted in producing authentic data as the main researcher directly interacted with the participants. It also allowed the participants to be free in a non-threatening environment, hence they were able to recall with ease what they wished to share with the group. In support, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) observed that FGDs can produce data that is qualitative as well as illustrative. Mertens (2014) agrees that FGDs are also known to be very informative, as participants can recall information, elaborate and corroborate while discussing critical issues. It was further beneficial in this study to employ FGDs as they allowed the researcher to generate loads of data through observing and documenting the participants' body language such as their gestures as well as their facial expressions while they were conversing about phenomena of concern. In accordance, Ritchie et al., (2013) stated that FGDs are mostly timely as they can produce large amounts of data in a short period of time, since several participants share their perceptions and responses simultaneously. Furthermore, FGDs also granted the opportunity for the interviewer to elicit and probe for clearer and detailed responses from the participants. King and Horrocks (2010) add that with FGD's the views of the participants may be amplified, qualified, corrected and even contradicted when glaring misinterpretations are evident.

#### *a. Applicability of FGDs in the current study*

In this particular study, FGDs were used to realise all the objectives of the study: analysing the current situation, assessing the need for a collaborative framework in a rural ecology, identifying and analysing the crucial rudiments for a collaborative

framework, ascertaining the anticipated threats against the operationalisation of the framework, and lastly providing evidence of implementing the collaborative framework. While FGDs made it possible to attain the objectives of the study, simultaneously, the cycle of PAR was followed using FGDs. The chronological process of the FGDs in this study consisted of five meetings, including the pre-FGD planning meeting. Notably, the stages that were followed in this study were in sync with the FGD steps that were identified by Morgan and Krueger (1998) which included research design, data generation, analysis, and reporting. Accordingly, the stages of FGDs have been outlined in figure 4.2 below.



**Figure 4.2:** FGD Steps of a Collaborative Framework

*b. The pre-session meeting*

The FGD process commenced with identifying the main aim of the research study, which is centred upon the research objectives (1.6).

### *c. Choosing the data generation method*

The choice of using FGD as a methodological strategy was influenced by the nature of the design of the study (which is PAR), and it was not only in line with the collaboration theory but it was also the most suitable method of data generation to complement collage-making. Since the study sought to involve various stakeholders from the community who are of differing status levels and intellectual ability, FGDs were perceived as the most suitable data generation method as most people within the same community have the capability of conversing in a discursive manner. Furthermore, the use of FGD as a method of data generation is not foreign within the rural ecology, as the *Induna* normally engages in *imbizos* (meetings) with groups of people from the community. Hence, the co-researchers agreed that they mostly feel comfortable in a discussion set-up, rather than being asked to complete questionnaires or being individually interviewed. Accordingly, it was within the pre-FGD phase when the co-researchers decided on the method of generating data.

### *d. Participants' identification and recruitment*

The selection of research participants and confirmation of their roles during the FGD process were finalised. Kitzinger (1995) suggests that following the granting of ethical clearance, participant identification is usually the most crucial step since the technique of FGD is largely based upon group dynamics as well as synergistic relationships among the participants in the data generating process, and the configuration of the group mainly depends on the main objective of the research study. Mertens (2014) concurs that willingness to fully engage in FGDs is crucial in generating useful data and may be obtained more readily within homogenous groups. However, homogeneity is sometimes criticised by other researchers as they feel that when participants are unfamiliar with one another and they are most likely to provide authentic as well as unprompted views. On the other hand, when participants are unknown to one another, they believe that they can disrupt the pre-existing statuses, relationships, and hierarchy of leadership and power within the community (Ritchie et al., 2013). Participant recruitment follows participant identification and it can be arduous and a tricky activity. This study had an open-door policy concerning the invitation to attend FGDs as it was challenging to ascertain individuals' genuine interest and commitment to the study in the full term. In addition, it was difficult to include everyone who showed interest in the study as that might have meant that almost the whole village would want

to take part in the study. Hence, it was announced that the six individuals to first arrive at the venue will be included in the first phase of the discussion. Accordingly, Mertens (2014) explains that one of the drawbacks of FGDs is the lack of guarantee that all recruited participants will attend all the sessions, hence to overcome and to prepare for such an occurrence, researchers may over-recruit by selecting ten participants so that the group is large enough to gain a variety of perspectives but small enough not to become chaotic.

The process of recruiting participants is arguably one of the most important phases in FGDs, and it is also believed to be amongst the foremost causes of unsuccessful FGDs (Barbour, 2018). The recruitment process was carried out using snowball sampling and targeted sampling. The candidates who responded to the initial invite were asked to identify other individuals within the ecology who would have similar interest as them, which was to sustain learning for those learners who were vulnerable in the ecology. The main- researcher jointly with the initial participants felt they could develop a fruitful, snowball recruitment method by using the “word of mouth”. The researcher also recommended that for the FGD, the recruitment should commence by purposely contacting identifiable groups in the ecology who were already working towards sustaining learning for those learners who were vulnerable in the ecology. That idea was to gain useful information for developing a collaborative framework. In addition, recruiting groups from the community may develop longer-term connections and commitment to the initiative. Further, this reflects on the initiative as being non-political or non-partisan as it involved people from different ages, status, and political parties. After the participants were identified and recruited, the invited lecturer capacitated and developed the participants regarding PAR, as it was the method that was going to be employed towards attaining the objectives of the study.

#### *e. Identifying suitable time and venue for FGDs*

Towards the end of the meeting, the suitable venue, dates as well as meeting times were discussed. Finally, the outline of the whole FGDs process was discussed. Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) agree that after identification and recruitment of participants, comes identifying a convenient venue for FGDs to take place taking into consideration the safety, comfort, accessibility, convenience for presenters, availability of resources, ventilation, furniture and seating, noise factors and ablution facilities.

Accordingly, the school hall was identified and selected as a suitable location for the FDSs to take place. Since the school was situated in the neighbourhood that was central for all the participants within the ecology. The school was perceived to be safe as it was situated amongst the community houses and was not isolated or deserted. The school hall (two classes joined together) was spacious as there was not a lot of furniture and equipment which could be obstructive to the participants. This was in accordance with the elements of the Asset based approach, that talks about focusing on what is readily available in the community instead of what is a deficiency. Moreover, the learners' desks would be comfortable as they had tables for the participants to write on and could be moved around in whatever desirable arrangement for FGD activity. The actual data generation process was divided into five FGD meetings.

*f. Data generation process (FGD one)*

The first FGD meeting followed after the pre-FGD planning session and the recruitment stage. During this FGDs the aim was to comprehend precisely what the collaborative framework was hoping to achieve and how it aims to achieve such objectives. Hence, major part of this stage focused on the first objective, which was the situational analysis.

Accordingly, the participants discussed the many vulnerabilities which existed within the rural ecology, and these included how they negatively impact on the quality of learning for the learners as well as the forms of care and support which existed in response to sustaining the learning process. This stage commenced when the researcher drafted the first set of questions for the FGDs, and the typical question format followed the under-mentioned pattern:

- icebreaker;
- introductory question;
- conversation question;
- three key questions;
- summary question; and
- final question.

Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) maintained that the use of a pilot group is a standard recommendation in most FGDs. However, the researcher did not want the participants to focus mainly on evaluating the content. More important was how people were participating in terms of responding to the questions in the desired manner. Hence, no independent pilot group to test the questions was used in this study.

*g. Data generation process (FGD two)*

This meeting commenced with the main researcher thanking everyone for availing themselves for the second meeting. Thereafter, the participants were reminded about the ethical issues, such as right to withdraw at any given time and about their identity being kept confidential, despite the use of audio-recorder. The dynamics of FGDs were repeated to refresh the minds of the participants, leaving no room for misconceptions. The participants were debriefed about the previous meetings. The debriefing session assisted the main participants to assess the value of each FGD that was held, and this also helped to plan for future FGDs while equipping the main participants to foresee any possible challenges that could arise during the forthcoming FGDs. Furthermore, debriefing enabled the main researcher and co-researchers to assess whether the objectives of the study were being met or not. According to the plan, FGD two mainly focused on the key elements or the crucial rudiments for the operationalisation of the framework, while being centred on eliminating the threats or overcoming the hindrances that may impede the proper functioning of the framework.

*h. Results and reporting (FGD three)*

Although each meeting commenced with a debriefing session of what was done in the previous meetings, FGD three was mainly concerned with reporting on the results of the initial meetings. Thereafter, the data that was obtained was analysed, reported on, and recorded. In accordance, Morgan (1997) asserts that the salient stage of the FGD's process is the post-FGD analysis and reporting stage which formally commences when the researcher begins to transcribe the first FGD's proceedings. Hence, FGD data was transcribed by listening to the audio-recordings and then writing (and then typing) verbatim of what was said. In this stage, the participants' free-writing reflections as well as the main researchers' field notes, were used to verify the portions that were not so audible. Finally, the collaborative framework was launched and the period of observing the implemented framework was communicated.



#### *i. Post-FGD reflection (FGD Four)*

This meeting represented the last stage of the process of PAR and it was mainly focused on reflecting on the operationalisation and the effectiveness of the collaborative framework. Hence, in this stage, the changes that were reported regarding the framework, were discussed. On the other end, the concerning issues that were raised were deliberated on and changes were made to foster the smooth functioning of the framework. Finally, the re-launching of the ultimate collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners was launched.

#### **4.5.3.3 Free-writing reflections (FWR): conceptualisation and suitability**

Free-writing reflection (FWR), according to Pithouse-Morgan (2017), is an activity which stimulates the expression of thoughts, perceptions, experiences and feelings with regards to the phenomena being interrogated. While reflecting allows participants to think about recent events (Pithouse-Morgan, 2017), free-writing expressions capture the participants' viewpoints and can provide critical information about their lives as well as about the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Khanare (2015) advises that it is advantageous to use FWR as this data generation method proved to be very effective within social science researches. Moreover, FWR elicits a prompt and immediate response which other data generation methods (weekly reflection, diary and journal keeping etc.) may not always succeed at (Khanare, 2015; Hewitt, 2017).

In the current study, FWR was a suitable data generation method as it allowed the participants to reflect on their lives, involve themselves in collage-making, as well as evaluating the collaborative framework. In support, Stevens and Cooper (2009) mention that FWR as a data generation method, is significant for generating data as it provides participants with a risk-free venue to explore, think and to practise skills that they have recently been exposed to. Additionally, FWR also allowed the participants to immediately reflect on the meetings and FGDs, to analyse the effectiveness of the collaborative framework after it has been implemented. Also, FWR complemented collage-making and FGDs, as it encouraged even the introvert participants to voice their thoughts through writing. Furthermore, FWR complemented the PAR process on which the study is based. Since FWR stimulated the activity of reflecting to occur, it

thus is an essential part of the cycle of PAR after the action phase has been implemented.

*a. Applicability of FWR in the current study*

While the study used collage and FGDs as methods of data generation, the researchers felt it was important to complement the two methods of data generation with a third method. Hence, FWR was included to add to the participants' responses when using collages and FGDs; all based on PAR principles. Pithouse-Morgan (2017) asserts that FRW is an activity where participants write whatever comes to mind about the phenomenon being studied, and this allows them to reflect on events closer to the time which they occur. In this study, FWR was used as an opportunity for participants to reflect on their lives, the collage-making process, the FGDs, as well as on the actual collaborative framework once it was implemented. Furthermore, FWR was also used by participants to reflect right through the PAR process, such that they were even afforded an opportunity to reflect on the troubling issues within the community, especially those which disrupted the learning processes. The participants also reflected on their actions within FGDs. Notably, FWR elicited all these reflections as events that were recent.

**4.5.3.4 Field Notes (FNs): conceptualisation and suitability**

Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) explicated that, keeping a journal and writing field notes is a manner of keeping track of the processes while the research proceedings takes place. In addition, field notes as process of giving accurate and detailed occurrence of situations and events as the take place in order to describe the logistics of where, how and when the conditions of the observation was made (Kumar, 2019; Roberts, 2002). Furthermore, field notes serve as an imperative role in qualitative methods since they provide the opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the moment that may seem to be important during the data generation process (Creswell, 2014). Field notes were suitable and relevant in the current study as they allowed the main researcher to generate multi-layered visual as well as textual data. Moreover, the use of field notes in the current study allowed the researcher to cross check the data that was obtained through collages, FGDs and from FWRs. In support of the later

statements, Hawk (2010) advises that, compiling field notes can be a significant manner of triangulating data.

*a. Applicability of FNs in the current study*

Using FNs, the researcher penned and reflected on the highlights, drawbacks, successes as well as the unsuccessful instances of the data generation journey. These notes were captured in various forms such as the participants' (and the main researcher's) own drawings, pictures, point-form writing, voice-recorded clips and video-recorded footages. The main researcher's field notes were centred on the observational, conceptual as well as procedural matters, which enhanced her comprehension of the research process. In elaboration, the field notes reflected the researcher's preparation procedure for generating data, how she negotiated access, and how she maintained cordial relationships with the other co-researchers. Furthermore, the field notes contained the main-researcher's introspections concerning the data generation process as well as aspects that came into mind which might have led to skewing the data that was analysed. In accordance, Emerson et al., (2011) posited that field notes have the function to act as an additional research tool which may significantly provide insights on the data that is generated. Lastly, the main-researcher's field notes were reviewed and transcribed after each contact session with the collaboration of the other co- researchers. In accordance, Table 4.1 below outlines the research plan that was followed.

**Table 4.1:** Research Plan

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY	INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE
9 <sup>TH</sup> August 2018	10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalising the research plan, the meeting dates, venue and times.</li> <li>• Distributing the research plan</li> </ul>	Research Team-one (The learners) Research Team- two (The adults)  The main researcher
August 2018	14:30	Discussing the forms of vulnerabilities faced by learners in the rural ecologies; the current forms of support that are already in place; putting those into collages and later interpreting the collages.	Research Team-one (The learners)
August 2018	17:30	Discussing the forms of vulnerabilities faced by learners in rural ecologies as well as the forms of care and support that are already in place.	Research Team- two (The adults)

August 2018	14:30	Discussing and placing in collages the reasons for having a collaborative framework, the elements which are crucial as well as the threats that may hinder the collaborative framework	Research Team-one (The learners)
August 2018	18:00	Discussing the reasons for having a collaborative framework, the elements which are crucial as well as those that hinder the collaborative framework.	Research Team-two (The adults)
August 2018	16:00	Developing the proposed framework	The whole research team
August 2018 - September 2018	Not specified	Field testing the Framework	The whole research team
January 2019	17:00	Reflection and finalisation of the framework	The whole research team
6 March 2019 (end of research project)	17:30	Debriefing of the research project	The main- researcher

#### 4.6 DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENTS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study employed data generation methods such as collages, FGDs, FWRs and FNs. The data generation instruments that were used in conjunction with the above-mentioned methods were the tape-recorder, interview observation schedule, as well as the reflective journals. In support for utilising these data generation instrument, Harding (2018) postulated that audio and video-recording minimises interruptions during the data generation process, while it also strengthens the credibility of the data as the researcher may sometimes miss some details during the ongoing discussions or interviews. Moreover, the main-researcher video-recorded and audio-recorded the collage-making proceedings as well as the FGD meetings, with the aim of maintaining and preserving the original words of the participants, for accurate and valid data analysis to be achieved.

While the above data generation instruments were used, strict ethical considerations were followed right through the study. In accordance, Fritz and Fuld (2010) warned that researchers are accountable of ensuring that all the participants in the study are physically and mentally unharmed, while their confidentiality is maintained at all levels and that they have consented to voluntarily participate in the research study. In maintenance, Punch (2013) asserts that the three major and critical parts of ethical issues include informed consent, confidentiality as well as informing the participants of the consequences or implications of the research study.

The current study involved a variety of stakeholders who held different levels or statuses within the community, hence it was imperative to maintain a respectful and a

good relationship with all of them. Most importantly, the ethical issues of conducting a genuine and appropriate study in line with the stipulated statutory regulations, are non-negotiable considerations. Thus, this study strived to meet the terms and it abided by the specifics of the ethical matters.

Prior to the data generation process, while the participants were being informed about the rationale, objectives and possible consequences of the study, the participants were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they could choose to withdraw their participation at any given time during the process of the study, without being disadvantaged in any way, with no questions being asked. Consent was requested from all participants allowing them to be audio and video-recorded during the FGDs, solely for the research purposes. While the participants gave consent to be recorded, it was further agreed on between the participants themselves and the main researcher, that all information concerning this study be kept confidential. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured by using pseudonyms/codes. All content details, materials, recordings and administrative records were kept in a locked safe, and electronic files were password protected. Also, the faces of all the learners were deliberately “blurred” in all the photographs that were presented for this research project. However, adult participants gave written consent to be photographed and had their faces shown on photographs that were presented in this dissertation. The transcriptions of collages, FGDs, free-writing scripts, CDs and videos were to be utilised strictly and solely for research purposes, thereafter they were locked away in safety cabinets of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and will be destroyed after 5 years in conformity with the university’s policy. In order to further ensure confidentiality, anonymity, transparency and benefit for the participants, they were guaranteed access to the outcomes of the study before and after the publication of the dissertation.

#### **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis refers to the process of evaluating, examining and transfiguring data that is generated to make it practical and usable with the aim of uncovering relevant information while adding value to a research study (Kumar, 2019; Silverman, 2016). Specifically, raw data that was generated in this study, was analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is described as a sequence of categorising data into specific themes that permits unbiased interpretation of data by the researcher.

Braun, Clarke and Terry (2014) explained that content analysis is a technique of analysing data that is shortened as a plan of organising, analysing and reporting. In elaboration, content analysis involves reading data thoroughly, unravelling data into labelled segments of information with thematic codes, looking out for patterns in the data that had already been coded, eliminating overlapping and recurring information, and finally breaking down codes into themes while dissecting each theme exhaustively (Silverman, 2016).

#### **4.8. VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

Prior the actual collage-construction and FGD sessions, a trial or pre-test (dry-run) was carried out in order to foresee the possible hindrances that might surface during the actual data generation process. This dry-run was carried out to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of the research study. The hindrances that surfaced during the dry-run were noted, as a result the actual data generation sessions were obstacle-free and productive. The transcriptions that emerged from the collages, FGDs and field-notes were transcribed by the main-researcher herself and that ensured that the analysed data was interpreted accurately and objectively. Also, Denzin (2017) posited that triangulation of data may be achieved through utilising two or more methods of data generation in attempts to ensure validity and accuracy. In accordance, three methods of data generation which complemented each other, were used: collage-making, FGDs and FWR.

Ritchie et al., (2013) agree that triangulation of data is when a researcher makes use of several methods of generating data with the intention of validating the research study. Furthermore, prior to publishing this research study, the researcher granted all the co-researchers or participants an opportunity to cross-check their transcriptions in order to make certain that it authentically presented their voices through the given data. Even after, publication the co-researchers were promised free access to peruse the document to further ensure that their views were presented accurately.

#### **4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the research design and the methodology that was used to carry out this study. The qualitative approach was employed in order to respond to the critical questions of the study. The qualitative approach was ideal for this study as it

aimed at proposing a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. The paradigmatic content of the study was critical; thus, the critical paradigm approach was compatible with the qualitative methodology as it allowed the participants to solve their own challenges in real-time research. The study was carried out using PAR in a school within a rural ecology in Lindelani village. Participants-selection-procedure that was used for the study was purposive as well snowballing sampling. Purposive and snowballing sampling of participants allowed the researcher to deliberately target and recruit those participants who had the best interest concerning the topic being investigated in the study. Data was generated using collages, FGDs, FWRs as well as field notes which were all analysed using content analysis. Since the study dealt with a sensitive issue of vulnerability of learners, strong ethical considerations were instituted. Participation was voluntary, all “gate-keeping” permission was applied for and subsequently obtained. All participants gave consent in writing, while those who were minors obtained written consent from their parents/guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were observed throughout the study. The next chapter presents results which animated from analysed data, that was obtained through collages, FGDs, FWRs and field notes.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (4) centred on data generation proceedings for a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. PAR as a data generation approach that underpinned the study, was intensely discussed. Aspects such as ethical considerations, the research setting, and team members' profiles, were outlined. Furthermore, the previous chapter discussed what had transpired prior to the data generation phase and what was discussed during the research teams' meetings, as well as the method that data was analysed. This chapter reiterates the research objectives with the aim of presenting, analysing as well as interpreting the results which animated from the data that was generated according to the objectives of the study. Finally, the chapter summary is stated.

### 5.2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As stated, (1. 6), this study seeks to propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. The precise objectives of the study as stated in 1.6, are as follows:

- To explore the situational analysis of vulnerable learners in a rural ecology;
- To measure the necessity for collaboration;
- To implement the crucial rudiments for a collaborative framework;
- To investigate threats against the operationalisation of collaborative initiatives; and
- To probe how we can through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

The above-mentioned objectives were utilised to generate, analyse and interpret data. The next section delves into the first research objective, that focuses on the



lives of vulnerable learners in a rural ecology as well as the forms of care and support that are currently in place.

### **5.3 THE SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY**

The collage transcriptions, interpretations of the free-writing reflections, and discussions which emanated from the second FGD session pointed towards a plethora of existing learner vulnerabilities, including evidence of forms of care and support which were already in place towards enhancing quality learning for the vulnerable learners in this rural ecology. Unexpectedly, during the situational analysis sessions, the research team raised several concerns which were hindering to the effectiveness of the forms of care and support.

Hence, the situational analysis section has been partitioned into three sub-sections as guided by the themes which arose from the co-researcher's responses. The first sub-section mainly focused on learner-vulnerabilities which impeded on the quality of learning. The second sub-section centered on the existing forms of care and support which are already in place in attempts to sustain quality learning for the learners who face adversities. The third sub-section of the situational analysis centered on investigating the challenges within the present forms of care and support which were perceived as detrimental to the learning.

#### **5.3.1 Identified Forms of Learner Vulnerabilities Impeding Quality Learning**

The research team of the current study reported on many forms of learner-vulnerabilities, which they believed disrupted the attainment of quality and sustainable learning for those learners who resided within the rural ecologies. In congruence with existing studies it was evident that learner vulnerabilities existed within the home, community, and school. Photograph 5.1 below depicts some of the learner vulnerabilities as extracted from one of the collage-creations which was made by the learner co-researchers.



**Photograph 5.1:** Collage Depicting Learner Vulnerabilities Which Disrupt the Learning Process in a Rural Ecology

While the younger co-researchers presented a variety of learner vulnerabilities through their collages, the older co-researchers through a series of FGDs and free-writing journal excerpts, reported learner vulnerabilities that were linked to community factors. Regarding this, **Candy** reported that:

*“Learners here on the farm (another name used to refer to a rural area) face a lot of hardships that stops them from obtaining equal academic opportunities as the learners in the cities. Not because of the way they are taught at school, but because of the conditions in our communities that are out of our control. For example, everything here is out of reach from us.”*

The main researcher asked for clarity concerning what was ‘out of reach’.

**Candy** continued:

*“I am referring to things like not having technology. No libraries, no internet cafes, no nearby clinics that all learners can go to.”*

The co-researchers linked learner-vulnerability in their area to mainly emanate from the rural community context. Another co-researcher, **Mhlengikazi**, added:

*“Universally, children face similar hardships such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, orphan hood, poor quality schools, unconducive learning home environments and so forth.... but the rural factor makes matters worse for the rural learners...[pauses]... as learners from the rural settings often experience, many more times worse vulnerabilities when compared to those learners from the urban areas.”*

Similarly, **Mother Theresa** observed that:

*“In most cases, it is learners from the rural areas who drop out of school due to community-related factors such as being used as child laborer in the farms and as domestic assistants. Often their own parents migrate to cities in search for better job opportunities, while in other cases, learners are used in the farms because they are orphans and must quit school to fend for themselves.”*

**S’khumba** commented:

*“Yes, most of our children leave school to become prostitutes or maids or taxi-driver assistants and do other risky jobs because they need to take care of their younger siblings.”*

In support, **Angel** also reported that:

*“For most learners, staying at school is not an option. They date older men or even get married early so that they get someone who can take care of them because the community that we live in is poor, hence unsupportive. In this area, there are no job opportunities for the youth, hence they are not motivated to stay at school.”*

**Uncle Sam** added:

*“There is no career guidance for our learners in this community, as a result these children are not motivated ... or should I say, they have poor self-esteem that they cannot break the cycle of poverty.”*

From a different angle, **Mr Thwala** commented:

*“There’s absolutely no form of entertainment... in this area as a result our children occupy themselves with sex and drugs... they would even sniff dangerous things such as benzene and get involved in criminal activities.*

**Mhlengikazi** added:

*“Since our community is backward in terms of development, and poverty is rife, most children who should be at school indulge in unsafe sex and have multiple partners just so they are taken care of.... not just girls... but boys too.... In turn, they contract STIs and unwanted teenage pregnancies which spreads like wildfire.”*

In summary, learner vulnerabilities which impedes the quality of learning for the learners residing within the rural ecologies, were reported to be varied. This is evident judging from the collage transcriptions which were depicted by the younger co-researchers as they were presented; some originated from the home, others from within the community, and the rest from the school context. However, the older co-researchers mainly reported that learner vulnerabilities were associated with the rural context which included challenges such as poor economic development, scarcity of jobs, poor technological installations and high rates of poverty.

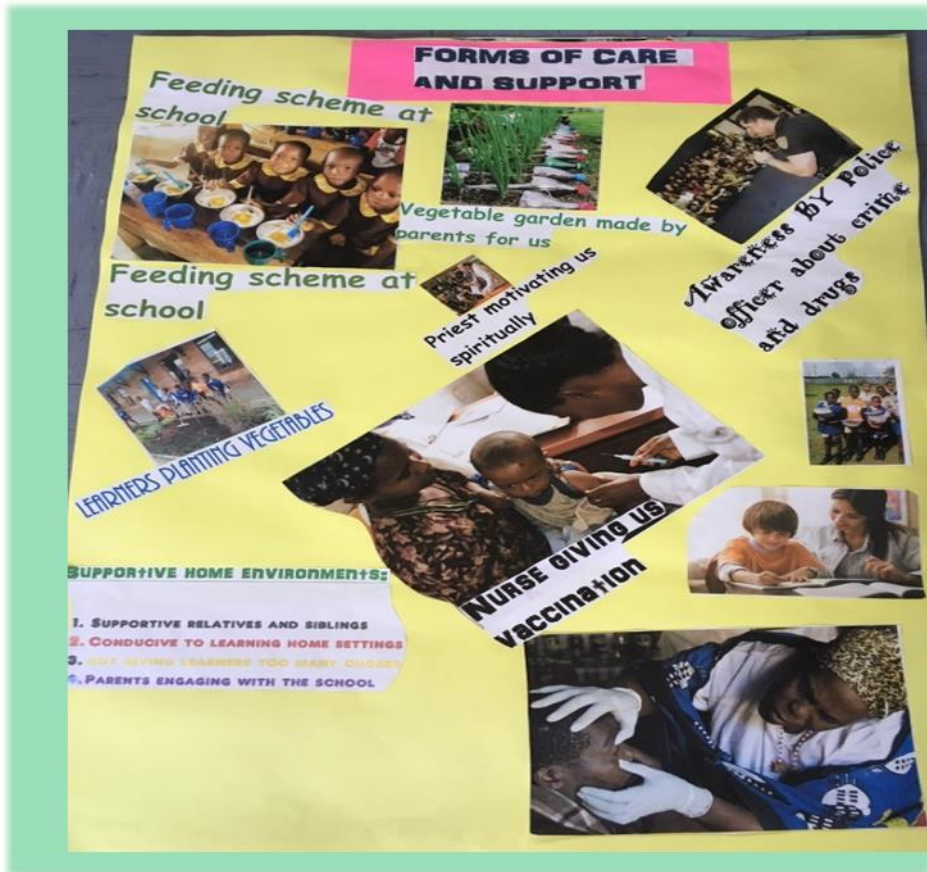
### **5.3.2 Current Forms of Care and Support for Sustaining Learning**

Five overarching themes arose from the collages, FGDs and from free-writing reflections that addressed research question one the situational analysis concerning the current forms of care and support. Such themes mainly included: tangible measures, undocumented actions, unlegislated efforts, Indigenous exertions, and unstructured means.

#### **5.3.2.1 Tangible measures of care and support**

Learner co-researchers primarily highlighted the forms of care and support which were tangible in nature. The tangible measures that were reported by the learner co-

researchers included food provisions, medical care, and school stationery. A glimpse of such measures has been depicted on a collage sample as shown in photograph 5.2 below.



**Photograph 5.2:** Collage Depicting the Existing Forms of Care and Support

An older co-researcher (**Gogo**), who was involved in FGDs stated:

*“Vulnerable learners in our school are given meals every day and they are sometimes given food parcels to take home. This food supply helps them to concentrate during teaching and learning as they have one less thing to worry about. Furthermore, the school feeding scheme encourages learners to regularly attend and remain in school because they know they are provided with food at school.”*

**Candy**, a co-researcher added:

*“When, my madam from the suburb gives me old clothing, I do not sell those clothes, but I give them to the needy learners here at school, so they remain at school and not leave school to go job-seeking.”*

**Mfundisi** commented:

*“As a church we provide soup every Wednesday for the needy families, while our church has also become a pickup centre for chronic medication for those children who are sick and for their other family members.”*

### **5.3.2.2 Undocumented forms of care and support**

While the co-researchers highlighted various forms of learners' vulnerabilities which emanated from various contexts such as the home, community and the school, a good number of co-researchers made reference to a variety of undocumented or tacit means of care and support which were also said to be operative within the home, community as well as from the school contexts. In elaboration, the research team referred to supportive roles that were reported to be played by the extended family members, which contributed to the academic success of vulnerable learners. Such indications linked extended family members with being supporters, encouragers as well as aiders in favour of susceptible learners. These indications are contained in the co-researcher's reflections shown below.

**Candy** stated:

*“My younger sister is always away partying with friends or at her new boyfriend's house, so I often help her daughter with homework and even help her bathe to be ready for school.”*

**S'khumba** said:

*“One of my gifts is being able to communicate with people who have passed on. [Pause] So, I often give messages of hope and faith to children from their late parents. In other cases, I tell them about the good fortune that I foresee coming their way. Now... such initiatives are undocumented, but they boost the vulnerable learners' self-confidence and hope. Once*

*their confidence has been heightened, they are reported to work harder in their schoolwork, and they are said to improve on their results.”*

In another instance, a co-researcher learner did not indicate an impact from the family or community member but, she accredited her academic achievement to her life-orientation teacher. **Butterfly** explained:

*“My LO teacher always has good advice for us as students, especially girls. She often warns us about the dangers of dating older men for money. Once she gave me money to buy sweets to sell at school for getting bus fare and bread with the profit.”*

### **5.3.2.3 Unlegislated Efforts**

Other forms of care and support that were indicated by the co-researchers were sub-themed as unlegislated effort. Approximately half the number of the co-researchers reported on efforts which were unlegislated but operative within their ecology. **Uncle Sam** shared:

*“We reward those children who go to school by giving them food. [Smiles]. Sometimes we even slaughter farm chickens for learners who do well in school. [Pauses]. Just to show how proud we are of their success and to encourage them to continue doing well while the others are also motivated to strive for better marks.”*

**Mfundisi** echoed this:

*“Since food is a luxury in most of our homes, we often use it to keep children in school, as those children who do well at school get more food than those who don’t do well.”*

**Gogo** added:

*“The same is done with the Christmas clothes! [laughs] ... only those learners who remain and do well at school get nice Christmas clothes.”*

Differently, **Mr Thwala** shared that:

*“As illegal as it is, and since corporal punishment was banished twenty years ago, parents still hit children and force them to go to school. The same is done to children who bunk school and those who don’t want to do their homework. Surprisingly, corporal punishment seems to keep learners in school while improving academic performances.”*

#### **5.3.2.4 Indigenous efforts**

Half the number of the co-researchers concomitantly reported on the indigenous means of care and support. Purposely for this work, those measures have been placed under a sub-theme termed, ‘the indigenous forms of care and support’. Such efforts consisted of original efforts which occurred naturally as well those forms of care and support which were regarded as native to the specific rural place. In clarification, the research team referred to the indigenous efforts as those which were not Westernised, such as the Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) or other school programmes such the Orphans Vulnerable Communities (OVCs). However, through this theme, co-researchers referred to those forms of care and support which were centred on the relevance of preserving and strengthening positive African morals, traditional values and cultures. These indigenous efforts involved a body of context, which evolved from cultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices as well as cultural values that are transmitted from one generation to the other. Moreover, the indigenous forms of care and support according to the research team, consisted of those measures which are tacitly followed by the local people, those that imbibed good morals and spiritual values.

In elucidation, **S’khumba** explained:

*“Expecting children to attend school has become our tradition here. Therefore, even when our children are faced with problems, it is expected that they go to school with the belief that they will uplift their family’s name and break the cycle of poverty in the community.”*

**Mfundisi** cautioned that:

*“The Bible warns against laziness but stresses on hard work being Godly. Therefore, the same Bible teachings are used in my church*



*and in the community to motivate youngsters to go to school and to work hard in order to reap great rewards.”*

**Gogo** added that:

*“It is within our attitudes and practices in the area, that from childhood, our children are instilled with the mentality to remain at school.... [Pauses]... for an example, you would often here visitors jokingly telling children that “Usuzoba udokotela” (You are about to become a doctor). Indirectly encouraging and sometimes dictating that children have to remain in school in order to become successful.”*

In support, **Candy** added:

*“Often our children are supported to stay in school without even the realising that they are being supported by the community. We refer to this as our African social norms as they are not written anywhere but they are governed by the behaviour of the people.*

The **Terminator** interjected:

*In most families, remaining at school has become a cultural value, that influences the behaviour of individuals and which is important and cherished by everyone in the family.*

**Gogo** stated:

*“Yes, we can go back to the basics of “Izinganekwane” (storytelling). We can tell our children good motivating stories, like how our elders used to do for us...that was very motivating.”*

In congruence, a learner participant, **Butterfly**, emphasised:

*“All my life, my family values such as hard work accrued a sense of responsibility and work ethics as it was taught in my home. This has now become a rule and a prescriptive norm that is understood by everyone within our home. Learning has become a something that we as children can’t do without.”*

### **5.3.2.5 Unstructured Measures**

Unstructured measures formed the fifth sub-theme that emerged from the co-researchers’ thematically analysed responses. Many of the co-researchers commented on the formlessness of the measures that were in place in their ecology towards the challenge of sustaining quality learning for the learners in their context. In elaboration, this theme referred to the forms of care and support which were lacking structure or organisation as they were not formally organised in a set or conventional manner. In support of this assertion, a few co-researchers commented as indicated below.

**Mfundisi** stated:

*“We don’t have a set of rules that we follow in trying to assist the children who find themselves in trouble or in need; we use whatever we have in any manner depending on the nature of the child’s problem and what we have at that time.”*

**Mrs Bee** added:

*“For us teachers, it is impossible to have a constant strategy that we use to provide care and support for the learners. Remember, our main job is to teach, so sometimes you find that a learner comes to you with a challenge at the wrong time, maybe when you’re occupied with the duty of teaching and learning. It is impossible to always follow the same pattern in helping*

*the learners. For example, most of their challenges surface during exam time when we are also pressurised with marking and writing of schedules and giving the learners hundred per cent of our time for revision; thus, extra assistance becomes almost impossible.”*

**S’khumba** added:

*“I am usually guided by the connection between my spirit and that of the child’s ancestors as to how I may be able to assist the troubled child. I would be lying if I said there was a set routine that I follow in assisting them. Furthermore, each child often presents a different kind of challenge, which has to be handled differently.”*

In summing up, the research team outlined an array of care and support systems which have already been undertaken in their community to assist vulnerable learners towards attaining quality and sustained learning. The measures of care and support for the purpose of this work were categorised into four themes; namely, the undocumented efforts, unlegislated measures, indigenous as well as unstructured measures. Notably, the bulk of the presented themes may be viewed as mainly being centred on the negatives rather than the positives.

#### **5.4. THE NECESSITY FOR THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK**

Data concerning the current forms of care and support have been presented and discussed above. In the process of presenting and discussing data, it also became evident that such measures of care and support may vary from context to context, hence there is no one-size-fits-all strategy. However, it also became evident from the co-researcher’s perceptions that there is a dire need within communities for various stakeholders to work in collaboration towards improving most societal challenges. Thus, working in collaboration places communities at the best possible positions to improve their current challenging situations.

Escalating forms of learner-vulnerabilities call for the dire need of a framework such as the one being proposed in this study. Hence, in attempts to further clarify the need for the proposed framework, the defects or the loopholes within the existing measures

of care and support are outlined in this section as raised by the co- researchers. Coupled with other predicaments which arose, such forms of care and support are questionable in this ecology. This leads to the second research question: **What is the need for the collaborative framework?** As prompted by the co- researcher's responses, this section is arranged into three major themes: the challenges within the existing forms of care and support, the possible outcomes of not having the proposed collaborative framework in place, and the expedient role of the collaborative frameworks.

#### **5.4.1 Challenges Within the Existing Forms of Care and Support**

During the FGDs, the co-researchers reported on challenges which they unanimously believed prohibited the proper functioning of the existing means of care and support which are in place towards enhancing quality learning for the vulnerable learners. Consequently, the challenges which were highlighted by the co-researchers were presented in the sections that follow.

##### **5.4.1.1 Financial constraints**

Financial constraints were mostly reported by the co-researchers to negatively impact on the effectiveness of the existing forms of care and support within the ecology.

**Mrs Bee** stated:

*“ I, together with a few teachers, once decided to buy school shoes for the learners who did not have shoes, but because everything is so expensive nowadays, our salaries are not enough to take care of our own needs as well as those of other learners in the school.”*

In support, **Mfundisi** added:

*“The donation from the church congregation is no longer enough to support all the children who are needy, as the number of such children keeps rising every year, and the congregation is complaining of not having enough money.”*

**Uncle Sam** elaborated:

*“Our community is poverty-stricken, even the entrepreneurs here are not in any position to support needy learners as they are themselves battling to make ends meet.”*

#### **5.4.1.2 Inadequacy of the existing forms of care and support**

The lack of funding and scarcity of resources was declared by the co-researchers for being amongst the leading contributors towards the non-functionality of many community partnerships. More than half the number of the co-researchers further commented that the non-functioning of such community partnerships also contributes towards their helplessness.

**Uncle Sam** elaborated:

*“People who are involved in such initiatives fail to make a difference, as there are only a few of them who get involved in such partnerships. As a result, they get demotivated and so the whole point of their initiative is defeated.”*

Similarly, **Mother Theresa** added:

*“Such community partnerships fail to cover all the various needs of learners with adversities. In most cases they focus on providing physical support such as food and clothing but forget about the mind and the heart of such learners.”*

In support of the social worker’s assertion, **Miss X** explained:

*“You find that in most cases such collaborators are not trained or equipped to deal with vulnerable learners. This, for them, is a trial-and-error game, as a result their organisations become ineffective. “*

**Uncle Sam** added:

*“Even if they try to assist, they are not well-equipped, skilled or trained to cover all the needs of the vulnerable learners.”*

#### 5.4.1.3 Inconsistency in the practices

While most co-researchers indicated that financial constraints and their resultant effects as being the major debilitating factor of many initiatives which aimed at supporting vulnerable learners, a large number associated the failure of such initiatives to them being inconsistent to their practices.

**Candy** stated:

*“These organisations are forever changing their methods of handling cases. One day you get there, they tell you to follow a certain procedure and the next time you get there they tell you about a different procedure. [Sighs].”*

**Gogo** interrupted:

*“It is tiring, I tell you.”*

**Uncle Sam** continued:

*“It depends on the people that you find on that particular day - they are so unpredictable; they are like the weather... [shakes his head] ... You never know what to expect from them.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“In what way are they unpredictable?”*

**Candy** elaborated:

*“I mean their procedures change all the time. Like ... [pause] ...one day you get there; they tell you need to get an affidavit from the police station supporting what you are saying. Some other days they help without an affidavit, eish.... “*

**Mr Thwala** stated:

*“In other instances, such partnerships are intended to only assist people who reside within a specific area. But some other times where you stay, is not regarded as important if you come for help; they help you.”*

Driving a similar point of inconsistency in practices as a weakness in most community partnerships, **Miss X** asserted:

*“From my observations, such community partnerships treat people differently and use different procedures as they encounter different cases which are often presented as unique cases to that particular individual.”*

In wrapping up, the research team mainly outlined three concerns which they strongly felt were destroying the effectiveness of the existing forms of care and support. These included recurring constraints such as inadequate financial assistance and the scarcity of resources, poor measures of implementation, and inconsistency in practices.

#### **5.4.2 Consequences of the Absence of a Proposed Collaborative Framework**

Possibilities of not having the proposed collaborative framework in place (and its consequences), was another theme which was considered to signify and impose the urgent need for a collaborative framework in the rural ecology. In general, the responses of the research team outlined what might happen should a framework such as the one being proposed through this study, not come to fruition.

##### **5.4.2.1 Short-term potential deleterious consequences for the learners**

Short-term potential deleterious consequences on the part of the learners was the first theme which emerged as a result of the continued FGDs and FWRs.

**Miss X** contended:

*“If schools continue operating in isolation from the community .... [pauses]... more and more learners will also continue dropping out of schools as it become unbearable for the teacher to work alone on the challenge.”*

**Mrs Bee** added:

*“Poor as well as orphaned learners may leave school in search for jobs, as no one from the community will avail themselves to assist or support those learners.”*

**Gogo** interjected:

*“The number of learners who abuse substances, those that fall pregnant as well as those that date older man for security and support, might also increase, if the community does not work hand-in-hand with the school to support them.”*

**Soup-lady** asserted:

*“The parents and the community, such as us the church, would become more and more ignorant about the school proceedings... [pauses]. We won't know how and where to help the learners.”*

**Mfundisi** added:

*“Very true ... [silence]. We wouldn't be able to provide support as we wouldn't know what we are expected to do in assisting the learners.”*

**Mother Theresa** agreed:

*“We wouldn't be able to provide critical feedback to the teachers and the learners. In turn, the gap between the school and the community will drift wider and would eventually make it impossible for us to work together for the betterment of the learners.”*

**Uncle Sam** concurred:

*“It would be easy for naughty learners to deceive parents as they know they have no contact with the school.”*

**Mother Theresa** commented:

*“The abuse of alcohol and drugs would definitely increase [shakes head] if the community, police officers and the school don't start to work in partnership, and the school alone would be fighting a losing battle.”*

**Mr Thwala** said:

*“The absence of partnerships between the school and the community may even worsen the learner abuse by teachers as well as teacher- violation by learners...by the number of cases of teachers who are violated by the learners.”*



**Mrs Bee** summed up:

*“All concerns that have just been raised by the other co-researchers such as school violence, substance abuse, misbehaving and learner poverty, would lead to more learners dropping out of school as well as the inability to attain quality learning.”*

In sum, the co-researchers outlined various factors which pointed towards the short-term potential deleterious consequences. Such outcomes included issues like increased rates of learner drop-out as learners will leave school in search for work, including those learners who leave school because of teenage pregnancy or substance abuse addiction. In addition, teachers being inundated with burdensome overload of work commitments of sustaining quality teaching-learning environments, adds to the woes. Also, the parental community further estranges itself from the school and thus further widening the gap between community and the school. Other short-term negative consequences of not having the proposed framework in place included the relevant stakeholders not knowing where to assist in supporting the vulnerable learners. Other short-term negative consequences included a deepening ignorance on the part of the parental community regarding learner vulnerabilities and interventions they may employ towards sustainable learning.

#### **5.4.2.2. The long-term potential deleterious consequences for the learners**

Although much data focused on the short-term consequences for the learners, the analysed data obtained from writing reflections, collages and FGDs also pointed towards long-term potential detrimental consequences that impacted on the learners should effective partnerships not be put in place. Numerous co-researchers also reported on other detrimental consequences which were deemed as having long-term effects on the learners, as indicated in the undermentioned responses.

**Mother Theresa** explained:

*“The majority of learners who receive poor quality learning, become miserable their whole life as they fail to attain their dream careers due to poor self-esteem and due to be being unskilled.”*

**Mhlengikazi** said:

*“Failure to work in partnerships between the schools and the community, may result in vulnerable learners developing mental disorders such as depression later in life, and which may even lead to suicide.”*

**Mother Theresa** continued:

*“Such learners who are failed by the system may end up being alcoholics or drug abusers; at times they may become criminals or addicts.”*

**Mfundisi** elaborated:

*“Schools working in isolation may later lead to the escalated unemployment rates as the youth may be unemployable since they did not receive appropriate skills required for most careers.”*

In support, **Miss X** said:

*“Competition may be too high or too demanding for those learners who received poor quality education, as a result they may fail to get themselves into those jobs which are demanding.”*

**Mr Thwala** reiterated:

*“Yes.... I also feel that, in the long run absence of partnerships between the school and the community may result in the upsurge poverty. Not only will it result to increased unskilled individuals, but it would also attract criminality as well, as such individuals would engage in illegal means of living.”*

In summation, the long-term deleterious consequences that were highlighted by the research team included psychological factors, physical factors, economic decline, escalation in unemployment rates, poverty and others. This makes it imperative to have an effective implementation framework in place to assist vulnerable learners.

#### **5.4.3 The Expedient Role of a Collaborative Framework in Rural Ecologies**

Though the findings of the current study highlighted the learners' short as well as long-term disadvantages in order to illustrate the necessity for the collaborative framework, the co-researchers also touched on the beneficial role which will be played by the

collaborative framework in enhancing academic sustainability for the vulnerable learners. Consequently, a sub-section named the 'expedient role of collaborative frameworks' was formulated to further demonstrate the necessity of the framework being proposed. Accordingly, the co-researcher's attestations validating the theme have been presented below.

**Miss X** stated:

*"One cannot attempt to overcome our learners' challenges alone, but we need to work as team in order to be successful."*

Similarly, **Mfundisi** inferred:

*"The severity of the challenges that faces learners today, forces us as community members to work hand-in-hand with the schools, in order to achieve great results."*

**Gogo** agreed:

*"Raising a child is no longer a responsibility of the parent alone, it actually takes the whole community to be in the same team, as the severity nowadays of challenges has gone worse over the years."*

**Mother Theresa** explained:

*"The alliances between the community and the school have the ability to strengthen the capacities of both entities in dealing with social adversities."*

In accordance, **Candy** stated:

*"Social confederations would help schools with networking sponsorships that would help with building repairs, upgrades as well as to buy teaching resources for the school in order to provide quality education for the vulnerable learners."*

**Miss X** stated:

*"Working in partnership would definitely provide more than academic excellence for the learners, it would also boost their overall social growth."*

**Mrs Bee** interjected:

*“Most definitely. When the whole school works in partnership with the community, bigger results would be achieved, which may not be achieved when schools work in isolation.”*

**S’khumba** reiterated:

*Amasongo akhala kahle uma emaningi (the bangles can make beautiful music when they are in a bunch... [smiles]... I mean just that.... Together we can make bigger things happen which we would not be able to do alone.*

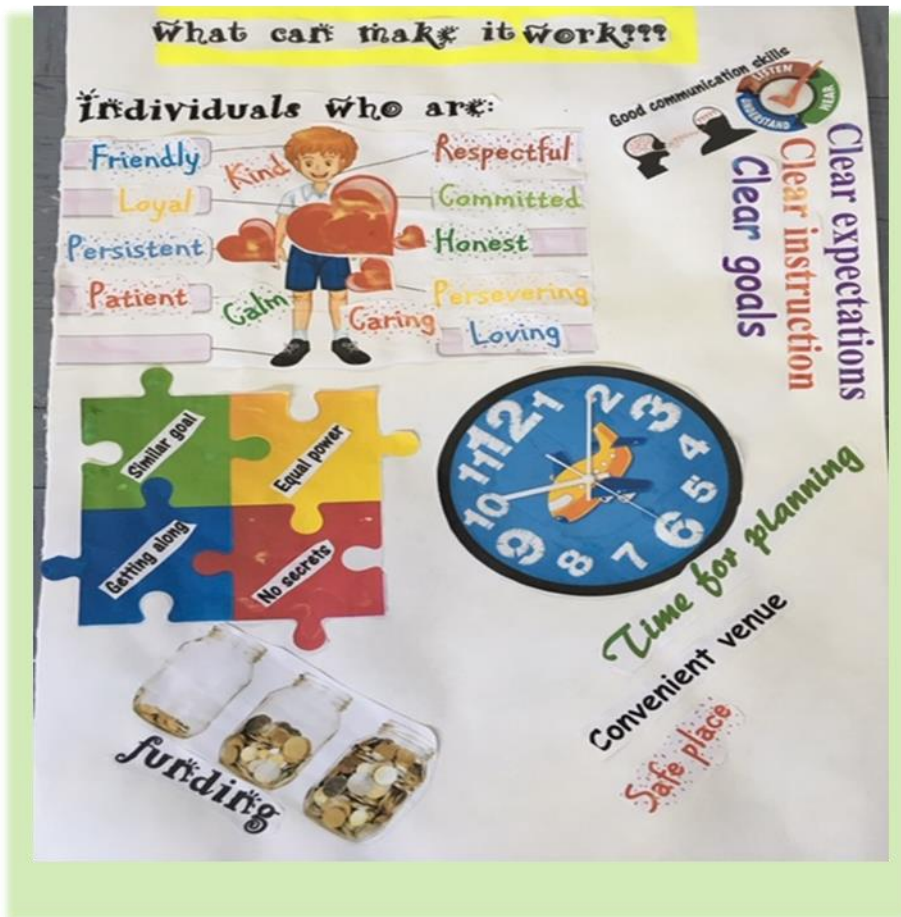
In summary, while collaborative efforts are driven by the communities’ needs to deliver upon their goals, in situations where collaborative initiatives are not installed, there could be dire consequences for the community as a whole, and most importantly for the vulnerable learner. Hence, in instances where collaborative initiatives are operating, there could be outstanding benefits for the learners and the community. Consequently, such significant positives may be seen as the elixir for better academic performances. The great effects of teamwork leads to positive changes in communities such as increased networking, innovative ways of seeking sponsorships, as well as heightening social growth for all.

## **5.5 THE CRUCIAL RUDIMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK**

In response to the third objective of the study, which was centred on ascertaining “**The crucial rudiments for a collaborative framework**”, the co- researchers, through making collages, holding discussions and writing reflections, came up with numerous elements which they felt were vital for the success of the proposed collaborative framework. In accordance, the responses were separated into two categories: namely, the positive personality traits, and the conditions for effective collaboration.

### **5.5.1 Positive Personality Traits**

The co-researchers reported on a variety of positive personality traits depicted in photograph 5.3 of a collage-creation that was made by the co-researchers. The responses of co-researchers (below) also enlightened the ‘positive-traits’ discussion.



**Photograph 5.3:** Collage Depiction of Positive Personality Traits and Conditions for Effective Collaboration.

**Mhlengikazi** stated:

*“This kind of coalition needs someone who is trustworthy, whom the vulnerable learners as well as the members of the coalition can trust.”*

**Candy** added:

*“The collaborators should be individuals who are committed to the group, so if there are challenges within the group, someone that won’t give up easily.”*

In support, **Miss Bee** explained:

*“The coalition needs individuals who are compassionate, who won’t be part of the group just to gain something for themselves, but they should*

*genuinely want to assist the vulnerable learner without gaining anything in return.”*

**Mother Theresa** added:

*“Of course [pauses]. They need to be able to empathise with another human being, so they can help them by understanding their adverse situation, even if they have not been in that situation themselves.”*

**Miss X** concurred:

*“That good working relationship will be created by parties respecting one another and being trustworthy.... If they promised them to do something, they should do it, and not make excuses.”*

In summary, through the collage display and excerpts (above), the co-researchers agreed that there are personality traits which must be evident in co-researchers for effective collaboration to occur. Such personality traits which were believed to be conducive for effective collaboration included trustworthiness, loyalty, compassion, empathy, honesty, camaraderie, respect and understanding.

### **5.5.2 Conditions for Effective Collaboration**

While responses concerning an individual's personality traits for conducive collaboration have been presented above, the co-researchers saw it equally important to also outline conditions which they felt were conducive towards effective collaboration amongst parties. Accordingly, conditions which were believed to be conducive for effective collaboration to take place, have been delineated below.

#### **5.5.2.1 Equal Partnership**

Equal partnership was the first condition to be highlighted by the research team as it was believed to be a crucial rudiment for a collaborative framework. Hence, the co-researchers responded as follows:

**Mrs Bee** said:

*“All the members in our coalition should have equal power regardless of their communal status in order for our initiative to be a success.”*

**Candy** explained:

*“More so, since the partners in our coalition are from all walks of life [pauses]. I mean ... we have people such as teachers, a priest, learners, a police officer, me... it is important that we all feel as equals so that we can contribute positively and effectively in the partnership.”*

**Gogo** added:

*“Yes... [pauses]. Just because you have a better position in the community, doesn't mean you must rule us here, as those are the kind of things that ruin most community partnerships which involve a variety of stakeholders.”*

**Mhlengikazi** clarified:

*“Yes, we get it! We are all equal here... [with a bit of annoyance], now can we please move on.”*

**Mr Thwala** explained:

*“Ensuring that all members feel equal will allow them to have a say in the decision-making process; hence, they will all feel important and want to fully to contribute to the endeavour.”*

### **5.5.2.2 Trusting and positive working relationships**

While the co-researchers highlighted the issue of equal partnership as a crucial element for their proposed collaborated framework, they further pinpointed the notion of a trusting and positive working relationship as being another crucial element for their framework.

**Mrs Bee** stated:

*“Working with someone you trust and that you are certain that they would do what they are expected to do, puts you at ease and you know that the initiative is made up of people who take the goals of the initiative to heart.”*

**Miss X** added:

*“Everyone contributes to the success of the group and you don’t get lazy people who just want to belong to the group for their own silly reason [sighs].”*

**Mrs Bee** commented:

*“When people do not need to be followed around to ensure they keep to their end of the bargain, makes being in the coalition to be so much of a bliss.”*

**Soup-lady** interjected:

*Most definitely... [pauses] it would mean various stakeholders trust one another and that they deliver what they promised without anyone keeping tabs on them or anyone being worried that they will deliver what they promised.*

**Mfundisi** explained:

*“There should be peace amongst the parties [pauses]. I mean they should get along with one another not necessarily meaning that they must be friends, but they need to have a good working relationship for the purpose of the endeavour.”*

**Mhlengikazi** clarified:

*“That positive working relationship mentioned by the Priest will only be created by members being respectful to one another; and they should also accept that everyone is different and thus embrace each other’s diversities by embracing one another, even if they are different from each other.”*

**Uncle Sam** elaborated:



*“I would say the Three T’s should exist [pauses]. The one T stands for trust as the members within the partnership should trust one another. The second T stands for trustworthy as they also need to be trustworthy within themselves. Lastly, the third T stands for transparency as I believe there should be transparency amongst the stakeholders and there should be no hidden agendas as that would destroy the organisation.”*

**Mother Theresa** emphasised:

*“Individuals who opt to belong to the partnership should also be committed to the organisation. They must be dedicated in participating in the activities as well the objectives of the group.”*

**Mr Thwala** summed up:

*“The members should complement one another, not compete against each other. For instance, if one member cannot do something within the partnership, another member should assist.”*

### **5.5.2.3 Accommodating diversities**

Being accommodative to diversities was another element which was raised by the research team to be included in the proposed framework. Since the framework comprised of a variety of stakeholders from the community, and the very nature of learner vulnerability which the framework aims to explore, is said to be a broad phenomenon, the accommodation of diversities was a crucial element for unity.

**Mother Theresa** stated:

*“The framework must accommodate various forms of learner vulnerabilities. [pauses] Since, the learners who reside within the rural areas are faced with the worst forms of learner adversities.”*

**Mrs Bee** commented:

*“There is no way of deciding who is vulnerable and who is not, because the state of vulnerability is understood differently by different people. So,*

*whichever learner comes forward asking for help should be assisted in any manner that brings positive change.”*

**Mhlengikazi** clarified:

*“Ones’ state of vulnerability might not be a state of vulnerability to the next person. In all... vulnerability is not a black or white occurrence, but there are patches of grey within it [smiles].”*

**Mother Theresa** emphasised:

*“Most definitely, like there are those learners who face emotional adversities such as parental loss, depression, loneliness, lack of emotional support or guidance. While others suffer physical vulnerabilities like not having enough food at home, not having stationery, not having school uniforms. Even those learners that are vulnerable because they simply cannot cope with their schoolwork. Even those who are not mentally adequate to grasp the concepts being learnt in class.”*

**Mr Thwala** continued the discussion:

*“Other learners are vulnerable because at school they are bullied, while in other cases the language acts as barrier to learning and eventually results in the learners being vulnerable [pauses] or...physically or... mentally. All in all, learner-vulnerability is fairly vast, and it all impacts negatively on the learning process.”*

**Miss X** added:

*“That is why we need to embrace all the diverse learner-vulnerabilities that are out there which hamper our learners’ learning process in order for the framework to be functional.”*

**Mrs Bee** contended:

*“Not just the various forms of learner-vulnerabilities [pauses] but for the framework to be a success, a whole array of individuals should also be accommodated to be part of the coalition.”*

In summary, the co-researchers agreed that the notion of being accommodative to diversities was a crucial element for their framework, as the learners would always present various vulnerabilities. Hence, by implication, the partners within the framework should also be diverse individuals who present an array of specialities and diverse views.

#### **5.5.2.4 Consistency in practices**

Consistency in practices was another crucial condition that was brought up by the research team as they felt that prescribed or standard procedures should always be practised or maintained, otherwise the success of the initiative may be jeopardised. Co-researchers of the current study responded as follows:

**Mother Theresa** stated:

*“When the members of the partnership are consistent in what they do, they create accountability for the partnership, not just for themselves but for the vulnerable learners also, who might be interested in making use of the framework.”*

**Miss-X** declared:

*“When the parties are consistent in their practices within the collaboration, this adds value to the initiative, and people, especially vulnerable learners in this case, would trust the framework.”*

**Mhlengikazi** added:

*“Consistency in practices will also provide an opportunity for the parties to see if they are really fulfilling their roles and thus show that they are moving forward towards attaining their coalition’s goal.”*

**Candy** agreed:

*“Yes, even the sponsors who might be interested in funding the project, might see it is as worthwhile project to sponsor, not just a fly-by-night initiative that is interested in making money at the expense of the vulnerable, like most community organisations.”*

**Sunshine** chipped in:

*“The members of the coalition need to follow the same procedures... [pauses] ... they cannot change like the weather.”*

The **main researcher** interrupted:

*“What do you mean by that? Kindly elaborate or give an example to clarify your point.”*

**Sunshine** elaborated:

*“I mean like ... [sighs] ... when a vulnerable learner approaches a member of a coalition on Monday, that member might be approachable and helpful. But when she comes for help on another day, she finds the team member who is grumpy, unhelpful and unapproachable.”*

**Mfundisi** summed up:

*“All in all, ... [pauses] ... the members of the coalition need to be people who are helpful, sympathetic, approachable, and who are sincere. “*

#### **5.5.2.5 Shared goal and a clear vision of the collaboration (coalition)**

While consistency was regarded as a crucial factor for the success of the initiative, the aspects of a shared goal and clear purpose were brought up by the co- researchers, as also being inextricably intertwined in the project. As such, the co- researchers made the following attestations:

**Mfundisi** stated:

*“The issue of shared goals in a coalition puts all the parties on the same level and they strive towards a common goal and their efforts to achieving the goal is not divided amongst a number of different goals.”*

**Mhlengikazi** added:

*“Having a shared or a common goal will ensure that the individuals within the initiative are kept focused on attaining that particular goal. Furthermore, this will make it easier to reach the goal as their responsibilities will be towards achieving the goal will be equally shared.”*

**Mr Thwala** agreed:

*“Clear and shared goals of the initiative will further rule out the trouble of individuals having hidden agendas, and hence also avoid energies that are individualised.”*

**Mother Theresa** affirmed:

*“Having a clear stated and shared goal will further ensure that everyone is committed to the activities that are being put into practice within the coalition and for the benefit of the organisation.”*

**Miss Bee** asserted:

*“The parties involved in the coalition should have a common goal or purpose, as these will allow them to give off their best towards the success of the partnership.”*

In agreement, **Uncle Sam** reiterated:

*“Having a common goal will ensure that all people who are involved in a partnership, also have equal responsibilities for the outcomes of the initiative, weather good or bad... [pauses]... God forbid that it fails. “*

**Mother Theresa** summed it up:

*“And... wallah! [shouts in excitement], the framework would be functional ... [pauses] ... as the members will function as a single entity towards providing care and support for the vulnerable learners so that their learning is preserved and sustained.”*

In summary, the research team agreed on several issues which they felt were crucial for effective collaboration. Concisely, the crucial rudiments were themed or delineated as personality traits, and conducive conditions for effective collaboration. These were categorised according to the transcriptions of the learner-collages, discussions, documented reports and free-writing reflections. In addition, the crucial rudiments were further broken down to include issues such as equal partnership, trusting and positive working relationships, accommodating diversities, consistency in practices, and having a shared goal and a clear vision of the coalition. Notably, many of the crucial rudiments that were highlighted by the current research team, were in accordance with the attributes of the Collaboration Theory.

## **5.6 THREATS TO THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE FRAMEWORK**

The co-researchers of the current study outlined several elements which they regarded as crucial for effective collaboration. In addition, the team responded to the next research question: **What are the threats against the operationalisation of the collaborative framework?** The co-researchers further brought up various threats that will adversely affect the operationalisation of the framework. Specifically, the learner co-researchers through their collages depicted a combination of hindrances including negative personality traits as well as those that could be regarded as unconducive conditions as shown in photograph 5.4 below:



**Photograph 5.4:** Collage Showing Threats to the Operationalisation of the Framework

Responses from the older co-researchers mainly concentrated on those impediments which were within human control. In accordance, the threats or hindrances to the operationalisation of the framework were divided as follows: individuals' negative personality traits, unskilled parties, conflicting agendas, and community hierarchies.

### 5.6.1 Individuals' Negative Personality Traits

The research team through the collages, free-writing reflections, and focus group discussions, identified negative personality traits which could be detrimental to the proper functioning of the framework. Some of these negative personality traits included characteristics of individuals who were lacking in skills, arrogant, disrespectful, inflexible, inconsistent, untrustworthy, and those who had poor self-esteem.

### 5.6.2 Unskilled Parties

Eight out of the twelve co-researchers who part took in the FGDs remarked on the amateurism or the lack of skills of the individuals who formed part of the existing team of collaborators within their community. In support, the following statements expose this aspect.

**Mr Thwala** commented:

*“Most people who belong in such organisations do not know how to behave or what is expected of them for the initiative to be fruitful. However, this is not their fault as they are often untrained on how such organisations work.”*

The **Mother Theresa** retorted:

*“The majority of the people who participate in these joint organisations often lack.... as well as enough knowledge and adequate skills regarding collaborative activities.”*

**Mhlengikazi** agreed:

*“It is not just the ordinary collaborators that let the organisations down but even the leaders in most cases as they do not know how to lead people, they become autocratic and often fail to lead appropriately for the smooth functioning of the organisation.”*

**Candy** interrupted:

*“They run the organisations like it is their own private business... [pauses]. They have no leadership skills whatsoever... [claps].”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“What do you mean?”*

**Uncle Sam** explained:

*“Most of these leaders often dictate and order people around, without asking for their inputs or perceptions. They also make all the decisions as a result people do not cooperate but often want to pull out from such organisations.”*

**Mrs Bee** concluded:

*“Habitually, the parties who participate in such initiatives do not understand that they must work as a team, but they often work in isolation and that*



*defeats the whole purpose of the organisation. This is because they are not trained to be collaborators.”*

### **5.6.3 Conflicting Agendas and Absence of Teamwork**

While the co-researchers exposed the aspect of unskilled partners as being a threat to the smooth operationalisation of the framework, seven of the twelve participating co-researchers criticised the “hidden” or “conflicting” agendas amongst the parties involved as often being an impediment against the smooth functioning of most partnerships. In exposition, co-researchers made the statements that follow.

**Mhlengikazi** stated:

*“In most cases, such organisations have people with different goals; for example, some are in for the money while others are genuinely involved to uplift their community, as a result they fail to work as a team.”*

In support, **Mother Theresa** added:

*“Due to various stakeholders being involved, conflicting agendas are bound to disrupt the organisation’s purpose if the goals are not strictly stipulated and abided by.”*

**Miss X** commented:

*“When the involved individuals are working towards different goals, they fail to reach the main goal of the establishment as they put a lot of effort on unrelated (hidden) purposes.”*

**Uncle Sam** asserted:

*“Well... diverse people have varied economic statuses and cultures as they come from different backgrounds. Hence, even if they have a good understanding of the initiative’s goals, somewhere along the line they are bound to fall off the wagon and try to pursue their own personal vendettas.”*

**Mrs Bee** averred:

*“It is not only when the objectives of initiatives are conflicting that the functioning of the group is threatened, but when they are also unclear.”*

In agreement, **Mfundisi** commented:

*“Precisely... [pauses]... it’s often the blind leading the blind scenario... [laughs]... as the parties do not know what they are striving towards and that causes a breakdown in the proper functioning of the initiative.”*

#### **5.6.4 Community Hierarchies**

Even though the co-researchers pointed critically to conflicting agendas amongst the collaborators as being amongst the threats obstructing the proper functioning of most community organisations, they were equally vehement about existing community hierarchies jeopardising effective cohesion in collaborations (as evident in the excerpts below).

**Candy** said:

*“Varying economic, age, educational level or professional status always threatens the effectiveness of most community group projects as other people think they are better than others, so they want to boss everyone around and make all the decisions themselves concerning the organisation.”*

**S’khumba** shed more light and commented:

*“When people have superior positions at their work places, like being a manager or a being principal, when they get involved in a community collaboration they want to manage and rule everyone without taking into account that everyone should collaborate as equals as they all have valuable inputs to make to uplift the organisation.”*

Differently, but supporting a similar opinion, **Mhlengikazi** asserted:

*“The blame is not only with those who feel superior, but it is also with the individuals who have poor self-esteem, who fail to contribute effectively to*

*the organisation as they fear being ridiculed by other members of the initiative. Thus, domineering members sense this and then they take over.”*

**Miss-X** agreed:

*Yes. [pauses] People who feel inferior to other people in the group do not bring any positive input to the table as they often tag along and make meaningless contributions which are not beneficial to the group.*

Similarly, **Mrs Bee** added:

*You find them taking subordinate positions, when there is no need to do so. They are just required to adequately contribute via responses and observations to the group for the upliftment of the community.*

**Mother Theresa** elaborated:

*It is not because they have no contribution to make, but they fear other people in the group, and they feel that their contributions might be nonsensical or meaningless. They are forgetting the real reason for the initiative.*

### **5.6.5 Time Constraints and Scarcity of Resources**

The issue of time constraints and non-availability of materials was stressed throughout the three forms of data generating processes. While the younger co-researchers depicted these on their collage-creations, others mentioned these debilitating hindrances via free-writing reflections and FGDs. Some of the co-researchers responded by making the following statements.

**Uncle Sam** stated:

*“There is no time for collaborative planning as we are busy trying to earn a living to support our family members.”*

**Terminator** added:

*“Time is the most challenging factor in our lives as we spend most of the time at school, and further, we have to come and meet for this project while our homework as well as our home chores await us.”*

**Miss X** agreed:

*“That time is a challenge is not only for collaborative meetings but also for actually undertaking the duties that will be proposed for the framework. I just foresee we do not have enough time to put all of them into action.... [pauses] anyway, that’s just my opinion.”*

In support, the **Main researcher** added:

*“I have also noted that it’s even difficult to agree on the time for our meetings concerning our project, as it involves quite an array of individuals from all walks of life, and finding a suitable time-slot for all, is a challenge.”*

**Soup-lady** commented:

*“The scarcity of time is worsened by scarcity of resources and funding to carry out the project.”*

**Mrs Bee** interjected:

*“Most definitely, because of the late hours we have to meet, we have to cater for refreshments, which can be quite expensive since there’s quite a number of us.”*

**Mhlengikazi** concluded:

*“Even transportation to and from the meeting can be regarded as a scarcity of a resource. While we reside near the research site, inclement weather affects us especially when we finish late. Some of us have to be driven to our homes (on bad roads) to ensure that we reach our homes safely.”*

### 5.6.6 Unclear Goals and Disrupted Communication

Communication and language usage, coupled with a vague understanding of the goals of the collaboration, acted as obstacles to the smooth functioning of the collaboration.

**Mfundisi** advised:

*“We have to set clear goals in order for the framework to be successfully activated.”*

**Mhlengikazi** added:

*“If the goals are not clear, the collaborators would go astray as there will be nothing which guides their goals.”*

**Mr Thwala** gave another angle to the discussion:

*“Unclear communication which sometimes entailed double-meanings and a lack of understanding a common language [even isiZulu has different versions, and English is not generally understood in such rural communities] which will lead the collaborators to being confused and to lose focus. As a result, they will not be able to put as much effort on the functioning of the initiative. “*

The co-researchers of the current study commented on various hindrances which they felt were detrimental to the proper functioning of their framework. While such hindrances were in line with those that have been outlined in previous studies, most of the threats that were brought up by the younger participants represented a combination of issues. As their collage depicted threats that were sometimes manipulated by individuals and authorities, the success of some collaborations was doubtful from the beginning. However, collaborations can become successful when hindrances like arrogance, distrust, dogmatism, and hidden agendas are eradicated. Other hindrances such as lack of funding, time-constraints, unclear goals, poor communication and community hierarchies, exacerbated the situations.

## **5.7 THE “COLLABORATED FRAMEWORK” AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY**

The penultimate meeting that took place amongst the co-researchers was inclusive of the younger as well as the older co-researchers, with the aim of responding holistically to the last critical question of the study: **How can we through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**

Firstly, the whole research team agreed that there was a dire need for a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in their ecology. As their ecology was characterised by a preponderance of learner- vulnerabilities which negatively impacted on academic performance, co-researchers designed four major strategies that needed to be placed into operation:

- Promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possess an optimistic mentality;
- Intensifying the existing forms of care and support;
- Inspiring collaborations; and
- Connecting with the curriculum.

In the following sections, the plan of action which the co-researchers structured, and which included several mini activities, was launched to successfully realise the main objective of enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology to be a success.

### **5.7.1 Promoting a Culture of Ambitious Learners who Possess a Spirit of Optimism**

An impressive number of the co-researchers who were involved in the current study touched on the concept of culture as being a crucial element in enhancing learning for the vulnerable learners in their ecology. To illustrate, some of the co-researchers responded as seen in the following excerpts.

**S’khumba** began:

*“You see, here in the rural areas, the concept of culture is important in moulding the behaviours of the people in the community especially that of our youth.”*

The **Main researcher** probed:

*“Kindly elaborate, how the notion of culture may be linked in enhancing learning for the vulnerable learners in this ecology?”*

**Mfundisi** elaborated:

*“Well... [pauses] ... if we as the community cultivate and pass on to the youth the habit of an unrelenting desire to succeed, despite whatever challenges one is facing, our youth could develop attitudes of being fighters.”*

**Miss X** agreed:

*“Yes, even at school, we can preach to the learners in the classroom and at assembly the voice of being fighters and that of always wanting to rise against all challenges, achieving the highest and being hopeful.”*

**Gogo** suggested:

*“We can even go back to the basics of “Ukuxoxa izinganekwane” [storytelling]. We can tell our children good motivating stories, like how our elders used to do for us...that was very motivating.”*

**Candy** interrupted:

*“Not just at home [pauses], but at school as well. We as parents can start by setting a good example for our young, by not smoking or drinking in front of the children, but always striving to swim against the tide. [laughs].”*

**Butterfly** concurred:

*“Most definitely, our culture needs to change from feeling sorry for ourselves to believing that we are fighters and we can achieve whatever*

*we set our minds to, despite our vulnerable states. We cannot change the fact that we come from poor families, but we can change what we become in the future [ pauses] by focusing on our work, working hard and staying in schools.”*

The **Main researcher** probed:

*“Are those the only activities that you think may be carried out for encouraging an ambitious ethos or beliefs amongst vulnerable learners which may enhance sustainable learning?”*

**Uncle Sam** advised:

*“We as community members and parents should love our children and show them that we care, even in the times when they don’t do well academically.”*

**Mrs Bee** commented:

*“I agree. Even us as teachers at school should show and believe that all learners have the ability to do well, regardless of their challenges in school, at home and in the community. In that way they also start believing in themselves, and that they can do well.”*

**Miss X** added:

*“Even what we teach them, we must teach them in a way that will give them self-confidence.”*

**Mr Thwala** (police Officer) interjected:

*“Not just lessons ... [pauses] ... I think they should also be involved in competing with other schools, in competitions such as sports, music and debating, so they learn to persevere and embrace criticism while they get used to developing resilience.”*

The **Main researcher** probed further:



*“Okay, I understand ... [pauses], but how exactly will such activities enhance sustainable learning?”*

**Uncle Sam** advised:

*“By us loving our children and believing in them, no matter what the circumstances are; this will actually make the learners to also believe in themselves and they will be encouraged to try harder.”*

**Mrs Bee** concurred:

*“They wouldn’t want to disappoint the very people who show them unconditional care and love.”*

**Mr Thwala** added:

*“You see the learners will know they are not alone; they have our full support and they may even ask for assistance and guidance on other issues pertaining to their quality of learning.”*

**Candy** continued:

*“Yes... [pauses]. We will be like good role models for the learners, encouraging to them strive for the best no matter what the circumstances are.”*

**Mrs Bee** elaborated:

*“Such programmes or activities will train our learners to be competitive, to accept and use positive criticism for their own development.”*

The attestations of the co-researchers towards formulating a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in their rural ecology resulted in formulating a theme: the promotion of a culture of ambitious learners with an optimistic mentality. The initial theme was made up of a series of activities that was believed by the co-researchers to have the potential of promoting a culture of ambitious learners. Such activities included actions like holding talks during assembly

times for the learners to motivate them, and storytelling in the homes in order to raise the learners' hopes while boosting their confidence. The other action was for teachers, parents and community members to display good behaviour in front of the learners, so that they become good role models. Other actions included showing love, passion and care for the learners, as well as encouraging learners to participate in extra-curricular activities that would teach them perseverance and competitiveness.

### **5.7.2 Intensifying the Existing Forms of Care and Support**

Almost all the co-researchers reported on some form of care and support which were already in place to enhance the quality of learning for vulnerable learners in their rural setting. However, some co-researchers indicated that the existing forms of care and support needed to be intensified or strengthened in order to be made effective in reaching set goals prescribed by the collaboration. Co-researchers' responses are recorded in the undermentioned excerpts.

**Gogo** commenced:

*“Not to say that, there are no forms of care and support in our place of living [pauses] but they are not as effective as one would desire them to be.”*

**Mr Thwala** acknowledges:

*“Yes, there are many reasons for the ineffectiveness of the means of care and support not to be successful in achieving their objectives.”*

**Uncle Sam** believes:

*“Maybe one just needs to focus on making stronger the things that are already being done in the community to support the vulnerable learners' in attaining quality education.”*

The **Main researcher** probes:

*“Okay, [pauses] what can be done to actually make the existing forms of care and support to be effective or to work?”*

**Mother Theresa** suggests:

*“I think to make the available existing forms of care effective; we need to know exactly why we need them and what will happen if we do not have them.”*

**Terminator** hastens to say:

*“Yes. [pauses], like we need to teach as many people as possible about the different kinds of challenges that we as learners from the rural places experience..... We also need to teach as many people as possible how the learner vulnerabilities negatively impact the process of us getting good education and actually remaining at school.”*

**Sunshine** agrees:

*“Exactly [pauses]. We have to teach the people in the community about vulnerabilities, but it is also important that we inform them of the means of care and support that are available in our community.”*

**Mhlengikazi** interjects:

*“But to make these measures stronger and effective, we need to check what is it they are lacking in and be able to prevent those short falls.”*

**S’khumba** resumes:

*“Yep, I strongly feel that combining the various existing forms of care and support would make them more effective.”*

The **Main researcher** further probes:

“What do mean?”

**S’khumba** explains:

*“I mean that we should not throw away our ethnic or original means of care and support and completely change into using the modern ways, as*

*these have been working previously so we need to see where they are lacking and then try and perfect them with the ones that are recent or current.”*

The **main researcher** interrogates:

*“What are examples of our ethnic means of support?”*

**S’khumba** proceeds:

*“There are plenty [pauses]. For example, spiritual activity like “ukuphahla” and Ukuhlaba (conversing with our ancestors and slaughtering for our ancestors).”*

**Mfundisi** acknowledges:

*“Most definitely... [ pauses] whatever works [pauses], even praying for those learners who are facing challenges, that would help them boost their hope by them knowing and trusting that there are indeed superior beings who can help us when we are in need. Instead of us having our learners just quitting school because their faith and hope is weak.”*

**Angel** criticises:

*“But [ pauses] the process of gaining care and support should also be simplified, as learners often decide to quit school or they decide not to seek assistance because the whole process of gaining support is so complicated, restricting and tiring.”*

**Candy** adds:

*“Referral procedures should most definitely be made user-friendly; you find the learner is vulnerable already and they do not have the energy to go through all the channels that they need to go through to before they receive help.”*

**Butterfly** hastens to say:

*“Oh yes! [screams] They send you to Home Affairs and to the police station like a hundred times. You find that during this time you do not even have the money for bus fare to go up and down requesting for affidavits, making statements, and obtaining documents like death certificates.”*

**Uncle Sam** advises:

*“There should be a one-stop station for all these things, as they require a lot of energy and money. Or at least there should be a resource chart that is followed, because most of the time people do not even know what they are doing; all at the expense of a child who is already vulnerable.”*

**Miss X** suggests:

*“Educating people around the community regarding learner vulnerabilities and its negative impact will surely decrease the rate of those vulnerabilities which are purposely carried out by the individuals in the community as they will now understand the devastating nature of their actions on the individual as a human being which includes learners in school.”*

**Mother Theresa** added:

*“Strengthening the means of learner-support would be beneficial in enhancing sustainable learning as the several of forms of care and support will become balanced, and they would also be more effective since they will cover a lot of vulnerabilities.”*

**Mhlengikazi** stated:

*“The one-sided means of support would only be able assist a few learners whilst leaving out the majority of those learners who present unique types of vulnerabilities.”*

**Mother Theresa** continued:

*“The resource chart would make it easier for those people who wish to access support as they would know exactly what services are available in their community as well as how to go about obtaining them.”*

**Candy** proceeded:

*“It will also be easy to identify which means of care and support are missing within the community, and thus give more focus on developing or establishing those areas. Eventually, within the same community, a vast range of measures will be available to cover a variety of vulnerabilities.”*

**Mother Theresa** concluded:

*“More respect would be given to such stakeholders; hence, more and more vulnerable learners would be comfortable to approach them for help as the service-providers will be certain of where to refer vulnerable learners to. Also, the exact kind of service or assistance they are being referred for, will be easily identified.”*

In recapitulation, the research team of the current study discovered that there are various forms of care and support which are already in existence in their ecology. However, these measures according to the research team, were somewhat inadequate in meeting the demands of sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners. Hence, the readily available forms of care and support needed to be intensified or strengthened in order to capacitate them in reaching their objective. In accordance, the smaller activities that should be followed included actions such as awareness-creation concerning various forms of learner vulnerabilities, their impact on the quality of learning, as well as on the already available measures of care and support. In clarification, awareness-creation may be made through the presentation of talks, pamphlet distribution, roadshows and posters. The other sub-activity mentioned by the co-researchers included asset-mapping and assessing the effectiveness of readily available forms of care and support. Combining various forms of care and support such as the Western and indigenous ones, leads to physical actions such as starting vegetable gardens, and emotional inspirations fostered by spiritual or secular or cultural measures such as praying for the learners and motivating them through

stories. Formulating a resource chart in order to enhance and simplify accessibility including referral procedures of the means of care and support, was also strongly recommended.

### **5.7.3 Inspiring Collaborations**

Although the majority of the co-researchers gave accounts concerning the existing forms of care and support as well as on the activities that may capacitate them to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable within their context, many of them equally emphasised the importance of cheering or inspiring the continuation of collaborations which exist in the community. Accordingly, some of the co-researchers' responses are indicated below.

**Mfundisi** commenced:

*“Different associates within the various levels in the community need to be encouraged to work together, as this is not a one-man-show.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“Kindly elaborate on what you are saying.”*

**Mfundisi** elaborated:

*“Where there are groups of individuals who are working together to assist the vulnerable learners, their partnerships should be encouraged so that they will see the value of their efforts, thus they will continue their venture of assisting our learners.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“So, you mean those individuals who are working in isolation to try and achieve similar outcomes should be discouraged?”*

**Uncle Sam** interrupted:

*“Of course, that is not what the man of God is saying [pauses]. But what he means is that, those parties who are already active towards assisting vulnerable learners, should be supported.”*

**Mfundisi** added:

*“Exactly [pauses], and you will find such collaborations within various levels of community, such as within the school, the home and the community - they need to be revived.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“Clear now [pauses and smiles] and... how can such collaborations be encouraged, and how will those activities heighten sustainable learning for those learners who are at-risk?”*

**Gogo** explained:

*“Well.... they say, charity begins at home [pauses]. Meaning we can start by encouraging those relations within the families which are in place to assist vulnerable learners. For instance, you will find an aunt taking turns with the Grandmother to look after the child of a teenage mother, so the teenager can go to school. .... In other cases, you will find an uncle taking turns with the older brother to walk a learner to school because the way to school is dangerous, so that the learner will continue attending school, despite the adversity of walking on unsafe roads to school, [pauses], things like that.”*

In support, **Candy** added:

*“Those family members who are trying their best to support vulnerable learners need to be supported, by firstly us acknowledging their efforts and later encouraging them to continue with their good practices. We may also encourage them by confirming the areas where they need support, and then help them to attain their objectives.”*



**Miss X** advised:

*“Let us not forget about also supporting and cheering the partnerships between the school and the family.”*

**Butterfly** agreed:

*“The relationships between the families and the school may be made tighter by us learners speaking good things about our teachers at home so their relationship will be strengthened.”*

**Angel** agreed:

*“Most definitely, we need to love and protect our teachers so that our parents also see their value and want to maintain good relations with them.”*

**Mrs Bee** elaborated:

*“The school should also involve the learners’ families in the important decision-making processes within the school. The school could also run little programmes or courses where parents are taught about the importance of being involved in their children’s learning. Furthermore, the school could offer the parents basic English and Maths so that they will be able to assist their children at home with homework tasks and reading. In that way the parents or families will also see their importance in the school and thus have a respectful and good relationship with the school. These programmes of involvement will not only boost the families’ self-esteem but will also provide a chance for the school and the family to work together in supporting the learners.”*

**Gogo** added:

*“Of course, this relationship between the school and the family will heighten the levels of care and support, as they would now work in*

*partnership to support the learners, and it will not be the job for the school or the home alone to offer support.”*

**Soup-lady** suggested:

*“But this cheering of partnerships should not only be encouraged within the family and school level alone [pauses]. How about us, and the other members of the community assisting too?”*

**Mother Theresa** commented:

*“Other relations between the different community members should also be encouraged, as they also play a huge part in assisting vulnerable learners.”*

**Mhlengikazi** observed:

*“Encouraging relations within the different community members, will actually reduce the existing subdivisions which are there already, as our community is filled with diverse groups of people and some look down on others. Once we realise that we are one community, with just different specialities, we will be able to work together for the benefit of our vulnerable learners and will be able to put aside our differences.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“What does that have to do with sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners?”*

**Mhlengikazi** explained:

*“Firstly, our learners will not feel left out because they come from poor families or because they are disabled or abused. All the learners will feel the same despite their range of difficulties.”*

**Mother Theresa** agreed:

*“Again, the different individuals within the community will feel at ease to share their best practices and they will feel as equals, despite their economic status or education levels [pauses]. We will all be a big happy family [smiles].”*

**Mrs Bee** added:

*“We could hold activities such as games, sports, cultural events and progression meetings. Such activities will allow us as different stakeholders to meet, rub shoulders, form stronger relations, re-identify our roles, share best practices, become more passionate about caring and supporting the vulnerable learners, and most importantly, we will be able to realise our significance in the endeavour to support our community’s learners.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“Progression meetings? [pauses]... that sounds unfamiliar, please elaborate on that.”*

**Miss X** explained:

*“Progression meetings are where stakeholders meet, talk about their duties or roles in assisting the community, in this case the vulnerable learners [pauses]. Once they have met, they will weigh and evaluate the duties, ask for assistance where they feel they are lacking, as well as get support in order to advance their roles.”*

**Mother Theresa** continued:

*“Another activity to encourage collaborations within the community will be to recommend or to propose a crafted dare for the whole community. Here, the learners, teachers, parents, and specialists within the community will jointly be challenged to support the vulnerable learners in sustaining their learning. The crafted dare would enhance learning as not only the learner will be encouraged to do well academically, but the other*

*community members will also be challenged in a playful manner to support those learners facing adversities.”*

In summary, the research team felt that encouraging existing collaborations which were evident within the home, school and the community, will enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners. Progress meetings as well as whole-community ‘crafted dares’ were some of the activities that were highlighted which can be put into action in order to encourage the existing collaboration. Furthermore, encouraging existing collaborations was an effective measure in sustaining learning, but which needed to be ‘beefed up’ in order to achieve set objectives.

#### **5.7.4 Connecting with the Curriculum**

A significant number of co-researchers raised concerns regarding the importance of linking the learners’ “real-lived-lives” to the curriculum in order for them to see the relevance of their own experiences in relation to their learning. In doing so, the co-researchers came up with several activities which they felt should be carried out towards connecting with the curriculum. The co-researchers further pinpointed how specific activities would improve sustainability of learning for those learners who face adversities in the area. Some of the co-researcher’s responses to this aspect of connecting the learners’ real-life experiences to the curriculum, are indicated below.

**Miss X** commenced:

*“In order for us to win over the learners into liking school, they need to be taught lessons that are relevant to their lives [pauses] ... something they can relate to - not something that they have no interest in.”*

**Angel** cautioned:

*“Before we can even do that, we need to pay attention to the learners’ own voices, as their opinions would enlighten us on the matters that concern them the most .... and if we know exactly what interests the learners, we would also be able to assist, such that we make homework to be interesting to the learners by relating it to the curriculum, so the learners would excel.”*

The **main researcher** probed for clarification:

*“Okay, I understand [pauses] ...but how exactly do we pay attention to the learners’ own voices?”*

**Angel** suggested:

*“Anonymous boxes could be stationed around the school, where learners can write about their concerns and their vulnerabilities, as well as ways in which they want us to support them. In that way, their identities would be protected, and they would be free to state whatever thoughts or concerns without fear of being laughed at or ridiculed.”*

**Sunshine** agreed:

*“Yes, we could also set up Whatsapp or Face book closed groups, where we can freely talk about learner vulnerabilities on our own terms and style.”*

**Terminator** interjected:

*“Oh yes! ... [pauses]. Once we state our views, they should be carefully considered by people who try to help us... [pauses]. We shouldn’t just state our concerns, but they should be acted upon.”*

**Miss X** stated:

*“We can take learners out on educational tours where they can learn about the content of their work in the real environment while their minds are relieved from their usual surroundings... such educational tours must not be expensive as most of the learners depend on Government grants.”*

**Mrs Bee** advised:

*“To keep the learners at school, they have to enjoy what they are taught in school; they have to be interested in what is going on at school, so*

*that they like coming to school so that they take interest in their schoolwork.”*

The **main researcher** probed:

*“Kindly give examples of activities that may be carried out in order to relate the curriculum to the learners’ lives.”*

**Mrs Bee** explained:

*“Lessons should be all-encompassing [pauses], meaning that the lessons should embrace different talents and gifts that learners have, instead of focusing on the negative aspects of our rural context.”*

**Uncle Sam** added:

*“I also think the lessons should also involve the people from the home sector or from the community at large”.*

**Mrs Bee** elaborated:

*“For example, when learners are taught about good leadership qualities, the examples of people used should not only be people who lived way before they were born, but also include local leaders from their community. That will help learners to be able to relate better to the curriculum and enjoy learning, as a result their grades may improve as well. “*

**Mhlengikazi** advised:

*“The lessons should be non-discriminating, and they should value all humans as equals and as important. Furthermore, if there is a way, lessons should involve learners engaging knowledge from sources outside of the classroom.”*

**Mother Theresa** continued:

*“The learning programmes and activities should also be individualised and cater for the different learner personalities. This will help in that the different learning styles are accommodated.”*

**Mrs Bee** interjected:

*“But these activities should be carried out continuously so that they are effective, and they should consist of a variety of teaching resources, strategies, assessments as well as ways of monitoring the learners’ and the teachers’ work.”*

**Mother Theresa** summed up:

*“To add to what Mrs Bee said, the school should introduce early identification of the learners’ challenges concerning emotional well-being and mental health, through the whole-school approach. The school should also include other specialists and professionals to be involved in the process of early identification so that they would receive immediate or early support; in turn avoiding damage-control, as prevention is better than cure.”*

In sum, connecting with the curriculum will enhance sustainable learning through undertakings such as having all-encompassing courses, individualised learning programmes, early identification of challenges, and using the whole-school approach to combat emotional and mental health issues of learners. These services would enhance sustainable learning as they will allow learners to relate better to the curriculum as they will now see the relevance factor.

## **5.8 REFLECTIONS ON THE 4 STEPS OF THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK**

Since, Coghlan and Brannick (2014), advise that PAR is a process that mainly involves the co-researchers participating in planning, carrying out the activity, observing, and finally reflecting on their actions. This process was two-fold: the first part centred on reflecting on the actual process of implementing the actions or the undertakings; the second part concerned evaluating the effects of those actions or undertakings which were implemented for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in

their rural ecology. Notably, both reflections are carried out with the intention of later finalising the proposed framework.

### **5.8.1 REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES FOR A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The final meeting that took place amongst the co-researchers occurred five months subsequent to the meeting where the levers of the collaborative framework were outlined. Expectedly, the co-researchers started by bringing to light and reminding one another of the four major levers of their framework which they had agreed on putting into action five months earlier; namely, promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possessed an optimistic mentality, intensifying the existing forms of care and support, inspiring collaborations, and connecting with the curriculum. After the co-researchers had recalled and outlined the key levers of the framework, they started reflecting on the implementation process of their proposed actions and later evaluated the effects of these actions. Notably, the co-researcher's reflections indicated that numerous activities were carried out successfully, while some were not.

#### **5.8.1.1 Reflections on the actions of promoting the culture of ambitious Learners who possess an optimistic mentality**

The first lever (strategy) that the co-researchers ruminated on was that of promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possessed an optimistic mentality. The re-research team reported back that the activity was implemented successfully over a period of five months; however, some of the actions such as 'assembly motivational speeches' were delayed due to other school programmes such as learners' formal assessments. The co-researchers responses are indicated hereunder.

**Miss X** stated:

*“Over the past five months or so, on Mondays during assembly time we were able to get a five-minute-slot to talk to the learners, with the intention of motivating them and heightening their self-confidence.”*

**Mrs Bee** added:

*“We have also started engaging learners in extra-mural activities such as sports and debating in our school. Such activities were religiously carried*



*out except on rainy days for outdoor sports and on those days when learners were preparing for their formal assessments.”*



**Photograph 5.5:** Learners Being Encouraged to Engage in Extra-Curricular Activities

**Candy** continued:

*“At home, I have started to really show the children more compassion, such as telling them how much I love them, giving them hugs and helping them with homework. I have also started telling them that I believe in them, and that they are capable of doing well in their schoolwork.”*

**Gogo** stated:

*“Since this project has started, I have started praying in the evenings with my grandchildren, whereas before I used to pray alone in my room [pauses]. During my loud prayers my grandchildren hear me pleading with God to help, support and strengthen them in attaining good academic*

*achievements. I have also started telling them motivational and inspiring stories from the past like how my granny used to do for me.”*

**Uncle Sam** added:

*“Me and my friends because of this project, we have tried to become good role models, by not smoking and drinking in front of the school children. However, [pauses] ... in all honesty not all the people who had promised not to smoke or drink or to sell alcohol, cigarettes and even drugs to youngsters have adhered to their promises as they complained that selling such things is their only source of income used to support themselves and their families.”*

In sum, the activities which were intended to encourage an ambitious culture and an optimistic mentality in the learners, were mostly executed by the co-researchers and the other relevant stakeholders in the community. However, unforeseen circumstances such as inclement weather, and learners' formal assessments, and diminishing commitment from some of the stakeholders, prevented such activities from being totally successful.

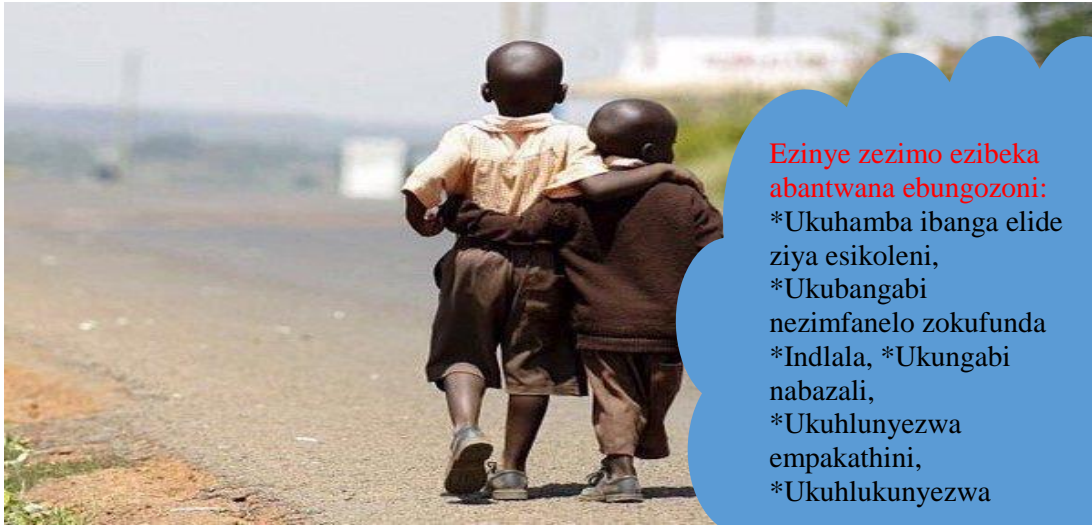
#### **5.8.1.2 Reflections on the undertakings of intensifying the existing forms of care and support**

The transcriptions of the research team were thematically signposted to intensify the existing forms of care and support as a second lever of the collaborative framework. The undertakings or actions which were to be followed were reviewed by the research team and the following responses were recorded.

**Mfundisi** began:

*“Within the space of five months, we were able to hold two talks during the parents' meetings at school. We were also able to distribute approximately fifty pamphlets at church after mass, mainly creating awareness regarding various forms of learner-vulnerabilities in our rural community, as well as its negative effects on learning.”*

# Izingane ezisebungozini...



Ezinye zezimo ezibeka abantwana ebungozoni:

- \*Ukuhamba ibanga elide ziya esikoleni,
- \*Ukubangabi nezimfanelo zokufunda
- \*Indlala, \*Ukungabi nabazali,
- \*Ukuhlunyezwa empakathini,
- \*Ukuhlukunyezwa

Zonke lezizinto zingabangela ukuthi abantwana bayeke isikole

Bewazi ukuthi lukhona usizo elingatholwa iyalabantwana la empakathini ??????

- ✓ Emtholampilo oseduzane
- ✓ Ezikoleni
- ✓ Emakhaya
- ✓ Esontweni
- ✓ E- police station
- ✓ Ekhaya lezintandane
- ✓ Onompilonhle
- ✓ Osomabhisinisi abasempakathini

**Photograph 5.6:** An awareness-creation pamphlet (created by co-researchers)

**Mrs Bee** continued:

*“With regards to mapping out our community’s readily available measures of care and support, we were able to carry out that action through drawing up a table on a chart where we stated the actual available measure, and*

*next to it we wrote how it helped the vulnerable learners in sustaining their learning, and in the third column we tried to rate (%) the effectiveness of each measure. On the last column we stated what we felt was the reason for its effectiveness or dysfunctionality.”*

**Mother Theresa** added:

*“In all honesty, it was not plain-sailing to highlight the causes of the failure of some of the measures due to them being connected to other issues, such as the lack of funds, and resource-mismanagement. Hence, we can’t guarantee that the mistakes of the existing groups such as the NGOs will be completely solved.”*

**S’khumba** explained:

*“With regards to combining the various forms of care and support, the activity that was of success was again promoted by drawing a table. Here, we played around with ideas trying to align the various forms of care and support. For example, matching the indigenous measures with the Westernised ones, the older ones with the modern ones, the physical ones with the abstract ones [pauses] and so forth.”*

**Candy** stated:

*“We also designed a small user-friendly resource chart and booklet which were to be advertised on boards at different places such as the police station, the clinic, the church, school, Home Affairs and the library. Here, an easy to follow mind-map was drawn up indicating the referral procedures to be followed when referring vulnerable learners to other stakeholders, as well as what information learners should provide when in need to be referred. Furthermore, the booklet outlined the contact details as well as working hours of certain service-providers.”*

**Miss X** followed:

*“We were able to start a small vegetable garden within the schools to provide food for our learners to take home. We had a school concert as well as market day, selling handmade stuff which were made by the learners themselves. The money received was used to buy school uniforms and to repair broken school windows.”*



**Photograph 5.7:** A small Vegetable Garden at School



**Photograph 5.8:** Some of the Handmade Items by the Learners

In a nutshell, the basic undertakings which were to be pursued in order to intensify the existing forms of care and support, were to a large extent, accomplished. The co-researchers were able to hold talks with the learners and the public. They were also able to design and distribute pamphlets. The teacher and the learners were also able to start small vegetable gardens, hold a school concert, and initiated a market-day where they sold learners' handmade items to raise funds. While this was aimed to support the vulnerable learners, it was also aimed at teaching them skills which they may use to earn money to remain in school. However, the activity of mapping and weighing readily available services of providing care and support, were met, but with limited success due to resource-mismanagement and a dearth of funds. Additionally, some activities moderately achieved as some of the relevant stakeholders were not represented in these meetings (such as the psychologists, medical doctors and school management personnel). Barring some obstacles, the main activity of streamlining the forms of care and support with the intention of making them more intense, was generally successful.

#### **5.8.1.3 Reflections on the activities of inspiring collaborations**

The thematically transcribed attestations of the Lindelani research team had earlier resulted to a lever of the collaborative framework which was termed as: "inspiring collaborations" in efforts towards enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in their ecology and in order to accomplish it, smaller strides also had to be taken. Significantly, a bulk of the mentioned smaller strides or steps were met with an exception of a few that were unmet. Inherently, some of the co-researchers were quoted as follows:

**Mrs Bee** began:

*"During our parents' meetings at school, we initiated our talks by firstly acknowledging and letting the parents and guardians know how much they are appreciated for caring and supporting the learners in the way that they do. We then went as far as telling them that their efforts are significant, and that they should continue but not cease in trying to assist learners wherever possible."*

**Miss X** interjected:

*“Yes! [pauses] ... Even amongst us staff at school, we asked our school principal, the head of department and senior teachers to start their staff meetings by acknowledging the efforts that are made by the individual teachers to support the vulnerable kids in our school.”*

**Soup-lady** observed:

*“One of the co-researchers organised for one local newspaper to come and interview me and our parish Priest concerning the good work that we do for the community. Even though the interview did not happen due to unexplained reasons from the newspaper’s side. However, the actual thought of inviting them to come and shoot an interview of our efforts, was humbling and appreciated.”*

**Butterfly** added:

*“The activity of us as learners writing and sending out hand-designed letters to the local businesspeople, clinics, social workers, teachers, churches and healers who provide care for us, was a complete success. During the past five months, our free periods in class were used to design, write or make cards of appreciation for those who help us. And we completely enjoyed such sessions, instead of sitting and fooling around. Thanks to Mrs Bee for initiating a beautiful idea of showing appreciation to our supporters.”*

**Uncle Sam** proceeded:

*“We really appreciated being made part of the decision-making process as the learners’ parents and guardians. Previously, we were merely called in to be informed on what the school principal, the teachers and the SGB had already decided on. But over the past few months, things really changed. We were asked to state our views as to what we think the Government allocation funds could be used for in our children’s school [pauses]... I would say we were made to feel as a team within the school.... Basically, thumbs up to this activity.”*

**Gogo** observed:

*“The three programmes where we as parents were taught basic English and Maths as well as the importance of being involved in our children’s schoolwork, were of great help, even though the turn-up from the parents was not so great. But the few parents who were able to attend, really gained a lot and it was a success... not just for us but for our children as well, as it is creating good relations between ourselves and the school.”*

**Mhlengikazi** added:

*“We had also planned on meeting other stakeholders from other nearby communities [pauses] ... and we even sent out invites, but the people from other communities did not show up and they didn’t even send apologies for not being able to join us... [pauses]. That was sad though.”*

**Miss X** asserted:

*“Our planned progression meetings did not take place, as I feel the co-researchers had pre-planned a lot more activities to be achieved within a small space of time. I feel the five months’ period that we had earlier agreed on, was a bit too short when compared to the number of activities we had planned to roll out.”*

On a positive note, **Mother Theresa** shared:

*“The activity of a ‘crafted dare’ for the whole community was successfully rolled out [smiles], as Mrs Bee drew up a chart, where we all as the co-researchers as well as other people in the community were listed as those who took part in the dare or challenge. We actually, signed a document, promising that we would do our best to care and support the vulnerable learners in our community to attain quality sustained learning.”*

In summary, five out of the nine activities that were planned to inspire collaborations were regarded as being successful; that is equivalent to more than 50% success- rate. The research team was able to recognise and appreciate the parental community for



their good efforts in supporting vulnerable learners, and the efforts of the school personnel were acknowledged during staff development meetings. The local business- people and other individuals within the ecology also received heart-warming messages of appreciation directly from the learners. The whole community's 'crafted dare' or challenge promises were also put to test. Coupled with that, the lay community members were not only capacitated to assist their young, but they also gained by receiving free basic training in English, Mathematics as well as Life orientation lessons. They further received a chance to mingle with other specialists, share ideas and to voice out their opinions during the programmes and meetings that were held throughout this initiative of intensifying collaborations. Unfortunately, the media interview session that was organised was not executed due to unforeseen circumstances from the newspaper's side. Also, unfulfilled outcomes regarding the progression meetings and the failure of sharing ideas with other neighbouring communities (due to inadequate commitment and poor time management), somewhat stymied an otherwise successful project.

#### **5.8.1.4 Reflections on actions aimed at connecting with the curriculum**

The final theme that emerged from the co-researcher's transcriptions concerning compiling the levers of their collaborative framework was centred on connecting learners' real-life events with the curriculum. The co-researchers were able to execute a justifiable number of the planned actions, while other actions were going to be met only if they met specific terms and conditions. Some of the co-researcher's responses were recorded, as indicated in the excerpts below.

**Angel** began:

*"In order to pay attention to the learners' voices with the aim of connecting the curriculum to the learners' lives, the co-researchers were able to station two anonymous boxes within the school premises where the learners could place 'anonymous' opinions concerning their issues of concern in the form of written notes."*

**Sunshine** outlined:

*“Two social media sources were successfully set up. Namely, a WhatsApp group and a Face-Book closed group were created and learners as well as teachers added to the groups in order to chat about the issues that are of interest to them and those items that they would like to be incorporated into the curriculum.”*

**Mrs Bee** explained:

*“In order to create all-encompassing lessons that includes various learners’ backgrounds, talents and gifts, we as teachers were able to incorporate examples of topics that learners could relate to, things that are no too far-fetched from the learners’ experiences but things that they were familiar with.”*

**Butterfly** proceeded:

*“The teachers also succeeded in getting into the habit of inviting people from the community to demonstrate whatever it is that the lesson was aimed at teaching, instead of using ‘unrelated’ individuals from other contexts.”*

**Miss X** advised

*“To achieve the notion of non-discriminating lessons, this was out of the teachers’ hands to change or manipulate the teaching content. During the period of this endeavour, the teachers started using various methods of teaching and assessing learners in order to accommodate different learning styles.”*

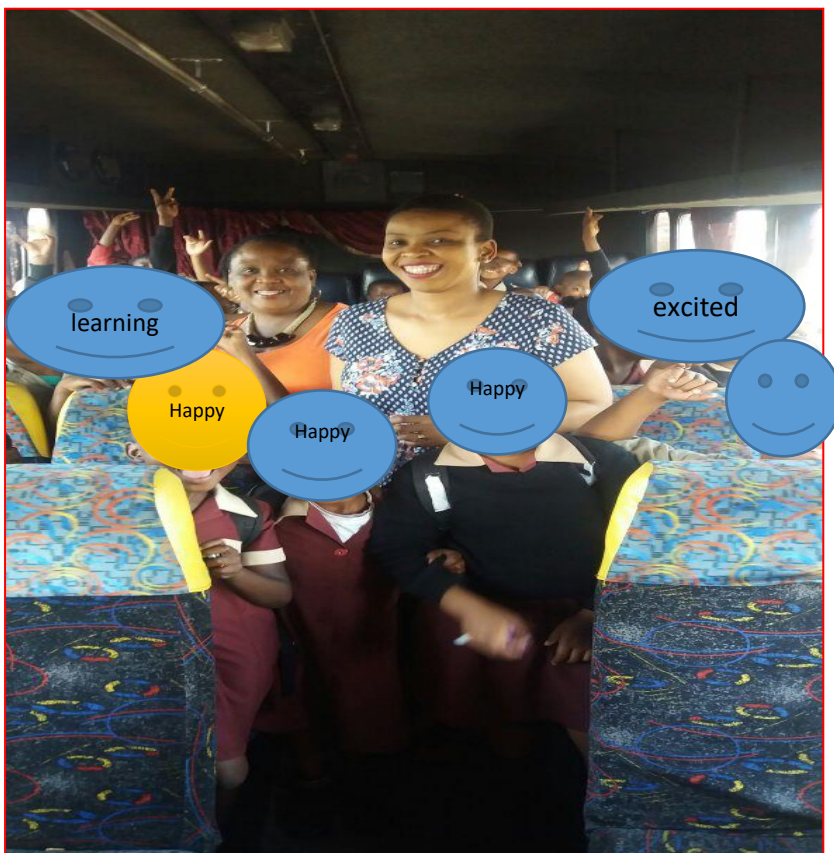
**Mrs Bee** continued:

*“While, the educators did not totally disregard the idea of continuously practising the earlier highlighted activities of connecting with the curriculum, they did not completely buy into it as well. However, they placed certain clauses and conditions as they stated they will only abide*

*by them or continue to pursue them if they notice some level of improvement from the learners' part."*

**Miss X** added:

*"We were able to convince the principal and the parents to fund the educational tours; we visited the water reservoir where water is purified, as well as the sugar-mill where sugar is processed. These were not expensive trips but were in relation to what the learners are being taught in class."*



**Photograph 5.9:** Learners in the Bus, being taken for an Educational Tour

**Mother Theresa** concluded:

*"In pursuing early identification of the learners' challenges, the research team was successful as they managed to confirm a buy-in from local the nurse, psychologist, social worker, priest and traditional healers to commence with early identification of learners with specific adversities*

*from the time of their first grade, even though the initiative was to start in the beginning of the following year. “*

In summary, a few of the proposed measures towards connecting with the curriculum were met by the co-researchers such as paying attention to the learners' voices, going on educational tours, and teaching relevant real-life lessons. The measures that were not met were also reported to being prohibited by specific conditions which were beyond the co-researcher's control. For instance, the activity of early identification of the learners' needs could not be executed effectively as the project itself had only commenced during the middle of the year. Overall, this strategy attained reasonable success.

### **5.8.2 Evaluating the Effects of the Implemented Actions of the Four Levers of the collaborative Framework**

As earlier stated, that the activity of reflecting or pondering on the activities that were intended on sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners' in a rural ecology were going to be presented in a two-fold manner. The first part centred on reflecting on the actual implementation of the activities as it has already been accomplished. Appropriately, this sub-section is fixed on evaluating the effects of the actions that were implemented by the co-researchers. Notably, the evaluations of the effects of the undertaken actions were also presented in precise accordance to the reflections concerning their implementation.

#### **5.8.2.1 Evaluating the effects of actions centred on promoting a culture of ambitious learners with an optimistic mentality**

Noticeably, the research team supportively evaluated the actions which were intended for promoting a culture of ambitious learners who held an optimistic mentality. Essentially, more than half of the number of the co-researchers indicated that the actions which were to promote a culture of ambitious learners were fruitful. Hence some of the co-researcher's responses were recorded as follows:

**Miss X** commenced with saying:

*“My notes from the free-writing reflections showed that motivational slots during assembly as well as sessions encouraging curricular activities such as debating and sports proved to be fairly fruitful, as a large number of*

*learners were reported to have become more positive, competitive and extra resilient when compared to the period prior to the commencement of the study.”*

Almost similar sentiments of positive evaluations were noted within the home sector as well, as **Candy** observed:

*“Ever since, I have really started showing interest, compassion and support for my nieces concerning their schoolwork. I have noticed considerable improvement in their general attitude about school. They no longer want to stay at home for no apparent reason, but they are often looking forward to going to school. To add, their school uniforms are now always washed by themselves; they even remind me now to assist them with their homework.”*

**Gogo** supported:

*“Same with me, since I started telling my grandchildren that I believe they can attain wonderful academic outcomes and since I have started praying for them aloud pleading with God to strengthen them and help them to do well at school, I have noticed that they are taking school more seriously, they are believing in themselves more and they are working hard in their schoolwork as they do not want to disappoint me.”*

**Miss X** asserted:

*“Learners’ results in the social sciences reflected an improvement since they were taken out on the educational tour, which they could not stop talking about.”*

In support, **Uncle Sam** stated:

*“Even though some individuals failed to stick to their promises of not selling alcohol and other illegal substances to the learners but claimed not to have any source of income other than selling illegal substances to the learners, a small percentage of the people did refrain from those bad*

*behaviours. Three learners came forward to seek rehabilitation assistance so they could quit smoking with the vision that when they are fully rehabilitated, they would focus more on their schoolwork and create a better tomorrow for themselves.”*

Concurring, the **Soup-lady** reported:

*“I don’t think it’s a coincidence, but these efforts really yielded amazing results on some of the learners. I say that because since the project has started, I have noticed two learners who are regulars at the soup- kitchen who used to come in their ragged uniforms, but now their clothes are washed and mended, and they looked really presentable for school.”*

**S’khumba** commented:

*“I have observed that during these past months, a fewer number of learners go past to school after eight in the morning, which means the majority of the learners are now getting to school on time.”*

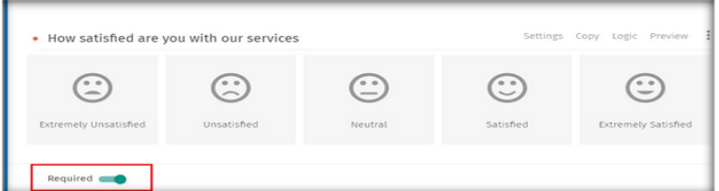
In summing up, the co-researchers who responded on evaluating the actions concerning promoting a culture of ambitious learners, mainly mentioned positives. For instance, the fruitfulness of the motivational slots directed to the learners during assembly. Similarly, positive outcomes were noted due to educators, parents and community members developing a positive attitude for all learners despite their adversities. Additionally, concerning the activity of praying aloud for vulnerable learners was noted as a revelation carried out in the home by relatives and guardians who took part in the study. Moreover, being good role models for the learners, showing them love and compassion, and protecting them from using abusive substances, were all observed within the community as predictors of sustainable learning.

#### **5.8.2.2 Evaluating the impact of the undertakings for intensifying the existing forms of care and support**

Most of the interventions were reported to produce positive effects. In elucidation, some of the co-researchers shared the following which centred on intensifying the existing forms of care and support.

**Mother Theresa began:**

*“The resource chart that was developed by the co-researchers did not only assist those learners who needed guidance with locating the available sources of support, but it was also beneficial to those individuals within the community who wished to provide care and support intended for sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners. The resource chart was valuable as it outlined which measures were already obtainable as well as those which were unavailable. As a result, they were able to focus on accessing available resources while those ‘unavailable resources’ were being awaited.”*

<b>ALREADY AVAILABLE MEANS OF CARE &amp; SUPPORT</b>	<b>EVALUATING THE ALREADY EXISTING FORMS OF CARE AND SUPPORT</b> 
The home	
The school	
The church	
The clinic	
The fire station	
The library	
Community Hall	
Fire Station	
Library	
Small claims Court	
Bus depot	
Informal Nursery	

**Photograph 5.10:** Resource chart for mapping and evaluating available means of care and support (Created by the co-researchers).

**Candy** added:

*“Even the user-friendly resource booklet was distributed in the community such as at the police station, the clinic, the church, the school and the library. Three learners within the school commented that it was easy to follow.”*

**Mr Thwala** commented:

*“Two other lay individuals within the community further commented on how easy it was to follow and refer vulnerable learners to the nearest police station or clinic as the locations and contact numbers were stated on the small pocket size booklet.”*

**Mother Theresa** mentioned:

*“Through the 3% increase in the number of young individuals who have approached us over the four past months for support concerning various challenges ... [pauses] ... I sense that more youths have developed faith in us, and they are more at ease to approach us for help as the service-providers. Such resource booklets guide them on how to locate or contact us, as well as on what forms of vulnerabilities we are able to support them with.”*

**Miss X** proceeded:

*“The two talks that were held during parents’ meetings at school, resulted in three parents who gave positive feedback and indicated that the talks were informative as they as parents have learnt intensely about other forms of learner vulnerabilities and how they have a negative impact in sustaining learning for those learners who are regarded as being vulnerable.”*

In support, **Mfundisi** shared:

*“I am positive that educating people around the community regarding learner-vulnerabilities and its negative impacts will surely decrease the rate of those vulnerabilities which are purposely carried out by the individuals in the*



*community as they will now understand the devastating nature of their actions on the individual as a human being as well as for learners in school.”*

**Butterfly** acknowledged:

*“Through the activity of distributing pamphlets concerning learner vulnerabilities, the quality of learning increased, and the readily available means of care and support were openly advertised to reach who it was intended to reach. More learners were able to gain a deeper understanding regarding other covert vulnerabilities and to access the means of care and support in order to enhance sustainable learning for themselves.”*

**Mrs Bee** agreed:

*“With regards to mapping out our communities’ readily available measures of care and support, we were able to carry out that action through drawing up a table in chart form, where we stated the actual available measure. Next to it we wrote how it helped the vulnerable learners in sustaining their learning; and on the third column we tried to rate the effectiveness of each measure, and in the last column we stated what we felt was the reason for its effectiveness or failure.”*

**Uncle Sam** continued:

*“It was not easy to harp on the non-functioning of some of the measures due to their connection to other issues, such as available funds and resource-mismanagement. However, the chart that was drawn up (in table form) mapped the readily available assets and sources of support within the community as well as inclusion of the rating of their effectiveness. This intervention strategy allows for more chances for intensification and improvement of care and support services.”*

**Soup-lady** added:

*“Mapping of the available sources and assets made it easier for us to identify which means of care and support are missing within the community, hence*

*more focus was given on planning to develop those areas. As time goes by.... [pauses] within the same community, a vast range of measures will be implemented to eradicate a variety of vulnerabilities.”*

**S’khumba** hastened:

*“The activity of combining the various forms of care and support was great. As it made people like us, the traditional healers, to feel part of the initiative, as we felt that our efforts were not disregarded, as they often are in many endeavours within the community... [pauses]..We felt proud of our indigenous means of caring and supporting learners here in the rural areas as our efforts were recognised and combined with the Westernised efforts for the benefit of the African child.”*

**Miss X** elaborated:

*“The activity of starting small vegetable gardens was a great success as it is hoped that as soon as the vegetables could be harvested, they will be able to take them to their families, as well as sell them. The school concert has not been held yet, but some of the handmade items have been sold to the community members to gain some money, and so far, two pairs of school uniforms and one pair of school shoes have been bought”.*

Substantially, the research team advocated for most of the measures as they stated that the resource charts and the resource booklets assisted the learners in need of support as well as guided those stakeholders who wanted to offer support. It also assisted in evaluating the effects of the already available means of care and support. The chart which was used to map and evaluate the existing forms of care and support has been depicted on photograph 5.10 above. In accordance, the effectiveness of this chart is evident in the increase in the number of vulnerable learners who came forward to seek assistance, as well as on the improvement of services that are already offered in the area. In a similar manner, the assembly talks as well as the pamphlets that were distributed, were regarded as fairly informative, and thus were effective strategies that could lead to communities combatting learner-vulnerability.

### 5.8.2.3 Evaluating effects of the actions on inspiring the collaboration

The actions placed towards inspiring the collaboration had mixed evaluations from the co-researchers. While most of the evaluations reported on the positive, a few indicated negative impacts. In accordance, the co-researchers responded as recorded in the excerpts below.

**Miss X** reported:

*“Our parents’ meetings have been started off by us expressing our gratitude and acknowledging the positive efforts that are carried out by the relatives at home who support the children. Also, our school meetings held by HODs and the Principal had a slot where the individual teachers are recognised and acknowledged for their positive efforts. We have seen that more and more learner guardians and teachers are trying to do good in order to support and sustain learning for the learners with adversities.”*

**Mrs Bee** affirmed:

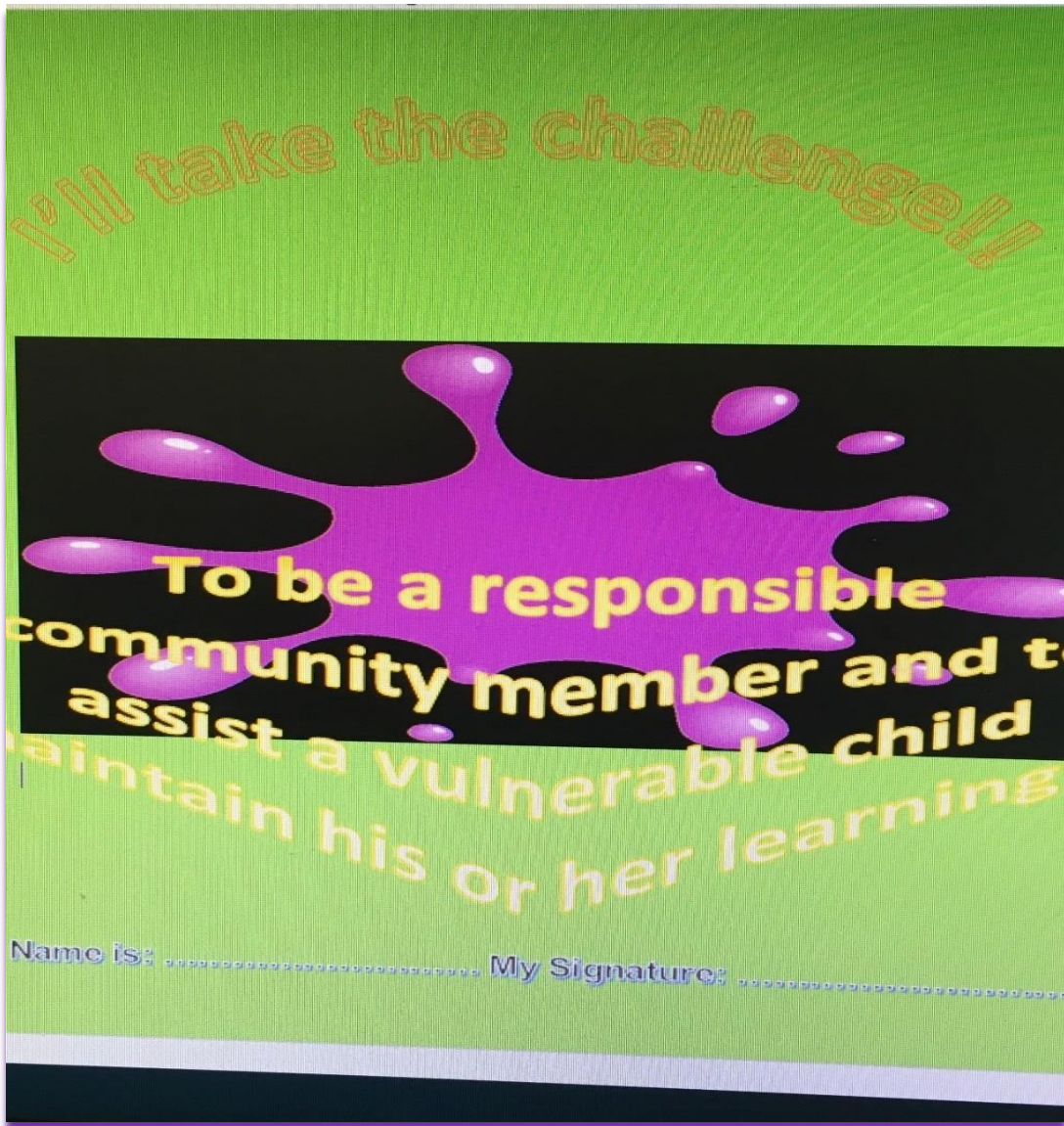
*“Some learners wrote ‘Thank you’ cards to appreciate the efforts made by the relatives at home, and to the local business people, thanking them of their support. These individuals within the home continued to support the vulnerable learners. Notably, the number of school uniforms, shoes and food parcel donated to the school this year, has increased drastically.”*

**Uncle-Sam**, in appreciation:

*“We, as the learners’ parents and guardians, really appreciated being made part of the decision-making process as previously we were merely called in to be informed on what the school principal, the teachers and the SGB had already decided on. But over the past few months, things here have changed..... For example, in one of the meetings we were asked to state our views as to what we think the Government allocation funds for the school can be used for in the school [pauses]... We were made to feel as being members of a team by the school personnel.... basically, Thumbs up for that.”*

**Mother Theresa** claimed:

*“The activity of the “Crafted dare” for the whole community had a positive impact as the learners’, parents and specialists within the community as it provided a chance for them to be a team. In a playful and relaxed manner, the learners and the community individuals were inspired to care and to support the vulnerable learners in their community.”*



**Photograph 5.11:** A ‘Crafted Community Dare’ Encouraging Partnership (created by the co-researchers).

**S’khumba** asserted:

*“I feel the activity of encouraging different relations within the community, helped. Since people like us, the traditional healers, are often looked down upon by the professional people in the community as we are not educated most times. But letting us rub shoulders with other professionals made us feel somewhat important, and we are now more eager to try and assist those who have problems in our community.”*

**Mother Theresa** added:

*“Again, the different individuals within the community will feel at ease to share their best practices and they will feel as equals, despite their economic status or education level, ...[pauses]... we will all be a big happy family [smiles].”*

**Candy** proceeded:

*“The activity of involving the community more on the school happenings also boosted our self-confidence. While it made the job of supporting the needy learners to be a shared responsibility amongst everyone in the community. We also felt that we have an important role of assisting learners.”*

**Mhlengikazi** resumed:

*“We initially sent out invites to other stakeholders from nearby communities for them to come and join us, with hopes that we will be able to share best practices even though our contexts slightly differed. However, the stakeholders from other communities did not show up at meetings and they did not even bother to reply.”*

**Miss X** commented:

*“Even our planned, progression meetings did not take place [pauses]. Such meetings would have assisted us as well as other significant stakeholders to evaluate our positions and to share effective techniques that may be used in a rural ecology to support learners facing adversities.*

*Nonetheless, I feel that such meetings did not happen as we as co-researchers had bitten off more than we could chew... [pauses].*

**Main- Researcher:**

*"How do you mean?"*

**Miss X** explained:

*I feel we had scheduled too many activities within a short space of time."*

**Soup-lady** added:

*"A newspaper interview was also pre-arranged where I was going to be interviewed concerning the good work that I do in the community of providing soup for needy people. Regrettably, the interview did not take place due to unexplained reasons from the newspaper's side. However, the actual thought of inviting the newspaper people to come and do an interview was quite thoughtful of the co-researchers."*

**Gogo** asserted:

*"The three programmes where we as parents were taught basic English and Maths as well as the importance of being involved in our children's' schoolwork, were of great help, even though the turn out from the parents was not so great. But as the few parents who were able to attend them, we really gained a lot and it was a success... not just for us, but for our children as well, and for creating good relations between ourselves and the school."*

In summary, the activities which had been planned by the research team towards inspiring collaborations in their ecology elicited varied evaluations. Many of these engagements were successful, but a few of them were unsuccessful due to various reasons. The actions which were regarded as fruitful included those such as parents' and school staff meetings where acknowledgements of good practices were expressed. Sending letters of gratitude to individuals and local companies for their

sponsorships, and truly involving the parental community in important school decision-making meetings, proved to be effective strategies. Also, the rolling-out of courses for parents on basic Life-orientation, Maths and English and involving the whole community in innovative challenges such as the “crafted dare”, proved to be the right tonic. On the other hand, other undertakings were evaluated as unsuccessful due to certain concerns like lack of communication, poor planning and being overcommitted. Such unsuccessful undertakings included the progression meetings, newspaper interview, as well as extending meetings with significant stakeholders from neighbouring communities.

#### **5.8.2.4 Evaluating the impact of pursuits aimed at connecting with the curriculum**

More than fifty per cent of the co-researchers who had something to say concerning the impact of connecting learners’ real-life experiences with the curriculum in order to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology reported on how impressive the efforts were. The co-researcher’s responses were recorded in the undermentioned excerpts.

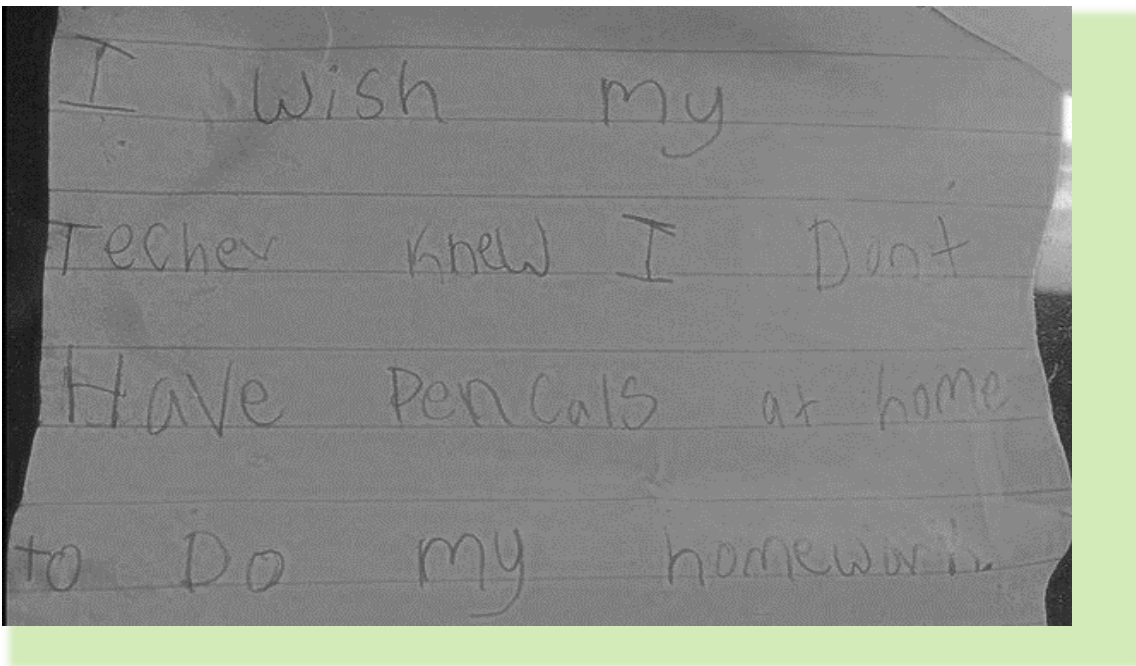
**Sunshine** commenced:

*“The use of two anonymous boxes which were stationed around the school as well as the formation of a Face-Book and a WhatsApp group were quite useful in providing a platform where the learners’ voices could be heard ... [pauses]. Such activities gave us a chance to state our views without fear of being judged on matters which really interest us and concern us, and it also allowed us to be ourselves on our own terms as learners.”*

In support of Sunshine’s attestation (above), the two photographs below (photographs 5.12 and 5.13) have been included to show the learners’ anonymous box and one of the notes that was written by the learners in order to let the teachers know of their real-home situation - all in efforts to connect the curriculum with experiences of real life in order to sustain learning for the vulnerable learners.



**Photograph 5.12:** Learners' Anonymous Box



**Photograph 5.13:** One Learner's Notes from the Anonymous Box

**Miss X** continued:

*"The activities of paying attention to the learners' voices did not act as an advantage to the learners only, but it also assisted us as educators to be*



*in line with what really interests the learners ... [pauses] as a result we were able to design our lessons and assessments in a manner that was interesting to the learners, and which they could relate to. As a result, the failure rate in my class decreased by 4%. and I strongly feel that this is because the learners enjoyed and understood my lessons better.”*

**Mrs Bee** concurred:

*“All the learners in my social science class were able to submit their assignments on time and this was the first time ever in the many years that I have taught this subject in this school. I further think that this great change was due to the realistic manner that the assignment was structured. It was time-consuming for me and it took a lot of deep thinking from my part to set an all-encompassing task. However, the outcomes were great as the manner that the assignment was set included various learners’ backgrounds, talents and gifts. I am proud to announce that 98% of the learners passed that assignment [smiles].”*

**Butterfly** added:

*“I must say we now intensely enjoy many of the lessons as they are no longer boring for us. I have also observed that most of my peers look forward to coming to school, whereas in the past we used to dread coming to school.”*

**Mrs Bee** proceeded:

*“I am not exaggerating [smiles], even in my free-writing reflection journals, I have noted that the rate of absenteeism has decreased in our school while we had no single learner who has absconded school for the past four months... Meaning that, most of the learners now see value and they enjoy being in school as they are learning and being assessed in a manner that they can relate to.”*

**Mrs X** added:

*“Remember, we did not have a complete buy-in from all the teachers in the school. However, they stated that their commitment to the initiative will rely on the positive results brought about by the activities of connecting with the curriculum. Guess what? [pause]..two teachers who are not part of the research team have come forward and agreed on continuing to practise these activities, when they do get time.”*

**Mother Theresa** observed:

*“Expectedly, no results have been shown concerning the action of early identification of learners who have challenges, as the activity had not been put into practice. However, most of the co-researchers were have hopeful and positive of the activity and have promised to try and put it into action during the beginning of the next year.”*

In summary, seven out of the twelve co-researchers who took part in the study highlighted the positive effects that were brought about by connecting real-life events to the curriculum. Despite being unsuccessful in the early identification of the learners' challenges, many of the other interventions elicited positive changes. Essentially, the co-researchers highlighted that within the school sector the use of anonymous boxes and social media allowed an opportunity for the teachers to pay attention to the learners' voices. Once the learners' voices were comprehended, it was possible for the educators to connect the curriculum to the learners' experiences, contexts and lives. Doing home visitations as well as taking learners on educational tours, reflected positive outcomes on the learners' academic attainment. Significantly, the lessons, assignments as well as forms of assessing, were related to the learners' lives. In turn, learners enjoyed their schooling experience, while the absenteeism and absconding rate decreased, and their attitudes towards school as whole changed into a positive one. As a result, the learners' academic achievements improved, and their learning was sustained despite their adversities or vulnerabilities. Moreover, some of the educators within the school of study who were initially sceptical on taking on the actions which were proposed by the co-researchers, completely bought-in to the ideas that were proposed by the research team.

## **5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented results and analysis which animated from the generated data guided by the five research objectives. The co-researcher's discussions were utilised to back up data that was generated from the collage transcriptions and from the free writing reflections. The next chapter (6) will consider presenting discussions which are a combination of the findings in relation to the literature that was reviewed for the study, including the two theories that framed the study. Later, presenting the contributions, recommendations and conclusions of the study.

# CHAPTER SIX

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented, analysed and interpreted data that was generated through PAR, and was guided by the five objectives of the study. The direct responses and transcriptions were utilised to support data that was presented to be aligned with the purpose of the study, which is to propose a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Consequently, this chapter is mainly concerned with presenting the summary of findings as well as the discussions that arose from the themes, when compared to literature that was reviewed for this study. The discussions are further presented in relation to the two theories that framed the study. The chapter uncovers the reflections as well as evaluations of the aspects that formulated to the conclusions of the proposed framework which are mostly guided by the co-researchers' free-writing reflections. Towards the end, the contributions of the study are presented, the recommendations stated as well as concluding remarks elicited.

### 6.2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussions were guided by the four objectives of the study, namely the exploration of the situational analysis, the need for a collaborative framework, the rudimentary elements for the collaborative framework, the threats against the operationalisation of the framework and lastly the collaborative framework as a framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

#### 6.2.1 Exploring the Situational Analysis

Findings concerning the real lives of vulnerable learners in rural ecologies consisted of multifarious forms of learner-vulnerabilities as well as the five overarching measures of care and support that are currently in place within the rural ecology

### **6.2.1.1 Multifarious forms of learner vulnerabilities**

In compatibility to existing literature, the research team of the current study highlighted multiple forms of learner vulnerabilities, which they believed disrupted the attainment of sustainable learning for learners who resided within the rural ecologies. This conglomeration of learner vulnerabilities was categorised into those which existed within the home, in the community, and within the school context. Such learner vulnerabilities were consistent with those conveyed through existing literature, which was reviewed for the purpose of this study (chapter 3). This included various learner vulnerabilities such as parental neglect towards the learners' school lives, impoverishment, scarcity of technology, shared time, social exclusion, long walking distances and homophobia, to name a few (Chindanya, 2011; Coleman & Stern, 2018; Duma, 2015; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Gorman, 2017; Gregoire, 2010; Hoffman, 2012; Jingzhong & Lu, 2011; Muchuchuti, 2016; Nyabanyaba, 2009; Lekule, 2014; WHO & UNICEF, 2015).

### **6.2.1.2 The five overarching forms of care and support**

The five major categorised themes that emerged from the research team's discussions included tangible measures, undocumented actions, unlegislated efforts, indigenous exertions, and unstructured means.

#### *Tangible measures of care and support*

The research team reported on tangible measures of care and support such as donations of food parcels, clothing items, school stationery and medication for those learners who are ill. Also, existing literature that was consulted for this study reported on abstract as well as tangible forms of care and support which were aimed at enhancing the quality of learning for the vulnerable learners in most rural contexts. In elaboration, studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century included measures such as parental engagement, propitious child rearing efforts, supportive efforts of siblings, emotional guidance as well as displaying positive attitudes towards all learners despite their adversities (Chandler, 2018; Lewis, 2015; Munthali et al., 2014; Nikolayev, 2015; Smith et al., 2015).

### *Undocumented forms of care and support*

With regards to undocumented forms of care and support, the majority of the co-researchers made reference to a variety of unregistered means of care and support which were said to be operational within the home, community and the school. Such forms of care and support that were highlighted in the current study were tacit. They included parental engagement and involvement, propitious child rearing efforts, helpful efforts of siblings and extended family members, modifying the culture to that of having the ambition to succeed, as well as posing as good role models who were all believed to positively contribute to the academic success of vulnerable learners. However, some South African researchers found divergent forms of assisting vulnerable, as their work mainly focused on the documented forms of care and support. Such measures according to certain South African researchers included initiatives such as, The School Nutrition Program (a joint venture between the DoE, the Department of Social Justice, and the OVC Programme (Banks, 2015; Jacobs, 2015; Kuo & Operaior, 2011; Steyn & Singh, 2018; Tsotetsi et al., 2008).

### *Unlegislated efforts*

Although, unlegislated efforts may be similar to undocumented measures of care and support, the actual activities which were designed by the co-researchers concerning unlegislated efforts were not exact. The efforts which were highlighted included rewarding good academic achievement with the slaughtering of chickens or goats in celebration of a child's good school progress. Other unlegislated efforts (negatives) that were raised by the research team were restricting the buying of clothing, as well as administering corporal punishment which has long been made illegal in South Africa. On the other hand, existing literature that was reviewed for this study outlined authorised means such as the initiative by the Department of Health which entailed writing appropriate child-rearing guidelines on the infants' health cards to be followed by parents to create a community of healthy individuals who would not stay away from school due to illnesses. (Engle et al., 2011).

### *Indigenous efforts*

There was evidence of indigenous forms of care and support related to those efforts which took place naturally as well as those that were native to the specific rural

contexts. These indigenous efforts were inclusive of Western and indigenous philosophies on preserving good morals, sound traditional values which evolved from cultural knowledge, and best practices transmitted from one generation to the next. The efforts that were regarded as indigenous included measures such as going to school which is embedded in the belief which condemns laziness as being sinful, such as not wanting to do schoolwork or wanting to abscond from school for no apparent reason. Other indigenous practices included encouraging children to remain at school as they will become significant others in the community, such as doctors and lawyers.

### *Unstructured measures*

Literature that was consulted for this study, was generally silent with regards to the 'structure' of the existing means of care and support in the rural areas. The unstructured measures referred to those efforts which were regarded as lacking structure or organisation, and which were not formally organised in a conventional manner. Some of the reasons for referring to these measures as unstructured included not having a specific set of rules to follow as each case was regarded as unique. Additionally, varying contexts influenced the means utilised to support and care for the vulnerable learner.

#### **6.2.1.3 Situational analysis and findings in relation to conceptual frameworks**

Co-researchers identified the various forms of vulnerabilities impeding quality learning regarding learners in the rural ecology. Conspicuously, the concept of the Asset-based Approach as a theoretical framework, which partly frames this study, is in line with the assertions made by the co-researchers when they performed an analysis of the current situation by outlining numerous learner vulnerabilities. This is supported by the participatory appraisal method, a component of asset-based approaches known for providing trustworthy mapping of knowledge and aiding decision-making in the community (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011).

Five salient efforts of care and support that were categorised by the co-researchers included those that were undocumented, unlegislated, indigenous, and those which were regarded as unstructured. However, some of these sub-themes may be regarded by some as being negative; for instance, unstructured efforts. This is contradictory to

the main beliefs of the Asset-based Approach which mainly focuses on the positive aspects of all efforts to create a positive change within the context (Brandolini et al., 2010; Friedli, 2013). This implies that the research team should focus on the positives that the current measures possess, instead of dwelling on the negatives.

## **6.2.2 The Necessity for A Collaborative Framework**

The necessity for a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology may be justified, as discussed in the following sub sections.

### **6.2.2.1 Challenges within the existing forms of care and support**

Challenges within the existing forms of care and support were the first findings of the co-researchers which led towards the need for the proposed framework. The analysis of data that was employed in the current study, revealed the findings which were then were categorised into meaningful themes to compare them to findings of other studies, as one method of validation.

#### *Financial constraints*

Research indicated a strong connection between the failures of most partnerships aimed at community alleviation, with insufficient funding (Soutullo et al., 2016). Correspondingly, the findings of the current study also blame financial constraints and the scarcity of resources to be amongst the challenges for effective partnerships aimed at alleviating adversities in the community.

#### *Inadequacy of the existing forms of care and support*

Inadequacy of the existing forms of care and support was the other major finding which challenged the effectiveness of most community partnerships. In support of this finding, a study by Epstein (2018) revealed that community partnerships were not efficient as new professional educators were themselves not adequately prepared to work with learners, more especially those learners who were said to be vulnerable. As a result, the partnerships between the schools, families and communities became unworkable (Epstein, 2018).



### *Inconsistency in the practices*

The third finding that was reported to be of a challenge regarding the existing forms of care and support is that of inconsistency in the practices. While this challenge was reported to be dependent to various circumstances such as the variety of vulnerabilities presented, the severity of presented cases also had an impact in the manner it would be handled by different personnel with unique personalities.

### **6.2.2.2 Negatives of not having the proposed framework in place**

Negative situations arising out of not having strategies in place to enhance sustainable learning regarding vulnerable learners, can lead to having dysfunctional communities, therefore this study justified the necessity for a collaborative framework to heal communities. Consequently, the second research question (**What is the need for the collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**) was divided to include the short-term as well as the long-term possible effects.

#### *Short-term potential deleterious consequences for the learners*

The findings of the current study revealed that as a result of the absence of a proposed framework, there arose short-term potential deleterious outcomes which negatively affected the learners. Notably, the negative effects that were outlined included issues such as escalated rates of learner drop-out and absconding due to various reasons (5.4.2.1). The other concerns included demotivated and work-overloaded educators, which further widened the gap between the school and the parental community. This also led to uninformed stakeholders being ignorant of vulnerabilities in the school-community and the community as a whole – stakeholders who would possibly provide significant support to vulnerable learners. Notably, existing literature shared similar findings but went further to elaborate on negatives affecting educators, the parental community as well as other relevant stakeholders within the community, maintaining that should such partnerships not be put in place, learners will continue to be unemployable, unskilled, incompetent and will fail to become well-rounded citizens (Savickas et al., 2009). Moreover, while educators and the DoE fail to create an environment that is conducive to learning that will lead to academic excellence, the situation remains bleak, but can be turned around if all stakeholders become serious and propose a working framework to structure interventions (Melhuish et al., 2008).

### *Long-term potential deleterious consequences for the learners*

While short-term detrimental consequences were found to derail the necessity for a collaborative framework, long-term potential deleterious consequences were also found to validate the necessity for the proposed framework. Essentially, long-term potential deleterious consequences for the learners (5.4.2.2) were present in psychological, physical, and socio-economic conditions, which included escalating poverty, inability to find jobs, and psychologically damaged adults (among others). Significantly, the findings of the current study proved to be in accordance with other existing studies (3.3.2.4) regarding failure to undertake community partnerships and how it may lead to increased rates of poverty in most rural communities. Hence, WHO and UNICEF (2015) reported that one in five learners who resides within the rural contexts is likely to be vulnerable to poverty-related issues.

### **6.2.2.3 The expedient role of the collaborative framework in rural ecologies**

The expedient or beneficial role of the collaborative framework in rural ecologies led to the necessity for the proposed framework of action as collaborative efforts are driven by the communities' needs to deliver upon their goals. However, in unfortunate situations where collaborative initiatives are not installed, there could be dire consequences for the community as whole, mostly affecting vulnerable learners. Where collaborative initiatives are granted opportunities to operate, there could be outstanding advantages for the learners and the community. The great advantages of teamwork generally bring about positive changes in communities such as increased networking, innovative ways of seeking sponsorships, and the proliferation of social growth (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Kuo & Operario, 2011; Witte & Sheridan, 2011). In support, Sanders (2009) states that community partnerships play a crucial role in mitigating challenges in rural schools' inability to attract effective teachers who own the capacity to enhance quality teaching by bringing community-based expertise and indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning experiences. Further, Chambers (2014) attests that collective partnerships are known for being close-knit and can be effective in encouraging community members to be involved in their learners' lives. The absence of joint partnerships in attempting to combat the effects of learner vulnerability may eventually result in failure by Government to solely satisfy the needs and the expectations of the learners, especially those from the rural settings (Witte &

Sheridan, 2011). Community partnerships are believed to play significant roles in uplifting communities, such as equipping learners with essential skills and competencies through providing solid academic foundations; if such partnerships are absent or ineffective, then they (learners) would become unemployable and face difficulty in attaining their desired careers, coupled with inability to contribute to the country's economic growth, let alone being ingrained in the culture of democracy (Kolb's, 2014; Moon, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009).

#### **6.2.2.4 Findings that justify the necessity for the collaborative framework in relation to the conceptual framework**

Findings justifying the necessity for the proposed collaborated framework may be related to the two theories which framed the study. One of the major findings highlighted the challenges within the existing forms of care and support which necessitated the need for the framework. Identifying challenges with the main aim of bringing about emancipation may be linked to the basic assumptions of the asset-based approaches. As the asset-based approach focuses on the positives, it evokes resilience in individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Hence, the challenges that are highlighted through the findings of the study are used in order to bring about a positive change within the community, which is through a collaborative framework. Challenges in this sense are not used negatively but used positively to show the need for the framework, in addition to creating a platform to build thus creating an effective framework, free from hindrances. The findings further stressed the crucial role that is played by community partnerships in bringing about positive changes using the theory of collaboration (one of the two theories which frame the study) which encourages community partnerships in resolving conflicts, challenges, as well as developing shared visions for the future (Danese, 2011).

From the discussion above that emanated from the findings of the current research study and seeing the similarities in the findings of other studies that were reviewed, the necessity for a framework for an effective collaborative initiative, could not be underestimated. This plan was further supported by the two theories which helped in the formation of the framework for the study. Thus, the significance, as well as a dire necessity for the collaborated framework for sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology, has been justified and explicitly declared.

### **6.2.3. Rudimentary Elements for the Collaborative Framework**

There are some rudimentary elements structuring the collaborative framework for sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology, which must be borne in mind.

#### **6.2.3.1 Positive personality traits**

Positive personality traits had to be kept in mind for effective collaboration to occur. Some of the important characteristics included people who are trustworthy, loyal, compassionate, persistent, accepting of criticism, embractive to diversity, and display a sense of empathy. Such personality traits were regarded as being conducive towards effective collaboration, and the co-researchers felt that such characteristics would allow the vulnerable learners to be able to approach and cooperate with the members of the collaboration for learning to be sustained. Literature also supports a number of these conditions that foster effective collaboration, which include amongst others, factors like cooperation, trust, reciprocity, tolerance, communication, and accountability (Diamond, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2016; Ralphs & Wagner, 2018; Spillane, 2012).

#### **6.2.3.2 Conditions for effective collaboration**

Rudimentary elements for an effective collaborative framework included an array of conditions which were regarded as imperative. The reviewed research literature for this study also touched on similar conditions. Literature included aspects such as distributed leadership and shared responsibility as being the two imperative elements for successful partnerships (Diamond, 2015; Langfield-Smith, 2008). other conditions that arose from previous research studies involved the commitment to shared goals, having effective and clear communication lines, granting partners equal responsibility to initiate activities, and vigilant monitoring of the progress of the initiative (Harvey, 2016; O'Leary & Vij, 2012; Ruben, 2017). In accordance, such conditions were met as discussed in the following sections.

#### *Equal partnership and distributed leadership*

Equal partnership and distributed leadership amongst the stakeholders were regarded as important conditions, since the framework was to comprise of individuals of varying

statuses and ages. In accordance, some researchers in their discussions also highlighted the notion of equal partnership as well as that of shared responsibility as being crucial in a community partnership (Diamond, 2015; Langfield-Smith, 2008; Ralphs & Wagner, 2018). For the current study, the co-researchers opted for the term *distributed leadership* as they felt that they represented a wide range of individuals, such as professionals, learners, and the parents-community.

#### *A trusting and positive working relationship*

A trusting and a positive working relationship between the various individuals was regarded as a condition that had to be kept in mind for effective collaboration to take place. It was believed that this condition would enhance the smooth flow and the functionality of the initiation as the stakeholders will be encouraged to deliver on their promises, while it also places them at ease that they have each other's support in addition to avoiding duplication of work. In cases where the responsible individual fails to deliver, support is provided. Hence, having a trusting working relationship amongst the members of a partnership is an important element in reaching set goals (Luna-Reyes et al., 2008).

#### *Accommodative of diversities and complementarity of parties*

Accommodating diversities was another element that was raised pertaining to collaborative frameworks. Although, this element was not unduly emphasised, literature indicated several forms of learner adversities relating to diversities which negatively impacted on the academic progress of learners (Chambers, 2014; Milton, 2019; Motsa, 2016). Hence, being accommodative to diversities was recommended to be a crucial condition for the success of the operation of the collaborative framework. Moreover, since the endeavour comprised of a variety of stakeholders from the community, the very nature of learner (and community) vulnerability is said to be a broad phenomenon – which encompasses diversity. Furthermore, if collaborators embrace each other's diversities, they would be able to complement each other's gifts and talents which will all be a positive factor contributing to the effectiveness of the partnership. Also, literature attests that complementarity amongst members of a partnership may enhance the parties' strengths, skills and gifts for the benefit of the partnership (Burke et al., 2017; Kim & Shin, 2015). In addition, members

assist in enhancing resilience, building collective intelligence, and enhancing the likelihood of great acceptance regarding partnering endeavours (Mendes et al., 2016).

### *Consistency in practices*

Consistency in practices was another condition that was regarded as important for the collaborative initiative to be successful. In support, a research study that was conducted by Kuo and Operario (2011) recommended that community partnerships should be unceasing and consistent in their practices in order to be triumphant in achieving their goals of community adversity-alleviation.

### *Shared goal and a clear vision of the coalition*

Having a shared goal and a clear vision of the coalition directs the collaboration. These aspects or conditions were imperative for fruitful collaboration. Several researchers placed great emphasis on the importance of having a shared goal linked to shared responsibility that kick-start community partnerships (O'Leary & Vij, 2012; Langfield-Smith, 2008). However, numerous previous studies blamed the failure of collaborations on having multiple goals, exacerbated by participants working in silos (Diamond, 2015; Ralphs & Wagner, 2018; Spillane, 2012).

### *Clear communication*

The collaborators further unearthed the communication factor amongst the collaborating parties. They emphasised that communication should be clear, unambiguous, meaningful, succinct, and relevant to the objectives of the partnership in order for the parties to be productive. This, according to the research team, would ensure that parties have a good understanding of the purpose of the initiative, their roles, and reasons behind performing set activities. Efficient and effective communication in a common language obviates any misunderstandings and misconceptions which would stifle to the effectiveness of the partnership. Literature also states that communication is a key tool in empowering and strengthening relationships between stakeholders in the community as it regulates cooperation and productivity amongst them for the benefit of the endeavour, while the roles and responsibilities of team members are clarified (Epstein, 2018; Parani, 2016).

In recapitulation, the findings concerning the crucial rudiments for effective collaboration indicated personality traits as well as conducive conditions for effective collaboration to take place. Personality traits included characteristics such as individuals who were trustworthy, loyal, companionate and respectful, while the conducive conditions comprised of circumstances like equal partnership, trusting and positive working relationships, accommodation of diversities, consistency in practices, and having a shared goal and a clear vision pertaining to the team-project.

### **6.2.3.3 Crucial rudiments of collaborative framework in relation to the conceptual framework**

While the main idea behind the Theory of Collaboration is centred on embracing diversity towards creating a positive change in challenged communities, the primary concern is linked to collaboratively providing a plan or framework that would enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology by also involving diverse individuals. Hence, many of the crucial rudiments that were borne in mind were aligned to the collaborative framework in accordance with the principles of the actual Theory of Collaboration. Correspondingly, researchers who have conducted extensive studies utilising the Theory of Collaboration outlined processes such as joint negotiation of common ground, shared purpose and vision, shared thinking, respect, shared problem-solving, shared creation of integrated instruction, a trusting working relationship, equal partnership, ability of assessing individuals' capacities, and cooperation (Saint-Onge & Armstrong, 2012; Gray, 1989; Huxham & Vangen 2013; Kanter, 2015; Spears & Lawrence, 2016; Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014; Patil & Sheelavathy, 2018; Porter & Kramer, 2019).

### **6.2.4 Threats Against the Operationalisation Of the Framework**

There are some threats against the operationalisation of the collaborative framework that should be anticipated. Notably, while some of these threats emanated from the current study, other threats were retrieved from literature that was consulted for the study. However, for the purpose of this work, the hindrances that were regarded as significant for this study, have been categorised into two sub-sections: those centred on the individual's negative personality traits, and those which were termed as unconducive conditions towards the operationalisation of the framework.

#### **6.2.4.1 Negative individual personality traits**

There are individual personality traits which need to be avoided for the proper functionality of the framework. Negative personality traits to be eradicated include arrogance, disrespect, inflexibility, being untrustworthy, or disloyal. In congruence, literature that was consulted for this study also reported that there were individual negative personality traits which acted as hindrances (also in this study) to the smooth functioning of the collaboration (Heslop et al., 2018; Langfield-Smith, 2008).

Additionally, recent research studies on collaborative initiatives reported on other negative individual personality traits which were not outlined by the co-researchers of the current study. Notably, individual negative personality traits which are regarded as detrimental to collaborative initiatives include the lack of commitment, not being able to positively accept criticism, the fear of voicing different opinions (Powell et al., 2017; Sinkovics et al., 2018) and the inability to accept diversities (Dodd & Konzal, 2016).

#### **6.2.4.2 Conditions unfavorable to the operationalisation of the framework**

Conditions which were regarded as uncondusive to the operationalisation of the framework included matters such as unskilled parties, conflicting agendas, community hierarchies, inadequate time, and a lack of resources. Existing studies which were consulted for this research also highlighted some uncondusive conditions that were outlined in the current study. The lack of resources and funds, especially in the rural contexts, was blamed as the number one hindrance to the proper functioning of most community development initiatives (Epstein, 2018). Similar to findings of the current study, existing literature further highlighted the lack of time for collaborative planning and reflecting, absence of effective communication, and the lack of a complete buy-in from all stakeholders, as obstructions for collaborative practices (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015; Garmston & Wellman, 2016; Sahs et al., 2017; Meza et al., 2016).

This study and literature unveiled other related hindrances to collaborative efforts: failure to collaborate as equals, absence of training in the skills of collaboration, incompetent leadership, lack of transparency, and the absence of collegiality and



complementarity (Cooper et al., 2016; Fawcett et al., 2015; Haines et al., 2015; Dodd & Konzal, 2016; Tutwiler, 2017; Sanders, 2016; Kim & Shin, 2015).

Evidently, there are threats which collaborators need to be wary of which may disrupt the operationalisation of the collaborative framework. Some were derived from the findings of the current study, while others were obtained from existing literature. Some threats gleaned from existing literature were in congruence with the ones from the findings of this study - others were not. All in all, both sets of hindrances and threats were split into those which involved negative personality traits as well as those that were conditions which were uncondusive or unfavourable to effective collaboration as elucidated above.

#### **6.2.4.3 Anticipated threats against the operationalisation of the collaborative framework in relation to the conceptual framework**

The combination of the research findings and the findings in literature that was consulted for the study divulged an array of threats which could be detrimental to collaborative initiatives. Significantly, most of the threats that were dissected are aligned with the Theory of Collaboration which stipulates that when relevant individuals are brought together in a positive manner and when they have adequate knowledge, they own the power to mitigate their societal challenges [2.3.1.2] (Fawcett et al., 2011). The current findings concerning the anticipated threats of the operationalisation of the framework warns against collaborators who are not complementary to each other, those who work in isolation, as well as those who are not skilled on proper collaborating skills. Gray (1989) explains that the Theory of Collaboration presumes that collaboration may be effectively used to resolve conflict and safeguard service-delivery based on a common vision when parties realise the significance of working together. Thus, the findings of the study caution against working in silos as well as having unclear goals as they may be detrimental to the operationalisation of the framework. Moreover, the Theory of Collaboration assumes aspects of trust, good leadership, shared purpose, and organisational ownership are imperatives to the success of community partnerships (Graesel et al., 2006).

## **6.2.5 The “Collaborative Framework” As a Framework for Enhancing Sustainable Learning for Vulnerable Learners in A Rural Ecology**

The four foundational pillars of the collaborated framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology as well as their relation to the Theory of Collaboration and the Asset Based Approach, are discussed in the following sections.

### **6.2.5.1 Promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possess an optimistic mentality**

Promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possessed an optimistic mentality is the first pillar of the collaborated framework as the essence of culture is regarded as important in most rural sectors. Notably, under this lever of the framework, there are activities which need to be undertaken such as motivational talks to the learners during assembly time, and modelling (as good role models) for the learners. Other actions include having a positive regard for all learners, exhibiting passion and love, and encouraging them (learners) to participate in extra-curricular activities. However, recent literature is silent concerning the issue of promoting a culture of ambitious learners in order to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners. Studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century indicated that rural areas are believed to be the locus of cultural traditions and that culture is a significant architect of an individual’s behavior (Fetvadjiev et al., 2018). In accordance, studies that were carried out in Haiti, Zambia, Congo, as well as those which were conducted locally in differing capacities, indicated that the aspects of culture may be fruitfully utilised to enhance sustainable learning especially for those learners who are facing adversities.

### **6.2.5.2 Promoting a culture of ambitious learners who possess an optimistic mentality in relation to the conceptual framework**

To all intents and purposes, the first pillar of the collaborative framework is centered on making use of culture as well as to impart an optimistic spirit or mentality to the learners by following or undertaking a series of minor activities, all in efforts to enhance learning that is sustainable for those learners who are vulnerable within the rural contexts. In relation to the Asset-based Approach, it is one of the strategies that was utilised in framing this collaborative research project. Asset-based approaches indicate that one of its anticipated outcomes is on community development, which is

centered on boosting the self-belief approach on communities believing and inspiring in them that they are in possession of an inherent ability to positively contribute in their own development rather than relying on outside help (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2006). Hence, culture in this case may be perceived as being a community asset or a readily available ability which may be effectively employed to bring about a positive change in the community, instead of dwelling on those assets or abilities which are absent or lacking in the community.

### **6.2.5.3 Intensifying the existing forms of care and support**

The intensification of the existing forms of care and support was the second pillar of the collaborative framework. Consequently, smaller activities that should be executed towards intensifying the existing means of care and support include the following:

- awareness-creation through talks, pamphlets and posters regarding forms of learner vulnerabilities and their impact on the quality of learning;
- accessing information about the existing means of care and support;
- Asset-mapping and assessment of the readily available forms of care and support;
- combining the Western, indigenous, physical, emotional, and secular or cultural means of care and support;
- enhancing the accessibility and the referral system's mechanisms towards improving the existing measures of care and support; and
- going back to the basics concerning the efficacy of existing means of care and support.

Examples of such actions involve starting vegetable gardens at home, in the community, and at school, and holding school concerts and selling learners' handmade craftwork in order to raise funds for the school. While, there is existing literature that indicates going back-to-basics in this manner, there was no indication of concurrence nor of divergence, responsive to intensifying the existing measures of care and support.

### **6.2.5.3 Intensifying the existing forms of care and support in relation to the concept of collaboration.**

While a scarcity of literature concerning intensifying the existing measures of care and support was noted, this pillar is related to the Theory of Collaboration, since some of

the principles of this theory include shared thinking, shared problem-solving, and shared creation of integrated instruction (2.3.1.3). As such, these attributes of the collaboration theory are consistent with the philosophies and actions of the current research team. Fundamentally, this relationship (Collaboration Theory and theoretical framework) amalgamates to strengthen the various forms of providing care and support in efforts to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the ecology.

#### **6.2.5.4 Inspiring collaborations**

Inspiring collaborations constituted as the third pillar that formed part of the collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. This pillar concerned encouraging existing collaborations within the home, school and the community. Specific to the community, holding progressive meetings and the whole community 'crafted dare' concept, were to be intensified. However, literature that was reviewed for this study indicated a mixture of beliefs, as some were confirming while others were contradicting the proposed idea with regards to the effectiveness of collaborations in sustaining learning. Other researchers found some degree of success concerning the effectiveness of collaborations in the low and middle-income groups in countries like Albania and Georgia (Engle et al., 2011), whereas, researchers such as Kanyane et al., (2017) and Westoby (2014) refuted the efficacy of collaborations as they blamed some of the collaborations or partnerships for having discords amongst the them, inconsistency in practices, as well as unshared objectives amongst the stakeholders.

#### **6.2.5.5 Inspiring Collaborations in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

While the literature that was reviewed for this study presented contrasting views concerning the issue of inspiring collaborations with the intention of enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners within the rural settings, the aspect of intensifying collaborations was largely in line with the theories which framed this study (The Theory of Collaborations and The Asset-based Approach). The Asset-based approach is popular for its indiscriminating nature (McKnight, 2010). Similarly, the Theory of Collaboration also grounds the concept of co-operating as one of its

principles; that is, collaboration thrives when two or more parties work jointly by agreeing on a common goal (Kanter, 2015).

#### **6.2.5.6 Connecting with the curriculum**

Connecting with the curriculum was the last pillar of the collaborative framework and it was planned to be achieved through paying attention and responding to the learners' voices, having all-encompassing and relevant courses, individualised learning programmes as well as early identification of emotional and mental-health stressors. The mentioned proposed activities were seen to allow learners to relate better with the curriculum as their home and community environment experiences would be taken into consideration. The learners will better comprehend what is being taught and that would result in them enjoying their schooling experience, as a result the absconding and absenteeism rate will decrease. Connecting the curriculum with the learners' lives will also allow the activities and tasks that are given to the learners to be in line with the available resources within the rural community, hence the learners will not be frustrated (by the lack of materials) when doing schoolwork, thus they will thrive at school. Furthermore, sustainable learning will be ensured as the activity of early identification through the whole-school approach will provide suitable pathways to intervene timeously. In accordance, existing literature indicated that educators were single-handedly showing compassion to the vulnerable learners by caring for them and taking interest in their lives (Tsoetsi et al., 2008).

#### **6.2.5.7 Connecting with the curriculum in relation to the theoretical framework**

The Asset-based Approach is consistent with the aspect of connecting with the learners' curriculum in order to sustain their learning. The Asset-based Approach falls under the wide umbrella of the positive psychology discipline and focuses on making use of available resources, gifts and talents in attempts to improve societal challenges (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Significantly, in this case, the curriculum can be viewed as an existing resource that may be exploited and used in a manner that it relates to the learners' lives in order to achieve great and positive outcomes. The adversities that are experienced by learners who reside within the rural contexts may also be turned around to be approached positively to connect the learners' lives with the curriculum as they can better relate to their own real-life situations and thus be

capacitated to achieve better academic performances. In addition, asset-mapping being one of the major techniques of the Asset-based Approach allows and encourages individuals to view their contexts in a positive manner (Griffin & Farris, 2010).

### **6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has brought to the fore a collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. Not much has been written concerning how participatory action research method can be utilized by various stakeholders within a rural context to work collaboratively in enhancing a quality of learning for the vulnerable learners. Through the problem statement, the key research questions, the two theoretical frameworks as well as the findings of the study, the studies' contribution is two folded namely at the conceptual level and at the methodological level.

#### **6.3.1 Conceptual Contribution**

In response to research question 1 (**How can we through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**), it became evident through the framework that various stakeholders within the rural ecology such as the learners, the teachers, police officer, a priest, traditional healer, a nurse and some parents, can work together to achieve a shared goal for sustaining learning for the vulnerable learners. The findings of the study made us realise that collaborations are possible if certain crucial principles are followed which include co-researchers who possessed positive personality traits, who were loyal, compassionate, persistent, empathetic, accepting of criticism, and who welcomed diversity. The study further contributed by highlighting the conducive conditions for effective collaboration such as equal partnership and distributed leadership, clear communication, and a trusting and positive working relationship.

The other conducive conditions outlined through the findings of the study included being accommodating to diversities, appreciating complementarity of the co-researchers, consistency in practices, shared goal, and having a clear vision for the coalition. Through the collages, focus group discussions and free-writing reflections,

the study further contributed to existing knowledge concerning the various forms of learner vulnerabilities that pervade rural ecologies, how they affect the quality of learning, and the current situation concerning the forms of care and support.

In drawing from Collaboration and the Asset-based Approach as the two concepts which formed the theoretical framework which framed the study, new knowledge was contributed by the study. In summary, the study relates its findings to both collaboration and asset-based approaches; hence, bringing new knowledge as there is scarcity of research studies which have combined the use of both these concepts in conjunction to formulate a theoretical framework for a study, especially in proposing a collaborative framework or strategy.

### **6.3.2 Methodological Contribution**

Regarding the methodological contribution of the study, using PAR linked to the fact that the study was located within a critical paradigm, this study allowed a range of collaborators to participate in proposing a collaborative framework. First, the study provided an opportunity for the young co-researchers and their teachers to engage in a harmonious manner in producing knowledge concerning learner vulnerabilities, its effects on the learners' quality of education, as well as in the manner that they may be assisted through a collaborative framework. Secondly, the study enabled diverse participants from different backgrounds, statuses, beliefs and professions to cooperate, collaborate in collective thinking, all in efforts to attain the mutual goal of bringing a positive change within their community. Thirdly, the study allowed the critical thinking of co-researchers by engaging them in a process of evaluating and rating the effects of the activities that were placed with the intention of filling the pillars of the collaborative framework. Fourthly, the study facilitated a platform for presenting the proposed framework and publicising the findings to their community.

### **6.4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

While the research focused on one rural ecology in South Africa, further research could be carried out to investigate the potential application of the framework in other rural ecologies in the area, or even other countries. The collaborative framework may also be adaptable and further developed to other communities which are not rural.

However, context specifics must be kept in mind for the framework to be effectively operationalised.

In addition, the framework included specific collaborators who were interested in the study and who shared a common goal, which is to sustain learning for the vulnerable learners in their ecology. Further research may include other categories of co-researchers to include unemployed graduates in the ecology, as well as other professional communities such as psychologists, medical doctors and psychiatrists. An opportunity exists to address other issues of concern in the community such as unemployment, woman-abuse, and hate crimes against the minority groups within the community – thus, this study could possibly create the foundation for addressing other issues in the community.

## **6.5 CONCLUSIONS FOR THE “COLLABORATED FRAMEWORK” AS A FRAMEWORK**

This section is mainly concerned with outlining the conclusions concerning the pillars of the framework after the execution of the sub-actions had been assessed and their impacts have been evaluated.

### **6.5.1 Conclusions concerning Promoting a Culture of Ambitious Learners who possessed an Optimistic Mentality (Spirit)**

Promoting a culture of ambitious learners who have an optimistic mentality, is a pillar of the framework which was implemented successfully. Despite negligible interruptions such as learners’ formal assessments, partial commitment of stakeholders, and inclement weather conditions, which in a limited sense affected some of the sub-activities, the intended objective for promoting a culture of ambitious learners with an optimistic mentality progressed somewhat uninterrupted. Specifically, these activities included motivational talks to the learners, posing as good role-models for the learners, reflecting feelings of passion and love to the learners, having a positive regard for all learners, and encouraging learners to be active when it comes to extra-curricular activities. Accordingly, success of this component was mainly noted in vulnerable learners by some of the educators, parents and community members, despite some of their adversities that come with rural contexts.



### **6.5.2 Conclusions regarding the intensification of existing forms of care and support**

The aspect of intensifying existing forms of care and support was also regarded as significant for the collaborative framework. Most of the basic undertakings which were to be pursued in order to intensify the existing forms of care and support were successfully accomplished. One example was creating awareness concerning learner-vulnerabilities, its negative impacts and the available means of care and support. This was combined with the sub-activity of mapping-out and weighing the readily available measures in the ecology for providing care and support. The action of streamlining the accessibility and the referral mechanisms to support vulnerable learners yielded positive effects when they were put into action. As a result, and due to its relative success, the aspect of intensifying the existing forms of care and support is regarded as important in enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

### **6.5.3 Conclusions concerning inspiring collaborations**

Inspiring collaborations was the third pillar that emerged from the co-researcher's attestations, and from the literature that was reviewed. Notably, most of the actions which were intended for inspiring collaborations were almost a complete success with the exception of a very few. The newspaper interview and that of progression meetings were not achieved due to circumstances that were beyond the research team's control due to time-constraints and partial commitment of a few members. Other actions were achieved such as those intended for appreciating the parent-community, the local businessmen as well as the family relatives for their good efforts in supporting vulnerable learners. Another successful action was the whole community 'crafted dare' or challenge, as well as that of capacitating family members through providing free basic training in English, Mathematics and Life orientation. These were not only beneficial in assisting the vulnerable learners with their academic work, but they further provided an opportunity for the learners' relatives to receive free basic education. This had a cascading effect that extended having harmonious relationships with other specialists in the community such as the social workers, the nurses, psychologist and police officers. Consequently, positive results were reported through these activities, which is indicative of the significance for this lever (namely, inspiring collaborations in order to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology).

#### **6.5.4 Conclusions Regarding Connecting with the Curriculum**

Connecting with the curriculum is the final pillar of the collaborative framework. A justifiable number of actions which were to be undertaken in order to achieve the objectives of the lever were met. The actions which were met included paying attention to the learners' voices, individualised learning programmes, and the introduction of all-encompassing lessons for relevancy. However, the activity which was termed as early identification of the learners' challenges was not undertaken because the study itself had not begun the process of PAR at the beginning of the year. On the other end, the whole approach on emotional wellbeing and mental health was one activity that was going to be enacted further, considering its positive results. Since there were reports from the educators indicating that learners were displaying enthusiasm during lessons, a decrease in the number of learners who absconded and absented themselves from school was noted.

#### **6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Converting frameworks into action is a complex and challenging activity. In fact, literature indicates that the implementation of strategies and frameworks is usually troubled with difficulties and often falls short of what was anticipated.

For frameworks such as the one proposed in the next chapter to be implemented fruitfully, collaborators need to be more mindful to the threats which may hinder the operationalisation process. However, that alone does not guarantee success. In order to heighten the chances of the framework being unhindered, the collaborators need to unceasingly identify and manage the threats while they simultaneously monitor the implementation proceedings.

In conclusion the main researcher believes that for the framework implementation to be of success, there must be a detailed plan, meaningful collaborations, as well as continuous cooperation from collaborators who have a shared goal and a strong desire to succeed.

## **6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings that emanated from the discussions which emerged from the co-researchers' thematically analysed data in conjunction with the literature that was reviewed. The findings were further discussed in relation to the two theories which framed the study. The chapter, then presented contributions as well as the recommendations of the study. Thereafter, conclusions for the study were outlaid by focusing on the reflections as well as on the evaluations of the actions that were undertaken in order to reach the main objective of the study. Lastly, the concluding remarks were outlined. The next chapter (7) will present the proposed collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY

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### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the proposed collaborated framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. It commences by outlining the synopsis of the framework, then it profiles the collaborators or the role-players of the framework, after which the conditions of effectively structuring the framework are presented. Following this, is the unpacking of the framework as guided by the outline with special focus on the collaborators, their actions, the significance of their actions, as well as the suggested time-frames. Lastly, the chapter summary is presented.

### 7.2 ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

This framework is considered as a collaborative framework as it involves various stakeholders who co-exist within the ecology. The framework further draws from various sources such as other existing studies and from the findings which emanated from the collaborators of diverse backgrounds who were also co-researchers in the study. The collaborative framework considers the context of rural ecologies. The framework does not require any form of financial outlay but requires the stakeholders' time, commitment, creativity, and collaborating harmoniously with other stakeholders/co-researchers. The focus of the framework is to collaboratively enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. The framework may be re-used in the ecology where it was first initiated should the need arise. Notably, the framework may also be applied in other rural ecologies which are said to be facing challenges of a similar nature concerning learner vulnerabilities. The collaborative framework may be adjusted to accommodate the types of learner vulnerabilities that are evident in a particular context. The number of collaborators or role-players may be increased or decreased to suit contextual needs according to the severity of the vulnerability in that rural ecology. Since the framework is based on PAR, it is imperative that the actions proposed for this framework are reflected upon and rated

in order evaluate their effects in meeting the objectives of the framework and should be re-enacted or repeated should the need arise.

### **7.3 THE COLLABORATORS OR ROLE-PLAYERS**

There are several categories of collaborators for the proposed framework. The categories of collaborators included learners, educators, learners' relatives, the community as well as other relevant stakeholders or specialists such as the nurse, police officer, social worker, priest and traditional healer. All the collaborators need to play their part (as guided by table 7. 1) in order to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in their ecology.

### **7.4 CONDITIONS OF THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK THAT ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR THE VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY**

As guided by the findings of the study, the conditions of the framework are two-fold: those which mainly speak to the personality traits of the collaborators, and those that are centred on the actual circumstances which need to be conducive for the effective running of the collaboration.

#### **7.4.1 Positive Personality Traits of the Collaborators or Role-players**

While the categories of the collaborators have been indicated above, it is advisable that such collaborators need to possess specific traits for the framework to operate effectively. While it is unrealistic for an individual to possess all the positive personality traits, it is preferable that they should possess many of them. Hence, the following personality traits need to be exhibited by the collaborators.

##### **7.4.1.1 Trustworthiness**

The collaborators should be individuals who are trustworthy. As the findings of the current study together with some from previous studies recommend that trust in collaborations is an imperative characteristic for the benefit of the initiative as collaborators productively cooperate if they have a high degree of trust among them (Bosma et al., 2010; Coleman & Stein, 2018; Langfield-Smith, 2008), especially in this case where the collaborators originate from various backgrounds.

#### **7.4.1.2 Loyalty and commitment**

Loyalty is another personality trait that is regarded as important for this framework. Literature is consistent with the findings of the study that disloyalty and a lack of transparency are amongst the many negatives which threaten the effective operationalisation of the collaborative framework (3.4.5.4 & 6.4.2).

#### **7.4.1.3 Passion and compassion**

For parties to be committed to the endeavour, they need to be passionate at some level about what they are doing. Collaborators need to possess strong, intense or zealous feelings concerning the objectives of the collaboration. Furthermore, collaborators need to be compassionate towards vulnerable learners, as they represent a delicate group of people. Correspondingly, literature that has been consulted for this particular study as well as the co-researchers of the study warns against individuals who enter into such initiations purely for their personal gains as that may negatively affect the cohesive functioning of the initiative (3.5.3 & 6.6.1).

#### **7.4.1.4 Patience and persistence**

Patience and persistence are the two other personality traits that need to be inherent in the collaborators. Significantly, this framework deals with a tricky and sensitive phenomenon which is vulnerability; so, collaborators should be capable of being patient as the nature of the phenomenon may be regarded as complex. Since PAR (methodology employed to propose the framework) is not concerned about the swiftness of an investigation which includes planning, action, reflecting and reworking; and these are not time-bound. Hence, sometimes it may occur that an impatient or easily frustrated collaborator, gives up before reaching the objective of the study (6.4.1 & 6.4.2.4).

#### **7.4.1.5 Open to criticism**

Being open to constructive criticism is not an easy skill for some individuals, but it is regarded as another crucial personality trait for collaborators of this framework (6.4.1). Co-researchers need to develop further from fruitful criticism for the framework to be successful, as the initiative is partly framed by the asset-based approach which

is centred on building from available skills, gifts and resources to produce positive outcomes. Significantly, the co-researchers need to have the capacity to positively absorb criticism by ‘turning it around’ for the benefit of the framework and the team as a whole. Additionally, PAR cannot escape the notion of reflection and evaluation as they form part of the methodological steps aligned to critical thinking.

#### **7.4.1.6 Respectful and accepting of diversity**

While being open to criticism is important for this framework, being respectful and welcoming diversity is another significant positive personality trait to have as a collaborator for this partnership (3.4.5.1 & 3.4.5.2). The aspect of diversity is salient since the nature of the framework focused on working with various individuals from diverse backgrounds who choose to cooperate because of a shared goal, which is sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in their ecology. Also, literature on community partnerships warns against being disrespectful and intolerant to diversities as it mostly hinders the operationalisation of the project (Dodd & Konzal, 2016).

#### **7.4.2 Conditions for an Effective Collaborative Framework**

Although there are positive personality traits which are essential for the proper functioning of the collaborated framework as stipulated above, these may be insufficient in cases where the conditions are not conducive for effective collaboration to take place. Consequently, there are certain conditions which are vital for effective collaboration to take place: distributed leadership, shared responsibility, shared goal, clear vision and clear communication. Notably most of the conducive conditions overlap; that is, it is not completely possible for one to be present in the complete absence of the other.

##### **7.4.2.1 Distributed leadership and equal partnership**

Distributed leadership is one of the conditions which is regarded as conducive and important for the collaborative framework to smoothly function. Since the framework comprises of a diverse range of individuals from different backgrounds with varying ages and statuses within the ecology, they all need to feel important in order to cooperate and be of value to the framework. The main researcher opted to use the term *distributed leadership* in this case since the learner participants are granted equal

partnership with their adult co-researchers. The principle of equal partnership is equally significant as it encourages all parties to put greater effort into the initiative and thus prepare themselves for equal sharing of the outcomes of the endeavour, whether positive or negative. Regarding the notion of distributed leadership, leadership may be allocated according to an individual's capabilities. For an instance, in this case the older participants were given more roles to play in order to avoid disrupting the learners' academic processes - this be contradictory to the main objective of the framework, which is to enhance sustainable learning for all learners, especially those who are vulnerable.

#### **7.4.2.2 Trusting and positive working relationships**

A trusting and working relationship is also a crucial conducive condition for the success of a collaborative framework. This kind of a healthy working relationship encourages solid and good communication, enables transparent decision-making, in addition to the fact that it inspires positive interactions which are likely to yield successful outcomes and productivity would be heightened within the partnership. Moreover, positive working relationships will promote creativity and will result in co-researchers focusing their energies on positive issues rather than negative ones. Notably, negative working relations are most likely to disrupt the effective operationalisation of the framework; for instance, some parties prefer working with others whom they are in good terms with. Hence, a positive working relationship is imperative in this collaborative framework as it will aid a collegial working atmosphere where there is respect, acceptance, trust and transparency.

#### **7.4.2.3 Shared goal and clear vision for the framework**

While a trusting and positive working relationship is important in this framework, the conditions of shared goal and that of a clear vision are just as crucial. Since the collaborative framework comprises of a variety of parties from all walks of life who might have differing priorities and opinions, the condition of having a shared goal is important as it would encourage parties to be committed to a common objective. Hence, they would execute their roles efficiently and meaningfully since their benefits would be similar. To illustrate the importance of a shared goal, Langfield-Smith (2008) prioritises the aspect of shared goal as being the heart of most community initiatives,



as multiple or differing goals are regarded as hindrances to most community partnerships.

#### **7.4.2.4 Clear communication**

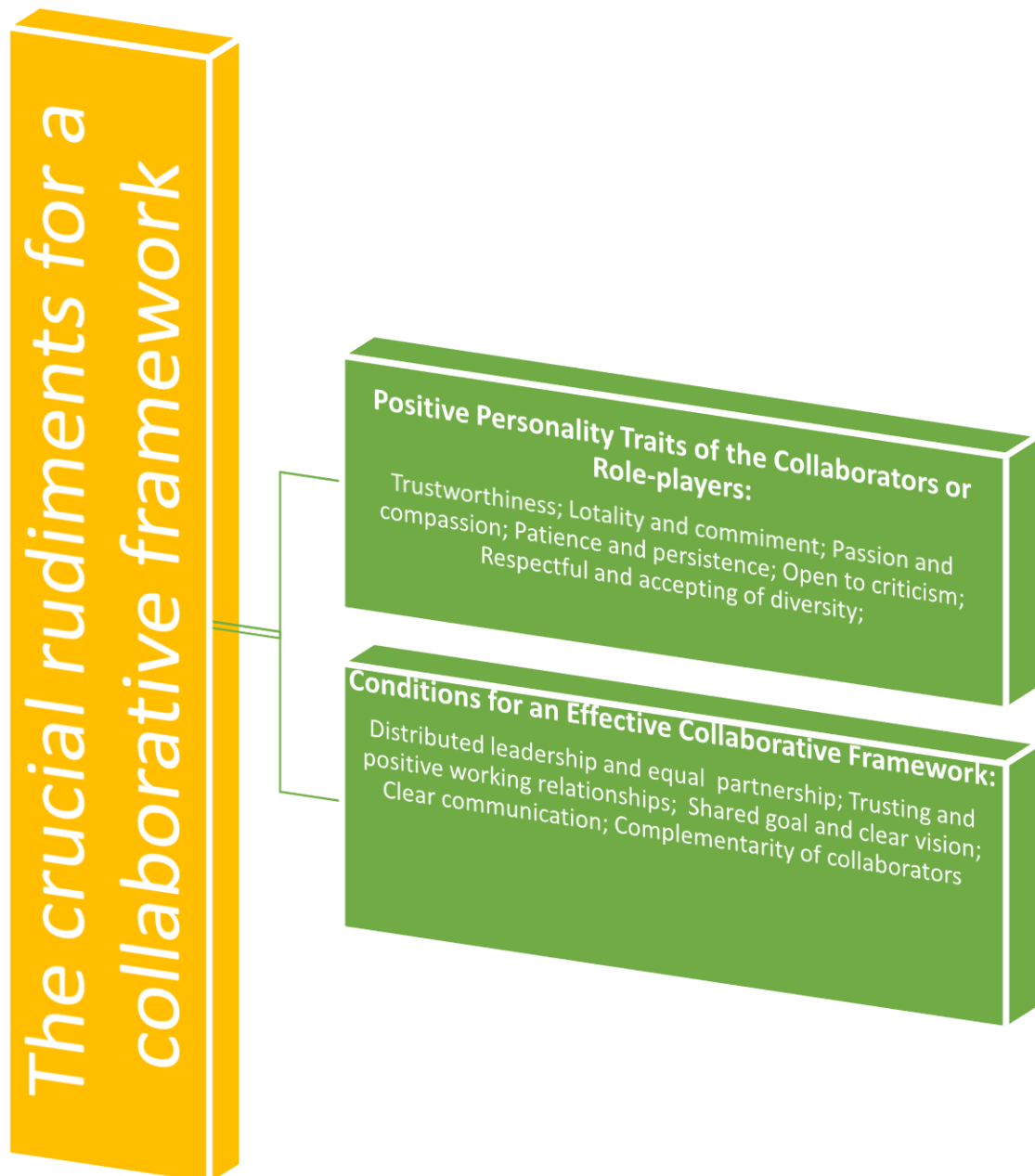
A goal may be shared, and the partnership vision may be as clear as daylight, but if communication is not clear the partnership may be doomed to fail. Importantly, clear communication will strengthen collaborations and ensure that collaborators cooperate and deliver for the success of the framework, as elaborated by researchers Harvey, (2016) and Ruben (2017). Furthermore, clear communication will ensure that collaborators know what is expected of them and how they may go about realising those expectations. Clear communication will also ensure that the collaborators reflect and evaluate the framework effectively. Notably, the kind of communication that is considered in this case may take many forms such as in talking, drawings and clarifications, if the need arises, as the collaborators involved in the framework possess a range of competences. Also, the diversity of ethnic groups may call for a common language of communication, such that all conversations are understood, leaving no gaps in information that may hamper the processes of collaboration.

#### **7.4.2.5 Complementarity of collaborators**

Complementarity of collaborators is another conducive condition leading to the effectiveness of this collaboration framework. This condition of collaborators who complement each other in terms of acquiring and sharing knowledge and skills, is significant in this case as the framework comprises of an array of individuals such as learners, teachers, traditional healer, priest and others. Furthermore, through complementarity, the characteristics of resilience and collective intelligence is likely to surface, and as a result be beneficial to the collaborative framework. For example, an educator is a specialist in the field of education while a police officer specialises in law and order; in cases where the one party falls short of knowledge or capacity, the other would be able to make up or cover for the other, all for the benefit of the vulnerable learners.

## 7.5 THE OUTLINE OF THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

The collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in a rural ecology has been outlined by stating the details of the collaborators, the crucial rudiments, as well as the four major levers. These were aligned to the actions that need to be executed in order to enhance sustainable learning for the vulnerable learners in the rural ecology.



**Figure 7.1:** The Crucial Rudiments for a Collaborative Framework



**Figure 7.2:** The Four Pillars of the Collaborative Framework

**Table 7.1:** The Outline of the Collaborative Framework

<b>Pillar One: Promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistic learners</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible collaborator / Role player</b>	<b>Objective(s)</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Assembly motivational speeches	Educators and learners	To motivate learners into becoming ambitious	Continuous

Modelling good behaviour for the learners	Educators and parent-community	To cultivate an optimistic mentality in learners.	Continuous
Encouraging extra-mural activities	Educators and parent-community	To heighten good sportsmanship. Influence learners to embrace constructive criticism Enhance resilience amongst learners	Continuous
Displaying a positive regard for all learners despite their vulnerabilities.	Educators and parent-community	To show learners love and compassion To heighten learners' self-esteem.	Continuous

<b>Pillar Two: Intensifying the existing forms of care and support</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible collaborator</b>	<b>Objective(s)</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Designing and distributing pamphlets.	Educators, learners, parent-community and other significant stakeholders.	Awareness-creation concerning the forms of learner vulnerabilities in rural sectors, their impact on the quality of learning, as well as on the existing forms of care and support for vulnerable learners.	Two months
Asset-mapping	The whole research team	To map out available forms of care and support in the contexts and to evaluate their effectiveness.	One month
Poster Work	The whole research team	To combine various forms of care and support to make them	One week

		complementary to increase effectiveness.	
Evaluation Sheets	The whole research team	To evaluate and streamline the existing forms of care and support in order to make them assessable, and to simplify their referral mechanisms.	Two weeks
Going back to basics	The whole research team	Utilising the basic means of caring and supporting learners: Starting vegetable gardens. Holding school concerts for fundraising. Selling handmade crafts by the learners	

**Pillar-Three: Inspiring collaborations**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible collaborator</b>	<b>Objective(s)</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Providing incentives (beadwork, custom-made cards etc.).	Learners	To acknowledge and show appreciation and gratitude to the individuals who are already offering support with the intention that they will be more motivated to offer added support.	Two months

Offering courses on basic English, Mathematics and Life-orientation to the parent-community.	Educators and other relevant stakeholders.	To capacitate the parent- community in assisting their children. Creating good relations between the teachers, the learners, and community. Creating good relations between the learners and their families.	One to two months
Community-cluster formulation	The whole research team with other individuals within communities.	To share best practices and to strengthen relations between community citizens.	Once a month, over a period of three months
Progression meetings	The whole research team	To provide opportunities for reflecting and evaluating existing practices. To identify gaps within the existing forms of care and support.	Two to three months

**Pillar Four: Connecting with the curriculum**

Action	Responsible collaborator	Objective(s)	Time Frame
Paying attention to the learners' voices and acting upon them: Placing two anonymous boxes around the school.	Educators and learners	To pay attention to the learners' voices and interests. Providing space for learners to share their genuine interests.	Two months

Opening a WhatsApp and facebook group where learners can converse on their own terms.		Providing an opportunity for educators to gain an in-depth understanding of the learners' real needs and interests.	
Employing various methods of teaching and assessing.	Educators and parents	To provide all-encompassing lessons. To assess in a manner that caters for individual learning styles.	Three to five Months
Home visits	Educators	To develop an understanding of the learners' home environments in order to design all-encompassing, real-life lessons, and individualised lessons.	Once a month, for a period of three months

## **7.6. THE PRELIMINARIES OF “THE COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR THE VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY”**

This section focuses on outlining the preliminary work that went into the structuring of this framework by pinpointing each collaborator's responsibility towards his/her specific activity; in addition, it explains the significance for undertaking the specifically allotted activity. Also, the suggested time-frame is stated which directed the collaboration, thus the preliminaries are linked to the four major levers of the collaborative framework, namely:

- Promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistically-minded learners
- Intensifying the existing forms of care and support

- Inspiring collaborations
- Connecting with the curriculum.

### **7.6.1 Promoting a Culture of Ambitious and Optimistic Learners**

Promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistic learners is the first pillar of the framework. In order to achieve the objectives of this lever, there are four actions which need to be followed: namely, motivational speeches, modelling good behaviour for the learners, encouraging learners to take part in extra-mural activities, and developing a positive attitude towards all learners despite their vulnerabilities.

#### **7.6.1.1 Motivational speeches and prayers**

The educators, social-workers, nurses, priests or any other collaborator who might have the skill to present motivational speeches and to pray over the learners, may be requested to participate and lead these activities. These ongoing activities may be given a ten-minute slot fortnightly. Other significant individuals such as ex-offenders, other priests, successful businessmen, and ex-learners who are now successful, may be invited to motivate the learners to uplift their self-esteem so that they may believe in themselves, develop a sense of hope, and hence become enthusiastic about schoolwork. This leads to obtaining better academic outcomes.

#### **7.6.1.2 Modelling good behavior to influence learners**

Being good role-models for the learners is another strategy towards promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistic learners. This activity may be carried out continuously by all the co-researchers including the learner co-researchers. The collaborators need to always model good behaviour that will rub-off on learners within the school, the home, and in the community. For example, they may refrain from drinking alcohol or abusing any other form of substance, especially in the presence of the learners. Also, being violent to another individual or using derogatory and insulting language should be avoided at all costs – “children see, children do”. Role-players must focus on doing good deeds such as helping around the neighbourhood especially those who need assistance, such as the old and frail, the sick, and abused women and orphaned children. Modelling good behaviour for the learners is an activity that is significant for this framework as it inspires a culture which is concerned with leading a positive lifestyle despite existing adversities in the ecology.



### **7.6.1.3 Encouraging learners to participate in extra-mural activities**

The third activity under the lever of promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistic learners, is that of encouraging learners to participate in extra-mural activities such as sports, debating, spelling-bee competitions, Readathons, and community engagement activities. These may be undertaken on an ongoing-basis by the educators, parents, other learners, as well as nurses who clarify and unpack other health benefits of engaging in extra-mural activities. The purpose of undertaking this activity is to enhance resilience on the part of the learners as some research studies associate good sportsmanship in children with heightened resilience (Watson, Rich, Sanchez, O'Brien, & Alvord, 2014). Also, encouraging participation in extra-mural activities for vulnerable learners promotes learner-discipline as well as the ability to positively accept criticism and turn it to their advantage. This will possibly ensure that vulnerable learners do not easily quit school as these traits (to persevere, be persistent, and resilient) may become fossilised (through to extra-curricular activities) and thus facilitate the achievement of their target goals.

### **7.6.1.4 Having a positive attitude towards all learners**

Having a positive attitude for all learners is the fourth activity towards promoting a culture of ambitious and optimistic learners. While all collaborators may be responsible for this activity, special emphasis is placed on the educators and the parents at home as they are the ones who spend most of the time with the vulnerable learners. The gist of the activity involves believing and displaying that all learners can do better, regardless of the austerity circumstances. The significance is that the vulnerable learner may also begin to look beyond his/her adversity and may start believing that he/she is academically gifted, and as a result they may accelerate their efforts on attaining good academic outcomes.

## **7.6.2 Intensifying Existing Forms of Care and Support**

Intensifying the existing forms of care and support is the second pillar that underpins this collaborative framework. Designing and distributing pamphlets, holding presentations, asset-mapping, and filling in evaluation sheets are the four activities that may be followed in order to attain the goal of strengthening the existing means of care and support.

### **7.6.2.1 Designing and distributing pamphlets**

The activity of designing and distributing pamphlets is one of intensifying the existing forms of care and support. The whole research team took part in this activity, as creativity and being innovative may be beneficial towards reaching the activities' objective. The pamphlets were used to inform the public about learner-vulnerabilities and their negative impact on the learning process, including exposing all the deficiencies in the already available forms of care and support in the ecology. This activity may take a month or two as an awareness creation strategy.

### **7.6.2.2 Asset-mapping**

Asset-mapping is the second activity under intensifying the forms of care and support. This activity may also include all the collaborators as they would be valuable informants in sharing various points of view concerning the available assets in the area. The activity of asset-mapping may take approximately a month and involves compiling a list of all the available agencies of care and support in the ecology by stating their location, their functionality, as well as their contact hours. The main purpose for this activity is to also advertise the readily available services and places of care and support in the area, so that learners in need may know about them and be able to access them in order to receive assistance. Moreover, asset-mapping may assist in identifying which forms of care and support are not available in the ecology; thus, more focus may be placed in obtaining those scarce services.

### **7.6.2.3 Poster-work**

The drawing and compiling of posters is another strategy that may be employed to enhance the various forms of care and support. The whole research team may be involved in this activity as it may become a tiring pursuit if one individual has to do it alone. Over a week or two, the whole research team lists the forms of care and support which they feel may be complementary to one another for enhancement purposes.

### **7.6.2.4 Evaluation sheets**

Completion of evaluation sheets is the fourth action which is employed towards intensifying the existing forms of care and support. While this activity may be undertaken by all the collaborators, any other member(s) of the ecology with a similar

interest may be invited to complete the evaluation or rating forms. The main objective is to reflect, rate, and evaluate the existing forms of care and support. Notably, this activity further calls for the communities' views on how the existing forms of care and support may be strengthened to become effective and efficient, instead of calling for their removal.

#### **7.6.2.5 Going “back-to-basics”**

The fifth action towards intensifying the means of care and support is going back to the basics. This activity may engage all the co-researchers on an ongoing basis and includes programmes such as starting vegetable gardens at home, in the community and at school. It also included holding school concerts in order to raise funds for the school. In addition, learners' handmade arts and crafts products could be sold to the public on market days. Besides physically providing an extra means of survival for vulnerable learners, teaching and equipping them with skills cascades into future employment opportunities.

#### **7.6.3 Inspiring Collaborations**

Inspiring collaborations stood as the third pillar of the collaborative framework. Like the other two levers, inspiring collaborations also comprised of smaller steps or activities which may be followed in order to complete the process. Such steps or activities include incentivising, offering basic literacy and skills courses to the parent-community, cluster formulation, and progression meetings.

##### **7.6.3.1 Incentivising**

Offering incentives may be carried out by any of the collaborators. However, to intensify the activity, the learners themselves may drive this initiative. Incentivising is a strategy that may be employed where learners create simple tokens such as handmade cards, arts and crafts, or anything cost-effective. The activity may take three to four weeks. Sponsors such as the local business people, the church, or anyone (or institution) who has played a major part in caring and supporting vulnerable learners are given tokens of appreciation and gratitude for their support; this creates the setting for ongoing or continuous support from such people or organisations.

### **7.6.3.2 Offering basic courses to the parent-community**

Offering basic courses to the parent-community may be done over one or two months. While this activity may normally be undertaken by the educators as it is in line with their profession, it may also engage any of the collaborators or other professionals from the “outside” who have the requisite skills and knowledge to deliver a quality service to those who need such programmes. The educators may offer courses in basic English and Mathematics, while the priests, traditional-healers, nurses or social-workers may teach or coach the parent-community regarding basic life-skills. The aim of offering basic courses and programmes is to capacitate parents to assist their children with homework and other assignments; thus, they gain an opportunity to bond and build stronger familial relations. The activity may further strengthen the relations between the school and the parents, in addition to parents sharpening their English literacy and Mathematics skills, so necessary to become a meaningful member of a global society, not to mention opening up doors for work opportunities.

### **7.6.3.3 Cluster formation**

Cluster formation is another activity towards intensifying collaborations. The activity of cluster formation may be undertaken by the immediate research team by firstly sending out invites to other individuals or stakeholders in other neighbouring communities to form clusters. This activity may be time-consuming as it is dependent on how quick the individuals from other clusters respond to the invites. Hence, this activity may be given lengthy periods such as two months or three months to plan and hold meetings which may be held once a month. The significance of holding cluster meetings is to provide a platform where the communities may mingle, share experiences and best practices, and to generally network while bonding with other community members.

### **7.6.3.4 Progression meetings**

Progression meetings may involve all the collaborators. The time-frame for progression meetings may be once a month over two to three school terms. The significance of having such meetings is to further evaluate the forms of care and support and to rate their intensification. These meetings may further be used to develop one another as individuals as well as to identify gaps that may cause some

processes to be ineffective. Such meetings may also be useful in altering or adjusting or evaluating the measures of care and support.

#### **7.6.4 Connecting with the Curriculum**

Connecting with the curriculum is the fourth pillar of the collaborative framework. In order to connect with the curriculum, there are three activities which may be considered: paying attention to the learners' voices and acting upon them, employing various means of teaching and assessing, as well as home visits.

##### **7.6.4.1 Paying attention to the learners' voices and acting upon them**

The activity of paying attention to the learners' voices is not enough if the learners' voices are only going to be heard and not be acted upon. This activity may not only concern the educators, but also the parent-community, the learners themselves, and the DoE officials. While this activity may be undertaken for a period of two months to four months for research purposes, learners' voices must be heard continuously through anonymous-boxes placed at strategic points around the school, social media platforms, as well as through ordinary discussions. The logic behind paying attention to learners' voices and acting on them, is to gain an in-depth understanding of the learners' real-life situations and experiences, and relating them to the curriculum by using examples and content from community issues to plan and make lessons more meaningful and relevant, instead of Westernising and giving adult perceptions when facilitating lessons.

##### **7.6.4.2 Blending or varying teaching-learning methods**

Another activity under the pillar of connecting with curriculum, is that of employing various methods of teaching and assessing. While this activity may be mainly associated with the educators since it is in line with their profession to teach and assess learners. However, parents at home may also make use of this activity as it would further enhance the whole aspect of connecting with the curriculum as learners also grasp certain concepts more easily if they are taught by their parents at home.

### **7.6.4.3 Undertaking home-visits**

Undertaking home visits is another activity that may be used to connect the curriculum to the learners' lives. This activity may progress throughout the year, since the conditions within the home are bound to fluctuate due to several factors. The educators may be the responsible collaborators for undertaking home-visits as they will mostly be the ones responsible for teaching the learners in the classroom so family members may easily relate to them. The importance of undertaking home-visits is to gain a true sense of the learners' home environments as the learners may sometimes be too reticent to share their real-home situations to the whole class. In undertaking home visits, the educators are also afforded an opportunity to connect with the learners' relatives and jointly they may come up with strategies that may facilitate solutions to their academic problems in class. This sustains the vulnerable learners' learning process despite their adverse conditions.

## **7.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter mainly focused on presenting the proposed collaborated framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology. The synopsis of the framework was presented, and the collaborators' or role-players' functions were outlined. The conditions of the framework were also included, and at the tail-end the preliminaries of the framework were unpacked.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A : Ethical Clearance letter



27 March 2018

Ms Snenhlanhla Immaculate Mbambo 981207420  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mbambo

Protocol reference number: HSS/2234/017D

Project title: A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology

**Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

In response to your application received 23 November 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr F Khanare & Prof DJ Hlalele

cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza

cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## Appendix B: Permission letter from the Department of Education



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1041

Ref.:2/4/8/1392

Ms SI Mbambo  
N97 Ubangangala Avenue  
KwaMashu  
4360

Dear Ms Mbambo

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN A RURAL ECOLOGY", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 13 November 2017 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Ndabazezwe JP School

Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education

Date: 16/11/2017

..Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa

Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201

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Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @DBE\_KZN... Instagram: kzn\_education... Youtube: kzndoe

## Appendix C: Request letter to the school Principal

N97Ubangalala Avenue  
KwaMashu  
4360

K981 Ndlazi Road  
KwaMashu  
4360  
Dear Principal

### **REQUESTING INFORMED CONSENT FOR THE STUDY TO BE CONDUCTED IN A SCHOOL**

My name is Sinenhlanhla Immaculate Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. Your school has been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

The study requests the participation of learners, teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders from the community in collage making, focus group discussion and keeping reflective journals. Participation is purely voluntary, and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me at 0732099057 or my Supervisors Prof Hlalele or Dr. Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare

## **Appendix D. Letter to learner participants' parent/guardian seeking permission for their child to participate in the study**

Dear Parent

My name is Sinenhlanhla Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. Your child has been selected to participate in this research project. The title of the research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**. The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to your school, other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

Your child is required to take part in the study in which he/ she will be asked to create a collage (a piece of art made by sticking various materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing). Which may provide awareness into ways of sustaining learning for learners who are having challenges or problems that may stand in their way of learning. Participation of your child is of free will and you may withdraw him or her from the study at any time.

I promise:

- That all information regarding the participation of your child will be confidential and will not be shown to other teachers, school managers, or other learners. The only persons with access to information will be Professor Hlalele and Dr. F. Khanare (Doctoral supervisors) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm your child.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt their teaching and learning process. Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me at 0732099057 or my Supervisors Prof Hlalele or Dr. Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo .....

---

BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate, Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare.



## Permission from Parent/ Guardian

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of parent/guardian) of a child by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ have been approached to let my child participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My child's participation in the research of free will.
- She/ He may refuse to answer any questions asked.
- She/ He may withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My child's identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of my child will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants' rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my child's learning time.
- If you are consenting (willing for your child to take part), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are, or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera and video recording)		

I **agree that my child** may participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of parent/guardian): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E. Letter of request of participation of Parent

Dear Parent

My name is Sinenhlanhla Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of the research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to your school, other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

You are requested to participate in the study in which you will be scheduled for partaking in focus group discussion, which may provide insights into ways of providing ways on sustaining learning for vulnerable learners. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The first five parents to confirm their availability for the study will be selected as participants on the study.

I promise:

- That all information regarding your participation will be confidential and will not be divulged to other teachers, school managers, or learners. The only persons with access to information will be Professor D. Hlalele and Dr. F. Khanare (Doctoral supervisors) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm you.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me at 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr FP Khanare

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a teacher or my relationship with other colleagues at the school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants' rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are, or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera and video recording)		

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Letter of request of participation of a learner.

Dear Learner

My name is Sinenhlanhla Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of the research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to your school, other schools, the community the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

You will be required to take part in the study in which you will be asked to create a collage (a piece of art made by sticking various materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing). Which may provide awareness into ways of sustaining learning for learners who are having challenges or problems that may stand in their way of learning. Your participation is of your free will and you may withdraw from the study at any given time.

I promise:

- That all information regarding your participation will be confidential and will not be divulged to teachers, school managers, or other learners. The only persons with access to information will be Professor Hlalele and Dr. F. Khanare (Doctoral supervisors) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm you
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation  
S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr FP Khanare.

## Learner Participant Consent Form



**Project Title:** A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology

**Researcher's name:** Sinenhlanhla Mbambo

**Name of participant:** .....

1. Has the researcher explained what s/he will be doing and wants you to do?

 YES NO

2. Has the researcher explained why s/he wants you to take part?

 YES NO

3. Do you understand what the research study aims to do?

 YES NO

4. Do you know of anything good or bad that can happen to you during the research?

 YES NO

5. Do you know that your name and what you say will be kept a secret from other people?

 YES NO

6. Did you ask the researcher any questions about the research?

 YES NO

7. Has the researcher answered all your questions?

 YES NO

8. Do you understand that you can refuse to participate if you do not want to take part and that nothing will happen to you if you refuse?

YES

NO

9. Do you understand that you may pull out of the study at any time if you no longer want to continue?

YES

NO

10. Do you know who you can talk to if you are worried or have any other questions to ask?

YES

NO

11. Has anyone forced or put pressure on you to take part in this research?

YES

NO

12. Are you willing to take part in the research?

YES

NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **LEARNER PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM *(Isivumelwano semvumo acaciselwe ngaso-umfundi othatha iqhaza kucwaningo)***



Isihloko Socwaningo: **Ukuhlanganyela ekwakheni uhlaka olungasiza ekwakheni imfundo emile yabafundi abasebungozini empakathini wasemaphandleni**

**Igama Lomcwaningi: Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo**

**Igama lothatha iqhaza ocwaningweni:**

---

1. Ingabe ucaciselwe yini ngalokho okuzofanele ukwenze ocwaningweni?

YEBO

CHA

2. Ingabe ukuchazelile yini umcwaningi ukuthi ufunelani ukuthi wena uthathe iqhaza kulolu cwaningo?

YEBO

CHA

3. Uchazelekile yini ngesizathu socwaningo?

YEBO

CHA

4. Uyazi yini kukhona okubi okungakwehlela kulolucwaningo?

YEBO

CHA

5. Uyazi yini ukuthi igama lakho nalokho ozokusho kuzoba imfihlo kwabanye abantu?

YEBO

CHA

6. Kukhona yini imibuzo oke wayibuza umcwaningi mayelana ngalolucwaningo

YEBO

CHA

7. Umcwaningi uyiphendulile yini yonke imibuzo yakho?

YEBO

CHA

8. Uyaqonda yini ukuthi uvumelekile ukunqaba ukuthatha iqhaza uma ungathandi futhi ngeke kwenzeke lutho kuwena uma unqaba?

YEBO

CHA

9. Uyaqonda yini ukuthi ungaphuma kucwaningo noma inini uma ungasathandi ukuqhubeka?

YEBO

CHA

10. Uyamazi yini ekumele ukhulume naye uma kukhona okhathazeke ngakho noma

oneminye imibuzo ofisa ukuyibuza?

YEBO

CHA

11. Kukhona yini okuphoqile noma okuphoqile ukuthi uthathe iqhaza kulolucwaningo?

YEBO

CHA

12. Uyathanda yini ukuthatha iqhaza kulolucwaningo?

YEBO

CHA

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature yomfundi**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Usuku**





## Appendix G. Letter of request of participation of Teachers

Dear Teacher

My name is Sinenhlanhla Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of the research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to your school, other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

You are requested to participate in the study in which you will be scheduled for partaking in focus group discussion and keeping a reflective journal, which may provide insights into ways of providing ways on sustaining learning for vulnerable learners. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I promise:

- That all information regarding your participation will be confidential and will not be divulged to other teachers, school managers, or learners. The only persons with access to information will be Professor Hlalele and Dr. F. Khanare (Doctoral supervisors) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm you.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr FP Khanare.

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the participant)  
that have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework  
for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a teacher or my relationship with other colleagues at the school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants' rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera and video recording)		

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Request letter to the Priest

Dear Priest

My name is Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners in the community.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

The study requests the participation of learners, teachers, priests, traditional healers, social workers, police officers and nurses in participatory art-based methods and in focus group discussions. However, you will only be required to take part in the focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary, and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them.

I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my Supervisors Prof Hlalele or Dr. Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare.

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a learner / teacher or my relationship with other colleagues/learners at school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- participants' rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual equipment ( <i>Camera and Video recording</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I: Request letter to the Nurse

Dear Nurse

My name is Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for the vulnerable learners in the community.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

The study requests the participation of learners, teachers, priests, traditional healers, social workers police officers and nurses in participatory art-based methods and in focus group discussions. However, you will only be required to partake in focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary, and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them.

I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

-----

BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare.

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a learner / teacher or my relationship with other colleagues/learners at school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera/Video recorder)		

**I agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**I do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J: Request letter to the Police Officer

Dear Police officer

My name is Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of how ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners in the community.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the teacher training institutions and the policy makers.

The study requests the participation of learners, teachers, a priest, a traditional healer, a social worker, a police officer and a nurse in participatory art-based methods and in focus group discussions.

You will be specifically required to participate in focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary, and all participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation  
S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a learner / teacher or my relationship with other colleagues/learners at school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are, or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera/Video recording)		

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix K: Request letter to the Traditional Healer

Dear Traditional healer

My name is Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. Your school has been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of how ways that may be used in order to sustain learning for vulnerable learners in the community.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to other schools, the community, the Department of Education, the policy makers and the teacher training institutions.

The study requests the participation of learners, teachers, a priest, a traditional healer, a social worker, a police officer and a nurse in participatory art-based methods and in focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary, and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them.

You will only be required to take part in focus group discussions. However, I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my Supervisors Prof Hlalele or Dr. Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD: Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare.

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position or my relationship with other colleagues.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-equipment		
Visual-equipment (Camera/ video recording)		

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## INQUBO MGOMO YESIVUMELWANO SEMVUMO

N97 Ubangalala Avenue  
KwaMashu  
4360

Kulowo emayelana naye

Kothatha iqhaza othobekileyo

### ISICELO SEMVUMO KULOWO OZOTHATHA IQHAZA

Igama lami ngingu Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo (981207420). Ngingu mfundi owenza i-PhD eNyuvesi yaKwazulu-Natal. Isihloko so cwaningo sithi: **Ukuhlanganyela ekwakheni uhlaka olungasiza ekwakheni imfundo emile yabafundi abasebungozini empakathini wasemaphandleni**. Inhloso yalolucwaningo ukwakha ngokuhlanganyela uhlaka olungasiza ekwakheni imfundo emile yabafundi abasebungozini emphakathini osemaphandleni. Ngifisa ukukwenza ingxenye yelunga lalezigxoxo.

- Sicela uqaphele ukuthi: Ulwazi ozosinikeza lona luzosentshenziselwa ulwazi locwaningo kuphela.
- Ukubamba kwakho iqhaza kungo kuzikhethela ngokuphelele, awuphoqiwe.
- Ungazikhethela ukuthatha iqhaza noma ungalithathi iqhaza noma ume ukuthatha iqhaza kulolu cwaningo futhi angeke uhlawuliswe ngokuthatha lesi senzo.
- Imibono yakho kulezizingxoxo izovezwa ngokufihlekeleyo. Igama noma yini engakudalula ngeke ivezwe kulocwaningo.
- Izingxoxo izothatha imizuzu engaba ewu-60
- Okuqoshiwe nako konke okumayelana nalezizingxoxo kuzogcinwa kwisigodlo ekungeneka kuso ngokuba ube nesivumelwano ukuze ungene kuso okuzokwazi ukungena khona mina kanye nomphathi wami kuphela. Uma sekudlule isikhathi esingengeminyaka emihlanu, ngokomgomo wenyuvesi, kuphele ngayo ngokuyidabula mese iyashiswa.
- Uma uvuma ukuthatha iqhaza ngisacela ucikice isimemezelo esinamathiselwe kulesilandisi (iphepha eliseceleni uzonikezwa lokuthi icikice kulo)
- Uma uvuma (uzimbandakanya kulezizingxoxo) ngicela utshengise (ngokubeka uphawu oluka X) noma uyavuma noma awuvumi ukuba imibono yakho iqoshwe ngalemishini:

	<b>Ngiyavuma</b>	<b>Angivumi</b>
Umshini oqopha okukhulunyiwe		

Ngiyatholakala eSchool of Educational Psychology, University of KwaZulu –Natal, Edgewood Campus, Pinetown. Email: [mkhwanzisne@yahoo.com](mailto:mkhwanzisne@yahoo.com) Cell: [0732099057](tel:0732099057)

Umpathi wami uSolwazi Dipane Joseph Hlalele utholakala eEducational Psychology, CS102 Main Tutorial Building, University of KwaZulu –Natal, Edgewood Campus, Corner of Marianhill and Richmond Roads, Pinetown. Tel: 0312603858 Email: [HlaleleD@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HlaleleD@ukzn.ac.za)

IHumanities ne Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee bona batholaka: Ms Phumulele Ximba, University of Kwazulu-Natal , Research Office, Email: [ximba@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximba@ukzn.ac.za) Phone number +27312603587

Ngiyabonga ngegalelo lakho kulolucwaningo.

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare

## ISIMEMEZELO

Mina \_\_\_\_\_ ngiyaqinekisa ukuthi ngiyaqonda kahle nangokuphelele okubhalwe ngenhla nokungesimo salolucwaningo futhi ngiyavuma ukuthatha iqhaza kulolucwaningo.

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngikhululekile ukuphuma kulona noma inini, uma ngifuna noma ngithanda. Mina futhi ngiyaqonda inhloso noma isizathu salolucwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuthatha iqhaza.

Mina ngiyavuma /angivumi ukuthi inhlolombono iqoshwe (uma kudingakala).

KUSAYINA OTHATHA IQHAZA

USUKU

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix L: Request letter to the Social Worker

Dear Social worker

My name is Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo. I am a doctoral student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Registration number: 981207420. I am required to carry out research to write up a thesis. You have been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.**

The importance of this study are as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of how ways that may be used in order to sustain learning
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful to other schools, the community the Department of Education, the policy makers and the teacher training institutions.

The study requires the participation of learners, teachers, a priest, a traditional healer, a social worker, a police officer and a nurse in participatory art-based methods and in focus group discussions. You will specifically be required to take part in focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary, and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoters Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof DJ Hlalele and Dr. FP Khanare.

## DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**

I understand that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position or my relationship with other colleagues.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Participants' rights will be respected
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.
- If you are consenting (willing to be interviewed), please indicate (by ticking as applicable with an X) whether you are, or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio-equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual-equipment (camera/ video recording)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I **agree** to participate in a study that Sinenhlanhla I. Mbambo is conducting.

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix M: Letter of request of the participation of a school counsellor

Dear School Counsellor.

Pending to the discussion that we had over the phone, I wish to formally ask for your presence on the research focus group discussions that I will be conducting at a school. The research is for the doctoral study that I am doing at the University of KwaZulu Natal and it's entitled: **A collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology**. Since the study deals with a vulnerable group of people, I am pleading that you may be there as a counsellor in the event that any participant may require your services.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 0732099057 or my promoter Prof DJ Hlalele or Dr. FP Khanare on Tel: 031-2603858.

Thank you very much in anticipation

S.I. Mbambo

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BA, PGCE, BEd. Hons, M.Ed. (Summa Cum Laude) Educational Psychology, PhD Candidate,  
Promoters: Prof D J Hlalele and Dr. F P Khanare.



## **Appendix N: Questions to be asked for collage constructions (The learners)**

1. What are some of the challenges that are experienced by learners at home that negatively impacts on their learning?
2. What are some of the challenges that are experienced by learners at school that negatively impacts on their learning?
3. What are some of the challenges that are experienced by learners in the community that negatively impacts on their learning?
4. How do these challenges impact on the learning progress?
5. What things have been done that show support to learners to support their learning and by who?
6. What are some of the things that you think can be placed to support learning for those learners who experiences these challenges?

## **Appendix O: Questions to be asked in the Focus Group Discussions (Teachers)**

1. Are you informed about the vulnerable learners at your school?
2. Are you aware of the existence of such learners and their number in your school /class?
3. What kind of behavior or challenges do you experience from such learners?
4. What / how is their academic performance?
5. Have you ever been trained on how to assist such learners respectively?
6. How do you normally do to deal with their learning challenges in class to offer support?
7. What is your general feeling about this matter?

## **Questions to be asked in the Focus Group Discussions (Parents, Nurse, Social Worker and Police officer)**

1. Are you informed about the concept of vulnerable learners in the X school?
2. They experience numerous challenges as indicated, how do you as Nurses, Social Workers and SAPS assist them?
3. How do you think these learners may be further supported for their learning to be sustained? this includes their social problems, psychological problems and learning problems?

## **Questions to be asked in the Focus Group Discussions (Traditional healers and Priests)**

1. Are you informed about the concept of vulnerable learners in the X school?
2. They experience numerous challenges as indicated, how do you think the Traditional healers and Priests can assist them?
3. How do you think learners can be assisted or supported in order to sustain their learning? this includes their social problems, psychological problems and learning problems?

## Appendix P: Focus Group Discussion Schedule

**OBJECTIVE 1: What is the current situation on enhancing learning for vulnerable learners in the community?**

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
1.1. Are you informed about the vulnerable learners at your school?	
1.2. Are there any program that your community has that supports enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in your community?	
1.3. Do feel there should be more that is done to support learning for vulnerable learners in your community?	
1.4. As a stakeholder in the community what initiatives have you taken to enhance learning for vulnerable learners in your community?	
1.5. What else would you like to say about sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in your community?	
1.6. What would it take to support learning for vulnerable learners in the community?	
1.7. How do you feel about the current situation about learning for vulnerable learners in the community?	

**OBJECTIVE 2. What is the need for a collaborative framework in enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**

2.1. Do you think there is a need for sustaining learning for vulnerable learners in your community?	
2.2. Do you feel the current initiatives in your community are impactful on sustaining learning for vulnerable learners?	
2.3. How do you think they may be made to be effective?	
2.4. Do feel that as a community we put much efforts in sustaining learning for vulnerable learners?	
2.6. Do you think that unstained learning will have any impact on the community in the future?	
2.6. What else would you like to say about the need for a collaborative framework in enhancing sustainable learning in your community?	

**OBJECTIVE 3: What challenges could be presented against the collaborative framework to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**

5.1. What would be some of the things that would disrupt the operationalization of a collaborative framework on sustaining learning	
5.2. What do you think we can do as a community to prevent the disruption of the operationalization of the framework?	
5.3. How do you think we could overcome the challenges to the operationalization of the framework?	
5.4. What else could you say about the challenges against the operationalization of the framework?	

**OBJECTIVE 4: How can we through a collaborative framework enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology?**

4.1. What can be done to sustain learning for vulnerable learners in the community?	
4.2. How can the current efforts and initiatives on sustaining learning for vulnerable learners be made functional?	
4.3. Do you think as people we make it possible for them to ask for help?	
4.4. What more can we do to enhance learning for vulnerable learners?	
4.5. what do you think your support or lack of support would to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners?	

## Appendix Q: Meeting Schedule and Programme

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY	INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE
9 <sup>TH</sup> August 2018	10H00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalising the research plan, the meeting dates, venue and times.</li> <li>Distributing the research plan</li> </ul>	Research Team-One (The learners) Research Team- Two (The Adults)  The Researcher
August 2018	14:30	Discussing the forms of vulnerabilities faced by learners in the rural ecologies, as well as the current forms of care and support that are already in place then putting those into collages and later interpreting the collages.	Research Team-One (The learners)
August 2018	17:30	Discussing the forms of vulnerabilities faced by learners in rural ecologies as well as the forms of care and support that are already in place.	Research Team- Two (The Adults)
August 2018	14:30	Discussing and placing in collages the reasons for having a collaborative framework, the elements which are crucial as well as the threats that may hinder the collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.	Research Team-One (The learners)
August 2018	18:00	Discussing the reasons for having a collaborative framework, the elements which are crucial as well as those that hinder the collaborative framework for enhancing sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in a rural ecology.	Research Team- Two (The Adults)
August 2018	16:00	Developing the proposed framework	The Whole research Team
August 2018- September 2018	Not Specified	Field testing the Framework	Grade 5 learners
January 2019	17:00	Reflection and finalization of the framework	The Whole research Team
6 March 2019 (End of research project)	17:30	Debriefing on the research project	The researcher

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Introduction of team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Opening, welcoming and prayer.</li> <li>✚ Introductions</li> <li>✚ Purpose of the study</li> <li>✚ Sharing of plan and responsibilities</li> <li>✚ Date of next meeting</li> <li>✚ Closure</li> </ul>	Researcher and team members
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Opening, welcoming and prayer.</li> <li>✚ Workshop on collage construction</li> <li>✚ Distribution of material.</li> <li>✚ Construction of collages.</li> <li>✚ Transcription of collages</li> </ul>	Researcher, participating learners
<p>Briefing of all other participants.</p> <p>Reflection and Discussion of way-forward</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Opening, welcoming and prayer.</li> <li>✚ Briefing of all other participants on transcribed data that transpired from collages.</li> </ul> <p><u>Focus Group Discussion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Discussion of the main challenges</li> </ul>	<p>The researcher</p> <p>All participating members</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Discussion of the interventions towards sustaining learning for vulnerable learners.</li> <li>✚ Way forward guided by an operational plan.</li> </ul>	
<p>Launching of the collaborated framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Opening, welcoming and prayer.</li> <li>✚ Briefing on what was discussed on the last meeting.</li> <li>✚ Discussion of the different roles played by different stakeholders towards sustaining learning for vulnerable learners.</li> <li>✚ Outlining the strategies that are used and raised by the various stakeholders to support and assist vulnerable learners to sustain their learning.</li> </ul>	<p>The researcher and all the participants</p>

## Appendix R: Sample of Thematically Analysed Transcripts

Data Analysis: Thematic coding and categorising of themes and patterns		
THE CRUCIAL RUDIMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK		
 = Positive personality traits  = Conducive conditions		
Co- researchers' quotations:	Coding	Patterns
<b>Mrs-Bee:</b> <i>“Working with someone you trust and that you are certain that they would do what they are expected to do puts you at ease and you know that the initiative is made up of people who take the goals of the initiative at heart”.</i>	<b>Trust</b>  <i>you are certain that they would do what they are expected to do puts you at ease</i>  <i>take the goals of the initiative at heart”.</i>	<u>Positive personality traits</u>  <i>trust</i>  <u>Conducive conditions</u> <i>you are certain that they would do what they are expected to do puts you at ease</i>  <i>take the goals of the initiative at heart”.</i>
<b>Mother- Theresa:</b> <i>“Having a clear stated and shared goal will further ensure that everyone is committed on the activities that are being put into practice within the coalition and for the benefit of the organisation”.</i>	<b>clear stated and shared goal</b>  <b>committed</b>	<u>Positive personality traits</u>  <b>committed</b>  <u>Conducive conditions</u> <b>clear stated and shared goal</b>
<b>Mhlengikazi:</b> <i>“This kind of coalition needs someone who is trustworthy, who the vulnerable learners as well as the members of the coalition can trust”</i>	<b>-Trustworthy</b>  <b>-Trust</b>	<u>Positive personality traits</u>  <b>-Trustworthy</b>  <b>-Trust</b>  <u>Conducive conditions</u>
<b>Miss X:</b> <i>“Everyone contributes to the success of</i>	<b>“Everyone contributes to the success</b>	<u>Positive personality traits</u>  <u>Conducive conditions</u>



<p>the group and you don't get lazy people who just wants to belong to the group for their own silly reason" [sighs].</p>	<p><b>for their own silly reason"</b></p>	<p><b>"Everyone contributes to the success</b></p> <p><b>for their own silly reason</b></p>
<p><b>Mrs-Bee</b>-said: "All the members in our coalition should have <b>equal power</b> regardless of their communal status in order for our initiative to be a success".</p>	<p><b>- equal power</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>- equal power</b></p>
<p><b>Candy</b>, explained: "More so since the <b>partners</b> in our coalition are from all walks of life [pauses], I mean ... we have people such as teachers, a priest, learners, police officer, Me... it is important that <b>we all feel as equals</b> so that we will contribute well in the <b>partnership</b>".</p>	<p><b>- partners</b></p> <p><b>-we all feel as equals</b></p> <p><b>- partnership</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>- partners</b></p> <p><b>-we all feel as equals</b></p> <p><b>- partnership</b></p>
<p><b>Candy</b>: "The collaborators should be individuals who are <b>committed</b> to the group, so if there are challenges within the group someone that <b>won't give up easily</b>".</p>	<p><b>-Committed</b></p> <p><b>-Won't give up easily-</b></p> <p><b>Persistent</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>-Committed</b></p> <p><b>-Won't give up easily-</b></p> <p><b>Persistent</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p><b>Mother- Theresa</b>: When the members of the partnership are <b>consistent</b> in what they do they that would create</p>	<p><b>Consistent</b></p> <p><b>accountability</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>Accountability</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>

<p><b>accountability</b> for the partnership not just for themselves but for the vulnerable learners who might be interested in making use of the framework”.</p>		<p><b>Consistent</b></p>
<p><b>Mrs Bee:</b> “When people do not need to follow around to ensure they keep the end of their bargain, makes being in the coalition to be so much blissfulness”.</p>	<p>-not need to followed around to ensure they keep</p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p>-not need to followed around to ensure they keep</p>
<p><b>Mhlengikazi:</b> “When the members are consistent in their, that practices will also provide an opportunity for the parties to see if they are really doing their roles and thus moving forward towards attaining their coalition goal”.</p>	<p><b>Consistency</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>Consistency</b></p>
<p><b>Mr-Thwala</b> also explained that: “Ensuring that all members feel equal and that they are equal will allow them to <b>have a say in the decision-making</b> process, hence they will <b>all feel important</b> and want to fully to contribute to the endeavour”.</p>	<p>- <b>Have a say in the decision-making</b></p> <p>- <b>all feel important</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p>- <b>Have a say in the decision-making</b></p> <p>- <b>all feel important</b></p>
<p><b>Mhlengikazi:</b> “Having a <b>shared or a common goal</b></p>	<p><b>shared or a common goal</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p>

<p>will ensure that the individuals within the initiation are kept focused on attaining that particular goal. Furthermore, this will make it easier to reach the goal as their responsibilities will be towards achieving <b>the goal will be equally shared</b>".</p>	<p><b>the goal will be equally shared</b>".</p>	<p><u>Conducive conditions</u> -shared or a common goal</p> <p>-The goal will be equally shared".</p>
<p><b>Candy</b> added that: "Yes even the sponsors who might be interested in funding the project, might see it is as <b>worthwhile</b> project to sponsor, not just a fly by night initiative, that is interested in making money at the expense of the vulnerable, like most community organisations"</p>	<p><b>Worthwhile</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>Worthwhile</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p>In support, <b>Miss- Bee</b> explained: "The coalition, needs individuals who are <b>companionate</b>, who won't be <b>part of the group</b> just to gain something for themselves, but they should <b>genuinely</b> want to assist the vulnerable learner <b>without gaining anything in return</b>"</p>	<p><b>-companionate</b></p> <p><b>- part of the group- (team player)</b></p> <p><b>- genuinely</b></p> <p><b>- without gaining anything in returning (Sincere and thoughtful of others)</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>-companionate</b></p> <p><b>- part of the group- (team player)</b></p> <p><b>- genuinely</b></p> <p><b>- without gaining anything in returning (Sincere and thoughtful of others)</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>

<p><b>Soup- Lady:</b> Most definitely...[pauses] it would mean various stakeholders trust one another and that they deliver what they promised without anyone keeping tabs on them or anyone being worried that they will deliver what they promised”.</p>	<p><b>-various stakeholders trust one another and that they deliver what they promised without anyone keeping tabs</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p>-various stakeholders trust one another and that they deliver what they promised without anyone keeping tabs</p>
<p>“Of course[pauses] they need to be able to <b>empathise</b> with another human being, so they can help them with an <b>understanding</b> of their adverse situation, even if they have not been in that situation themselves” added <b>Mother- Theresa.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empathise</li> <li>- understanding</li> </ul>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p>-Empathise -understanding</p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p><b>Mfundisi:</b> also added that: There <b>should be peace amongst the parties</b> [Pauses]. I mean they should get along with one another not to necessary mean that, they must be friends, but they need to have a <b>good working relationship</b> for the purpose of the endeavour.</p>	<p><b>- be peace amongst the parties</b></p> <p><b>-good working relationship</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p>- be peace amongst the parties</p> <p>-good working relationship</p>
<p><b>Sun-shine:</b> “I mean like...[sighs] when a</p>	<p><b>approachable and helpful</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>approachable and helpful</b></p>



<p>vulnerable learner approaches a member of a coalition on Monday, that member might be <b>approachable and helpful</b>. But when she comes for help another day, she finds a member who is grumpy, unhelpful and unapproachable”</p>		<p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p>Concomitantly <b>Mhlengikazi</b> explained that: “That positive working relationship mentioned by the Priest will only be created by members being <b>respectful</b> to one another. and they should also accept that everyone is different and thus embrace each other’s diversities by embracing one another even if they are different from each other”.</p>	<p><b>-respectful</b></p> <p><b>-accept that everyone is different and thus embrace each other’s diversities</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>-respectful</b></p> <p><b>-accept that everyone is different and thus embrace each other’s diversities</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p><b>Mhlengikazi:</b>“Having a <b>shared or a common goal</b> will ensure that the individuals within the initiation are kept focused on attaining that particular goal. Furthermore, this will make it easier to reach the goal as their responsibilities will be</p>	<p><b>shared or a common goal</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>Shared or a common goal</b></p>

<p>towards achieving the goal will be equally shared”.</p>		
<p><b>Gogo:</b> “Yes... [ pauses] just because you have a better position in the community, that <b>doesn’t mean you must rule us</b> here, as those are the kind of things that ruin most community partnerships which involve a <b>variety of stakeholders</b>”.</p>	<p><b>-doesn’t mean you must rule us</b></p> <p><b>-variety of stakeholders</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>-doesn’t mean you must rule us</b></p> <p><b>-variety of stakeholders</b></p>
<p><b>Mhlengikazi:</b> “Yes we get it! <b>We are all equal here</b>... [ with a bit of annoyance], now can we please move on...”</p>	<p><b>-We are all equal here</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>-We are all equal here</b></p>
<p>Concurrently, <b>Miss X</b> said that: “That good working relationship will be created by parties <b>understanding</b> one another and being <b>trustworthy</b>.... If they promised them to go to do something, they should do it and <b>not make excuses</b>”.</p>	<p><b>- understanding</b></p> <p><b>- trustworthy</b></p> <p><b>- not make excuses (committed and dedicated)</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><b>- understanding</b></p> <p><b>- trustworthy</b></p> <p><b>- not make excuses (committed and dedicated)</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p><b>Mr Thwala</b> also explained that: “Ensuring that all <b>members feel equal</b> and that they are equal will allow them to have a say in the decision-making process, hence they will all feel important and want to fully to contribute to the endeavour”.</p>	<p><b>- members feel equal</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>- members feel equal</b></p>

<p><b>Uncle-Sam</b> elaborated: “I would say the Three T’s should exist” [ pauses] The one T- stands for trust as the members within the partnership should trust one another. The second T stands for <i>trustworthy</i> as they also need to be trust worthy themselves. Lastly, the third T stands for <i>transparency</i> as I believe there should be transparency amongst the stakeholders and no hidden agendas as that would destroy the organisation.</p>	<p><i>-trustworthy</i></p> <p><i>-transparency</i></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><i>-trustworthy</i></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u> - members feel equal</p> <p><i>Transparency</i></p>
<p>Other learners are vulnerable because at school they are bullied, while in other cases the language acts as barrier to learning and eventually results in the impacted learners being vulnerable[pauses] or...physical or... mentally. All in all, learner vulnerability is fairly vast amongst learners and it all impacts negatively on the learning process.”</p>		
<p><b>Mother-Theresa</b> also asserted that: “Individuals who opt to belong to the</p>	<p><i>-dedicated</i></p> <p><i>- committed</i></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><i>-dedicated</i></p>

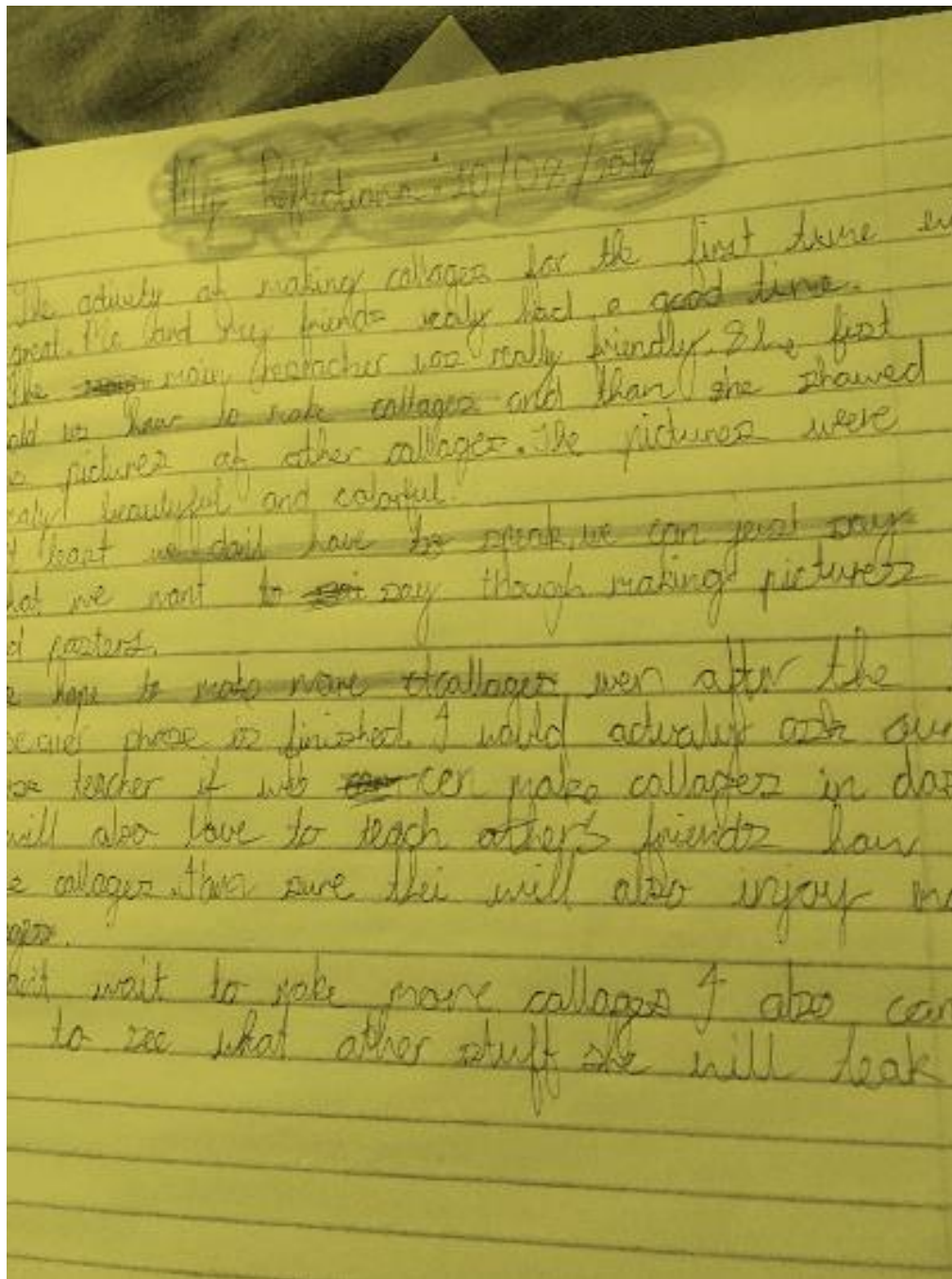
<p>partnership should also be <b>committed</b> to the organization. While they are also <b>dedicated</b> in participating in the activities as well the objectives of the group”.</p>		<p>- <b>committed</b></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p>
<p>In addition, <b>Mr. Thwala</b> added that: “The members should <b>complement</b> one another but <b>not compete</b> against each other. For an instant, if one member cannot do something within the partnership another member should help without being club in to assist.”.</p>	<p><b>Complement</b></p> <p><b>not compete</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>Complement</b></p> <p><b>not compete</b></p>
<p>“The framework must <b>accommodate various forms of learner vulnerabilities</b>. [ pauses] Since, the learners who resides within the rural areas are faced with the worse forms of leaner adversities”.</p>	<p><b>accommodate various forms of learner vulnerabilities</b></p>	<p><u>Positive personality traits</u></p> <p><u>Conducive conditions</u></p> <p><b>accommodate various forms of learner vulnerabilities</b></p>

**Sub Themes:**

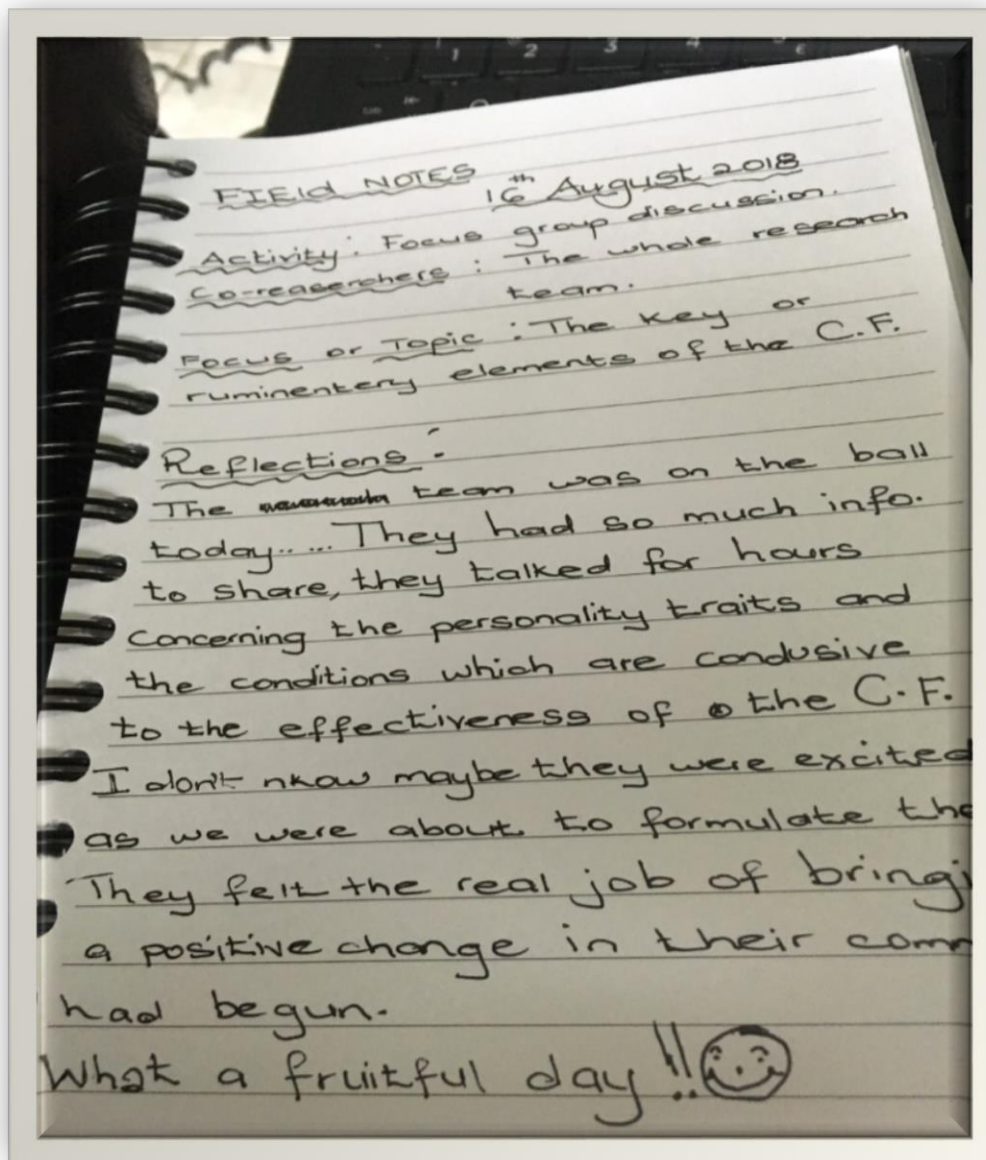
<p> =Positive personality traits</p>	<p> = Conducive conditions to collaboration</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-trustworthiness</li> <li>-loyalty</li> <li>-compassionate</li> <li>-empathetic</li> <li>- respectful</li> <li>-understanding</li> <li>-Approachable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Equal partnership</li> <li>-Trusting and positive working relationship</li> <li>- Accommodative to diversities</li> <li>-Consistency in practises</li> <li>-Shared goal and a clear vision of the coalition</li> </ul>



## Appendix S: Sample of Free- Writing Reflection

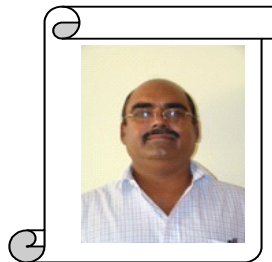


## Appendix T: Sample of Field Notes



## Appendix U: Editors' Certificate

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Brian Naidoo (BA Hons English; BA Hons TESOL; Bed Hons;  
BA- English major; Univ. Dip. In Ed. [English special]; UCT Cert. In  
Legal and Business Writing; UCT Cert. in Copy-Editing)

**SPECIALISING IN THE LANGUAGE EDITING OF THESES, DISSERTATIONS, JOURNAL  
ARTICLES, PROPOSALS, POLICIES AND PUBLICATIONS.**

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