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## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING IN RURAL ECOLOGIES

СПІЛЬНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО РОЗВИТКУ ПРОСОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ПОВЕДІНКИ ДЛЯ СТАЛОГО НАВЧАННЯ В СІЛЬСЬКИХ УМОВАХ

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose.** Disruptive behaviour by learners in school is a longstanding global concern that adversely impacts not only teaching and learning, but the overall school culture. The situation is even worse in marginalised areas such as rural settings in developing countries. Research shows that it is more effective to foster prosocial behaviour than to punish disruptive learners. Our study aims to explore strategies to promote acceptable social behaviour amongst adolescent learners in a rural school in Zimbabwe in order to enhance sustainable learning. Sustainable learning refers to educational practices that contribute to an evolving, healthy learning ecosystem in which knowledge is co-created and shared in a community.

**Methodology.** The qualitative study was underpinned by the Ubuntu philosophy as the theoretical framework. To conduct this study, we followed principles of Critical Emancipatory Research paradigm and the participatory research design. Data were generated by means of discussions and reflections with learners, teachers, and parents and were thematically analysed.

**Results.** The findings show that collaboration among parents, teachers, learners, and school management promotes prosocial behaviour. Strategies to promote sustainable learning include engaging all stakeholders in clubs, tapping into learners' curiosity and promoting good relationships between learners, teachers, and parents.

**Conclusions.** We conclude that, while there is no 'silver bullet' to promote pro-social behaviour among learners in rural ecologies, it is more likely to occur when all stakeholders in school communities work together. Therefore, we argue that if teachers and parents work collaborative, they can reinforce learning positive behaviour and values which lead to improved understanding and learning retention.

**Keywords:** collaborative approach, disruptive behaviour, pro-social behaviour, rural ecologies, sustainable learning.

**Мета.** Деструктивна поведінка учнів у школі є давнішньою глобальною проблемою, яка негативно впливає не тільки на викладання та навчання, а й на загальну шкільну культуру. Ситуація ще гірша в маргіналізованих районах, таких як сільські місцевості в країнах, що розвиваються. Дослідження показують, що ефективніше сприяти просоціальній поведінці, ніж карати учнів, які порушують дисципліну. Наше дослідження має на меті дослідити стратегії сприяння прийнятній соціальній поведінці серед підлітків-учнів у сільській школі в Зімбабве з метою покращення сталого навчання. Стале навчання – це освітні практики, які сприяють розвитку здорової екосистеми навчання, в якій знання створюються спільно та поширюються громадою.

**Методологія.** Якісне дослідження базувалося на філософії Убунту як теоретичній основі. Для проведення цього дослідження ми дотримувалися принципів парадигми критичного емансипаторного дослідження та партисипативного дизайну дослідження. Дані були отримані за допомогою дискусій та бесід з учнями, вчителями та батьками, й проаналізовані нами за темами.

**Результати.** Результати показують, що співпраця між батьками, вчителями, учнями та адміністрацією школи сприяє просоціальній поведінці. Стратегії сприяння сталому навчанню включають залучення всіх зацікавлених сторін, використання цікавості учнів та створюють хороші відносини між учнями, вчителями та батьками.

**Висновки.** Ми дійшли висновку, що, хоча не існує «чарівної палички» для сприяння просоціальній поведінці учнів у сільській місцевості, формування такої поведінки більш імовірно, коли всі зацікавлені сторони в шкільних громадах працюють разом. Тому ми стверджуємо, що якщо вчителі та батьки працюють спільно, вони можуть посилити навчання позитивній поведінці та цінностям, що приведе до кращого розуміння та запам'ятовування навчального матеріалу.

**Ключові слова:** співпраця, деструктивна поведінка, просоціальна поведінка, сільська місцевість, стале навчання.

**INTRODUCTION**

Disruptive learner behaviour in schools is cause for concern not only in Zimbabwe, the site of this study, but worldwide. Jung and Schröder-Abé (2019) define prosocial

behaviour as any positive action that is conducted on one's own accord which has the potential to engage and benefit other individuals in the community. This implies that such behaviour has both short- and long-term benefits for learners and advances sustainable learning.

Sibanda and Mabhena (2017) describe disruptive behaviour amongst adolescent learners as behaviour that deviates from expected norms and disrupts the order and harmony of the school. It also impinges on the rights of other learners and teachers to enjoy a healthy, safe environment based on mutual respect.

Disruptive behaviour is thus of concern to teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in rural and urban settings (Chikwature et al., 2016; Närhia et al., 2017). Such behaviour is not limited to the classroom but includes conduct in the school environment that negatively impacts teaching and learning. Internationally, the ban on corporal punishment has resulted in an increase in different types of disruptive behaviour in schools (Närhia et al., 2017; Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019; Van der Graaff et al., 2017).

Violent and aggressive behaviour seems to be on the rise in all social environments, with schools not exempt from this scourge (Wu et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017). Sustainable learning is impossible in disruptive, discordant environments (Michelsen & Fischer, 2017; Lunga, 2020). It is against this background that this study aimed to enable teachers, parents, and learners in a rural setting to take collaborative action to reduce disruptive behaviour, not by punishing it, but by introducing activities and policies to encourage pro-social alternatives.

A drive to enhance pro-social behaviour should target all learners, not only those exhibiting unruly behaviour. Adolescent learners are in a difficult phase of development where they are trying to find their identity and often do so by challenging authority and accepted norms. Positive psychology (Mares, 2017) focuses on enhancing positive behaviour rather than punishing problematic conduct among learners. Thus, promoting prosocial behaviour can be viewed as an optimal strategy to reduce learner misbehaviour, while at the same time improving mental health and resilience (Jones et al., 2017; Spataro et al., 2020).

From this perspective, schools should embrace proactive ways of developing and sustaining constructive patterns of behaviour and interaction, rather than simply adopting measures to handle disruptive behaviour. Social-emotional learning (SEL) emphasises that individuals have the capability to learn and harness a set of social, emotional, and related skills, attitudes, behaviour, and values (Ramirez et al., 2021; Gregory & Fergus, 2017), which creates more equitable learning environments for all learners (Jones et al., 2017; Jagers et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2018). This suggests that what the learner experiences in school lays the foundation for the development of a sense of identity and self-worth to foster pro-social behaviour.

Prosocial behaviour increases the likelihood of generating mutual benefits and synchronisation of interpersonal or social relationships that protect an individual's identity, creativity, and initiative in the community (Mares, 2017). It helps learners to direct their thoughts, feelings, and actions to empower them to make the most of current and future learning opportunities, ultimately enabling them to improve their quality of life; thus, the community also benefits (Van der Graaff et al., 2017). A conducive classroom climate improves learning as teachers are able to engage more with individual learners (Mares, 2017).

Moreover, prosocial behaviour among learners mitigates the negative emotional effects of stress among teachers (Wu et al., 2016; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Mares (2017) and Hoffmann et al. (2021) suggest that prosocial behaviour enhances psychological well-being, social relationships, and even physical health. It is positively linked to improved learning outcomes because it builds good relationships amongst learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders within the community (Jung and Schröder-Abé, 2019; Okereke, 2016), leading in turn to improved and supportive school climates (Hoffmann et al., 2021) and thus enhanced learner engagement and commitment to learning (Närhia et al., 2017). Chikwature, Oyedele and Ganyani (2016) and Mares (2017) observe that social support positively impacts human well-being as it reduces the risk of loneliness, use of alcohol, and depression.

Okereke (2016) highlights that teamwork is crucial in addressing unruly behaviour among learners as it creates strong partnerships among community members. Based on this understanding, this study argues for a collaborative approach to promote prosocial behaviour in rural schools and beyond. The following question therefore guided our research: “What strategies do teachers, learners and parents believe can promote prosocial behaviour to enhance sustainable learning in rural ecologies?” We begin by outlining Ubuntu as our theoretical framework. Thereafter we explain the methodology employed, followed by discussion of the findings.

### **The Ubuntu philosophy as a framework to promote prosocial behaviour**

This study was framed by the Ubuntu philosophy that Metz (2007) and Metz and Gaie (2010) describe as a moral theory linked to humaneness, sharing, charitableness, and cooperation. It thus promotes a spirit of participatory humanism. Hutton (2011) and Metz and Gaie (2010) identify five values promoted by Ubuntu, namely, (i) survival; (ii) compassion; (iii) solidarity; (iv) respect; and (v) dignity. The absence of these values may compromise the promotion of prosocial behaviour.

These values were used in this study to enhance social interconnectedness and collaboration among all stakeholders to encourage to promote prosocial behaviour and ultimately enhance sustainable learning. This is in line with Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2015) and Mangena (2012) who suggest that African people’s success is enhanced by caring communities, rather than individual self-reliance. This section details how the social values from the Ubuntu theory could be used to promote prosocial behaviour and enhance sustainable learning.

In order to integrate the values of Ubuntu, it is important to understand social behaviour in context. Social behaviour refers to people’s activities that influence or are influenced by members of the same community (Sevillano & Olivos, 2019). It ranges from conduct that brings individuals together to anti-social behaviour that divides communities. Ubuntu has a strong connective influence and regards responsibility for community welfare is a collective endeavour.

Two pathways can be followed to promote prosocial behaviour, namely, an interactive and self-sufficient one (Spataro et al., 2020). An interactive pathway aims to achieve interpersonal accountability which is possible in small rural communities where people live in close proximity to their neighbours. It stresses people’s interconnectedness in sharing one another’s struggles and solving one another’s problems. Spataro, Calabrò and Longobardil (2020) explain that understanding a culture calls for shared meanings (cultural interpretations) and shared activities (cultural practices). The people in most rural Zimbabwean communities share a common cultural ontology.

These beliefs are passed on to children by adults in the community and include norms such as being obedient, carrying out older people's instructions, helping the poor and needy, and working for the family in order for it and the community to thrive (Jones et al., 2017; Jagers et al., 2019). This is congruent with the proverb embedded in the Ubuntu philosophy: 'it takes a village to raise a child' (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019); that is, all adults in the community have the responsibility to teach appropriate social values to children.

Two types of strategies fall under the interactive pathway, namely, anticipatory and transferral strategies. Anticipatory strategies are designed to enable teachers, parents and other stakeholders to implement measures that prevent disruptive behaviour and create a strong routine to reduce frustration (Armstrong, 2018). Thus, in order to promote prosocial behaviour, people within rural ecologies should have good working relations and collaborate for easy implementation of anticipatory strategies. Such strategies are regarded as the foundation for behaviour that enhances sustainable learning (Hoffmann et al., 2021; Laghi et al., 2018).

Examples include adopting a respectful, calm tone, and acting in a composed manner (Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019). Hoffmann et al. (2021) stress that lesson topics should be relevant to learners' needs and context in order to avoid frustration and increase their concentration. Teaching strategies should be in harmony with learning styles and activities should be pleasurable.

It is important that teachers offer learners sufficient assistance so that they focus on working towards their own success rather than disrupting teaching and learning activities, as opposed to micromanagement which breeds needy, demanding, dependent learners (Armstrong, 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021). The quality of the teacher-learner relationship is also a key factor in promoting good behaviour and sustainable learning (Laghi et al., 2018; Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019).

Närhia, Kiiskic and Savolainen (2017) note that transferral strategies engage learners in activities that enable them to concentrate on the expected behaviour. Teachers need to be aware of behaviour which signals that learners are becoming bored or disengaged and calmly implement sanctions to prevent disruptive behaviour (Armstrong, 2018). For example, peer learning can be used as a transferral strategy to enable learners to understand the importance of prosocial behaviour and encourage collaboration and teamwork. Stigmar (2016) and Carvalho and Santos (2021) note that sharing knowledge enables learners to become self-motivated and develop skills.

Good behaviour should be remarked on and celebrated (Närhia et al., 2017). Another transferral strategy entails setting tasks that must be completed immediately without any discussion (Jones et al., 2017). This allows learners to move step by step towards redirecting their unruly behaviour to one which is more socially acceptable at both school and in their community.

It enables all stakeholders to be more responsible, thereby enhancing sustainable learning. Self-sufficient pathways focus on learners' survival regardless of existing challenges (McClune, 2018). Allowing them to choose how they should behave and what they want to do is an effective and commonly used strategy to promote prosocial behaviour and increase participation in activities (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Armstrong, 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021).

This pathway is not common in rural learning ecologies. However, Van der Graaff et al. (2017) and Jagers Rivas-Drake and Borowski (2018) recommend that learners be given opportunities to make their own decisions, as this helps them to understand the

consequences of their behaviour. An Ubuntu approach positively impacts rural communities because school stakeholders' cooperation empowers, emancipates, and transforms learners to become active participants in the learning process.

Our study **aims** to explore strategies to promote acceptable social behaviour amongst adolescent learners in a rural school in Zimbabwe in order to enhance sustainable learning. We now turn to the methodological aspects of the study.

## METHODOLOGY

Our methodological choices were influenced by the critical emancipatory research (CER) paradigm. Thus, a qualitative approach was adopted that enabled parents, community members and learners to collaborate to think critically about ways of fostering and promoting prosocial behaviour in rural schools. The participants themselves generated strategies that they felt would develop prosocial behaviour and enhance sustainable learning in rural ecologies.

One secondary school was chosen as the research site because the first author observed that, amongst the five secondary schools within the cluster, it had the highest number of children of school-going age who were not attending school. A high rate of disruptive behaviour was also observed among learners in this rural school. Moreover, this was the only fully day school in the area, as the other four have a combination of boarding and day facilities.

An increasing number of girls between the ages of 15 and 20 with children was noted within this community. Three teachers volunteered to participate in the study (two Form Three teachers and one who was the head of the disciplinary committee) as well as three learners (two females and one male) and three parents. Form Three is equivalent to Grade 10 in South Africa.

The table below presents the participants' biographical details.

**Table 1**

*Participants' biographical details*

Code	Gender	Age group	Ethnic group	Designation	Level of education
T1	M	25-35	Shona	Class teacher	B.Ed. student
T2	M	45+	Kalanga	Class teacher	Diploma in Education
T3	F	25-35	Ndebele	Senior teacher	M.Ed. student
P1	M	35-45	Ndebele	Parent	O-level
P2	F	45+	Ndebele	Parent	Form 2
P3	F	35-45	Kalanga	Parent	O-level
L1	F	15-20	Kalanga	Learner	Form 3
L2	F	15-20	Kalanga	Learner	Form 3
L3	M	15-20	Ndebele	Learner	Form 3

The three-member academic research team's biographical details are set out in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Academic research team’s biographical details*

Codes	Gender	Age group	Ethnic group	Designation	Level of education
R	M	35-45	Shona	Researcher	PhD
RS	F	45+	Zulu	Research Supervisor	PhD
RS	F	45+	English	Research Supervisor	PhD

We met every four weeks to discuss how to address disruptive behaviour and promote prosocial behaviour amongst learners. Data were generated by means of group discussions which were recorded and transcribed, and parents, teachers and learners’ written reflections. We were aware of the power relations at play among parents, teachers and learners, and the first meeting brought all the participants together to foster a trusting relationship.

The purpose of the study and the importance of prosocial behaviour were also discussed at this meeting. Thereafter, each group had three separate meetings, making a total of ten meetings. It was agreed that all the meetings would be held at the school to reduce travel costs, but at times which did not disrupt lessons.

The discussions were unstructured and revolved around the question, “*How can we promote prosocial behaviour among learners at our school and in the community to enhance sustainable learning?*”. Each group meeting lasted 45 minutes. A final meeting was held where all the participants came together to discuss the themes that the first author drew from each group.

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data that was generated by the research participants (Clarke & Braun, 2017). We applied Clarke and Braun’s (2017) six steps, namely, familiarising ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report on the findings. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe and the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (Approval number: HSS/1899/018D).

The researchers adhered to the Belmont principles of justice, respect for anonymity and confidentiality, voluntary participation and beneficence (Anabo et al., 2019). Trustworthiness was established by using methodological triangulation through recorded and transcribed discussions and written reflections that were produced by the participants at home (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

The findings, data, interpretation, and conclusions were shared with the participants to enable them to clarify their intentions, correct errors, and provide additional information (Moon et al., 2016).

**RESULTS**

The findings are presented in line with the themes that emerged and are substantiated with verbatim extracts (translated from isiNdebele to English). The codes used for participants are: P1-P3 for parents, L1-L3 for learners and T1-T3 for teachers. The themes explain how the participants understood the concept of prosocial behaviour and their ideas on how to promote it within rural school contexts.

**Theme 1:****Pro-social behaviour in rural ecologies**

While the participants agreed on the need to promote prosocial behaviour among learners, they initially differed on whose responsibility it was. One parent suggested that parents' absence has a negative effect on learners' behaviour in rural schools:

*I agree with the idea that the learners should be encouraged to behave in a good manner to enhance sustainable learning ... but with the style of life it is now the duty of the teachers to teach children to behave because parents are staying away ... children are staying alone. (P2)*

Through active participation in the study, teachers, parents and learners learnt that promoting prosocial behaviour requires a collective effort:

*P2: For us to be able to encourage our children to behave in a way that is beneficial to other learners and the whole community I realise that we ought to work together.*

*T3: You know I have learnt an important lesson from this project that success in raising a child is to assist each other as teachers, parents, children themselves and all the members in the community.*

*L2: I never wanted my parents to know what I do at school, but I feel that being part of this research came as an eye opener to us as learners because I personally have seen that teachers can better assist us if they have good work connections with the parents.*

The teachers were also of the opinion that they needed the support of parents and community members:

*... prosocial behaviour should be decisively encouraged to every learner regardless of their capabilities and background ...through use of clear rules that are enforced and parental collaboration. (T3)*

*We all, as teachers, parents, and leaders in the community, need to give special attention to methods that lead to good behaviour to help all learners achieve their educational goals. (T1)*

A learner recounted how a lack of prosocial behaviour affected learning in class, and implied that learners needed to take responsibility for their behaviour:

*It can be good if learners can behave well at school because it [disruptive behaviour] disturbs us a lot; some teachers end up not teaching because of the bad behaviour of our fellow learners. (L3)*

The thinking of the parent who initially passed responsibility for learners' behaviour to teachers shifted during the meetings and she ended up supporting the idea of a collective duty:

*What I can say is that 'igugu liyadonselanwa' [something special is scrambled for] so let us be united if we want to come to a solution to the problem of our children's behaviour... (P2)*

**Theme 2:****Changed behaviour among learners**

The teachers mooted activity clubs as one of the co-operative processes that can be used in schools to promote prosocial behaviour. An activity club is a union of people who work

together to accomplish an assigned task which helps to change a particular situation faced by a specific group of people.

*... we can make use of activity clubs as a strategy to make sure that learners behave in a manner that is acceptable both at school and at home ... and this will help to enhance learning which is meaningful to learners ... hence they can use the knowledge in their entire life. We once had the 'junior call' where we could put children in groups and involve them in projects such as poultry, gardening, sewing and cookery, which could keep them busy...and it was helpful in encouraging some attributes like caring, and working together for the community...among the learners. (T3)*

One of the parents supported this idea and added that engaging learners to join clubs will limit the time available for them to misbehave:

*It is important that we have some clubs ... so that the learners do not get time to misbehave but work towards their own benefit as well as that of other learners and the community. (P2)*

In addition, one teacher's notes in her reflective journal that:

*...it is important that as teachers, we redirect the disruptive learners to other activities that are within their area strength. This will not allow the learner to have an opportunity to behave in a disruptive manner rather it can motivate him or her to learn ... (T3)*

### **Theme 3:**

#### **Potential strategy to promote prosocial behaviour**

Although it is vital that learners' curiosity is identified and respected if prosocial behaviour is to be promoted and sustainable learning is to be enhanced (Hoffmann et al., 2021), this is not a common teaching approach in rural ecologies. The parents and teachers' responses suggested that some believe that it is part of their culture for children to obey adults:

*You know if as adults we can say what these children want must be considered then we are making them to disrespect us. Remember when we grew up, we used to know that a child must not interfere or argue with an adult, so I feel let us stick to our culture. We don't want our children to twist us left, right and centre. (P3)*

However, we argue that holding onto traditional practices oppresses learners and denies them the right to be active participants in their learning. Some participants acknowledged the importance of focusing on learner interests:

*As parents and teachers, it is important that we identify the curiosities of our children. This will help in making them like school and behave well. So maybe we should try to persuade them with what they like so that we can nurture the talent they have through working together with the teachers at school. (P1)*

One teacher differed on the notion of identifying learner's curiosity, but appreciated the need to collaborate with other stakeholders in addressing this issue:

*...it is dangerous to identify and consider the interest of the learner as teacher because some learners have very wild curiosities...we need to have a plan that can assist all learners, for example, working together with parents and other learners ... (T2)*

Furthermore, learners made the following observations with regards to identifying their interests:

*...we have our own ambitions, but the problem is that teachers just put us in classes without consulting us and that affects us ... (L2)*

*In my opinion if the teachers can put us in classes based on our curiosities it can be of great assistance in making learner behave well since they will be doing something they like. (L3)*

#### **Theme 4:**

##### **Creating a good relationship with learners**

The participants suggested that good relationships amongst learners, teachers, and parents are key to the promotion of prosocial behaviour in schools. Therefore, teachers and parents should find a way of engaging with learners so that they understand one another. In responding to the question on whether good relationships can assist in promoting prosocial behaviour among learners, participants commented:

*Befriending the child can also help to reduce the learner's disruptive behaviour ...by discussing issues which have nothing to do with education ...and addressing the problems faced by the learners. (P3)*

*Good teacher/parent-learner relations are very important because they ensure cooperation for resource mobilisation and ... help in motivation and curbing of indiscipline. (T1)*

*It will break down the 'them-against-us' attitudes from the three parties involved. Energy will be focused on one goal that is of teaching and educating the learner concerned. (T3)*

*and ...to a greater extent a good parent/teacher-learner relationship can encourage good behaviour as it expands participation of the learners in their learning activities. The learner will also have a sense of belonging to the system (T2)*

While the parents and teachers agreed that good relationships are central in promoting prosocial behaviour, learners had different perceptions of this issue:

*Having a good relationship with teachers may cause serious problems because some teachers display bad behaviour which is copied by the learners. (L2)*

## **DISCUSSION**

This section provides a discussion of the results in relation to themes presented in the previous section. Relevant literature is drawn on to support and compare the findings.

#### **Theme 1:**

##### **Responsibility for promoting pro-social behaviour in rural ecologies**

The findings suggest that the responsibility of ensuring that learners behave well to teachers since many parents are absent for various reasons and children are left at home alone or with relatives. Although scholars such as Armstrong (2018); Laghi et al. (2018) and Jung and Schröder-Abé (2019) support this notion, the principles of *Ubuntu* stress the importance of collaboration and interrelationships in the community to come up with lasting solutions to problems (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Noel, 2016; Wood 2020).

This study aimed to bring about change in the way people think about prosocial behaviour and encourage such collaboration.

The *Ubuntu* theory emphasises collaboration to improve the lives of children and the community (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). The study's findings concur with the literature that suggests that responsibility for dealing with disruptive behaviour lies with teachers, learners and parents (Okereke, 2016; Lunga, 2020; Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019). They also highlight that these stakeholders, as well as traditional and religious leaders, play an important role in this respect in rural communities (Chidakwa et al., 2024; Mangena & Chidakwa, 2024).

The reality in rural learning ecologies is that some teachers may abandon classes where learners are disruptive. Sibanda and Mabhena (2017) note that indiscipline has caused many children to be excluded from education in Zimbabwe. Abandoning classes violates the values of compassion and solidarity which are embedded in the *Ubuntu* theory. The problem of disruptive behaviour in schools requires all stakeholders to unite and to work collaboratively for the general good of both learners and the community to encourage sustainable learning in rural ecologies.

This view is supported by Armstrong (2018) and Mares (2017) who highlight that developing prosocial behaviour among learners is the collective responsibility of all community members. The African proverb that states, 'it takes a village to raise a child' (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019) encompasses the five values of *Ubuntu* (survival; compassion; solidarity; respect; and dignity). Collaboration entails that people care about making a positive difference in other's lives through enhancing individual growth and effectiveness (Yada et al., 2020; Jäppinen & Ciussi, 2016).

The following themes present the participants' ideas on how prosocial behaviour can be fostered in rural learning ecologies.

## **Theme 2:**

### **Activity clubs may promote changed behaviour among learners**

The participants agreed that clubs can be useful in guiding learners to behave according to the school's code of conduct. Although obeying school rules is important, prosocial behaviour is much more than that; it aims to benefit other learners and the community in areas such as helping, sharing, donating, co-operating, and volunteering within the school system. In the classroom situation, prosocial behaviour has the potential to increase enthusiasm for learning and ensure that learners make positive contributions to the class and the broader social and emotional school climate (Mares, 2017; Wu et al., 2016).

The participants suggested that being part of clubs would prevent frustration and boredom and encourage learners to express their feelings in a constructive manner. This notion overlaps with the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL) (Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019) which promotes the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making amongst learners. Mutsvara (2021) notes that individuals with social-emotional skills can cope with challenges and progress academically, professionally, and socially. Social-emotional learning assists learners to develop positive self-esteem, manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, show empathy for others, and handle stress.

It is important to involve learners in activities that develop self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success. *Transferral* can also promote prosocial behaviour (Armstrong, 2018; Jones et al., 2017). Through

involvement in activity clubs, learners are redirected from behaving in a disruptive manner to concentrating on learning and helping others to learn effectively. Närhia, Kiiskic and Savolainen (2017) and Van der Graaff et al. (2017) state that prosocial behaviour can be promoted by redirecting learners and celebrating their motivational and dynamic energy.

The reflections demonstrate teachers' understanding that occupying learners in certain tasks can assist in guiding them to behave in an acceptable manner in learning ecologies. It supports the use of peer groups where they can be guided to support one another in a positive manner. Such a strategy encourages learners' sense of collectiveness and promotes the distribution of knowledge within the community (Stigmar, 2016; Carvalho & Santos, 2021).

It can thus go a long way in reshaping learner behaviour which will enhance sustainable learning. Moreover, activity clubs are an anticipatory strategy that can be used to identify learners' needs and goals, which Armstrong (2018) and Laghi et al. (2018) identify as one of the duties of teachers. This enables teachers to help learners to develop in ways that lead to the achievement of their goals. The next theme details how tapping into learners' curiosity can be helpful in promoting prosocial behaviour.

### **Theme 3:**

#### **Tapping into learners' curiosity is a potential strategy to promote prosocial behaviour**

The current situation where learners' interests are not considered in decision-making in schools indicates that parents and teachers regard learners as passive recipients of whatever is expected of them. This could negatively impact the development of prosocial behaviour. The literature supports using learners' curiosity as an anticipatory strategy to encourage them to participate in educational activities for the benefit of other learners (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Ramirez et al., 2021; Armstrong, 2018).

However, it is important that learners receive proper guidance from both teachers and parents so that their interests benefit other people in the community. Parents and teachers should work together to identify learners' curiosity and find ways to engage them in activities that will also promote the social good.

We understood these sentiments to mean that learners felt that teachers' actions are the reason why they fail to fulfil their ambitions: '*... teachers just put us in classes without consulting us and that affects us ...*' This shows that they want to take responsibility for their education and build their own future. The current education system denies them this opportunity as it groups learners according to subjects and age. We argue that the system should be designed to encourage adults to guide learners to make sound decisions regarding their interests. Such involvement would not only assist them, but the community at large.

As the data was analysed by all the members of the group, participants had the opportunity to listen to the recordings, and read the transcriptions and reflections. The teachers seemed to value the parents and learners' opinions and felt that they should be put to good use. In the community where the study was conducted learners were dropping out of school, bullying other learners, disrespecting teachers, and parents, and were involved in sexual activities, to their own and others' detriment. Participating in the study proved to be a starting point in transforming learners, parents and teachers' thinking regarding collaboration to promote prosocial behaviour among all.

**Theme 4:****Prosocial behaviour may be encouraged by creating a good relationship with learners**

Although parents and members of the public tend to assume that all teachers are of good character and instil a disposition and qualities that assist young people (Rubbi-Nunan, 2021) and make them useful members of society, the above remark suggests that teachers' behaviour is also cause for concern.

Rubbi-Nunan (2018) found that, while some South African teachers have the necessary qualifications to teach, their moral character disqualifies them because it takes more than an academic qualification to be a good teacher. It is thus important that teachers lead by example in portraying prosocial behaviour, as it then cascades to learners.

Nonetheless, the parents and teachers' views are in line with those of Laghi et al. (2018) and Jung and Schröder-Abé (2019) who state that prosocial behaviour can only be promoted in schools through good teacher-learner relationships.

The data suggest that all the participants accepted the need to change the way things are done in the school and the broader community. Hoffmann et al. (2021) suggest that effective promotion of prosocial behaviour requires teachers, parents and other stakeholders to take collective action. Good relationships can yield long-term support that enhances such behaviour which benefits learners, teachers, parents and the entire community.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This study explored the need for collaboration among all stakeholders to come up with contextually relevant strategies to promote prosocial behaviour to enhance sustainable learning in rural ecologies. We acknowledge that no prescriptive, single or common strategy can be utilised to accomplish such a goal.

The findings suggest the need to employ a collaborative approach where different stakeholders participate in identifying strategies which suit a specific setting and work best towards the development of prosocial behaviour.

Participation in this study led to changes in thinking as the participants listened to and learnt from one another. The strategies they selected included setting up activity clubs, tapping into learners' curiosity and creating a good relationship with learners. We conclude that proper implementation of these strategies could go a long way in enhancing sustainable learning.

Schools should thus create conducive environments which allow all stakeholders in the community to collaborate to find ways to promote prosocial behaviour that minimises disruptive behaviour and enhances sustainable learning.

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**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STATEMENT**

No artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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