UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GENDERING CHILDREN'S VULNERABILITY AND SCHOOLING IN THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

A thesis by publications submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Doctoral Degree (PhD) Social Justice Education

By:

NCAMSILE DAPHNE MOTSA

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Supervisor: Professor Pholoho Morojele

Durban (Edgewood Campus)

DECLARATION

I, Miss Ncamsile Daphne Motsa, declare as follows:

1. That the thesis titled, "***Gendering Children's Vulnerability and Schooling in the Kingdom of Eswatini"*** and the work described in this thesis has not been submitted to UKZN or any other tertiary institution for purposes of obtaining an academic qualification, whether by myself or any other party.

2. **That my contribution to the project was as follows:**
   Ncamsile was the student/researcher who undertook the research. She conceptualised the entire study with the guidance of the supervisor, conducted data collection and did data transcription and analysis. Ncamsile also, wrote the review sections of this study, framed the articles, prepared the manuscripts and was also responsible for the writing up of the critical aspects of the manuscripts. She further attended to the corrections and revisions for each manuscript as suggested by the targeted journals.

3. **That the contributions of my supervisor, Professor Pholoho Morojele were as follows:** Professor Pholoho Morojele provided intellectual insights in conceptualising the study and approved the conceptualising of each manuscript. He provided the intellectual input and designs and further approved the protocols to be followed for each manuscript. Professor Morojele also did proof reading of the manuscripts and provided guidance with the revisions.

4. **I further declare that,** in order not to tamper with published material and the specifications of the different journals, all pictures used in the dissertation have been listed as figures in the table of contents. This is despite that in some publications they are labelled as pictures or images.

Signed: _____   **Date** _____

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa

Student Number: 214 581 500

_____

Supervisor: Professor Pholoho Justice Morojele

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ABSTRACT

The thesis comprises of eight published articles, whose collective aim was to explore how vulnerable children as a social group in three rural primary schools in Eswatini experience school, and the ways in which they make meaning of gender. The aim was to understand the implication of these on their social welfare, gender equality, their quality of education and experiences of school. The study was informed by children's geographies and the new sociology of childhood studies. Social constructionism was then adopted as a paradigm through which to comprehend the vulnerable children's schooling experiences and gender constructions. The study adopted a qualitative narrative approach as its methodology and elicited narratives from the vulnerable children and their teachers. The study was conducted in three primary schools located in the rural areas of Eswatini. Purposive sampling was used to select the thirty children (ten from each participating school) who participated in the study and their ages ranged between 11- 16 years, and were in the 6th grade. To collect data from these participants, semi-structured questions in individual and focus group interviews were utilised. A participatory research method in which participants used photo-voice to explore their spaces and places in the school contexts was also used. Random sampling was then used in selecting the teachers who participated in the study. These were nine teachers, (three from each school) who were aged between 24 and 60 years. To generate data from the teachers, questionnaires and in-depth individual interviews were used.

The study worked from the premise that the vulnerable boys' and girls' schooling experiences and meaning making of gender is socially constructed. Culture, societal discourses and the social relationships they had in the society and the schools not only form a basis for their way of constructing reality, but they also have an impact on the way they engage with reality. Indeed, the study found an intricate interchange of culture, tradition, and societal discourses in the way the vulnerable boys and girls constructed gender and also experienced school. This was in ways that presented the vulnerable children with negative schooling experiences and compromised efforts towards inclusivity and gender equitable school spaces. Poverty was found to act as a contextual site for the vulnerable boys' and girls' experience of school and gender constructions, in ways that aggravated the gendered inequalities against both the vulnerable boys and girls in these contexts. The study postulates that the vulnerable children of Eswatini have challenges that affect their experience of school. In the school contexts they are

discriminated against by both insensitive teachers and learners. In the home contexts again, these children have greater responsibilities that compete with their study time. This study demonstrates that schools are also discursive sites for the enactment of troubling gender discourses and performances developed in the communities in ways that compromise efforts for inclusivity and gender equitable school spaces.

The vulnerable children's constructions of gender were found to be heavily reliant on the wider societal discourses as also socialised by teachers. Such discourses were imbedded in patriarchal structures and systems that upheld and re-inscribed inequalities between vulnerable boys and girls and by extension within the social groups- boys and girls. The boys' vulnerability excluded them from hegemonic masculinities and this predisposed them to discrimination by other learners in the school contexts, and also in ways that emasculated them. The vulnerable girls also constructed their femininities in ways that re-affirmed the gendered inequalities against them. The vulnerable boys and girls were found to use their agency to navigate such gendered spaces but this was unfortunately in ways that further relegated them to subdual. For example, trying to affirm their masculinities the boys engaged in heterosexual relationships which proved to be challenging for them because they could not provide for the girls within these relationships. Similarly, by adopting powerful femininities the girls exposed themselves to gender based violence, STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) and teenage pregnancies.

Despite these challenges and the apprehension that came with their future aspirations, the vulnerable boys and girls used their individual resilience to navigate the school spaces that sought to stifle their educational aspirations. These children had dreams for the future through education and their individual resilience proved inadequate to ensure that they attain to what they aspired. For example; some of the children aspired to be doctors, teachers and nurses. The support of the society therefore was found to be imperative in these children's present and future welfare. The study argues that, schools can be the best intervention sites for the deconstruction of gender discourses from the wider societies. It recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training, the community and the schools should make a collaborative and coordinated effort to ensure that vulnerable children have positive schooling experiences. The Ministry of Education and Training also needs to equip teachers with skills on how to work with vulnerable children and to be inclusive in their pedagogic practises. Teachers, on the other hand, ought to change their perceptions and attitudes towards vulnerable children in favour of inclusivity and equality for all children.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY CANDIDATE

Published Papers

1. **Motsa, N. D.** & Morojele, P. J. (2016). Vulnerability and Schooling in Swaziland. *Educational Research for Social Change.* 5(2), 35-51.

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3. **Motsa, N. D.** & Morojele, P. J. (2017). Vulnerable Children Speak Out. Voices from One Rural School in Swaziland. *Gender and Behaviour*, *15*(1), 8086-8104.

4. **Motsa, N. D.** & Morojele, P. J. (2017). Narratives of Resilience among Learners in a Rural Primary School in Swaziland. *Education as Change*, *21*(1), 155-173.

5. **Motsa, N. D.** & Morojele, P. J. (2018). High Educational Aspirations amidst challenging situations. *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *53*(5), 797-811. 6. **Motsa, N. D.** (2018). Vulnerable Femininities: Implications for Rural Girls'

   Schooling Experiences in Femininities Through Teachers' Voices: Implications on Gender Equitable Schooling for Vulnerable Children from Three Primary Schools in Swaziland. *Educational Research for Social Change*, *7*(2), 102-116.

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8. **Motsa, N. D.** & Morojele, P. J. (2019). Vulnerable Masculinities: Implications on Gender Socialisation in Three Rural Primary Schools in Swaziland. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 9*(1), a580. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.V9i1.580.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING A STUDY OF GENDER AND VULNERABILITY IN ESWATINI
SCHOOLS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The thesis comprises of eight published articles whose collective aim was to explore how
vulnerable girls and boys, as a social group, in three rural primary schools in Eswatini (Swaziland)
experience school. It further sought to comprehend the nexus between gender, childhood and
vulnerability, and how gender dynamics play out in the schooling experiences of these young boys
and girls. The purpose was to find out what conclusions could be drawn from these, in order to
enhance the quality of the boys' and girls' schooling experiences, both socially and academically.

The study was informed by children's geographies and the new sociology of childhood studies.
Social constructionism was adopted as a paradigm through which to comprehend the vulnerable
children's schooling experiences and meaning making of gender. As its methodology, the study
used the qualitative narrative inquiry. Purposive sampling was used to select the children who were
involved in the study. These were 30 vulnerable children (ten from each of the targeted schools),
fifteen boys and fifteen girls whose ages ranged from 11to16 years. The study also involved nine
teachers of these children (three from each school) who were randomly sampled and whose ages
ranged from 24 to 60 years. By involving the teachers, the study wanted to understand how their
(the teachers') subjective constructions of gender influenced the vulnerable boys' and girls' gender
constructions and performances. A participatory research method photo voice and individual and
focus group interviews were utilised to collect data from the child participants. For the teachers,
questionnaires and individual interviews were used.

This chapter begins by describing Eswatini as the study context. It also presents the policy context
of the study, the rationale and the objectives. Lastly it attempts to show how the eight articles have
been linked together to make one complete study.

Since June, 2018 the country formerly known as Swaziland adopted a new name "Eswatini". Eswatini has since then been used as
an official name of the country. It is for that reason therefore that whilst Swaziland appears on the published articles (most of which
were published before the change), "Eswatini" is used in the other chapters.

1.1 KINGDOM OF ESWATINI: THE STUDY CONTEXT

1.1.1 Geographical and Social Context

The Kingdom of Eswatini, is a small country in Southern Africa, covering a region of 17 363 km^2 with a total population of about 1.1 million people (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2017). Eswatini is also one of the world's last absolute monarchies unified by culture and has enjoyed peace and stability since its independence from Britain in 1968. With its beautiful landscape and scenery, Eswatini is divided into four regions; Lubombo, Manzini, Hhohho and Shiselweni. The study was conducted in three of the four regions - Lubombo, Manzini and the Hhohho region. Lubombo is located in the low-veld, Manzini in the middle-veld and Hhohho in the highveld of the country. The different geographical regions of the country make it prone to experience different and diverse climatic conditions. Whilst the high-veld is mountainous, cold and experiences occasional rainfall, the Lubombo with its plain terrain is drier, hotter and rarely experiences rainfall. Manzini, on the other hand, is mild and has moderate temperatures throughout the year. The map below, shows the specific positions of the three schools under study within the larger geographical context of Eswatini.

Figure 1 - **The Map of Eswatini**
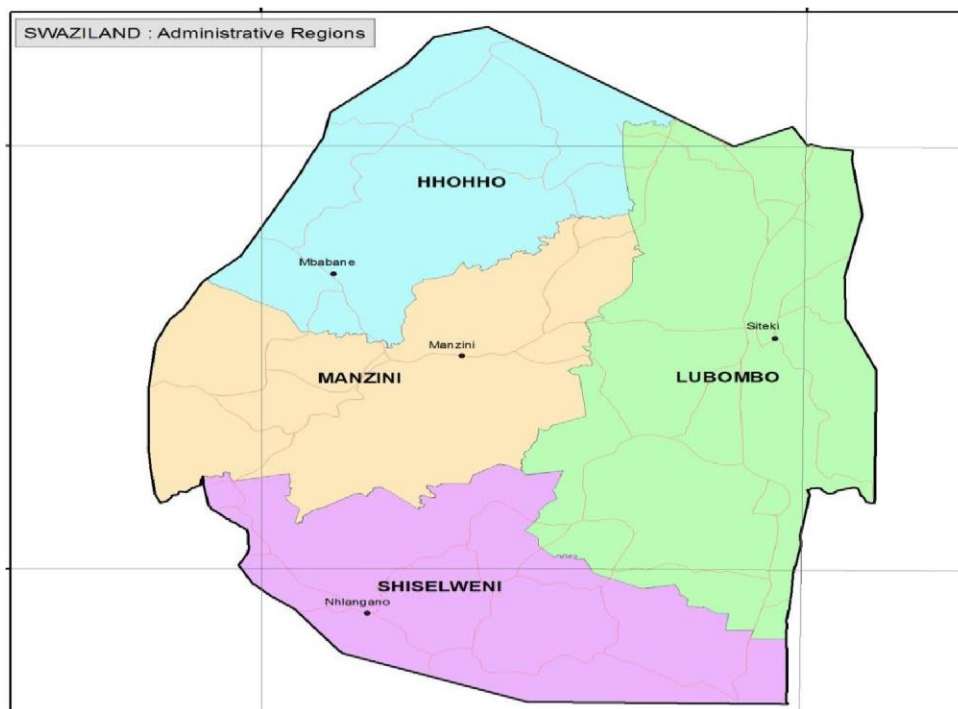
Source: S. S Vilakati. (1997, p. 3).

Muntu* primary school (a pseudonym) is located in the Lubombo region with the nearest town being Siteki. Mjikaphansi* primary school is situated in the rural areas of the Hhohho region, and Mazingela* primary school is located in the rural areas of the Manzini region, a few kilometres from the industrial site, Matsapha. The different climatic conditions of the three regions, means the people also experience life differently. For example; Lubombo being the driest region is also the hardest hit by the effects of poverty and destitution. One of the reasons being, farming in this region is almost impossible yet most Swazi people rely on farming for survival (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2017).

The people of Eswatini are well known for being generally friendly, peaceful, welcoming and respectful. Culture and Christianity have not only been used as a unifier of the Swazi nation but have also served to assert patriarchy within individual societies. It is said that King Somhlolo, meaning "the king of mysteries" who ruled Eswatini from 1815-1837, had a vision on his death bed (Kuper, 1963:5). In this dream he saw people of a strange species coming out of the sea, who were the colour of red mealies with their hair resembling the tail of cattle (Mzizi, 2005). Mzizi says, these people were carrying two things; *umculu* (the bible) and *indilinga* (the coin). In the dream, the ancestors instructed the king to warn Swazis to accept only the bible from these strange people, and make it the pillar of the Swazi nation. According to Swazi culture, when people die they turn into ancestors and these (ancestors) not only "form an integral part of the nation, [but also have] to be revered and feared" (Curle, 2016: 41). Again, any word from the ancestors is final and is never to be questioned or disregarded. For it is from them that favours are asked and if "upset, [they] can cause harm to the living" (Oluikpe, 1997: 46). Indeed, for generations the Swazi people have heeded Somhlolo's words and firmly held on to Christianity-
"the bible".

However, Christianity has in a number of ways enforced patriarchy. Gender stereotypes in Eswatini are inflexible and patriarchal attitudes continuously form bases for the Swazi people's social life (Gayman, 2011). True femaleness in these contexts is measured by how far femininities could subserviently position themselves and respect the male counterpart (Gilbert, 2015). The stability of the country too, is vested in women's respect for the males who act as heads of families, communities and the country at large. Being a woman on the other hand accords one a minor and

second class citizen position (Nxumalo, Okeke & Mammen, 2014). Subserviently positioning themselves is not only an obligation for women but a service to the nation and therefore for obvious reasons, gender equality is not a subject most Swazis are comfortable talking about. The common belief is, gender equalities would not only be against Somhlolo's words but also lead to the inevitable decay of moral standards in the country.

Considering the peaceful environment and ostensibly perfectly structured social hierarchy within the Swazi communities, one would conclude that all is well for the nation. However, HIV and AIDS has over the past years brought new challenges for the country, chief of which is a new generation of children. These are orphaned children, from low socio-economic backgrounds and those living in child headed households. According to the Swaziland Educational Vulnerability Matrix, the vicious predicament these children find themselves in, has led to a general local expression describing them as - vulnerable children (Mkhatshwa, 2017).

1.1.2 Economic Context

Each of the three schools is located in a different geographical and administrative region. Eswatini is a small country and although these schools are approximately less than 100 kilometres apart, they all have one thing in common - poverty and destitution. The diverse locations of the three schools, do not define difference and a number of similarities were observed during the study. For example; all three schools had dilapidated structures with broken windows in almost every classroom. Each of these schools reflected a picture of desolation from the wider communities on which they were located. One could also see children wearing torn uniforms, unshod and dirty. One teacher at Mazingela primary school explained that, some of the learners came to school hungry and as teachers they would share whatever food they had with them. However, most of these children were saved by the meals offered by the school through the school feeding programme (Motsa & Morojele, 2017). Until then, effective teaching and learning was a challenge in the classrooms. Looking at the poverty and desolation defining these three schools, it was imperative that I look at the economic status of Eswatini as a country within which these schools are contextualised.

To begin with, even though Eswatini has made major strides in its fight against HIV and AIDS (Mabuza & Dlamini, 2017), it has over the years failed to alleviate poverty and uphold the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG). According to the 2017 Census Report, sixty-three percent (63%) of the country's population still lives below the poverty line, on less than $1.25 a day (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2017). With the general economic situation in the country hitting hard on the average population, destitution for the vulnerable boys and girls who already live below the poverty line cannot be overemphasised. The mere fact that the Government of Eswatini is not in a position to cater for the needs of these children, one effective way to help them out of their poverty is through empowering them educationally (Akpede, Eguvbe, Akpamu et al., 2018). This involves ensuring that school spaces are both inclusive and gender sensitive in ways that would not only keep the vulnerable boys and girls in school but also provide them with quality education that would help them individually rise above their penurious life situations.

1.1.3 Education Context

The people of Eswatini value formal school education. However, socialising children along cultural and traditional beliefs has superseded formal school education. For example, notwithstanding the primary role of schools is the acquisition of literacy, for the normal Swazi people a good woman is one who has been nurtured with deep rooted respect and one who conforms to the gender norms of the Swazi society, rather than one who is educated (Nyawo & Nsibandze, 2014). Hence, Swazi cultural and tradition beliefs permeate and in most instances govern school processes (Collins & Coleman, 2008). The education system too has not been without its own problems, and these have diminished efforts for the development of education in the country. Some of these challenges are; unqualified teachers, teachers'/pupils' sexual relationships, underpaid and demotivated teachers, and dropout rates which continue to escalate each year (Mkhatshwa, 2017). Consequently, completion rate of learners in Eswatini is lower than most SADC countries. For example, whilst Botswana stands at 87% and Zambia at 72%, in Eswatini only 60% of the learner population complete school (Khumalo, 2013).

Formal school education in Eswatini starts from the 1st to the 7th Grade and takes a period of 7 years, then 5 years for secondary schooling. The rate of learners progressing from Grade 7 to Form 1 (equivalent to Grade 8) has always been low over the years (Simelane, Thwala & Mamba, 2013)

largely because of high repetition rates, teenage pregnancies and high education fees (Khumalo, 2013). Again, the Form 3 examinations (equivalent to Grade 10) which act as a bridge from Form 3 to 5 (Grade 10 to Grade 11) have also compromised much of the Swazi children's education because, failing these examinations usually spell the end of one's educational life. This is primarily because of the high expenses for repeating the class. The introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010 has increased educational chances for a number of children from low socio-economic backgrounds who have previously not been able to enrol in school. The FPE policy though has also not been without challenges, and these I discuss in Section 1.3.

1.2 THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

In an effort to establish the best educational experiences for all its children that ensures educational success, Eswatini adopted a number of international conventions and policies targeting educational experiences and gendered inequalities in the school contexts. By being a participant in the 1990 World Conference on Education for All assembled in Jomtien Thailand, Eswatini committed itself to providing basic education for all its children. This commitment was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. It was through the Dakar Framework of Education (EFA) that countries took a different yet inclusive stance by emphasising not only compulsory primary education but also one that is gender equitable, free and of good quality by 2015, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged child populations (UNESCO, 2000). By adopting these policies, the consideration was, every Swazi child should get effective and appropriate education that appreciates and attends to dissimilarities amongst learners at the same time deconstructing gendered disparities in the schools.

In September 2000 Eswatini was again a signatory of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which strengthened the EFA targets. By signing the MDGs, the country undertook to eradicate extreme poverty; achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality in all sectors of the society by 2015 (Susuman, 2017). In essence, the Jomtien Declaration, Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), accentuated and highlighted gender equality as a prerequisite for sustainable social development and eradication of poverty. Similarly, this makes gender equitable school spaces a requirement for the effective teaching and learning of the vulnerable boys and girls of Eswatini. Indeed, aligning with the state's

initiative to meet Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By adopting the SDGs, Eswatini further reaffirmed its pledge to; ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, ending poverty and also achieving gender equality in all aspects of social life.

For the vulnerable children of Eswatini therefore, effective education is education that would not only protect them from future vulnerabilities but one that would also ensure their academic and social welfare, further helping them to achieve their life aspirations (Motsa & Morojele, 2018). Such education would be one that nurtures them in school and be without discrimination (Mkhatshwa, 2017). Furthermore, education that is not only gender equitable but also appreciative and inclusive of their contextual and individual needs. In principle, Eswatini as a country has a point of reference as far as inclusive education, gender and vulnerability are concerned. The question that arises is how far then have these adopted conventions and policies been able to improve the real lives of the vulnerable boys and girls of the country?

1.3 THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

A number of international conventions have been endorsed by Eswatini to show its commitment to improving the lives of children inclusive of those affected by vulnerability but their practical execution has always not been impressive. The 2005 Constitution of Eswatini underpins legal policies governing the rights of children in the country. Through the county's constitution, made Eswatini gender equitable education the right for every child and further set an objective of Free Primary Education from Grade 1-7 by 2009 (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005). In 2006, as a way of re-affirming the EFA (Education for All) agenda, especially in issues relating to vulnerable children, the National Plan of Action (NPA) of 2006-2010 was put into place. This was meant to ensure that the rights of all children in the country are affirmed and respected (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2006).

In 2010, through Section 10(1), of the Free Primary Education Act, the Government of Eswatini committed state funds into paying primary educational fees for all children in the country (Khumalo, 2013). This was followed by the NPA of 2011-2015 whose emphasis was on the affairs of the most vulnerable children of the country. The NPA of 2011-2015 aimed to intensify the implementation of national legislations and policies significant to the vulnerable children of

Eswatini (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2010). The first objective of this NPA was to "strengthen the quality of education for all children through improved learning environments and enhanced access and right to education" (p. 6). Strangely, four (4) years after 2015 the NPA 2011-2015 still guides affairs of the vulnerable children in the country, and no new document has been designed. This is despite the fact that the NPA 2011-2015 has revealed gaps between its objectives and their actual implementation. For example, even though the NPA perceives "education as a powerful tool for the development and empowerment of the children," (p. 30), it is silent on how the vulnerable boys and girls of Eswatini as a different social group would take advantage of the strategies meant to empower them, let alone mentioning what strategies these could be.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Training, which governs the education system of the country, designed its own policy. Act 6.6 of the Education Sector Policy, Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training (2011: 23) gives prominence to the educational welfare of vulnerable children in the country. It seeks:

- to identify, register and track all orphaned, vulnerable and other educationally stigmatised or marginalised learners in every school and educational institution.
- to ensure that all orphaned, vulnerable and other educationally stigmatised or marginalised learners can continue with, and complete, their education, within the capacity and resources of schools and educational institutions concerned.
- to accommodate educational needs of orphaned, vulnerable, or other educationally stigmatised or marginalised learners through flexible design and scheduling of classes and programmes.

With such perfectly crafted policy statements, one would conclude that the educational affairs of vulnerable children in the country are well taken care of. However, like most policies in Eswatini, the objectives of the Educational Sector Policy were not fully implemented or did not prioritise the needs of the very people they were supposed to benefit- the vulnerable children. For instance, despite Section (6.6.3) of the 2011 Education sector policy, promising to ensure that all OVCs (orphaned and vulnerable children) continue with school, as provided by the country's constitution, but it is only "within the capacity and resources of schools and educational institutions concerned" (p. 23). With schools in the rural areas, which rarely have adequate infrastructure (Mkhatshwa, 2017), this call makes the vulnerable children the most affected as the Ministry of Education and

Training in the country does not seem prepared to stretch itself and provide additional resources or fully provide for the educational needs of these children.

There is a big gap among international, national, educational policies and their practical implementation, yet the educational welfare of the vulnerable children of Eswatini lies on following the dictates of the country's constitution, the international, national and educational conventions signed to the latter. Otherwise signing these conventions and policies would remain a lost cause for the country and the education of the vulnerable children would remain compromised. Consequently, it is also in the school contexts that teachers are discriminative of the vulnerable children and in ways consciously and/or insentiently socialise learners into unequal and or equal gender relations (Mkhatshwa, 2017). When learners are taken to school, the supposition is, they would be socialised in ways that they fit in society simultaneously acquiring life skills. Little is known of how teachers as the primary caregivers and socialisers of the vulnerable children in the school contexts, socialise the children not only in ways that exactly mirror the broader stereotypical gender discourses (Gansen, 2017), but also in ways that compromise the girls' and boys' education and chances for a better life (Motsa, 2018a).

1.3.1 Free Primary Education Context

As a demonstration of the State's commitment to the education of the vulnerable children of Eswatini, the Constitution of Swaziland (2005), Section 29(6) declares:

  Every Swazi child within three years of the commencement of the constitution has the right to free education in public schools at least up to the end of primary school, beginning with the first grade.

By 2009 no efforts were evident towards fulfilling the promise of free education. Unlike in most countries where Governments introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) willingly, for example Lesotho (Mapheleba, 2013), South Africa (Arendse, 2011), and Malawi (Kendall, 2007), Eswatini had to introduce it through a court order after the civil society approached the courts demanding free primary education as enshrined in the country's constitution (Skelton & Kamga, 2017). Mubangizi (2006) argued that, the constitution is the only safeguard to the freedom of the lowest in the social hierarchy. Hence, it was imperative for the Government to value the need and

importance of safeguarding, defending and adhering to the constitution no matter the cost, for the benefit of the children living in vulnerable situations. In 2010 the Government of Eswatini was enforced to introduce and fund free primary education (Khumalo, 2013).

The initial violation of the provision of the constitution regarding FPE seemed not only to be to the detriment of the vulnerable children of Eswatini but to the general populace, it also raised questions on its efficacy and sustainability once introduced. Indeed, even though the constitution of the country provided for FPE, it did not make education compulsory as enshrined by the United Nations Convention, Article (28a). The Free Primary Education act of 2010 itself was not without limitations. For example, Section 10(1) of the act compels parents to send their children to school, but nothing is said about those children who neither have parents nor guardians to ensure that they go to school. This means many children in the rural areas, especially those from child headed households still roam the streets with no prospects for education. With the struggling and weakening economy of the country, the State has always had difficulties funding the FPE (Sukati, 2016).

Strangely the Government again has always been without an instrument that compels principals to keep these children at school- either Government had paid the funds or not. As a result, principals indiscriminately expel children who owe fees (Sukati, 2013). In the year 2017, the Ministry of Education and Training of Eswatini through circular No. 6 of 2017, announced that schools were now free to charge top-up fees (Mhlongo & Khumalo, 2017). Top up fees are monies charged by individual schools in addition to the money provided by the Government, and it is up to each principal's prerogative on the additional amount to be charged. The question then is; what about the vulnerable children who have no means to pay these fees? Does this spell an end to their schooling and life aspirations? Considering that, in the country primary education alone is the same as having no education at all. As the curriculum lacks skills education, completing primary education is not enough to give vulnerable children the skills they need to sustain themselves and their families.

As if that was not enough, in the beginning of 2018, the Ministry of Education and Training of Eswatini set a requirement that all learners to be paid for by the Government should be in

possession of personal identity numbers (Hlatjwayo, 2018). According to the principal of Muntu* primary school, this is one educational barrier for these children as most of them do not have parents to help with the required documentation. Hence, as principals they were forced to expel children without identification numbers because the state is not prepared to pay for their educational fees. Presently, the country has 605 primary schools and the large number of schools- 301 schools, which could not meet the requirement of submitting documentation for all its learners in 2018 is evident enough that the problem is larger than what meets the eye (Hlatjwayo, 2018). The question, therefore, is this a confirmation that the FPE coffers were indeed running dry (Mhlongo & Khumalo, 2017), and the Government's emphasis on identification numbers merely meant to justify its failure to uphold this huge responsibility, which is, paying for the vulnerable children? Considering that the Government is also in a better position to find other means to ensure that all learners have the required documentation to receive FPE. In principle, even though the Government of Eswatini committed itself into providing free and fair primary education, no appropriate measures have been implemented to ensure the full realisation of this obligation.

Even more bizarre is, even after "adopting" most international guidelines on vulnerable children, the country itself does not have an up-to-date and comprehensive legal policy or strategy for the advancement of vulnerable children's rights. Having no cohesive and all-inclusive framework for the wellbeing of vulnerable children, has remained a deterrent to the interventions intended at improving the lives of the vulnerable children (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009). Hence, access to education is still unsatisfactory and most inclusive educational policies in Eswatini, only exist on paper and their actual implementation is very poor (Khumalo, 2013). Again, even though the state "provides" free education to cater for the vulnerable children's primary education, but is silent on matters of further education for these children. This reveals how the Government of the country has failed the vulnerable children whose only means to get to school is through free education, in ways that violate the country's constitution and callously trampling the rights of the children.

With the number of children affected by vulnerability in the country swelling each year, the importance of education for these children cannot be overstated. Besides, investing only in school fees has not made an impact to the welfare of the vulnerable boys and girls who still need to buy school uniforms in order to be at school (Mkhatshwa, 2017). The Government needs to realise that

educating these children would not only make a meaningful return on the sacrifices and investment that would have been made for their development but it is also one of the radical transformations Eswatini as a country needs to focus on if it hopes to be rescued from the claws of poverty.

1.4 WHY A STUDY ON GENDER AND VULNERABILITY IN ESWATINI SCHOOLS?

The Kingdom of Swaziland (2010; 4), declares that, children are "the resource and the future of the country". They are "the most treasured assets" of the nation (The Kingdom of Swaziland, 2009; 3). Similarly, Goal Number 5 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, views both boys [males] and girls [females] as the most important pillars of growth and sustainable development in the country (UNDP, 2015). Without whose conjoint contribution, Eswatini's aspiration of becoming a first world country by 2022 (Nyawo & Nsibandze, 2014), would remain a far-fetched dream. For that reason, effective, inclusive and gender equitable education for the vulnerable children who make up a larger percentage of the child population in Eswatini cannot be overemphasised. Noting that sixty-three percent (63%) of the country's population lives below the poverty line (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2017), disregarding the educational needs of the vulnerable children, would not only trap them in their circle of poverty and vulnerability but also compromise the country's developmental goals. The question is how effectively could the social and academic lives of these children be improved?

Past methods seeking to find ways to create inclusive and equitable school spaces for the vulnerable children have solely relied on adult people's views. Although the studies have tried to create ideas on how to help the children- the future of Eswatini, they have failed to adequately provide effective ways towards improving the schooling experiences of these children affected by vulnerability. One reason being that, the studies have relied on adult people's perspectives on a phenomenon that is completely out of their experience. Hence, vulnerable children in Eswatini still struggle and end up dropping out of school with no further prospects for education (Mkhatshwa, 2017).

The new sociology of childhood studies made me appreciate children as having an agency to change their life situations, and what better way than to involve them- as voices of experience, in efforts to improve their daily lived and schooling experiences. Hence their direct involvement as the key participants in this study. The study foregrounded the vulnerable children's voices not only

in expressing their reality but also giving adults that is, policy makers and other educational stakeholders, a glimpse of their daily challenges and how their education is affected by these. By so doing the study provides more valid evidence on the vulnerable boys' and girls' reality and hopefully will influence policies towards changing their compromising educational experiences, at the same time alerting the Government on the scale of the problems they (the vulnerable children) face. This is in ways that would potentially compel the Government to have an immediate and a systematic plan of action to improve the vulnerable boys' and girls' schooling experiences.

1.5 ABOUT THIS STUDY

The overarching objective of the study was to explore the schooling experiences of vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini, and how these children's constructions of gender influence gender equality/inequality in the school contexts. The purpose was to find out what insights can be drawn from these, in order to improve the vulnerable children's quality of schooling.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the gendered schooling experiences of vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in Eswatini?
2. How do vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in Eswatini construct gender?
3. What implications do teachers' constructions of gender have on:

    (a) vulnerable children's constructions of gender

    (b) gender inequality/equality in the school contexts?
4. How do vulnerable children navigate the gendered power laden spaces and places in these school contexts?
5. In what ways could the vulnerable children's quality of schooling and educational experiences be enhanced?

To address the research questions, this study adopted the qualitative narrative approach and elicited narratives from the vulnerable children and their teachers. A participatory research method-photovoice and individual and focus group interviews were used to collect data from the thirty (30)

purposively sampled vulnerable children. From the nine (9) randomly sampled teachers, data was generated by means of questionnaires and in-depth individual interviews.

1.6 LINKING IT ALL TOGETHER: RATIONALE FOR THESIS ORGANISATION

1.6.1 Chapter Two: Researcher Identity and Childhood Memories in a Study of Vulnerable Children in Swaziland

This chapter outlines how my social identity, that is, having been raised as a vulnerable girl child in the rural areas of Swaziland and the social relationships I had, in the family and at school instilled particular constructions of gender, vulnerability and schooling (Motsa, 2017). It critically analyses how these constructions featured prominently in instilling an interest and further shaping a study on the schooling experiences of vulnerable children in the rural areas of Swaziland. The main objective of this chapter was to highlight how socio-spatial experiences that mirror those of the participants not only give researchers a point of reference for the participants' narrations but also contributes to a deeper understanding and a more profound insightful interpretation of the participants' subjective constructions of their reality. This insider positioning enabled me to produce a contextually authentic study of vulnerability and gender, which illuminated both the possibilities and limits for the enhancement of effective schooling environments and gender equality in Swaziland schools.

1.6.2 Chapter Three: Vulnerability and Children's Real-Life Schooling Experiences in Swaziland

The chapter explored the real life schooling experiences of the vulnerable boys and girls as a diverse social group. It looked at the dynamics of their social relationships or lack of, in the family and school contexts and the implications of these on their experiences of school. The objective was to illuminate the positive or negative ways in which the vulnerable children's socio-economic backgrounds, affected their social welfare, feelings and by extension influencing their experiences of school. Scholarly literature succinctly communicates that school places and spaces in which children live their childhood do not only have an impact on their emotional wellbeing but also have a big role in determining their attitude towards school and consequentially their educational success (Collins & Coleman, 2008). Hence the need to look deeper into the vulnerable boys' and girls'

emotional geographies as the starting point in efforts aimed at improving their educational experiences.

1.6.3 Chapter Four: Vulnerable Children Speak Out: Voices from One Rural School in Swaziland

This chapter explored how the vulnerable boys' and girls' world, that is their communities, teachers and peers collectively affect their (the vulnerable boys' and girls') emotional wellbeing and experiences of school. By foregrounding the vulnerable children's voices and narratives, the chapter sought to highlight the salient places and spaces in the school and family contexts that emotionally affected these children's educational life in a positive or undesirable way (Joubert, 2012). According to (Gansen, 2017), children's experience of school is not only classed but also gendered, hence the need to further look at the gendered experiences of the vulnerable boys and girls in order to provide a more holistic understanding of their schooling experiences.

1.6.4 Chapter Five: Vulnerable Masculinities: Implications of Gender Socialisation in Three Rural Swazi Primary Schools

This was one of the two publications (see also 1.6.5 below) that sought to answer the question, how do vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in Swaziland construct gender? The objective of this chapter was to highlight the impact of socialisation on how the vulnerable boys made meaning of and performed masculinities, and to further explore the implications of these on gender equality, the boys' experiences of school as well as their social wellbeing. The goal was to comprehend the effective strategies that could be used to enhance inclusive and equitable school spaces for the vulnerable boys, and by extension how vulnerable girls, as one part of the gender equality scale, could also benefit.

1.6.5 Chapter Six: Vulnerable Femininities: Implications for Rural Girls' Schooling Experiences in Swaziland

In tandem with Chapter Five, this chapter focuses on what it means to be a vulnerable girl in the context of three rural primary schools in Swaziland. It explored how the vulnerable girls as a social group within a patriarchal space construct and perform femininities. The aim was to understand the implications of these on gender equality and the girls' social and academic wellbeing and

consequentially their experience of school. From these chapters (Five and Six), it was clear that gender beliefs play a critical role in determining the vulnerable boys' and girls' experiences of school and in shaping their constructions and performances of gender (Motsa, 2018b), making it imperative to understand how these beliefs and norms develop.

1.6.6 Chapter Seven: Masculinities and Femininities through Teachers' Voices: Implications on Gender Equitable Schooling for Vulnerable Children from Three Primary Schools in Swaziland

Social constructionism gave the study flexibility to involve teachers as primary socialisers of the vulnerable children in the schools and whose own gender socialisation and performances have a greater influence on how these children finally view as their reality as far as vulnerability, gender and schooling are concerned (Gergen, 2009). This chapter sought to find out how the vulnerable boys' and girls' teachers construct gender in the context of these vulnerable children's schooling. The aim was to comprehend the implications of these on the gender socialisation of the vulnerable children and towards the creation of gender equitable/inequitable school contexts. Despite the findings exposing a myriad of problems that were presented to these boys and girls by their teachers (and other social relationships they had or lack of), the vulnerable children were not ready to resign to their relegated fate - poverty and vulnerability as highlighted in the next chapter.

1.6.7 Chapter Eight: Narratives of Resilience among Learners in a Rural Primary School in Swaziland

In this study I explored the emotional stories of resilience told by the vulnerable boys and girls as a diverse social group, on how they navigated their emotionally taxing and challenging schooling experiences in their quest for educational success. The aim was to find and understand the creative ways in which the vulnerable boys and girls navigated the social injustices and inequalities against them. Such an insight was used as a springboard and point of entry into understanding the vulnerable children's potential to change their life situations and probably that of other vulnerable fellow children in similar contexts towards accomplishing their present and future dreams.

1.6.8 Chapter Nine: High Aspirations amidst Challenging Situations: Narratives of Six Vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland

This was the last of the eight publications. In this chapter the vulnerable boys and girls articulate their educational aspirations, fears and provide insights into the kind of support they feel would be effective in sustaining them towards attaining their educational goals. The chapter also provided invaluable insights on what could be done to improve vulnerable girls' and boys' quality of schooling and educational experiences. Hence, revealing the exact point of entry for all educational stakeholders, communities and the society of Swaziland on how these children's schooling experiences could be improved and their covert and overt resilience harnessed. Indeed, understanding the vulnerable children's fears and aspirations in these challenging contexts, provide a real time view on what could be done to address what is most discomforting for them in order to help them work towards and achieve their social and educational aspirations.

1.6.9 Chapter 10: This chapter concludes the present study of gender and vulnerability in rural Swaziland's primary school contexts. It contains a summary of the research findings, the theoretical, methodological and personal reflections of the study. Lastly, it provides the study limitations as well as some recommendations, which the Government of Swaziland or other educational reformists in the country or in similar contexts could employ to improve the lives of vulnerable girls and boys in these contexts.

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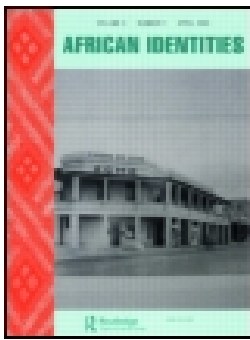
Researcher identity and childhood memories in a study of vulnerable children in Swaziland

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa

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Researcher identity and childhood memories in a study of vulnerable children in Swaziland

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa

Howard College Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Contrary to conventional wisdom, which construes scientific research as objective and value-free, this article foregrounds my social identity as a female, who grew up (and was schooled) in a deep rural, impoverished context of Swaziland, and my subjective childhood memories in shaping a qualitative-narrative study of six vulnerable children in a rural primary school in Swaziland. The article denotes the significance of productive remembering as a critical basis for knowledge acquisition and production. It contributes to ongoing avant-garde theorising about the centrality of researcher's reflexivity and positionality in the scientific processes of knowledge acquisition and production. I show how subjective remembering was at the heart of the conceptual, theoretical and methodological decisions undertaken in this study, and how, almost 30 years later, the vulnerable children's schooling experiences still mirrored my own childhood memories about schooling in this context. Therefore, highlighting the pervasive nature and, indeed, cross-generational extent of the vulnerable children's unfavourable schooling experiences. Just like my childhood memories and identities, the vulnerable children's schooling experiences were entangled in complex, enduring and discursively regulated power-laden social relationships. Hence, the article recommends foregrounding and addressing vulnerable children's identities and their power positioning within social relationships in their contexts as a basis upon which strategies for improving the quality of vulnerable children's rural schooling experiences should be founded.

Introducing memory and childhood experiences

My mother had six (6) biological children, and was married to a polygamous man (my father), who initially had four (4) wives but three (3) later left the matrimonial home leaving their children behind. My mother, being the senior wife and the only wife who decided to stay, probably because she also had a polygamous upbringing, had to resume the responsibility of caring for thirteen (13) children, ranging from age one (1) to twelve (12) years, with the little she received from selling handmade jewellery in the town's market. My father was never there for his family (as rumour had it – probably the main reason why the other wives left) as he lived in a different part of the country with his newest girlfriend. My mother therefore had to ensure that we were clothed, went to school, had something to eat, and with such a large number of children it was

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CONTACT Ncamsile Daphne Motsa ✉ Morojele@ukzn.ac.za, ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

difficult for her. Thus, we were rendered vulnerable and had a difficult life, both at school and at home. From a very young age though, my mother inculcated in us the value of education and that only through education, could we rise above our circumstances and transform our lives of poverty.

My childhood experiences (stated in the excerpt above) had a significant influence in my life, thus inclined the choice I made concerning my carrier as a teacher and later as a researcher. Due to deep resonances between my life struggles and association with vulnerability, I chose to focus my Master's degree study to understanding the schooling experiences of vulnerable children. The study aimed at aiding educational reformists to formulate policies that would be inclusive of vulnerable children and thereby transform their lives by breaking the circle of their poverty and vulnerability, by ensuring that they receive the best education and remain in school. Camahalan (2014) agrees that, everyone has childhood memories but it is those memories that had a significant influence and an impact to our lives as individuals that we reminisce. Reflecting on my earliest life memories and the lessons, I learnt from these experiences, provided me with a deeper understanding and basis for analysis and further brought a critical perspective, to the study. My childhood memories have therefore been the basis of reflection, knowledge production, understanding and analysis of a study on the schooling experiences of vulnerable children within a Swaziland rural school context.

The article draws on social constructionism (Burr, 1985; Gergen, 2009), as a theoretical paradigm, due to its emphasis on the prominence and centrality of social relations and location in how human beings construct reality. I denote how my childhood socialisation and social relationships, in the family and at school, imbued particular constructions of vulnerability, and how this featured in shaping a research on the schooling experiences of vulnerable children. The study consisted of six vulnerable children from a rural primary school in the Lubombo region which is one of the four regions of Swaziland. As a country, Swaziland has failed to uphold the first Millennium Development Goal of alleviating poverty, thus 84% of the total population of children in the country live in the rural areas under extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2009). Swaziland is also predominantly rural with Lubombo being the poorest region of the four and the hardest hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS (Nordtveit, 2010). Lubombo further has the largest number of vulnerable children in the country (Braithwaite, Djimba, & Pickmans, 2013). The study construed vulnerable children as orphans, children from child headed households and those from poor economic backgrounds. In the Swazi context, vulnerable children have one common feature, and that is vulnerability and poverty (Nordtveit, 2010), thus called, 'bantfwana bendlunkhulu' (those cared for by the whole community) and whose educational fees are paid by the Government (Motsa & Morojele, 2016).

I grew up as a vulnerable child from a poverty-stricken household in the rural areas of the Manzini region in an area called Mbekelweni, which is about 35 kilometres from the nearest town. Manzini is also the most densely populated region in the country (Braithwaite et al., 2013). The people in this area survive on farming maize, legumes, and vegetables for their families, or selling in the neighbourhood, or even the town market. Women, in most African countries are perceived as subordinates and men occupy the dominant position (Morojele, 2011) likewise, Swazi women are socialised to be economically dependent on their husbands. My father's absence as head of the family therefore, rendered us vulnerable, as my mother struggled to take over as head of the family and provide for a family of 13 children. Together with my friends and siblings, we would move from door to door selling cabbages or work in our neighbours' fields and get a meagre E5- (equivalent R5-) per day

and our parents would use this money to buy household necessities. My vulnerability was therefore situated in such contexts and this is where I learnt what living a penurious life really meant. This paper begins with the discussion of how my childhood experiences and memories helped in the conceptualising of a study on vulnerable children, the theoretical framework, my identity in the study, experiences during data generation that resonated with my childhood experiences and lastly, it provides the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

Childhood memories: in conceptualising a research on vulnerable children's schooling experiences

Reflecting on the past, not as a longing but as a recollection of past events in relation to present situations is imperative in bringing future social modifications (Gervais & Ubalijoro, 2013; Routledge et al., 2011). Indeed, childhood memories are a powerful resource that inform our conception of the world, especially when it is used as a point of reference rather than a place of residence. As illustrated in the excerpt earlier, my childhood memories and experiences were responsible for making me not only willing to transform my personal and family life struggles, but also be keen to bring a change in other vulnerable children's lives. Studies have debated on the objectivity of memory in research (Bernecker, 2011; Nash & Wade, 2008; Ojong & Ibrahim, 2012; Shaw & Porter, 2015) on the basis that, time and stressful episodes in life can distort memory therefore making recollection of past events, only an approximation of the truth and not reliable. Lindsay, Wade, Hunter, and Read (2004), on the other hand, argue that self-defining moments (Fivush, Habermans, Waters, & Zaman, 2011), events viewed as emotional or gave us a life's lesson (Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004) are more likely, not only to be remembered, but also to resonate with our adulthood constructions of life.

My experiences as a vulnerable and an indigent child was undoubtedly an emotional encounter as I was affected, likewise my whole family was, by poverty and life struggles making such experiences worthy to be remembered. I have very clear and fond memories of the smiles on our faces each time we came from working in our neighbour's fields (we used to go there with our mothers), sitting under a big tree in the compound after drinking *emahewu* 'sour porridge' and eating porridge and 'ematfumbu' (cow insides). It was fun; we sang and played with my siblings and other children from the neighbourhood, whilst the elderly shared their individual life experiences. It was at this time that the women (our mothers) shared a valuable skill of 'kuphotsela' (beading), and like my mother, would then sell the jewellery they made out of these beads to make profits in the town market.

I had deep admiration for my mother for loving and taking care of children who were biologically not her own in the absence of both their parents (their mothers and my father). This taught me to have compassion and imparted in me, deep love for children. I realised that all children needed love and care, not only from their biological parents but also from all those who have a heart, in order to rise above their predicament and have positive life experiences. As early as my teen years, such experiences obligated me to reflect on my life and changed my general outlook on the world and vulnerable children in general (Fivush et al., 2011). I felt obligated in not only fulfilling my childhood dreams and aspirations, but also in assisting those that were disadvantaged and needed assistance especially vulnerable children. I remember one day playing 'ikento' (indigenous game), with my siblings and

friends, subconsciously I planned to be a teacher, as that would not only ensure that I move beyond my poverty and vulnerability but also place me in a position of power to help the needy and marginalised children in the school and by extension, the society.

Being part of a family, which struggled to make ends meet, further placed me in a position where I could comprehend vulnerable children's daily life challenges, struggles, and understand their pain and suffering. From a very young age I comprehended that, my survival prospects, likewise other vulnerable children, could be inculcated through education that would affect every vulnerable child's schooling experience beyond the classroom. Education that has an ability to bring about a turnaround in vulnerable children's day-to-day life experiences and break their circle of poverty and vulnerability (Naysmith, Whiteside, & Whalley, 2008). As an educator myself, I have seen vulnerable children struggle with their education and adapting to school. This has further afforded me first-hand experience, which fostered my motivation to undertake a study on the challenges and the dynamics of vulnerability and schooling. Indeed, my childhood's socialisation, memories and experiences as a vulnerable child, inculcated my passion for the poor and needy children, and inspired me to endeavour in producing research knowledge aimed at helping vulnerable children move beyond the debilitating shackles of poverty into a better future through quality education and schooling.

Social constructionism as a theoretical framework

To reflect on my childhood experiences in augmenting a study on vulnerable children, I drew on the sociological theoretical paradigm of social constructionism. Social constructionism posits that our very existence as human beings is not a product of man's natural creation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) but socially located and thus a social construct, and all that we take to be the truth [memory and personal experience] develops from and is consistently imbedded to our society's tradition and values (Gergen, 2009). Agreeing with Fivush (2008), Pasupathi (2001), Nelson (2003) and Fivush et al. (2011), that memory and remembering is a social construct, thus located in historical social relationships. All action [remembering] therefore is positioned in specific social and cultural frameworks that define the form and meaning of that action (Fivush et al., 2011, p. 323). Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) agree that memory is dynamic, fluid and situationally bound constructions that are influenced by the context in which they are located. Our personal experiences as human beings therefore define who we are as individuals in relation to particular families, cultural norms and values, communities and historical periods (Fivush, 2008), and these past experiences act as bases for our constructions of knowledge about the world, as well as resonate with our appreciations and perceptions about it (Gergen, 2009).

Social constructionism further places emphasis on discourse and social relations as bases on which childhood memory and experiences are predicated. In this regard, this paper shows how, my [childhood] memory and experiences, were entrenched in the social relations and discourses of my childhood's social positioning (Gergen, 2009) and how reflecting on my [childhood] memories and experiences was imperative for knowledge production regarding vulnerable children's schooling experiences in Swaziland. According to Norton (2006, p. 16), discourses are 'cultural practises' of any given community or society. It is a society's culture and tradition, their way of talk, thinking and doing things which sets them apart from other communities. Reflecting on my childhood positioning, and social relations therefore, did

not only reveal my outlook on the life of vulnerable children, the values, norms, and dominant discourses of vulnerability, for the society where my childhood was situated (McAdams, 2001) but subsequently aided in the enrichment of my conceptualisation and analysis of a study on the vulnerable children's schooling experiences.

Researcher's identity: in undertaking research on vulnerable children's schooling experiences

My position in this research was that of both an insider and an outsider. I was an insider in the sense that, my childhood was socially located in poverty and vulnerability, in the rural areas of Manzini region in Swaziland, therefore I could easily relate to vulnerability, and the challenges of growing up in the rural areas of the country. Basing the research in the rural area made me a local, therefore acquainted with the local discourses, which acted as important means for knowledge production (Morojele, 2012). This approach to knowledge production has currency in post-modern ethnography, where the familiar is made strange (Morojele, 2012). As much as my childhood vulnerability and growing up in the rural areas of the country made me an insider, I was also an outsider to the vulnerable children's schooling experiences of the Lubombo region. Coming from the Manzini Region, which is both my workstation and my home – a postgraduate researcher from (the University of KwaZulu-Natal) also made me an outsider in conducting research in the Lubombo region. I brought with me an outsider theoretical perspective, which bolstered my critical insight as well as engagement in the study of vulnerable children's schooling experiences in the Lubombo region, a region ravaged by HIV and AIDS (Nordtveit, 2010). This had currency in Anglo-Saxon researchers of the nineteenth century – studying distant, unfamiliar and exotic spaces (Morojele, 2009).

Therefore, overall, my identity in this study conjoined a hybrid of insider and outsider perspectives – in ways that transcended polarities, often associated with a researcher positionality in the processes of knowledge production. This epistemological stance of binary pluralism resonated with social constructionism – a theoretical paradigm of this study, which accedes to the fluidity and multiplicity of identity and positionality (Gergen, 2009). Equally, vulnerable children in this study were construed as a heterogeneous and a diverse group, whose subjective recollections of their schooling experiences were embedded in their distinct sociocultural context, reminiscent of their social positioning and relationships in their context.

A qualitative research paradigm was adopted as a methodological framing for the study. The dynamic, plural and multifaceted nature of my researcher identity and childhood memories, inculcated in me a perspective to knowledge, which privileges elicitation of quality active data that explicates the complexities, dynamisms and emotional subjectivities of vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences, as a socially constituted phenomena (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). My childhood memories regarding the liveliness and active manner in which children engage with their life experiences, informed my choice for a participatory photo-voice technique (see Motsa & Morojele, 2016), individual, and focus group interviews (conducted in SiSwati, as a vernacular) as methods of data collection for the study. The participants were requested to take pictures of their salient places and spaces that held a positive or negative meaning to their schooling experiences (Joubert, 2012). They also actively aided in the conceptualisation and analysis of the photo-voice imagery,

as the pictures were used as ingress into the narratives and perspectives of the vulnerable children's lived experiences during the interviews.

Focus group interviews were opted for their ability to get into the real shared life experiences of the vulnerable children. The setting of these interviews reminded me of the moments I sat with my childhood friends and played in groups as vulnerable children. Such spaces provided us with a sense of comfort and security where we did not feel judged because of our vulnerability and poverty. From the security of our group, we drew strength to navigate the school spaces and places that supressed us (Sutton, Smith, Dearden, & Middleton, 2007), and we related with such spaces as they provided us with a sense of belonging. In these groups, we further shared our pains and sorrows, and discussed our day-to-day life experiences, our dreams, aspirations, and our role models. Focus groups also reminded me of the moments, my mother sat under the big tree with the women from my childhood; beading, telling stories and sharing day-to-day life experiences with ease.

Not only did the focus group interviews allow the vulnerable children to express their schooling experiences in a socially dynamic context, as they discussed and cross-referenced their views in response to the researcher's open-ended questions, but further enabled them to interact, discuss their shared feelings, views, and opinions concerning their schooling experiences without feeling intimidated or fear of being ridiculed. Individual interviews on the other hand helped in capturing the vulnerable children's personal schooling experiences in a secluded space that respected their right to speak freely but privately. Pseudonyms were used and have also been used in this paper to protect the real names of participants. A thematic process of analysis was adopted for data analysis and all standard ethical considerations were adhered in undertaking the research project.

Seeing my childhood memories in vulnerable children's schooling experiences

Vulnerable children's dynamics in school contexts

The first day I went to Wabo* primary school (where I conducted the study), after attaining permission from the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland, driving slowly on the dirt road towards the school, I met three young girls walking and playing 'ishumpu' (an indigenous game). I stopped and immediately, with respect, and without looking me in the eye, they came running. This respect reminded me of my childhood, as this was the kind of respect inculcated to us as children, growing up in the rural areas of Mbekelweni. Over the years in the teaching profession, I have seen learners lose their moral values and respect for adults, and as I saw these children, I felt this area was somehow disconnected from the rest of the country, but more allied to my childhood memories. Fivush (2008) agrees that, as part of a specific social and cultural milieu, we are implicitly and overtly knowledgeable of the culturally accepted and valued traditions of expressing ourselves, reacting and showing emotions. Indeed, respect is subjective to each context, and constructed from a community's cultural perspective which is guided by their social relations and discourses (Gergen, 2009). As children, we were socialised to be timid, compliant, obedient and not to express our emotions, as that was considered a rebellious behaviour deserving corporal punishment.

I remember very well, the endless times we planned with my siblings to talk to our father and express how much his absence affected us, but each time he came home, we could not

even be in the same space with him, but cried again when he left knowing that it would be months before he returned home. From the earlier incident along the road, I knew the study participants might have the same challenge and have difficulties in opening up to me as an adult. These children's actions mirrored their wider society's cultural beliefs, and values (Gergen, 2009) which guided the children in this rural community. To ensure therefore that the child participants opened up and expressed their opinions and feelings without feeling supressed, I deconstructed the power dynamics, by being casual with them and creating trust and rapport and indeed by doing so, they freely articulated to me their construction of their schooling experiences without limitations.

As I got to the school and the learners were at the afternoon assembly, I reminisced my primary school days, when we would stand in the assembly square patiently waiting for the day's announcements and punishments. Once or twice a week during the morning assembly, the principal would make the most frightful announcement. As much as she loved and cared for vulnerable children, her love extended from being a compassionate woman to a very strict disciplinarian, who had tough love and believed in the use of a stick to deter 'bad behaviour' in children. We anxiously made straight lines, and each time she bellowed 'nico-phile yini?' ('have you scrubbed your bodies'?), we all knew what would follow, and the teachers would move along the lines, checking if our uniforms were clean and our bodies had been washed. Culprits would be taken to the nearest river where a group of the same sex would wash their (culprits) bodies in the cold running water using river stones. I recollected the tears on the culprits' eyes as their bodies were scrubbed and my heart sank.

I was further captivated by a picture that Sifiso (a boy aged 12; individual interview) provided to illustrate how he felt when teachers scorned him for wearing a dirty school uniform.

Auntie, look at my room, it is very filthy and you can see basins filled with dirty clothes (pausing like he expected a reaction from the researcher). I usually do not have soap to wash or even to bath, yet teachers usually tell us to return home when we are dirty, and that is hurtful. No one likes wearing dirty clothes, but because I cannot always afford to buy soap, I do not have an alternative but to wear dirty clothes.

Precious also lamented, 'when we smell we become objects of ridicule especially by the teachers and other children make fun of us. This is because they do not know how it feels to be in need'.

As the vulnerable children expressed their feelings, I was transfixed and my emotions nearly got the better of me. Such narrations indeed resonated my childhood and I reflected on the schooling experiences of most vulnerable children from my childhood. I realised that teachers need to be informed of the socio-economic backgrounds and social positioning of each child they teach in order to be thoughtful on how they treat them. Furthermore, to help them realise that it is from these social relations (between teachers and the vulnerable children) that vulnerable children construct their schooling experiences (Gergen, 2009). By so doing, all children in school contexts, vulnerable children inclusive, would feel welcome, appreciated, and content with school. That would in turn lead to a good educational performance and indeed help them to rise above their poverty and vulnerability.

Anita (a girl who stayed and cared for her very old grandmother) provided the picture below to illustrate how the teachers' insensitivity, caused them negative schooling experiences. For example, learners in this school were punished for late coming because the teachers were ignorant of the distance their learners travelled to and from school and off course the individual vulnerable children's social backgrounds.

> This is the entrance to our school. Here we usually find Mr. Mlotjwa* waiting to give us a 'good' punishment for late coming. No questions asked, and that hurts! I wish they would first find out why we are late before they beat us. For instance, some of us travel long distances to school or have a lot to do at home before coming to school, like caring for our sick relatives.

I was immediately reminded of the long distance my siblings and I journeyed to school every morning. At times walking in the very cold weather conditions on frost and barefoot, to find teachers waiting at the school gate with sticks to give us a good beating for late coming. Ignorant teachers, who do not understand the real life experiences of their learners, perceive such actions like coming late to school and acting outside set down school norms, as being acts of irresponsibility and delinquency, yet ignoring their social positioning and relations or lack of, as being a prevailing factor for the vulnerable children's actions, attitudes and behaviour in the school contexts. Such teachers get so infuriated and ridicule the vulnerable children, the same way the teachers from my childhood did, yet by so doing, aggravate their vulnerability and make them feel like strangers and some end up dropping out of school (Nordtveit, 2010).

When Sifiso (boy aged 12; focus group interviews) expressed that, teachers always suspected them when school dishes were stolen 'because we (they) are poor.' I further recalled one time I sat with my friend Nonhlanhla in the schoolyard during break time. We had just received a thorough beating from Mrs. Gule for wearing untidy socks, and as we shared our experiences we felt different from the other learners in the school, we felt like outcasts and hated school. Other learners were not punished similarly, especially those we perceived to be the teachers' favourites and cleaned the teachers' houses. As vulnerable children, we were never given such 'privileges' because we were 'dirty' and untrustworthy. Such experiences created borders between us and the other learners and made us feel like we did not belong; likewise, these cultural borders [social status] and values posed challenges for the participants of the study, as they tried to traverse the school borders that separated them from other learners not affected by vulnerability (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999). I was fascinated by the ways in which as children we maintained our agency as we negotiated and navigated such borders and continued with school under such circumstances, the same agency that was being displayed by the vulnerable children of the study.

Punishment of vulnerable children in school contexts

The vulnerable children in the study came out strongly on the inhumane punishment by their teachers. In Swaziland, corporal punishment is supported by Section 29(2) of the country's constitution. Even though the constitution is against merciless punishment for children it allows for moderate forms of punishment as a behaviour corrective measure: *a child shall not be subjected to abuse or torture or other cruel inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment subject to lawful and moderate chastisement for purposes of correction* (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005) teachers though, have failed to stick to reasonable punishment and have used cruel methods to punish learners (Nordtveit, 2010). As a dominant educational and societal discourse, such callous acts have further bred complacence especially in the educational contexts and thus their effects never regarded (Morojele, 2012). As one respondent described how teachers punished them for petty offences, some of which were beyond their control, like not writing assignments, 'the punishment is just too much for us to bear, and our knuckles are always painful from the beatings that we cannot write'. I reflected on the

objectivity of corporal punishment as compared to positive discipline, and its emotional and physical consequences on vulnerable children, and the fact that corporal punishment has led to a number of school dropouts in the country (Nordtveit, 2010; Sukati, 2013). Berger and Luckmann (1991) talk about human governance, that people's actions and norms in any given society are governed and controlled by societal discourses, which are historically located and upheld therefore cannot be disregarded. Indeed, through the country's constitution of 2005, teachers have been given unchallenged power yet at the detriment of the vulnerable children they teach.

As schools, function amidst communities` discourses (Collins & Coleman, 2008), corporal punishment has become a dominant educational discourse and the Ministry of Education and Training has over the years tried to uproot, in preference to positive discipline, with no success. Positive discipline is believed to be less effective in inculcating good overall decent behaviour, and teachers in Swaziland have further attributed the poor Junior Certificate results of 2015 which were described as the worst in the past 10 years (The Examination's Council of Swaziland's, 2016), to the introduction of positive discipline in schools to replace corporal punishment. Probably the Government needs to remodel such dominant discourses from family level because it is impossible to deter bad behaviour with positive discipline for children who get a thorough beating as a form of punishment at home.

One day as I entered the school where the study was conducted, children were happily playing in the schoolyard. One female elderly teacher was thrashing a young boy wearing a torn trouser, probably in Grade one (1) or two (2) using a stick on the ears, and the boy was crying in a deafening sound. I was immediately taken back to my childhood. I was socialised and grew up under tough love, would be clapped for the slightest misdemeanours, be yelled at for failure to collect firewood after school and receive a thorough beating for not cleaning the house, thus listening to the respondents' narratives on corporal punishment resonated with my childhood experiences. I clearly recalled the principal's desk, where delinquents would be given a thorough beating, sometimes up to 10 hard strokes for offences like not writing homework and failing tests. This specific example reminded me of an experience I had with Mrs. Gule, one cold winter morning. I had lost my pen the previous day therefore could not write her homework. My explanations were ignored and she whipped me using a wattle stick on both ears and they hurt for days. Nursing a bruised ear and a swollen hand from a teacher's beating did not only hurt us physically and emotionally but brought negative schooling experiences as most of the offences we committed were beyond our control.

Such inhumane actions by teachers, rather than being condemned should be understood from the teachers' social relations and cultural standpoint (Gergen & Gergen, 2004) as they reveal a more socially and historically located cultural perception on children, childhood and vulnerability. That, as much as teachers are expected to be caring but they are not only stakeholders in the education system, which has its own discourses, but they are also members of a wider community which governs their own construction of vulnerability, their behaviour and above all, their attitude towards the vulnerable children. It is therefore imperative that such adverse dominant discourses be deconstructed in order for school spaces to be inclusive of vulnerable children, and teachers use different methods to 'motivate' their learners to conform to the school guidelines than using the stick.

How vulnerable children are perceived in school contexts

Over the years of being a teacher, I have been immersed in multi-opinionated environments on the issue of vulnerability and vulnerable children. The conversations usually revolve around vulnerable children being a 'spoiled lot,' a menace, a burden, attention seekers or on a more positive outlook, as children who are victims of circumstances and therefore in need of compassion. As I saw the plight of these children, with torn uniforms and dehydrated skins and heard how teachers called them names 'bantfwababobogo,' (spoilt brats), I related to their experiences.

I recalled a particular period when my father had abandoned the family for almost two years, and my mother was very sick and could neither make the jewellery nor go to the market place. I literally could not concentrate in class with the anger I had for my father and worry for my ailing mother. Mr. Dludlu, my mathematics teacher yelled at me, 'Ncamsile, your attention seeking stunts are irritating me'. As the whole class cheered in laughter, I cried silently, and as much as it woke me from my slumber but the embarrassment equalled to none. For days, my classmates made fun of me as they would repeat Mr. Dludlu's words at each opportune time. I also recalled Miss Soko's allegations in one of our endless conversations and my nostalgic intuition and the memories I had of my childhood, playing with the poor and needy children, whilst my mother was sitting under the big tree with their mothers, took centre stage. I knew these children needed love more than being reviled and ridiculed. That they are children in need and who are susceptible to grief therefore without the help they so desired, their life of poverty would be a perpetual circle for generations. Looking at these children's lives and blaming them for their failures without recognising their social positioning and background would therefore be snubbing and proliferating a deep social problem.

Support mechanisms for vulnerable children

The participants described the kind of assistance they would appreciate in improving their day-to-day life and school experiences as, 'being given life advices' and 'inculcated with life coping skills'. Immediately, I pictured my mother, and the other village women sitting under the big tree in my compound sharing ornamentation skills. These skills helped them to transcend to the higher standard of interdependency beyond circumscription, and be able to support their families instead of being dependant and inviting pity. This is the same help that these vulnerable children needed, assistance that would aid them to rise above their plight and inculcate self-efficacy (Mitchell, 2011), which would in turn help them to rise above their vulnerability and further avoid future vulnerabilities.

As the respondents narrated how their principal helped them and was 'concerned even with their (vulnerable children) social life, and bought them shoes and jerseys during the winter season', I was further taken back to my childhood. As we grew older, and progressed to higher classes, my mother could not afford to maintain the whole family, thus our school fees became more of a priority, than clothes and food. Sometimes we went to school barefoot and I remember one day applying black polish on my old red plimsoll shoes, not without stares and laughter from other learners at school though. Such an experience made me hate school, thus I personally appreciated these teachers' kind gesture, by going beyond their line of duty and caring for the schools' vulnerable children. I also remembered my Grade 5

teacher, Mam Bobo as we affectionately called her. She would keep a box of pens in her cardboard for whoever had lost or did not have a pen to write and would share her lunch box with whoever seemed hungry, and this brought smiles to most of us. By so doing, the teachers created noble social relationships from which the vulnerable children would draw positive schooling experiences (Wood & Goba, 2011). Lekule (2014) agrees that, a good teacher–student relationship may aid children in grim circumstances to cope better.

Due to the effects of HIV and AIDS in a country like Swaziland, most family structures have become dysfunctional, social relationships broken and families that have not been affected yet, have failed to adequately respond to the plight of vulnerable children and take care of their needs (Nordtveit, 2010). Teachers who spend most of their time with these children can therefore close the gap by maintaining good and mutually trusting relationships with the vulnerable children (Glover, 2009), and incorporate thoughtful acts in their pedagogic practices. Being educators places teachers in a position of power where their contribution to the emotional and physical welfare of the vulnerable children can go a long way. Teachers can help the children identify their life goals, to build their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Mitchell, 2011). In essence, like the principal in the study, teachers can juggle being both a teacher and caregivers for the well-being of the vulnerable children they teach in their classrooms and the school.

One of the vulnerable children narrated how her mother abandoned her and she presently did not have any mother figure in her life,

> My mother left me to stay in South Africa and the fact that she completely forgot about me, and I do not even know who my father is, affects me especially when I hear other learners talking about the things that their parents do for them. I also wish I had a mother who takes care of my needs and comforts me when I am sad. (Fortunate, girl aged 15; from a child headed household)

I reflected on the life without a mother figure, and in my mind's eye, I remembered one particular time when my mother was sick, and I also recalled the struggles we endured, like going to bed on an empty stomach. I also remembered the women from my childhood (my mother inclusive), working in the fields, enduring bitter cold mornings and wet summers in the open market place to sustain their families. Without such loving and caring parents, to offer emotional and physical support, and a building block for social relationships (Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff, & Marceau, 2008), life was definitely hard for this vulnerable child.

As I listened to these narrations and reflected on my own childhood experiences, I understood the pain that vulnerable children carry on daily basis, which obviously has a way of affecting their schooling experience in a negative way. Such experiences and circumstances obviously forced Fortunate, and most vulnerable children off course, to grow up into adults, as they fend for themselves and their siblings, whilst other children of same ages enjoy being children (Subbarao & Coury, 2004) and being cared for. Agreeing with the notions of social constructionism, that childhood itself is socially constructed (Joubert, 2012) making children a dissimilar group, experiencing childhood and off course vulnerability according to their diverse contexts. To provide effective education for vulnerable children, teachers therefore need to be cognisant of the diverse social backgrounds of the students they teach, and thus have individualistic approaches when dealing with each vulnerable child considering the burdens they carry in their everyday lives (Siope, 2011).

The respondents described how the meals offered by the school brought affirmative social relationships with their school spaces and thus positive schooling experiences. As one of the respondents narrated, 'if there is no food at home, I push myself and come to school

because I know that I may get rice and beans during the lunch hour', I remembered the meals that 'gogo Khanyile' as we lovingly called her, prepared for us on daily basis. I recalled the yearning we had as children, making long lines to dish stamp and beans, and it was the survival of the fittest. As the vulnerable children described how they were bullied and pushed off the queues for these meals, I recalled the tears of hunger in our faces each time, we could not get the food because we had not pushed enough. Such experiences affected us, and I always had difficulty concentrating in class without having had anything to eat. Hence, I imagined the extent to which such experiences negatively affected these vulnerable children's schooling experiences without having had anything to eat both at home and in the school contexts.

Vulnerable children as social agents

As the participants described how they navigated the teacher spaces by rebelling, and that it was this same defiance that helped them to thrive under the teacher's spaces that suppressed them, I was stunned. I reminisced my childhood, remembered the domineering style of control used by our teachers and I clearly remembered one particular time, when the school premises were littered with dishing bowls. I was directed by my class teacher, with five (5) other learners to go around collecting the bowls. Co-incidentally or with intent, we were all from the same circle of friends, children from poor backgrounds. I felt so bitter and angry with the teachers for picking us out of all the other learners and, angry with the other pupils for being irresponsible. I was also angry at life in general, for the life struggles we faced, but we could never have thought of rebelling and defying teachers' authority, the kind of teachers who did not envision the agency and voice of children. Culturally and socially, it was unheard off and the teachers' word was final. Having resilience and maintaining their agency as social actors as they actively constructed their childhood in their spaces (Uprichard, 2008) helped the vulnerable children of the study to rise above their educational impediments with optimism, and I recalled how as children we individually navigated such teacher-controlled spaces to effectively attain education.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated how growing up as a vulnerable child surrounded by the discourses of vulnerability influenced my construction of vulnerability and vulnerable children, which later inclined me to undertake a study on the schooling experiences of vulnerable children. My childhood memory and experiences provided a rich source to reflect on as the vulnerable children narrated their stories and I went about with the study. My childhood memories further enabled a deeper insight and an analysis of the study on vulnerable children and what might be done to make school processes inclusive of such children, in order to make their schooling experiences positive and effective in ending their future vulnerabilities. My childhood's positioning, social relations and discourses proved to be an overriding factor on the conceptualisation, knowledge acquisition, production and analysis of a study on vulnerable children, and in extension the schooling experiences of these children. The article has highlighted the importance of productive remembering, researcher positionality and the centrality of childhood memories in the processes of knowledge production. Indeed knowledge production is deeply immersed in complex interplay of discursively regulated

social relations, which formed the vulnerable children's schooling experiences and the researcher's positionality, informed by past experiences. The same way as my childhood memories affected my epistemology and knowledge acquisition, this study recommends that, through comprehending the efficacy of memory, teachers can formulate pedagogic practises that are responsive to the diverse experiences that vulnerable children bring into classroom and school contexts, which they subconsciously use as basis of learning and experiencing school. This would help teachers to be thoughtful of the things they say and do to vulnerable children, aware of the consequences they might have on their knowledge acquisition.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa is a PhD candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. She is an astute emerging critical educational sociologist and researcher with her research interests and publications on gender, vulnerability and experiences of children in rural schooling contexts in Southern Africa.

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Vulnerability and Children's Real-Life Schooling Experiences in Swaziland

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa

Pholoho Justice Morojele
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

This paper foregrounds vulnerable children as a social group whose experiences should be studied and understood from their own perspectives. The paper explores the real-life schooling experiences of six Grade 6 vulnerable children, aged between 11–15 years, in a rural primary school in the Lubombo region of Swaziland. Guided by a theoretical paradigm of social constructionism, the paper engages dynamics of children's vulnerability within this context, ravaged by poverty and HIV and AIDS. The aim is to contribute insights to our understanding on how we might improve vulnerable children's quality of schooling and educational experiences. A qualitative narrative approach was adopted, using semi-structured individual and focus group interviews and a participatory research method, photovoice, for data generation. The findings indicate that vulnerable children carried trauma caused by life experiences that affected their learning. They were also found to be lacking necessities like candles to help them with studying, and had additional family responsibilities that competed with their study time. Teachers' administration of corporal punishment was found to be inequitably skewed against vulnerable children, thereby exacerbating their schooling plight.

Keywords: **v**ulnerability, children, schooling, experiences, rural, Swaziland

Introduction

In the year 2016, alone, Swaziland had about 150,000 vulnerable children in the country's schools—a drastic increase from 78,000 in 2015 (Simelane, 2016). The Kingdom of Swaziland (2010) defines a vulnerable child as one, with or without parents, who lacks the basic needs for survival, and is living in circumstances with high risk, and whose prospects for health, growth, and development are seriously impaired, mostly due to the effects of HIV and AIDS. Within the Swaziland education system, vulnerable children are considered to include orphans, children living in child-headed households, and those from poor social and economic backgrounds. Vulnerable children are locally referred to as *bantfwana bendlunkhulu* [those cared for by the whole community] and whose educational fees are paid by the government. Although the reasons that render children vulnerable may differ, for instance, orphaned children, those experiencing childhood poverty, and children living in child-headed households in Swaziland, these children share one thing—and that is vulnerability and poverty (Nordtveit, 2010). It is against this backdrop that the study adopted the concept of vulnerable children in order to understand the shared real-life schooling experiences of these children. Although the article is about vulnerable children's experiences within school (or learning) spaces, we avoided referring to them as vulnerable learners so as to emphasise the social (rather than the didactical) dimensions of the vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences.

In 1990, Swaziland committed itself to the Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) aimed at focusing on poverty and the needs of all children by 2015 (Khumalo, 2013). The country also became a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All, which formed the basis for inclusive educational policies in the country (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2011). By signing these declarations, the state devoted itself to improving education, especially for the most vulnerable and underprivileged children in the country (UNESCO, 2000). Guided by these conventions, in 2003, the government of Swaziland introduced the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children's (OVC) fund to cater for vulnerable children's educational fees (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2012). The country's constitution of 2005 also offered a legal framework for the rights of all children and set an objective of free primary education (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005). In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Training consequently designed the Education Sector Policy, which was underpinned by international, regional, and national declarations on the rights of all children. This policy outlines the state's goals towards the improvement of vulnerable children's lives by identifying, monitoring, and accommodating their educational needs (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2011).

Even after adopting the aforementioned conventions, laws, and policies, Swaziland has not fully succeeded in implementing them at a practical level (Sukati, 2013). For example, Nordtveit (2010) found that school practices, and teachers in Swaziland, still exclude vulnerable children; and these children were also found to have a predisposition for exploitation and sexual abuse by some teachers (Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, 2013), which forces them to drop out of school (Nordtveit, 2010) at a higher rate than children who are not regarded as vulnerable. Such a scenario increases vulnerable children's risk of being trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability because it deprives them of their right to education, which is a prerequisite for a better and gracious later life. It actually contravenes vulnerable children's right to basic learning needs of fair and dignified treatment, which is necessary for them to complete quality school education (UNESCO, 2000) as ratified by the Dakar Framework for Action, to which Swaziland subscribes. Clearly, more needs to be done, therefore, to comprehend the daily life experiences of vulnerable children in light of these possible policy–practice discrepancies. Hence, we undertook this study, which tries to shed insights on the real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children in this context. To address this policy–practice gap, the paper combines narrative interviews with photovoice imagery to bring to the research world a glimpse of the vulnerable children's voices as they expressed their feelings and opinions related to their schooling experiences. In this rural context, education is seen as the only hope for breaking the

circle of poverty and vulnerability (Sutton, Smith, Dearden, & Middleton, 2007), hence the need to open debates and conceptualisations of new possibilities for educational reforms aimed at enhancing the schooling opportunities of vulnerable children.

Social Constructionism as Theoretical Perspective

One inevitable question that must be answered is, "What is it about social constructionism that makes it appropriate as a theoretical perspective for studying real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children in school contexts?" At the heart of social constructionism is the view that vulnerable children's ways of constructing their real-life schooling experiences are generated by relations, rather than by external realities (Gergen, 2009). Social constructionism's emphasis is on discourse and social relations as bases on which vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences are predicated. Gee (2011) saw discourse as a socially accepted association among ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group. McCann & Kim (2003) posited that a discourse is not a language or a text, but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs. Therefore, discursively constituted social relations are key phenomena informing vulnerable children's views about the world, and their relationships with wider society, family, and the school, and vice versa (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Similarly, Acevedo-Garcia, Rosenfeld, McArdle, & Osypuk (2010) noted complex and synergic nexuses between vulnerable children's social relationships at school, family, and the wider community.

However, this does not mean that there are no external realities informing or affecting vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences. Social constructionism postulates that what is important in the study of vulnerable children is to understand how these children perceive and make sense of the world around them, and that it is the vulnerable children's socially and historically constituted relations that determine their real-life schooling experiences. While social constructionists are not in the business of dismissing reality, they do, however, question the objective existence of meaningful reality.

> Social constructionism doesn't try to rule on what is or is not fundamentally real. Whatever is, simply is. However, the moment we begin to articulate what there is—what is truly or objectively the case—we enter a world of discourse, and thus a tradition, a way of life and a set of value preferences. (Gergen, 2009, p. 161)

Rather than seeking facts and truths, this article was interested in the vulnerable children's social spaces and places—in the home and school—and how historically constituted repertoires of vulnerable children's relationships with these spaces informed constructions of these children's real-life schooling experiences. This theoretical perspective enabled the article to illuminate not only the spaces and places of vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences but also the highly emotional value (due to often deeply held painful and traumatic memories, resulting from historically constituted social attachments and experiences some vulnerable children had in relation to these environments), which the vulnerable children attached to these spaces. Social constructionism draws on ideas of developmental psychology, influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Jerome Bruner (Bruner & Weinreich-Haste, 1987, p. 1), which has shifted in recent years from viewing children as active but isolated agents to an emphasis on children as active social beings: accepting that vulnerable children's "making sense [of real-life schooling experiences] is a social process; and an activity situated within [a] cultural and historical context." Indeed, vulnerable children's school experiences in this study were found to be inescapably immersed in discursively symbolised and regulated social relationships with close relatives, teachers, and other children within this context. When vulnerable children narrated stories about their real-life schooling experiences, we understood that these were not just vulnerable children's stories, but an embodied reflection of socially constituted relationships' dynamics in the

communities, schools, and homes in which they lived. Sadly, the values preferences that teachers, relatives, and other children ascribed to vulnerable children, and vice versa, had the consequence of relegating the vulnerable children to subservience, often bearing the brunt of any thwarts emanating from these relationships**.**

Real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children

Vulnerable children face challenges in community, family, and school contexts that bear devastatingly on their real-life schooling experiences. Communities tend to stigmatise and discriminate against them because they associate vulnerable children with social ills like poverty and HIV and AIDS (Nyabanyaba, 2009). Some communities, particularly in rural and poverty-stricken communities where almost everyone is struggling to meet basic means of subsistence, exhibit envy and jealousy towards vulnerable children who receive free aid—especially when this comes from rich international and Western organisations (Lekule, 2014). In family contexts, vulnerable children have real and important responsibilities in their lives that affect their study time (Mohlokwana, 2013). Some have lost both parents and live in child-headed households and, therefore, have to simultaneously address family responsibilities and meet schooling requirements (Nsibande, 2015). These complexities, and lack of proper and functional family structures, intensify the magnitude of vulnerable children's life challenges in ways that relegate them to inability to comply with their schooling requirements (Nelson & Christensen, 2009)—like completion of assignments and arriving on time to school (Horgan, 2007). This then becomes a recipe for corporal punishment by teachers and, in some cases, expulsion from school (Nordtveit, 2010), whether constructively or directly by school principals who are normally keen to enforce the school rules and regulations.

Vulnerable children further face challenges of social exclusion as they try to fit into the school society (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2004). For instance, other learners are terrified of playing with them due to an uninformed fear of contracting the HIV virus (Nyabanyaba, 2009). The negative constructions held about them and their menial social status render these children susceptible to bullying and ridicule by peers (Sukati, 2013). In addition, schools subject vulnerable children to unfair and unjust treatment (Sutton, et al., 2007), due to lack of understanding or appreciation of these children's life challenges and situations. Sometimes teachers and other children yell at the vulnerable children (Horgan, 2007) and intimidate them (Lekule, 2014), particularly because of the minority social status that they possess in the power hierarchies of social relationships within the schools. All these factors converge to compound the vulnerable children's situation in ways that exacerbate and add to their schooling plight and frustrations.

Research Design

Research context

The school in which this study was conducted is located in the rural Lubombo region on the far east of Swaziland, bordered by Mozambique. Lubombo is largely rural with 76% of its schools being in the rural areas (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2013). Due to the persistent drought, which has spanned more than 20 years now (Salam & Mamba, 2012), the people of Lubombo have heavily relied on food aid because extreme poverty stands at 37 % (Swaziland Central Statistical Office & United Nations Children Fund, 2011), which makes it the poorest of the four regions in the country (UNICEF, 2009). Most people here live from piecework, and are paid in the form of food (Salam & Mamba, 2012). Lubombo is also the area hardest hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS and, therefore, has the highest percentage of vulnerable children in the country (Braithwaite, Djima & Pickmans, 2013). Furthermore, children in Lubombo are the most deprived of education (UNICEF, 2009), and are the most engaged in child labour (Nordtveit, 2010).

Research methodology

A qualitative research paradigm was adopted as a methodological framing for the study. This paradigm was chosen for its ability to enable elicitation of quality active data, which explicates the complexities, dynamisms, and emotional subjectivities of socially constituted phenomena like real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This allowed deeper access into the cultural contexts of the vulnerable children, and in an empowering manner that valued vulnerable children as active participants and coconstructors of knowledge about their real-life schooling experiences. Unlike a quantitative research paradigm, which uses numbers and instruments (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010), qualitative research uses words, which privileges the vulnerable children's voices. In tandem with the theoretical perspective of this study, qualitative research is further concerned with the sociological nature of being and human experience (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Its appreciation of complexities, contradictions, and fluidities of being, and the value of subjectivities in research, adds immense richness, liveliness, and dynamism to knowledge production. This approach allowed the researchers to describe and examine vulnerable children's individual and common societal actions, values, and perceptions (Bryman, 2008) regarding their lived schooling experiences within the immediate context in which these phenomena occurred (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Through this approach, we were able to unearth complex, fluid, and supple realities that informed vulnerable children's understanding of the meanings, interpretations, and personal experiences of their schooling. We were further able to explore deeper into the social and personal world of the participants in more interactive, relational, and respectful ways. Moreover, the research participants had the opportunity to express their real-life schooling experiences from their own perspectives as children, using their own words.

Data generation methods

Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews and participatory photovoice techniques were utilised as methods of data collection. For photovoice, each participant was given a disposable camera with 27 frames. Pseudonyms, which the participants chose themselves, were used to name the cameras for ownership. The participants were trained on how to use the cameras, and were then urged to capture their chosen salient spaces and places that held meaning to their real-life schooling experiences either in an affirmative or undesirable way (Joubert, 2012) for a period of 4 days, after which the frames were developed. The photo imagery was then used during the interviews to act as ingress into the views, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants (Mitchell, Moletsane, Stuart, Buthelezi, & de Lange, 2005). Photovoice enabled active involvement of the participants as they took the images and helped in their analysis. This asserted the participant children as active agentic actors not only in shaping dynamics of their lives, but also in shaping the knowledge they would like this study to produce in respect of their real-life schooling experiences.

The study participants

The study participants consisted of six Grade 6 vulnerable children (aged between 11–15 years). They consisted of three boys and three girls, who were purposively sampled. Two were orphans, two from child-headed households, and two from poverty-stricken families (one boy and one girl for each pair). As indicated earlier, orphaned children were those whose parents had died, and were left in the care of extended families. Children from child-headed households were either those whose parents had died, or were abandoned by their parents and lived in households where the eldest was less than 18 years old, or stayed with very old people whose livelihood depended on the vulnerable children. Participants from poverty-stricken families had both parents, but lived under very poor socioeconomic conditions. Regardless of the source of vulnerability, a common denominator that cut across these children was poverty, which relegated vulnerable children susceptible to the worst of social ills and challenges related to their schooling.

With permission from the participants, the use of a tape recorder helped in the accurate capturing of what each participant said, and in supplementing data not recorded in notes. All interviews were conducted in SiSwati to allow participants to talk and express themselves without any linguistic restrictions (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data analysis procedures

Data were transcribed from SiSwati into English for easy analysis. One of the authors is a Swazi, which thus helped with the analysis of transcriptions from SiSwati to English. An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive patterns and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emergent themes were then coded and the pictures selected and contextualised with assistance from the participants. Careful relistening to the recorded data was useful to ensure transcriptions' accuracy during generation of themes and with linking names of the actual informants to the pseudonyms used in this study. The participants' facial expressions and voice tone were noted in order to comprehend their emotions. The themes that emerged from all the data (photovoice, individual, and focus group interviews) were then analysed and discussed to derive the findings of this study.

Ethical considerations

Consent for the research was sought from the Director of Schools in Swaziland, the school principal, and from parents or caregivers of the participants. Considering that some vulnerable children had neither parents nor guardians, letters of consent for such participants were written to the *umgcugcuteli* [community caregiver]. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office. As the study views children as competent human beings who can decide on issues that concern their lives, their consent was also sought. In this paper, pseudonyms, which the participants chose themselves, are used to protect their identity.

Findings

Vulnerable children's experiences in home and family spaces.

Schooling experiences of every child does not begin when learners get into the school environment or end when the school day is over, but goes far beyond the school context to the community and home spaces (Nelson & Christensen, 2009). For example, vulnerable children have to study and write assignments in their family spaces. Dynamics within the home settings were found to be contributing, somewhat negatively, to the real-life schooling experiences of the vulnerable children through the grief and trauma that these environments exposed them to. In addition, the absence of adult people (particularly their own parents) in their lives was also found to be devastating for these children, either emotionally or physically.

Vulnerable children's trauma and grief

The findings highlighted the traumatic experiences that the vulnerable children went through in their lives. There is evidence of huge emotional grief and distress that some vulnerable children underwent, and the stress these complications caused had likelihood to distract their concentration on learning. Picture 1, below, was provided by Anita to illustrate her daily distressing experience related to the suicide death of her father:

Picture 1

Anita (girl aged 12, focus group discussion): Lapha ngulapho babe atibulalela khona. Ngihlala njalo ngitibuta kutsi kwaba yini sizatfu sakhe. Kuyangilimata, noko ngiyati kutsi kute longanginika leto timphendvulo. [This is where my father committed suicide. I think about it almost every day. Why he really had to do this? It always hurt so much yet I know that I would never get the answers that I want].

The above excerpt demonstrates the pain and grief that some vulnerable children had to endure on a day-to-day basis. The emotional pain of seeing a place where her father committed suicide was a fact too hard to bear for a 12-year-old Anita. Unfortunately, there was no way in which this unsightly place could be removed from Anita's family compound, making it a place of horror to her on daily basis. There were no counselling services provided in this community, which means that Anita had to deal with all this on her own because her mother had also passed away. The plight of vulnerable children is really understated because the emotions they go through are usually not accommodated in many societal, community, and school structures, especially in the rural areas. The sight of a dead parent, or looking after a terminally ill parent who eventually dies in their care, was not uncommon among the six participants in this study. The findings indicate that the vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences were emotionally laden, often due to deeply held painful and traumatic memories as a result of historically constituted social attachments and experiences they had in relation to these environments. Without properly organised assistance, therefore, children like Anita were not able to cope with schooling requirements (Nelson & Christensen, 2009). Such emotional burdens that competed with their concentration on learning further aggravated their vulnerability. Furthermore, not being able to complete some school tasks and assignments predisposed the vulnerable children to punishment by teachers, which added to the level of their pain and discomfort.

The vulnerable children in the study were relegated to experience the bitter consequences of the breakdown of African and family values of communality because most of them were isolated and seen by extended family members as burdens due to a lack of financial resources to sustain their lives. This included the vulnerable children's educational requirements like school uniforms, and so forth. Separations from extended family members left some vulnerable children to shoulder the responsibilities of caring for themselves and their siblings emotionally and physically, as the excerpts below illustrate:

Anita (girl aged 12, focus group discussion): Ngake ngacela malume kutsi angitsengele inyifomu yesikolwa, wangikhahlabeta matima. Wangitjela kutsi babe akabulawanga nguye. Njalo nangicabanga loku lakusho, ngitfukutsela kakhulu ngiyafisa kutsi babe ngabe usekhona. Lokuhlupheka nebuhlungu lobungaka ngabe angibhekani nabo [I once asked my uncle to buy me a school uniform and he was mean. He said he was not responsible for my father's death. I still think about the things he said and I have so much anger and I wish I had a father; he would have obviously protected me from this suffering].

Fortunate (girl aged 15, focus group discussion): Make wangishiya wayohlala eSkhwahlande. Umundeni wakhe awukhonanga kuhlala nami ngobe bakholelwa kutsi make ubalekela imisebenti yakhe njengemtali. Bebahlala njalo bangitjela kutsi make wehla uyenyuka lena eJozi. Nangisahlala nabo ngangihlala njalo ngikhala kani nalokutsi make vele wakhohlwa kukhohlwa ngami, kuhlala njalo kungilimata kakhulu engcondvweni [My mother left me to stay in South Africa and her family refused to take care of me, because they felt she was running away from her responsibilities as a parent. They always told me that my mother was a very loose woman. I cried almost every day thus decided to go back home, and the fact that my mother completely forgot about me, affects me so much].

The data reveals the deep emotional scars, pain, and bitterness entrenched by both the circumstances that led to the vulnerable children's state of vulnerability, as well as by the denigrating manner in which their close relatives treated them as a result. The tendency by family members to reject vulnerable children had a devastating effect on these children's emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing, confirming social constructionism's argument that supportive social relations are important for vulnerable children to have positive constructions of their real-life schooling experiences. In particular, referring to the horrific incident of the death of Anita's father as a reason for not buying her a school uniform was the greatest form of emotional abuse. Anita was, clearly, deeply scarred by the experience of her father's suicide, which she witnessed just after it occurred—and daily afterwards in her school journey because she had to walk past the place where the suicide took place. The last thing she wanted in her life was to be reminded about this by a trusted uncle, who was supposed to be a source of joy and emotional comfort for Anita. Anita's uncle's remarks that he was not responsible for her father's death in justification of not buying Anita a school uniform had the likelihood to evoke a number of unpleasant emotions. First, to instil a notion that someone had to be blamed for the suicide death of Anita's father, which was futile given the context under which this was stated. Secondly, to make crystal clear the painful nexus between Anita's lack of school uniform and the death of her father—which merely served a dysfunctional purpose of relegating Anita to the brink of emotional breakdown. There is no doubt about the adverse implications of such an experience on Anita's ability to attend school and cope with the academic demands of schooling.

The lack of willingness by family members to assist vulnerable children is a deeply worrisome indication of African family disintegration, and a drift away from the spirit of African communalism—commonly known as Ubuntu, *Buntfu* in SiSwati. Historically, it took a village to bring up an African child, but with the status quo of unprecedented challenges of poverty, unemployment, and AIDS, the means of survival have become hard to come by. The findings indicated that these survival challenges had relegated most families in this Swazi community to conduct their lives along the "every person for herself or himself and God for us all" principle. Sadly, this mentality brings no good news for the vulnerable children who, to the very contrary, desperately require more support, care, and belonging from their families and communities than at any time before (Wood & Goba, 2011), owing to the challenges of abject poverty, unemployment, and the scourge of AIDS.

Absence of adult or parents in vulnerable children's lives

The study findings showed that the absence of adult people in home contexts brought about negative experiences, with consequent responsibilities that competed with the vulnerable children's study time—lack of necessities, chaotic home environments, and relatives who took advantage of the vulnerable children, as illustrated below:

> *Anita (girl aged 12, individual interview): Khokho kute nakunye lakwentako. Mine ke kudzingeka ngimunakekele, ngipheke, ngiwashe, ngiphindze ngiciniseke kutsi ngakusasa kukhona latokudla mangisesikolweni. Uma sekudzingeka ngidadishe, emva kwawowonkhe lomusebenti lona, ngisuke sengidzinwe kakhulu kutsi ngingenta lutho* [My great-grand mother literally does nothing and I have to do all the work, take care of her, cook, wash and also make sure that when I go to school the next day, she has something to eat. By the time I have to study, I am just too tired to do anything].

> *Precious (girl aged 13, focus group discussion): Uma ngibuya esikolweni onkhe malanga, ngiyacabanga ngelilanga lelilandzelako ngoba ngati kutsi lemisebenti lengidzinga kutsi ngiyente ekhaya, kupheka nalokunye lokunenti, itongenta ngingatfoli litfuba lekwenta umsebenti wami wesikolwa. Ngako ke ngiyati kutsi luswati vele lungihlalele. Ngesikhatsi sengicedzile ngisuke sengidziniwe, ngingacabangi ngsiho kucabanga ngemusebenti wesikolwa. Ngalesinye sikhatsi sekuhwalele, ukhandze kutsi nelikhandlela kute* [When I get home from school every day, I worry about the next school day because I do not get enough time to do my schoolwork and, obviously, the teachers will punish me. I usually have too much work to do, like cooking for the family and other house chores. By the time I am done, I am usually so tired that I do not even think of my schoolwork or we do not have a candle for lighting].

Below, Picture 2, is pictorial evidence of one of the chaotic environments the vulnerable children were subjected to in the home context:

Picture 2

> *Gustuff (boy aged 13, individual interview): Lesitfombe sikhombisa ingcinamba nje-lengibhekana nayo imihla nemalanga. Esimeni lesinjena angikhoni kunaka umsebenti wami wesikolwa. Mzala wahlala angitfuma ngiyomutsengela tjwala neligwayi ngisho lilanga selishonile, akangenelani nekutsi mine loko kungiphatsa njani. Kute ke lengingakwenta ngaphandle kwekutsi ngente lakushoko ngoba sondliwa nguye. Eskhatsini lesinengi usuke adzakiwe, abange umsindvo nge radio, amemete-nawo longikhubako phindze ungiphatamise uma ngifuna kubhala umsebenti wesikolo noma ngidadishe* [This picture shows what I have to deal with on daily basis. In such a set-up, concentrating on my homework is impossible. My cousin always sends me to buy him alcohol or cigarettes even during the late hours and he does not care how that makes me feel. I have no alternative but to comply because he is the one who buys food. Most of the time he is drunk and the loud music and noise that he makes also frustrates me when I want to study or write homework].

From the narratives above, it is apparent that the vulnerable children's real-life experiences were informed by historically constituted unequal power relationships between children and adults (Gergen & Gergen, 2000), which led to Gustuff's cousin's exploitative abuse of his guardianship authority. We determined that vulnerable children, like Anita in this context, were forced by circumstances to grow up into adults by doing chores and taking over responsibilities that were way beyond their ages, whilst other children of the same age enjoy being children (Evans & Pilyoung, 2013). Gustuff seemed to be profusely contradicted in his identities as a schoolchild and cigarette and alcohol delivery boy, coupled with late night music when he still had to wake up early and be attentive in the classrooms the following day. Evidently, such chaos at a family level did not contribute positively to the real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children like Gustuff who had to navigate complex and contradictory demands of having to do his homework in the midst of alcohol and loud music late at night.

From these findings, it is clear that in poverty-stricken households, family members who are generally not the biological parents of the vulnerable children, tended to be less responsible. The evidence points to these members' propensity to misuse or overuse the dominant African adult–child relationship where the assumption is that elders have many issues to deal with emotionally and physically pertaining to the welfare of the home, justifying delegation of all the mundane family chores to the vulnerable children. Such an approach characterised many a Swazi family (Nelson & Christensen, 2009), even in cases where there were no issues of vulnerability. Non-vulnerable children are unfavourably affected by this practice—and even more severely so by vulnerable children. Exploiting vulnerable children to perform any form of extra labour that does not support their developmental rights as children (like education) is flawed with negative and unjust implications, and cannot be justified by any cultural and moral principle. This shows the centrality of compassionate, sensitive, respectful, and nonexploitative social relations as basis for the enhancement of vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences.

Vulnerable children's experiences in school spaces

As stated earlier, social constructionism posits that the social relations that vulnerable children have with their teachers regulate how they construct their real-life schooling experiences (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Indeed, the findings indicated the central role that teachers' relationships and interactions with the vulnerable children played to inform these children's real-life schooling experiences. Teachers' and vulnerable children's relations could be understood as both productive and unfavourable.

Caring teachers

The study found a prevalence of good and affirmative relationships between some teachers and vulnerable children in this school. These teachers were found to be compassionate and responsive to the plight of the vulnerable children. There was evidence of care and concern for their well-being and welfare as illustrated below:

> *Precious (girl aged 13, focus group discussion): Linengi lebantfwana lapha esikolweni bayagula, umphatsi uyaya ayobahlola emakhaya uma bangasakhoni kuta esikolweni. Lokunye, uyacinisekisa kutsi ngaso sonkhe sikhatsi lapha esikolweni kukhona lesingakudla ngoba uyati kutsi linengi letfu ngeke sikhone kuphila ngaphandle kwalokudla lesikutfola lapha esikolweni* [We have many sick children in the school and the principal checks on their health when and if they get sick and can no longer come to school. In addition, he ensures that we always have something to eat because he is aware that most of us cannot survive without the food provided by the school].

> *Ayanda (boy aged 11, focus group discussion): Ebusika, labanye bothishela basitsengela ticatfulo nemajezi. Siyabonga kutsi basicabangele nome nabo banetinkinga tabo* [During the winter season, the teachers usually buy school shoes and jerseys for us. We appreciate the little that they do for us under their own circumstances].

> *Fortunate (girl aged 15, individual interview): Uma kukhona longakuva uma kufundvwa, ungaya kulomunye thishela uyobutisisa. Siya kubothishela labasiphatsa kahle. Labanye bothishela beva ngatsi singumutfwalo* [If you have not understood a concept in class, you can go to another teacher for clarity. Usually we go to the teachers that are good to us, because other teachers feel we are a burden and like attention].

Showing compassion and care towards vulnerable children was the kindest gesture of moral benevolence demonstrated by the principal and some teachers in this school. The positive ramifications that caring teachers brought to the vulnerable children not only reverberate in the tones of the children's narrations of these stories, but are indeed impactful on the quality of these children's real-life schooling experiences. The data confirms that vulnerable children felt welcome and content (Lupton, 2004) in schools where teachers were caring, loving, and took interest on their lives, making love and compassion an essential obligation for effective learning of vulnerable children. When there are no parents to care for the vulnerable children, and their extended families are neglecting and abusing them, it seems that the school was a place of hope for the vulnerable children in this study. Some teachers have begun to take responsibility on their own shoulders to alleviate the plight of the vulnerable children. This may mark the beginning of a turnaround in Swazi schools in respect of teachers' willingness to expand their roles beyond mere classroom pedagogical didactics to using their influential professional positions to play broader grief alleviation, social support, and transformational roles.

It should be noted however, that such extended show of support by teachers could be very emotionally draining for the teachers (Wood & Goba, 2011). Support mechanisms are therefore necessary to help caring teachers to become of maximum benefit to vulnerable children, without also comprising their own well-being. Among others, such support may come in the form of equipping teachers with skills on how to work with, care for, and teach vulnerable children effectively.

Uncaring teachers

The findings also revealed negative ways in which vulnerable children constructed their real-life schooling experiences in the school, particularly in cases where teachers subjected the vulnerable

children to unfair treatment and marginalisation. These learners claimed that teachers chastised them for offenses that were beyond their control and used different ways to mete out punishment. Hence, punishment by teachers came out very strongly amongst all the respondents of the study. They felt it was unfairly skewed against them as vulnerable children, which is evident from the narratives below:

Sifiso (boy aged 12, individual interview): Lendlela lebasishaya ngayo inesihlungu lesimatima, emvakwekushaywa vele singabe sisakhona kufundza kahle. Phandle kwaloko nje, bothishela bayakhetsa, basijezisa ngendlela lengafani neyalabanye bafundzi-ngobe tsine sihluphekile [The punishment is just too much for us to bear and we cannot really concentrate after the beating. Besides, the teachers are choosy when it comes to the punishment; teachers punish us differently from other learners because we are poor].

Gustuff (boy aged 13, focus group discussion): Mmmmmm lendlela lesishaywa ngayo isenta singasitsandzi sikolwa. Bothishela bavele bakubuke emehlweni; uma utiphuyele bakushayisa kwentfo lenganamusebbenti. Bafundzi labaphuma emakhaya lakeme kahle noma bangenti kahle, bona bayacolelwa melula [Mmmmmmmm—the punishment makes us hate school* [The tendency for children to speak in plural terms, not only for themselves was prevalent in this study, more as a cultural expression of communality linked to the African principles of ubuntu rooted in the Swazi local language dialect). The teachers just look at you in the eye; if you are poor, they punish you like a useless thing. If learners from better off families misbehave, they are easily forgiven].

Fortunate (girl aged 15, focus group interview): Uma kwentekile wefika esikolweni muva noma ngemizuzu lesihlanu, ushaywa nge duster etingalweni noma kutsiwe hamba uyosebenta engadzeni labanye bafundzi babe bachubeka nekufundza. Bayasitsetsisa, lomunye thishela wake wangitjela kutsi ngibahambela ngcunu ngekutsi nje ngangigcoke inyifomu ledzabukile. Bothishela abatihluphi ngekutfola kutsi sentiwa yini kufika muva esikolweni. Bavele basitjele kutsi si bantfwababogogo. Ngalesinye sikhatsi basitjele kutsi sibadzala kunaleli class lesikulo [If you come late to school, even 5 minutes late, you are punished by being beaten with a blackboard duster on the head or you work in the garden whilst the other learners continue with classes. They rebuke us; a teacher once told me I was naked because I was wearing a torn uniform. Teachers do not even bother to find out why we are usually late. They say we are spoiled brats. At times, they tell us that we are too old for that class].

The photograph, Picture 3 below, was provided by Gustuff to illustrate the way teachers punished vulnerable children in the school.

Picture 3

Gustuff (boy aged 13, focus group discussion): Lesitfombe sitjengisa I blackboard duster bothishela labasishaya ngayo noma sente emaphutsa lamancane kakhulu. Abakhulumi natsi kuva tinkinga lesinato letisenta singenti kahle—bavele basikhahlabete [This picture shows a blackboard duster used by teachers to punish us for very petty offenses. They do not talk to us, to find out about the challenges that we have—all they do is shout at us].

The findings indicate how the use of corporal punishment as a behaviour corrective mechanism is inequitably antagonistic towards vulnerable children. The social circumstances of lack of support, neglect, and abuse by extended family members naturally predisposed the vulnerable children's inability to comply with some rigid school regimes. For example, arriving on time in school, wearing proper school uniform (one that is not torn, least the child is labelled as coming naked to school, as the 15-year-old girl, Fortunate, has stated above), completing assignments, and so forth. Therefore, the likelihood that vulnerable children would feature in cases requiring corporal corrective punishment is very high; perhaps this might account for the feeling from the vulnerable children that teachers seemed to be targeting them as opposed to children from rich or conventional families. It is also logical to assume that children from rich or conventional families may have all the necessary support structures, which makes it easy for them to comply with and meet most of the school requirements.

Corporal punishment was propagated as a dominant sociocultural children's behaviour modification practice in Swaziland (Nordtveit, 2010), often justified on grounds of the age-old biblical scriptures of "spare the rod, spoil a child" logic. Yet findings indicate that the rod must be spared, not with intent to spoil the child but recognising the social backgrounds of children as being the root cause of their ill behaviour. Although corporal punishment informed real-life schooling experiences of the vulnerable children, there was no evidence that this practice achieved its intended outcomes—raising question as to the effectiveness of this form of punishment, in general, as a behaviour modification strategy. Certainly, corporal punishment has huge potential to change children's behaviour, but sadly not in line with the teachers' expectations. As the 13-year-old boy, Gustuff, furiously lamented, "Mmmmmmmm—the punishment makes us hate school." Actually, instead of coercing learners to do what teachers expect, corporal punishment does the opposite—it chases children away from school (Nordtveit, 2010), and made the vulnerable learners hate school and the teachers. All of this worked against the best interests of both the teachers, vulnerable children, and the broader Swazi national agenda of using education as a tool for social, economic, and human development (Sutton, et al., 2007). For these children, administering corporal punishment was a huge gesture of lack of love and care that teachers demonstrated and which had a compounding rather than mitigating effect on the severity of vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences.

These findings add to wider regional and international calls for the abolishment of corporal punishment as a means of reprimanding children in schools. Actually, neighbouring South Africa has long passed a law that abolishes corporal punishment, and teachers who practise this commit an offense that is punishable by law. Perhaps it is time for Swaziland to join in these developmental strides, which are all aimed at cherishing, supporting, and respecting all learners as competent members of society who deserve humane and considerate treatment just like any human members of our societies.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Socially constructed relationships were not only the means by which vulnerable children constructed their real-life schooling experiences (Gergen, 2009). In the bigger scheme of things, vulnerable children themselves, were a product of thwarted socially constituted historical relationships. Almost all life incidents that relegated children to vulnerability, and the vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences, were deeply suffused in complex social relationships or lack thereof. For instance, the

brutal death of a parent, abuse by close relatives or schoolteachers, dysfunctional families, teacher relationships at school, and so forth. The real-life schooling experiences of vulnerable children were suffused with fleeting moments of love and care, and enduring moments of grief and trauma. The moments of grief and trauma were mainly indicated by the painful incidents like the loss of a parent (which usually led to, or exacerbated, children's degree of vulnerability) and the manner in which teachers and relatives treated the vulnerable children as well as neglect and abuse by extended family members. The moments of love and care mainly came from the vulnerable children's school-based social relations and experiences, albeit these were a combination of love, care, and support from some teachers, mixed with exclusion and verbal abuse from other teachers. Notable among the unpleasant experiences at the school level was teachers' administering of corporal punishment as a behaviour corrective mechanism. This was found to not only be a form of unjustifiable physical abuse, but also inequitably militating against the vulnerable children. Such a strategy left vulnerable children with no recourse but to hate school—which may account for the high incidence of primary school drop out in Swaziland (Nordtveit, 2010). An aggravating factor to the challenge of school drop out was the apparent lack of opportunities for vulnerable children to organise their lives in other spaces because the school–home interfaces were the main, if not the only, social spaces and places that informed these children's real-life schooling experiences in this rural context. This left the vulnerable children with little or no buffer zones to mitigate the effects of their unfavourable experiences.

The following recommendations are made as possible ways through which the quality of vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences can be enhanced:

- Teachers' administering of corporal punishment in Swazi schools should be made illegal and punishable by law.

- In-service teacher workshops and seminars meant to deconstruct the negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with poverty and HIV and AIDS should be convened. This is because most vulnerable children in this context were either directly or indirectly associated with these social ills. Therefore, the dominant discourse closely associated with vulnerable children, in light of the misconceptions related to these social challenges, needs to be deconstructed.

- Reskilling of teachers with the appropriate teaching and social skills for dealing with vulnerable children is equally important. This is because teachers' lack of expertise regarding the facts and social realities of vulnerable children was found to play a major role in unfair and insensitive responses teachers made towards the transgressions committed by the vulnerable children. As stated above, most of the offenses committed by vulnerable children were due to circumstances beyond their control.

- Inception of social justice, diversity, and inclusive education modules should be made compulsory in all preservice teacher training institutions in Swaziland.

The above recommendations would be futile without foregrounding social relationship enhancement as an underpinning, overarching strategy to address the question of childhood vulnerability and unfavourable schooling experiences of vulnerable children in this context.

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Science and Poetry as Allies in School Learning

Claire Donald
Centre for Learning and Research in Higher Education (CLEAR), University of Auckland, Auckland
c.donald@auckland.ac.nz

Miles Barker
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton
mbarker@waikato.ac.nz

Abstract

In this paper, we propose that when learners in school classrooms write up a scientific observation, firstly as a science report and then as a poem, the way they express insights appropriate to each format can advance learners' observation skills and developing insight of the natural world. This could lead to productive learning alliances across traditional discipline boundaries and, by surfacing the cultural dimension of science within a sociocultural frame, promote social change. Tracing the domains of science and poetry over the last two centuries, we discern three areas of synergy: culture, creativity, and the curriculum. An integrative classroom exercise was devised to support these synergies explicitly with the intention of inspiring learners to write (say) what they really mean (see). We describe the encouraging results of a preliminary trial of this writing exercise with one small class of South African high school students, and outline possible future directions for research prompted by this work.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN SPEAK OUT: VOICES FROM ONE RURAL SCHOOL IN SWAZILAND

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-Mail: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Pholoho Justice Morojele
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-Mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of six grade six vulnerable children (aged between 11 -15 years) in one rural school, in Swaziland. Guided by Multiple Worlds theory, the paper elicited narratives of spaces and places depicting these children's schooling experiences. The study adopted a qualitative narrative approach as its methodology, and utilised semi-structured individual and focus group interviews and participatory photovoice technique, as its methods of data generation. The findings indicate that vulnerable children faced challenges of stigmatization and discrimination in their communities and schooling contexts. Vulnerable children had propensity to feature in cases of school reprimand due to obstacles they faced which prevented them from completing some school tasks or complying with certain school requirements. The study recommends some strategies by which the Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training, the community, and the school can make collaborative and coordinated efforts aimed at enhancing vulnerable children's quality of schooling experiences.

Keywords: Children; Schooling; Rural; Vulnerability; Education; Swaziland

Introducing vulnerability and children in Swaziland

In Swazi contexts, vulnerable children are especially those who are affected by the effects of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome), AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), and poverty (NPA, 2010). Since Swaziland is rated among countries with the highest prevalence of HIV cases, almost all Swazi children have a potential of being vulnerable. In Swazi schools, vulnerable children are in three (3) categories; orphans, children living in child headed households and those from poverty-stricken families. The Orphaned and

Vulnerable Children (OVC) fund which was introduced in schools as early as 2003 (Braithwaite, Djima & Pickmans, 2013) has enabled most vulnerable children to attend school. Like most vulnerable children in the continent of Africa, vulnerable children in Swazi schools, face difficulties that influence their schooling experience. Wright, Mannathoko and Pasic (2009) point out that school practices and teachers in Swaziland exclude vulnerable children. Teachers who fail to understand their different circumstances are marginalizing them, and the school practices stigmatise them. The use of the term Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC), in Swazi schools has also led to division among learners (Braithwaite et al, 2013) as the affected consider this label as being prejudiced (UNICEF, 2009).

Reza (2007) points out that, teachers sexually abuse vulnerable children in the school buildings and surroundings. This seems hard to control because, some vulnerable children due to their dire craving for basic survival needs tend to succumb to sexual advances from the teachers for meagre financial gains. Vulnerable children can also not afford to buy uniforms or pay the 'top-up' fees demanded by principals (Khumalo, 2013). Worse still, some vulnerable children do not have anyone to support them in assessing the OVC fund. Nordviert (2010) further argues that vulnerable children in Swazi schools are punished for failure to pay school fees and for not completing their homework. Teachers believe that vulnerable children do not write homework due to lack of commitment on their school work, then harass or snub them which eventually lead to them hating school.

Sukati (2013) explains that vulnerable children, especially those from rural areas start school very late in life. Parents and caregivers usually keep them at home to help with the cattle or as house cleaners, and because of their vulnerability, usually repeat classes. This makes them subjects for ridicule by their peers at school. Khumalo (2013) reveals that, vulnerable children are then found in the country`s cities doing low paying informal work like washing cars and carrying wares on their head across town for a fee. As reported in The Times of Swaziland (Mazibuko, 2015, p.12) vulnerable children also drop out of school to scavenge for food in the cities. Senzo*, a vulnerable child explained that he decided to escape from home and forget about school because his 38 year old mother struggled to provide for his family and they would at times go for days without food. Going to school on an empty stomach therefore was impossible for him.

In addition, vulnerable children have more responsibilities to attend to that end up contending with learning time. The Times of Swaziland (Nsibande, 2015, p.4) revealed a disheartening life of most vulnerable children in Swaziland. Siphilele*, a fifteen year old vulnerable child, was forced to sleep under a hospital bed caring for his sibling who was admitted in the hospital. He was quoted saying, "it is not easy for me to study and do homework while staying at the hospital. The first week in particular was hectic because I had so many tests and it was difficult for me to prepare for the assessments". This child relegated his right as a child and juggled his schoolwork with caring for the sibling. This changed the meaning that the child attached to his childhood and his school experience. Such is the plight of most children in Swaziland. Another aspect which negatively impact on vulnerable children`s schooling experience in the country is the journey to school. Most vulnerable children in the rural areas of the country travel long distances to school on foot because they do not have money to pay for transport (Sukati, 2013), and coupled with their economic status, usually without having had anything to eat.

In this article, we foreground the narratives and voices of vulnerable children in a rural primary school in Swaziland to provide a glimpse into these children's experiences – their plight and pleasures related to their schooling experiences. We contribute to the on-going debates on the complexities and magnitudes of inclusive education by adding vulnerable children in the equation as a social category that education policy makers and practitioners should factor in, in their efforts and strategies for the enhancement of inclusive education and equitable schooling experiences.

Using Multiple Worlds theory to understand vulnerable children

To shed some light on the phenomena of vulnerability and schooling the study used the concepts of the Multiple Worlds theory. This model was designed by Phelan P, Davidson Al and Yu H in the 1990s and it aims at understanding how vulnerable learners` family, peer and school worlds combined affect the educational engagement and experiences of these learners in school contexts (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1991). It is further interested in the situations that hamper or assist vulnerable learners in making transition between their family worlds and the world of school. Each world or context has boundaries and borders which sets apart insiders from outsiders. In addition, each world has values, beliefs, expectations, and emotional responses normal to insiders (Cooper

& Denner, 1998). In school contexts, vulnerable children are usually the outsiders and those not affected by vulnerability, are the insiders.

It is in these different environments that young people negotiate and make meaning of their life (Phelan et al, 1991). The Multiple Worlds theory is on the premise that all minority groups in various societies face complications as they attempt to move across their different worlds (Cooper & Denner, 1998). The different worlds have different values and vulnerable children usually face challenges of balancing the values of their families, their peers and the values of the school as they manoeuvre towards educational success (Cooper, Denner & Lopez, 1999). Cooper et al. further argue that, students utilize the cultural knowledge they acquire from their families, peers, and social worlds for their educational success. Vulnerable children usually come from poor backgrounds where the society or family does not put any value to education. When these children get into the school contexts, where the value of education is emphasized and they are obliged to meet certain requirements by the school like studying and peers who exclude them, the borders are impossible to penetrate for them. The limitations make vulnerable children to experience anxiety, fear and thwarts their ability to form relationships with other learners and teachers. Phelan et al. (1991) further argue that vulnerable children then end up giving up and accepting the world of their society or families.

Vulnerable children also face problems as they try to make up their identity in the different worlds (Cooper, 1999). Davila (2010) argues that as vulnerable children try to penetrate into the world of school, they are further faced with the complex challenges of thinking about whom they are to themselves and how others perceive them. Cooper and Cefai (2013) posit that teachers, school administration and all education stake holders can help vulnerable children effectively combine their family worlds and the world of school for effective educational achievement. At the same time they can frustrate the vulnerable children`s efforts to succeed (Phelan et al., 1991). Therefore this theory provided a platform to understand how these different worlds come together in the vulnerable children`s lives to construct their schooling experiences in this context and how they navigate between their different worlds. The theory also helped the study in comprehending the pain, suffering, and the challenges that vulnerable children face as they try to forge relationships with their schooling communities, and traverse through their worlds without any aid (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

Doing research with vulnerable children
Methodology

This study used a qualitative narrative design to provide data on the school spaces and places of vulnerable children in the school context. All interviews were conducted during the sports time in a room used as a community clinic within the school premises. Six participants were purposively sampled (3 males and 3 females), two were orphans, 2 from child headed households and 2 from poverty stricken families (1 male and 1 female for each pair) and their ages ranged between 11-15 years. Semi- structured questions were used in both individual and focus group interviews. Photo-voice helped in the recording of pictorial evidence of the spaces and places of the vulnerable children`s everyday schooling experience All interviews were conducted in the native language, SiSwati to allow all participants to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions without limitations. Integrity, trust and rapport were maintained throughout the research process.

Data analysis

Data was transcribed from the native language SiSwati into English. Data was then analysed through an inductive process. Listening to all the recorded data aided in the identification of the patterns and themes related to the places and spaces of vulnerable children in the school (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was followed by reading line by line of all the transcripts for familiarity with the data and identifying sub emerging themes related to the research question, which were, then coded (Di Cicco & Crabtree, 2006). The vulnerable children helped with the selection and contextualization of the pictures (Harley, 2012). All the generated data was then discussed in relation to the study objectives, drawing insights from the literature debates in the field, the conceptual framework of the study and the original critical interpretive abilities of the researchers.

Ethics

As the study was done on the school contexts and involved learners, the Ministry of Education and Training had to consent to the study. Therefore, permission was obtained from the Director of Schools in the country and later the school principal. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office and after which parents of the participants as minors consented. As some of the participants did not have parents or guardians but lived in child headed households, letters of consent for their involvement was sought from the area`s caregiver (umgcugcuteli). To manage the emotions of the vulnerable children (Liampton, 2007) a psychological counsellor was also requested to

provide psychological help if and when need arose. As this study views children as complete human beings with a clear reasoning to take decisions about their lives (Christensen & Prout, 2002) their consent was also sought, and they were assured of confidentiality on any information they would provide during the study. In addition, pseudonyms, which the vulnerable children chose (Morojele and Muthukrishna, 2013) were used to further protect their identity and participants were free to withdraw from the study when they no longer felt comfortable.

The study findings
Vulnerable Children's Experiences Related to Interactions with Community and Family

The study revealed that other families and children in the community stigmatized and discriminated the vulnerable children. This is because they believed their vulnerability meant they had contracted HIV and AIDS or felt they were very poor to associate themselves with. Data further revealed that, the vulnerable children had problems with discipline because they had no elders in their family set-ups to guide them. This consequently made them to have problems with respecting the teachers` authority. The narratives below evidence such interactions:

At home, we do as we please. There is no one to correct us when we have done anything wrong. When we come to school we are expected to abide by the school rules and if not so then we are punished. That is a very strange thing to us and it makes us hate school.
(Sifiso*, boy aged 12; focus group interview)

In the community, other children do not want to play with us because they are scared of contracting HIV or we are too poor to play with them. In the school, they continue with such an attitude. This makes us feel like we do not belong anywhere-everywhere we are-we are just targets of ill-treatment.
(Anita *, girl 12; individual interview)

In the community, people get drunk and say anything to us and that is hurting because we have no one to protect us from such ill-treatment. Some even shout that we look frail and sick either because we are poor or have AIDS.
(Precious*, girl 13; focus group interview)

The data above illustrate that vulnerable children cannot withstand the authoritarian school environments, partly because their family structure where discipline should be inculcated, was either shaky or not existent. In worst cases the vulnerable children dropped out of school because they do not want to be punished, and this was found to perpetuate their circle of poverty. Smiley (2012) heightens that vulnerable children cannot participate in an educational system which relentlessly dominate and demean them. As also noted by Collins and Coleman (2008) the findings indicate that schools function amidst discourses of the community in which the school is located. For example the humiliation and discernment that took place in the community contexts progressed to the school environment. Voyk (2011) in a study on vulnerable children in Ghana also found the same regarding the children who were abused and discriminated in community contexts. Therefore, it is the Government`s responsibility to enlighten people as that may improve the life of vulnerable children both in community and school contexts. Treating the vulnerable children in this manner obviously made them hate school and lose concentration especially during learning time. Walker and Smithgall (2009) in a study on the education of vulnerable children also confirmed that challenges faced by vulnerable children in community level disturb their attention from learning.

Findings also revealed that the vulnerable children had so much to do in home contexts or did odd jobs in order to put food on the table for their families. This meant that, by the time they wanted to study or concentrate on schoolwork, they were exhausted. Furthermore, the data determined that children in the rural areas had many challenges and tasks that children in the urban areas are not disposed to. The illustrations below evidence such experiences:

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Picture 1

When I get home, I have to look after cattle. This picture shows cattle enclosure and if the cows are kept in here, I get time to study immediately when I come from school, which is better than studying at night because at times I do not have a candle to study.
(Sfiso*, boy aged 12; focus group interview)

I usually help in the brewing of beer and collecting water for one woman who sells home brewed alcohol in the community, in exchange for chicken insides. By the time I get home, at the late hours of the day, I am too tired to do my schoolwork.
(Fortunate*, girl aged 15; individual interview)

Sukati (2013) pointed out that vulnerable children in the country`s rural areas usually start school very late in life because it's a social norm that male children look after the family livestock. The fact that, all vulnerable children can now go to school through the Free Primary education has not relegated the duties that are expected of them as children yet these responsibilities make them have negative schooling experiences. This finding is evident of the challenges vulnerable children face in trying to move across their different worlds, that is the world of home and of school (Cooper & Denner, 1998). The vulnerable children find it demanding to effectively meet the expectations of the home and the school. Furthermore, the additional work that they have to do, made them different from other learners and this difference, as a result made their schooling experiences different, as they do not have ample time to concentrate to their schoolwork. Nelson and Christensen (2009 concur that; vulnerable children have more responsibilities in home contexts that have a great impact on their schooling experience. This data agrees with Jourbert (2012) that childhood is not homogenous but is created by the environment and circumstances around every child.

Vulnerable Children's Experiences Related to Interactions with Teachers
The data determined that teachers had misconceptions on vulnerability and the lives of vulnerable children. The findings presented that some teachers mistreated the vulnerable children because they expected them to stick to their expectations when it comes to studying and writing of homework like all other learners. The teachers expected them to meet their expectations and if not they were then considered lazy, incapable and irresponsible. Failure to meet the teachers` requirements resulted to the teachers feeling offended and rushed to ridiculing, scolding and punishing the vulnerable children. Other learners also had negative

perceptions on vulnerable children and their vulnerability. The narratives below illustrate this:

Teachers usually tell us that we are lazy, incapable and spoiled (pause) - one day I came to school hungry and could not concentrate in class. The teacher told me that all I knew was to sleep-sleep-sleep therefore would fail. That hurt me so much and I just felt useless.
(Ayanda*, boy aged 11; focus group interview)

Teachers expect us to do our homework like all the other learners. They do not understand that we have challenges at home and usually we are unable to do the schoolwork. They tell us that we are hopeless and we would fail.
(Precious*, girl aged 13; individual interview)

If you come to school in a dirty uniform, the teachers turn you back. They say you are untidy. They do not even care that turning us back home might not change the situation. They have to understand that at times we come to school dirty because we do not even have the soap to wash. They should not compare us to other schoolchildren because we are different.
(Ayanda*, boy aged 11; individual interview)

You can see by the way they look at us that they think we are half humans, like we are always hungry and at their mercy. It hurts!
(Sifiso*, boy aged 12; focus group interview)

From the narratives above it is clear that the vulnerable children have negative schooling experiences because of the way teachers perceive them. The teachers` perception was, vulnerable children had to act, behave and do their school work like all other children. Estivill (2003) argues that teachers give vulnerable children negative labels and ill-treat them because they do not fit to their definition of good. This is perilous, as the way the school perceive and judge the vulnerable children affects the meaning they attach to their experience of school (Judson, 2006).

In addition, the fact that the vulnerable children were always preoccupied with how they were perceived in the school reveals the daily uncertainty brought about by their vulnerability. Generally, it appeared that the very custodians of care and support in the school, somewhat contradictory brought feelings of pain, insecurity and fear to the vulnerable children. The vulnerable children explained

that, if teachers would stop seeing them as useless, they would have positive schooling experiences. As stated in the conceptual framing of the paper above, the Multiple World theory is concerned with the situations that aid or impede children`s transition between their family and school worlds. In this study the findings indicated clearly how the vulnerable children`s schooling experiences were intricately tied to the family situations and the values and requirements of the school. That is, the community, families, and the school presented both means and hindrances for the vulnerable children`s educational achievement (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

The vulnerable children described the classes as spaces for teachers` domineering style of control that brought negative schooling experiences. According to (Weller, 2006), spaces have to do with the power dynamics in the school. The vulnerable children claimed that teachers punished them, using sticks and blackboard dusters in any way they wanted to. The vulnerable children also came out strongly on the Grade 4 class in particular as a place where teachers almost on daily basis without mercy punished them. The staffroom was also identified as a place where teachers discussed the personal lives of the vulnerable children.

The narratives below are illustrative of this:
The teachers talk about us in the staffroom. One day a teacher asked me a question relating to a previous homework. I could not answer because I had not been able to study. Later, a friend told me that she heard teachers gossiping about me. They said I was too forward and irritating.
(Anita, girl aged 12; individual interview)*
The vulnerable children provided these photographs to express their meaning making of the Grade 4 class.

Picture 2

This is the grade 4 class where our teachers punish us with big sticks and blackboard dusters. This class is directly in front of the assembly square and any offense that is observed in the assembly, no matter how minor it is- teachers just call the culprit into the class for a severe punishment.

(Sfiso*, boy aged 12; focus group interview).

Picture 3

This is where teachers usually punish us. Looking at the outside, this is a very beautiful class. The things that happen inside though are not as beautiful. There is always pain and tears here. Though it is better than being punished whilst all other learners are watching but each time we talk about that class with friends, I get the feeling that not even a single one of us like it. You even hear the Grade ones talking about this class.

(Precious, girl aged 13; focus group interview)*

This picture was provided by Anita* to display and express the feelings brought about by the Grade 4 class.

Picture 4

This picture shows a drawing made by our visitors from River Valley* College in America (face brightens up). Looking at this picture though brings mixed emotions for me because even though the visitors were good and left us with good memories, this is the same class where we are punished by teachers for coming late to the morning assembly. The visitors also taught us to be more open with our teachers with the things we do not like but that is difficult for us. *(Anita*, girl aged 12; photo-voice)*

The findings reveal that, school spaces and procedures have a great influence on the vulnerable children`s everyday social geographies (Collins and Coleman, 2008). In their spaces, teachers classified, discussed, and profiled vulnerable children. The teachers in this study used corporal punishment as a way of instilling moral values and forcing vulnerable children to abide by the school requirements. They ignored the fact that vulnerable children`s childhood is different from other learners. The teachers` action destroyed the vulnerable children`s morale to go to school because they had attached negative meanings to their classes and the Grade 4 class in particular. The vulnerable children in this study consequently associated school with control operated by unfair punishment. In addition, the vulnerable children felt they did not have a voice on whatever happened to them, but for the sake of their education, they had to comply.

Cobb, Danby and Farrell (2005) concur that, children do not have a voice on anything that transpire in the school spaces. As detected by the social discourses, children have no say on the things that adults make them do, even if it hurts them (Stoddart, 2007) and children who do that, are labelled rebellious and problematic. Lekule (2014) on a study in Tanzania also reveals the hierarchical control of the educational system where the principal and teachers did not have the interest of the learners at heart but used corporal punishment as a form of control. According to Lekule, in tandem with the findings of this current study, this domineering style of control in the school brought negative schooling experiences for the vulnerable learners and made them bitter at the teachers and at life in general.

Vulnerable Children's Experiences Related to School Rules and Regulations
The study found that, most of the school rules did not affect the vulnerable children except for three. The vulnerable children felt that these rules were not fair to them. They had to do with coming late to school, having all the necessary learning material, and fighting within the school. The vulnerable children had this to say about the aforementioned rules and regulations:

There is a school rule that says coming late to school is a punishable offense. If you come late, you are either punished or made to work in the garden. This is unfair to us because they do not consider the fact that we have other tasks that we have to attend to at home before coming to school. Unlike other learners who only worry about bathing, eating then coming to school. As vulnerable children, we have to do more than that.
(Precious*, girl aged 13; focus group interview)

I do not like the rule that says every learner has to bring his/her own learning material, each time when coming to school. Most of the time we cannot have all the necessities but we do want to learn. Teachers refuse when we borrow pens from other learners. They always say that we are being a nuisance. One day we were writing a test and I did not have a pen, I tried to draw the teacher`s attention but he ignored me. I could not write that test and the teacher recorded a zero, which really hurt me and affected my overall year mark.
(*Anita*, girl aged 12; focus group interview*)

Eish-there is a rule that says, no fighting within the school premises. Other learners treat us like dirt and we are expected not to fight them (showing anger). This is unfair because the teachers do not even help us by disciplining the learners who ill-treat us when we report. By so doing the ill-treatment will never stop.
(Gustuff*, boy aged 13; individual interview)

The rules are just unfair and not reasonable. They make us feel like we do not belong in the school.
(Fortunate*, girl aged 15; focus group interview)

The school rules and regulations, designed by the teachers are done so to the detriment of the vulnerable learners. These school guidelines infringe on their rights to free and fair education. The teachers did not consider that learners in every given school setting are different, and therefore, schools should not design a 'one size fits all' kind of rules and regulations. The data also reveals the anger and bitterness that vulnerable children carry because of being treated badly in school contexts. Moreover, it expresses the fury of not being able to defend oneself because of being tied down by rules that do not favour them as vulnerable children. The vulnerable children feel, had fighting in the school been allowed, they would be able to traverse through learner spaces where they were bullied and ill-treated. The findings are in line with Collins and Coleman (2008) observation that even though the United Nation`s Right of the Child 1989 stated that children should be free at school for effective learning to take place, but practically children in school contexts are deprived of this right through the school rules and regulations.

Vulnerable Children's Experiences Related to Interactions with Peers
The findings revealed that, the borders between vulnerable children and other learners not affected by vulnerability in the school (Cooper et al., 1999) were somewhat easy to penetrate and brought feelings of joy and pleasure. The vulnerable children described their relationship with other learners in the school as generally a good one. The narratives below describe such experiences:

We have a very good relationship with most of the learners here and such relationships make us forget about the challenges that we face at home. This is because we are usually happy and laughing especially during the lunch hour in the playground.
(Sfiso*, boy aged 12; individual interview)

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Most of the learners in the school are 'nice to us'. For example, I have a friend in Grade 7. She is older than I am and a Christian. She always gives me advices about life in general, and she is the one I usually talk to about my problems. I like being with her.
(Anita*, girl aged 12; individual interview)

In light of the above narratives, the good times that the vulnerable children have with other pupils in their learner spaces bring positive schooling experiences. It also made them feel part of the learners in the school. It is where they can enjoy being children and feel they are not being classified by their predicament. Judson (2006) agrees with the findings of the study that children`s spaces bring feelings of comfort away from the rigid control of teachers.

On the contrary, even if this was not dominant, other learners who were not vulnerable treated the vulnerable children with disdain. Findings further reveal that, such children practiced their power by bullying vulnerable children in learner spaces. Learner power dynamics in the school were evident in the assembly square and the queues for meals, where the vulnerable children were harassed and pushed out by other learners. The data also exposed that, prefects were responsible for operating the lines, but such prefects were not chosen but they volunteered for the responsibility and that meant, they did not have leadership qualities. Therefore, they could not maintain order in the learner spaces and not even the teachers seemed to care about the welfare of vulnerable children as expressed by *Sifiso*, (boy aged 12, focus group interview)* "if we report ill-treatment to teachers they never take action". The illustrations below show such ill-treatment:

If you do not have parents, other learners say, they died of HIV. These words hurt me so much that I find myself not enjoying the time that we spend here at school.
 (Anita*, girl aged 13; focus group interview)

By the time the bell rings for break time, we are hungry and rush for the meals. Unfortunately, at most times, we find older boys already in the queue and they ensure that they eat all the food. If we complain, they threaten to hit us and at times, they just ignore us. The school prefects just watch as if all is well.
(*Ayanda*, boy aged 11; focus group interview*)

(Disrupts Ayanda*….and auntie remember, here at school we are not allowed to fight. We have to allow other learners to do as they please without reacting.
(Gustuff, boy aged 13, focus group interview)*

Picture 5

This picture shows the assembly square. Someone here bullied me. He punched me and I was scared to attract the attention of the teachers by making noise. I knew the teachers would have punished me instead.
(Precious, girl aged 13; photo-voice)*

The data reveals that some learners ill-treated the vulnerable children in the school because they believed, they were HIV positive and sick. As also observed by Nyabanyaba (2009) it appears that other children did not want to play with vulnerable children in fear of HIV infection. This denote prevalence of some misconceptions and stereotypes in these communities regarding HIV and AIDS, which require to be addressed in order to enhance the schooling experiences of vulnerable children. Estivill (2003) agrees that, learners mistreat those they consider inferior to them whatever the cause of the children's inferiority might be. Another issue is the fear that teachers in the school had instilled in vulnerable children to the extent that they feared to even report ill-treatment by other learners. Children in all school contexts should feel comfortable and protected in the presence of teachers, to make teaching and learning effective. The fact that this did not happen in this school, revealed the weakness of the teachers in executing their pastoral duties of care and support for the vulnerable children. By virtue of their professional authority, teachers stand a good platform to help vulnerable children to understand and try to bridge the gaps posed by the home

and school culture, expectations and values. They can actually use their professional and personal creativity to orchestrate their interactions with vulnerable children in ways that compensate, or at least mitigates the absence of parental authority and guidance in the lives of these children.

From the above findings, the expression of anger and bitterness that vulnerable children carry because of being treated badly by either their peers or teachers is resounding. The above narrations depict the state of hopelessness for vulnerable children towards bullying in learner spaces, when they did not have any options in trying to stop this (Wright et al., 2009). Even though school prefects are meant to be the voice of all students in their spaces, the school prefects in this study did not have a propensity to protect the vulnerable children, partly because most of these prefects did not share in the experiences of being vulnerable children and thus lacked insights about what vulnerable children were experiencing.

The findings also denote that vulnerable children were more concerned about breaking school rules and regulations cooperatively to other children. It is clear that children who beat and bullied vulnerable children were breaking the school rule. Instead of breaking these rules in reciprocation against children who bullied them, vulnerable children opted for more conciliatory and peace building mechanisms of conflict resolution like wishing to report these to their teachers and so forth. Yet the compromised relationships between vulnerable children and their teachers made these children to fear reporting cases of abuse, thereby allowing the abusive experiences to continue unabated. The findings also reveal that vulnerable children in this study were not merely timidly scared inferiors in the mercy of teachers' and peers' gesture of good will to stop abusing them. At least in relation to their peers, vulnerable children expressed a wish that if fighting was ever allowed in the school, they would also put up a retaliatory fight against children who abused them. What we can learn from this is that the school must ensure that all children adhere strictly to all the school rules and regulations. Failing which, children who bear inferior social status in the school, like vulnerable children in this instance, tend to bear the brunt of school rules that are not properly and effectively enforced.

Conclusions and recommendations

The article concludes that, the community, school, and family worlds affect the educational engagement of vulnerable children in the school contexts. These different worlds can consequently either hamper or support the vulnerable

children`s educational achievement, as each world has diverse expectations and perceptions of vulnerability and the vulnerable children. For example, as the findings revealed that in family contexts, the vulnerable children were expected to do errands that consequently affected their schooling experiences. The rural Swazi communities' lack of conversance with HIV and HIV infection and the misinformation emanating from this were found to have permeated into the school with adverse effects on vulnerable children`s schooling experiences. This was especially so to those children whose vulnerability was a consequence of loss of parents due to AIDS, as they had to endure being negatively branded, and discriminated against.

In order to enhance inclusivity of vulnerable children and to add to the quality of these children's schooling experiences in this context, the paper recommends as follows:

- The community, families and the school should make a collective effort to aid the vulnerable children in crossing the different borders of their everyday schooling experiences.
- In the absence of families, teachers should have a different approach towards the vulnerable children recognising the challenges they face in the community, family settings, and the school.
- The school should have a teacher solely responsible for the psychosocial support of the vulnerable children. This would help them cope, understand, and deal with their emotions brought about by their different contexts and experiences even before they affect their learning abilities.
- Lastly, the voices of the vulnerable children, as people experiencing the phenomena should be heard in the designing and implementation of educational policies. This would help accentuate their plight and challenges, to be more pronounced so they can be heeded by all Swaziland stakeholders responsible for making education policy and practice reforms that can enhance the quality of vulnerable children's schooling experiences.

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AOSIS

Vulnerable masculinities: Implications of gender socialisation in three rural Swazi primary schools

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Authors:
Ncamsile D. Motsa[1]
Pholoho J. Morojele[2]

Affiliations:
[1]College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

[2]Gender and Social Justice Education Department, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Ncamsile Motsa,
ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Background: This article draws on social constructionism to explore vulnerable boys' constructions of gender within three primary schools in Swaziland.

Objectives: It seeks to understand the ways in which vulnerable boys make meaning of masculinities and the implications of these on their social and academic well-being in schools.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology, utilising individual and focus group semi-structured interviews and a participatory photovoice technique as its methods of data generation. The participants comprised 15 purposively selected vulnerable boys – orphaned boys, those from child-headed households and from poor socio-economic backgrounds, aged between 11 and 16 years.

Results: The findings denote that vulnerable boys constructed their masculinities through heterosexuality where the normative discourse was that they provide for girls in heterosexual relationships. The vulnerable boys' socio-economic status rendered them unable to fulfil these obligations. Failure to fulfil the provider role predisposed vulnerable boys to ridicule and humiliation. However, some vulnerable boys adopted caring attitudes as they constructed alternative masculinities.

Conclusion: The study recommends the need to affirm and promote alternative masculinities as a strategy for enhancing gender-inclusive and equitable schooling experiences for vulnerable boys.

Keywords: gender equality; masculinities; poverty; vulnerable boys; schooling; Swaziland.

Introduction

One of the devastating effects of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Swaziland is the escalating number of vulnerable children (Mkhatshwa 2017). In a population of approximately 1.1 million (Braithwaite, Djima & Pickmans 2013), the country presently has more than 150 000 vulnerable boys and girls in the primary school system (Simelane 2016). According to the country's education system, vulnerable children are those who are orphaned, those from child-headed households and those from destitute family situations (Mkhatshwa 2017). After introducing free primary education in 2010 to cater for the educational needs of vulnerable children, the government of Swaziland through the Ministry of Education and Training committed itself to providing 'disadvantaged groups [in the country] special attention in respect of equity, access, equality and protection – particularly from stigma and discrimination' (The Ministry of Education and Training 2011). The Swaziland education sector policy says disadvantaged groups 'may include rural dwellers, girls and women, persons with disabilities and the poor … [they] have little or no influence over their own education or welfare' (The Ministry of Education and Training 2011:xi). However, the list excludes vulnerable groups as a social group in school contexts. Practically, such definition gives more prominence to the needs of vulnerable girls over those of vulnerable boys. No wonder, therefore, that for almost a decade now, girls have performed exceptionally well in the Swaziland Primary Certificate examinations (The Examinations Council of Swaziland 2017) and boys are struggling with their education and are lagging behind. Simelane, Thwala and Mamba (2013) reveal that boys in Swazi schools repeat classes and drop out of school and their progress is not as smooth as that of girls. Mkhatshwa (2017) found that a large number of the boys who drop out of school are those affected by vulnerability. The questions that arise are as follows: Is the Ministry of Education and Training missing something in the schooling experiences of boys as compared to girls? Have the programmes aimed at enhancing gender equity in school contexts (SWAGAA 2013) disregarded the lived experiences of boys and made girls the only subjects of gender equity discourse in the country (Clowes 2013)? This is a cause for concern and a reason to invest in understanding

vulnerable boys' lived experiences. In light of this, Anderson (2009) called for research to investigate the complexity of changing formations of masculinity. Focussing on gender dynamics through the ways in which they construct their masculinities would therefore be one way to understand and comprehend vulnerable boys' daily challenges.

West and Zimmerman (2009) define masculinity as an act of 'doing boy'. This is mainly governed, constructed and defined by societies and institutions through their dominant structures and discourses (Messerschmidt & Messner 2018). Rather than being a natural attribute for all boys and men, masculinity is a shared gender identity which is both time-specific and meaningful within a particular context (Morrell 1998). Schools as social contexts too construct masculinities in diverse ways. Hence, researchers have found various ways in which boys in school contexts express masculinity. Swain (2006) found that idealised masculinities were competitive, rough, had no respect for girls and also subordinated weak boys. Renold (2001) says boys in the school context constructed masculinity through football and feminine disassociation. In Lesotho, Morojele (2011) found that hegemonic masculinities were rough, physically strong, uncaring, competitive and assertive, and in South Africa, Mayeza (2015) found that boys expressed their masculinities through bullying and violence, especially in football games, while, also in South Africa, Tucker and Govender (2017) found that dominant boys showed resilience and toughness, indeed proving that in every social context there are different patterns of masculinities drawn from the diverse cultural and traditional resources available (Swain 2006).

Swazi masculinities

The Swazi people's close-knit relationships are tied in maintaining, conforming and preserving their conservative and traditional way of life (Nxumalo, Okeke & Mammen 2014) founded on Christianity and patriarchy (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016). In the Swazi nation, masculinity is viewed as a natural attribute possessed by all boys (Mkhatshwa 2017), even at a young age. Hence, families are excited at the birth of a boy because that guarantees continuity of the family lineage; thus, boys are given names such as 'Vusumuzi (meaning revive the family name) or Gcinumuzi (meaning keep the family)' (Nyawo 2014:121). For example, a woman does not attain the status of *Inkhosikati* [real woman] in her marital home and community until she bears a male child – an heir (Nyawo 2014). Swazi boys are encouraged to show real manhood through heterosexuality and promiscuity even at a young age (Nxumalo et al. 2014). Maleness is associated with intelligence and inventiveness (Nyawo 2014); hence, boys and men are valuable members of the nation responsible for all household and national decisions. Swazi masculinity is constructed as ferocious, inventive and having the ability to take up the providing role well even at a young age (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016). Furthermore, masculinities possess dominant powers in all aspects of life. Mamba (1997) says Swazi boys should:

show the strength of an elephant, as their ultimate duty was to be victorious warriors able to continue the tradition established by the early king Mswati I. [It is] this male identity [therefore] … that sharpens the boy's determination to succeed in his venture. (p. 66)

The boys are expected to remain powerful and show great strength. Hence, all boys in school contexts are expected to use their inventiveness to navigate their life situations (Mkhatshwa 2017), unlike the girls who are not only regarded as fragile but also as needing special treatment and support from all educational stakeholders (SWAGAA 2013). Indeed, the Swazi concept of masculinity is framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that ignores difference and exclusion within the gender category – masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Therefore, vulnerable boys' masculinities are constructed through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, and thus, like all boys, they are expected to be independent and self-reliant (Mkhatshwa 2017). Within the Swazi dominant discourses, therefore, masculine failure is not accepted. Failure to uphold dominant discourses of masculinities is always a source of embarrassment and ridicule (Morojele 2011). A man who fails to conform and live up to his responsibilities as a 'real man' is viewed with disdain and considered lazy or weak (Mamba 1997). Such perception of masculinity falsifies and obscures the real experiences of vulnerable boys in the country (Mkhatshwa 2017) who by virtue of their social status do not fit in the dominant group of masculinities. Connell (2008:244) says applying the concept of masculinity 'as a static character type' ignores the dynamics within the social group – masculinities. Therefore, to understand vulnerable boys' masculinities, it is imperative to understand the gender systems in which they are defined and constructed (Raza 2017).

Masculinity and vulnerability

Connell (1995) argues that masculinities are heterogeneous, defined by their place in the hierarchal order of the society. To make sense of the hierarchy of masculinities within each context, Connell (1995) classifies masculinities as 'dominant, complicit, submissive and oppositional'. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe the dominant kind of masculinities in any given context as hegemonic. Hegemonic masculinities are the more socially exalted and idealised form of masculinities (Connell 1996). They are associated with respect, authority, influence and social power (Messerschmidt & Messner 2018). Hegemonic masculinities mainly draw from culture and the diverse society's dominant discourses which determine what is normal and what is not normal masculine behaviour (Connell 1995). Connell and Messerchmidt point out that the subordinate modes of masculinity stand in direct contrast to hegemonic masculinities. Connell (1996) says subordinate masculinities are the socially marginalised masculinities in a given context. Swain (2006) points out that they are the repressed and dominated. Subordinate masculinities do not have resources for power and hence their expression of masculinity does not conform to the acclaimed masculine attribute (Connell 1995)

that defines hegemonic masculinities. Morrell (1998) says subordinate masculinities are not only relegated as a differentiation logic from hegemonic masculinities but also subserviently positioned in the social masculine order. Raza (2017) agrees that when poverty intersects with masculinity, it gives birth to subordinate forms of masculinities, agreeing with Renold (2001) that poverty and vulnerability ascribe vulnerable boys (boys who are orphaned, boys from child-headed households and boys from poor socio-economic backgrounds) to subservient masculine positions. This is because their ability to conform to the normative masculine behaviours and norms is circumscribed by poverty and vulnerability (Izugbara 2015). This predisposes them to subordination and marginalisation in schools, mainly by boys who embody perceived hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

In essence, vulnerable boys' poverty becomes sites for their subordination and suppression (Chowdhury 2017). Given that cultural, social, economic and intellectual status have some influence over identity construction, subordinate masculinities (vulnerable boys) therefore construct their masculinities in ways that are not only different from hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995) but also strive to align with hegemonic masculinities. The different ways in which vulnerable boys seek to construct their masculinities seem to be harmful to their own well-being (Clowes 2013). For example, adherence to the orthodox provider role has become a basis for gender inequality between dominant and subordinate masculinities. This encourages vulnerable boys to perform masculinities in ways that compensate for the perceived lack of power. South African teenagers intentionally impregnate their girlfriends to claim ownership in the absence of economic power (Hendrikz, Swartz & Bhana 2010). This indicates that homogenising masculinities and looking at maleness through dominant discourses of masculinity, where boys have always been perceived as being strong and legatees of gender inequality in schools, have therefore overlapped problems faced by subordinate masculinities (Shefer, Kruger & Schepers 2015). Viewing masculinities through the lens of the broader social category – masculinity – perpetuates stereotypes and gender inequity and delays democratising gender relations and may not even fully represent the problems that vulnerable boys in the country face (Ratele 2013).

Against the backdrop of the Swazi (people of Swaziland) patriarchal society, the article focusses on what it means to be a vulnerable boy in the context of three rural primary schools in Swaziland. As a contribution to gender studies' debates, this article highlights how the intersection of poverty, vulnerability and expressions of hegemonic masculinities not only place the vulnerable boys in a subservient position (Raza 2017) but also predisposes them to gender inequity, humiliation and ridicule. In this article, we argue that vulnerable boys are profoundly affected by vulnerability as it affects any of the groups already classified by the education sector policy as disadvantaged (The Ministry of Education and Training 2011).

The article is premised on the notion of gender equality as a desired ideal, equally relevant for both girls and boys (Clowes 2013). Using Elliott's (2015) caring masculinities, the article also shows how, by challenging the patriarchal masculine norms, vulnerable boys in the study developed caring modes of masculinities. By privileging the voice of vulnerable boys as the 'voice of experience' (Watkins 2000:40), the article adds a critical component in the equation, which education policy-makers could factor in, in their efforts and strategies for enhancing inclusive education and gender-equitable schooling experiences for the rising number of vulnerable boys and girls in the country (Simelane 2016). By doing so, they are affirming the country's efforts and commitment to gender equality in school contexts (UNESCO 2000).

The theoretical frameworks

The article draws on social constructionism to explore vulnerable boys' constructions of gender within the three primary schools in Swaziland. Social constructionism argues that reality is not just a product of natural creation, but claims to truth are customarily rooted in traditions, values and social relations within diverse societies (Gergen 2009). Likewise, masculinities are socially constructed formations of gender practice that are created through historically regulated and reinforced practices (Connell 2005a; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). It is within individual society's discourses of masculinity and vulnerability therefore that vulnerable boys' constructions and experiences of masculinities are founded, governed and predicated (Gergen 2009). Gee (2011) saw discourse as a socially accepted association amongst ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that could be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group. Vulnerable boys' constructions and experience of masculinities therefore rely heavily on and are drawn from their individual society's discourses, traditional gender norms and ideologies (Ratele 2013), to which, as members of the society, vulnerable boys are made to subscribe to through complex and self-perpetuating processes of gender socialisation meant to prepare them to fit into a highly structured and hierarchic social gendered order (Connell 2005a).

Factoring in the gender socialisation and cultural influences on vulnerable boys' experiences and constructions of gender was, therefore, central to this article. Indeed, through vulnerable boys' narratives, the study highlighted various socio-cultural dynamics that informed their experiences and constructions of gender. This included how the realities of rurality, orphanage, poverty and living in child-headed households altered vulnerable boys' masculine prejudices and attitudes, which culminated in their gender performances and which did not signify hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). We further drew on Elliott's (2015) caring masculinities and their basic principles in trying to interpret our findings in relation to vulnerable boys' caring attitudes as they constructed alternative masculinities. Caring masculinities propose that when men and boys are immersed in care-

work, they are capable of embracing traditionally perceived feminine performances of gender, such as expressing emotions, caring and nurturing without completely departing from or completely subverting traditional masculinity. For example, caring masculinities could view financial provision not only as a way of expressing hegemonic masculinity but also exhibiting and providing care for the people they love (Hanlon 2012). Elliot says boys who adopt ethics of care into their masculine identity are non-dominating, value life-affirming emotions and emphasise on principles of caring. Indeed, the findings revealed that when vulnerable boys adopted a caring attitude into their masculine identity, they realised high principles of gender equality (Lee & Lee 2016) and better and productive lives for the femininities they care about, including their sisters and friends (Connell 2005a).

Research design

Geographical and socio-economic context of the study

Swaziland consists of four geographically diverse regions – Lubombo, Shiselweni, Hhohho and Manzini. The study was conducted in three primary schools – Muntu primary school (a pseudonym) is located in the Lubombo region, about 42 km from the nearest town Siteki, which is about 104 km from the capital Mbabane. Lubombo is largely rural, and it is the poorest region in the country and the hardest hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS (UNICEF 2009). Hence, it has the highest number of vulnerable children in the country (Braithwaite et al. 2013). Mjikaphansi* primary school is located in the rural area of the Hhohho region, about 25 km from Mbabane. Both boys and girls are usually found roaming the dirty roads, imbibing in alcohol, with no prospects of learning beyond Form 5, and they end up working in pine tree plantations. Mazingela* primary school is located in the rural area of the Manzini region, about 13 km from both Manzini city and from Matsapha, which is known as the industrial town of the country. Most vulnerable children live in rented one-room squatter camps, made of both stick and mud or cement bricks. Most children here stay with single parents, usually women, who work in the textile industry.

Study methodology and data collection methods

The study used a qualitative, narrative approach as its methodological design. Qualitative research was aligned with this study for its ability to comprehend human phenomena in context (Creswell 2014). Through this approach, the study was able to examine vulnerable boys' individual and societal actions and perceptions of masculinities (Gergen 2009) in their context of vulnerability (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Narrative inquiry was chosen based on the perspective that people are storytellers and their lives are full of stories (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). Through vulnerable boys' stories, the study could better comprehend their daily-lived experiences and meaning-making of gender. Fifteen purposively selected vulnerable boys – orphaned boys, those from child-headed households and those from poverty-stricken families, aged between 11 and 16 years – were selected to participate in the study. Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews and participatory photovoice techniques were utilised for data collection. For photovoice, each participant was given a camera with 27 frames and trained on how to use the cameras. They were then urged to capture salient spaces and places that held meaning to their real-life schooling experiences, guided by the theme of the study for a period of 3 days, after which the frames were developed and the photo imagery used during the interviews to act as ingress into their views, perspectives and lived experiences (Joubert 2012). Permission was sought from the participants to use a tape recorder to accurately record what they said, which in turn made up for data not recorded in the notes. Field notes were used to record the interviews, especially the participants' emotions and body language. All interviews were conducted in SiSwati so that all the participants could express themselves without any linguistic restrictions (McMillan & Schumacher 2010).

Data analysis procedures

All data were transcribed in English for easy analysis. An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive patterns and themes in the data (Creswell 2014). This necessitated listening and relistening to the recorded data while reading the transcripts for accurate interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Data were then organised, linking pseudonyms with informants. This was followed by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again for familiarity with the data and to identify sub-emerging themes related to vulnerable boys' constructions of masculinities. Pictures from photovoice were selected and contextualised with assistance from the participants (Joubert 2012), guided by the objectives of the study. The tone and voice of the participants were also noted, especially in comprehending their emotions. The theoretically informed emergent themes from all the data (photovoice, individual and focus group interviews) were thereafter coded, discussed and analysed through the lens of social constructionism (Gergen 2009) and Elliott's (2015) caring masculinities.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were observed so that the rights of the participants were respected (Creswell 2014). Consent was sought from the Ministry through the director's office. Written permission was also obtained from the school principals stating the purpose of the study. Ethical clearance was then obtained from the University research office, after which letters of consent were sent to the parents or caregivers of vulnerable boys in SiSwati, elucidating the issues of confidentiality, privacy and voluntary participation. Letters of consent for vulnerable children who had neither parents nor guardians were sent to the *umgcugcuteli* [community caregiver]. As the study considers children to be competent

human beings who can decide on issues that concern their lives, their consent was also sought. Trust and respect was maintained throughout the research process and with all the research participants. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study if and when they so desired without any undesirable consequences. For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this article to depict both the schools and participants.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Protocol number HSS/1914/016D.

Findings and discussions

Without money we are useless … masculinities as providers

The findings revealed that all boys in these schools (vulnerable boys included) constructed their masculinities through heterosexuality (see Figure 1). Attempts to forge heterosexual relationships in the case of vulnerable boys were not only compromising to their welfare but also an invitation for humiliation, subjugation and relegation to menial status. Without financial power to provide and maintain support, such relationships lead to distress, shame and ridicule for vulnerable boys (Morojele 2011), as this is not perceived as an accepted performance of masculinities. This logic emanated from the wider Swazi society's discourses that construed boys as natural providers (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016) and where financially stable and providing masculinities are exalted above all other forms of masculinities (Izugbara 2015). Statements by participants below illustrate this phenomenon:

'I do have a girlfriend, but I don't want to lie, it is stressful. But then I don't think I have an option. Otherwise these guys would think there is something wrong with me … like I am sort of a fool and I am not man enough.' (Cavin, boy aged 15, from Mjikaphansi Primary: focus group interviews)

'These are the bosses of the school playing and talking happily behind the classrooms. One day my friend played cards with these boys [the boys seen behind the classrooms] but within twenty minutes they chased him away, calling him a school spy because he does not have a girlfriend. Every break time they get behind the classrooms, and all they talk about is girls.' (Cmash, boy aged 13, from Muntu Primary: focus group interviews)

'I am usually alone. In fact being with the other boys is like constantly reminding myself how useless I am. I remember one day, two grade 7 girls spent time with me during the lunch hour. In fact, I was helping them with Mathematics. After school a group of boys from the grade 7 class, waited for me along the way and said bad words [showing anger] and one of them told me to forget about girls and concentrate on my school work because I was not man enough to provide for them [the girls].' (Mzwethu, boy aged 15, from Mazingela Primary: individual interviews)

Source: Photo courtesy of Ncamsile Motsa.
FIGURE 1: This picture shows boys playing behind the classrooms. Cmash claimed that these were the dominant boys in the school – boys with heterosexual girlfriends.

The dominant masculinities in these schools inscribed financial strength into their own masculine identity. Most central was their ability to maintain and provide for the girls in heterosexual relationships around which masculinities were regulated. Even though some vulnerable boys tried to perform their masculinities in ways that signified hegemonic masculinities, their destitute situations circumscribed their effort as they genuinely did not have the means to provide for the girls (Morojele 2011). Vulnerable boys' socio-economic status did not only place them at a menial status in the masculine social hierarchy but with poverty shaping their performance of masculinities (Raza 2017), their investment in heterosexual girlfriends failed to acquire them a space in the dominant masculine space because they could not provide for the girls. Mzwethu's narration illustrates the lonely life of a vulnerable boy prompted by societal gender expectations he could not fulfil. Mzwethu's inability to perform gender in ways that signified real manhood made him 'not man enough', hence subserviently positioning him in relation to the hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1996). For example, even though Mzwethu was good in Mathematics, but because he did not qualify as a real man, his social relationship with girls was monitored by the grade 7 boys, thus limiting his freedom to engage in equitable social relations in the school. Although the advice given to Mzwakhe that he 'forget about girls and concentrate on his school work' could be regarded as constructive, given the context, it could be viewed more as a discriminatory reminder of how useless he was.

Humiliation by girls also made up the daily experiences of vulnerable boys in the school. The girls had also devised cunning ways to ensure that they were provided for in heterosexual relationships. Failing to conform to the discourses of heterosexuality therefore meant that vulnerable boys lived in perpetual fear of being humiliated by both the dominant boys and the girls (Izugbara 2015). Statements by participants below depict the reality:

> 'The girls here love money. They either go for the boys who have money or the old men who work in the farms. As for us … having a girlfriend is one of those miracles you would expect once in a while. One day I tried to talk [propose love] to a girl, she looked down at my torn school shoes, laughed at me and left. I just felt like the worst fool.' (Kwesta, boy aged 14, from Muntu Primary: individual interviews)

> 'Hehehe [laughing] these girls lie and tell you that they love you, yet all they need is your money. You give them the little you have, even sacrificing your money for food and even for pens. But once you do not have money they jump to the next available [one with money] boy. After that everyone would know you failed, and you become the talk of the school [pause] you just feel like the worst fool.' (Gcina, boy aged 13, from Mjikaphansi Primary: focus group interviews)

> 'When you do not have a girlfriend … they say you are weak and make fun of you … ok then you have one … 1 2 3 days you fail to give her money then she leaves you … and again they laugh at you. This is confusing and sad!' (Sihle, boy aged 12, from Muntu Primary: focus group interviews)

> 'The other day a boy called me a coward only because I do not have a girlfriend. It is sad, but the girls here want 'blessers' [a slang term that defines a rich man who financially provides for a younger woman which is usually in return for sex]. I do not have that money but as a man, I do want to have a girlfriend.' (Phathwa, boy aged 11, from Mazingela Primary: individual interviews)

The inability of vulnerable boys to live up to the girls' expectations was akin to failure and was met with disdain by both boys and girls in the schools. Hence, the girls rejected the boys who could not provide for them and that left vulnerable boys, as a social group, further dejected and embarrassed. The narratives reveal how intractable constructions of masculinities, like being preordained providers even in situations where it was not possible, did not only undermine gender equity in the schools but were harmful to vulnerable boys (Shefer et al. 2015). The girls' actions of 'jumping to the next available boy' (a boy's availability was determined by his ability to be a provider) challenged the socially constructed notions of femininities as docile and submissive (Korobov 2011). Instead, this displayed girls' active roles in policing and influencing vulnerable boys' conformity to hegemonic masculinities. Hence, vulnerable boys had to bear the double burden of being demeaned by boys who performed dominant masculinities as well as girls who financially benefitted from this.

Hence, while heterosexuality gave ascendancy to dominant boys because they were in a better position to be *blessers* (providers), it placed vulnerable boys at the lower stratum. Indeed, hegemonic gender discourses in these contexts placed vulnerable boys between the devil and the deep blue sea , so to speak. Here goes the irony, without involving themselves in heterosexual relationships, vulnerable boys were shamed, discriminated and alienated by other boys (Ratele 2013), as effeminate. Yet, vulnerable boys' inability to provide financial resources required to maintain these relationships was equally ridiculed as displaying lack of 'real manhood'. Heterosexuality, therefore, provided basis on which vulnerable boys' masculinities could be judged (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) as real manhood was determined by one's financial strength and ability to maintain and provide for the girls in heterosexual relationships. This reveals how insistent pressure to perform gender in ways that uphold hegemonic masculinities, even in genuine situations where this is not possible, is detrimental and harmful to the social and academic well-being of vulnerable boys within schooling environments (Clowes 2013).

Rejection of heterosexuality … life-affirming for vulnerable boys

Vulnerable boys' idealised masculinities were compliance with hegemonic masculinities and being involved in 'boyfriend–girlfriend' dynamics. Repudiating and renunciation of these relationships given vulnerable boys' inability to financially nurture these relationships was equally liberating and academically empowering for them in

these schools (Clowes 2013). The following statements by participants are indicative of this fact:

> 'Here at school we compete on the number of girls you have … and to get a girl you should be having money … for us that is not possible so we then avoid the other boys. Myself I concentrate to my school work.' (Yikho, boy aged 12, from Mazingela Primary: individual interviews)

> 'I do not have a girlfriend because I cannot provide for her. These girls are too demanding. Other students think I am a fool and say I am a coward but I just do not mind that. I think I am okay without the stress of having a girlfriend. Without money, this boyfriend–girlfriend thing can be so annoying. So I do not want the stress … and I think right now, I am okay.' (Kwesta, boy aged 14, from Muntu Primary: individual interviews)

Competing on the number of girlfriends emanated from the wider societal discourse that encouraged boys even at a young age to express their masculinities through heterosexual promiscuity (Nxumalo et al. 2014). Vulnerable boys like Yikho and Kwesta utilised their human capital not only to mitigate threats to their masculinities and privilege their education instead (Ungar, Russell & Connelly 2014) but also to reject masculine constructions that did not favour their social identities. To create gender-equitable school environments for vulnerable boys would therefore mean deconstructing societal and school discourses that give ascendancy to hegemonic masculinities and relegating vulnerable boys to subservience. A coordinated approach involving all educational stakeholders aimed at addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable boys in these communities and schools could be a more sustainable way to alleviate the gender-based schooling plight experienced by vulnerable boys in these contexts. This is critically important, given that in Swaziland quality education and schooling experience are the only feasible means for vulnerable boys to transcend their life of poverty and vulnerability (Motsa & Morojele 2016). It also appears that social competeness on which masculine hegemony was established in these schools was not based on level footing. Therefore, there is a need to establish and promote gendered social interactions and affinities that affirm human empathy (Watkins 2000) and masculine diversities, rather than masculine hegemonic power, as logic of enhancing gender equality in these schools.

Our families need us … adopting feminine roles

The findings reveal that vulnerable boys had propensities to adopt traditionally feminine roles as expressions of alternative masculine performances. This revealed the fluidity of their masculine constructions as determined by their social contexts. Some of the responsibilities of vulnerable boys included doing household chores like cooking and collecting water as illustrated in Figure 2:

> 'I stay with my grandfather and two younger siblings. As the eldest child I should ensure that each day we have something to eat. So I usually spend about two hours of my time cooking then go play with friends. In fact our principal usually tells us to be responsible and help our elders even with cooking and collecting water.' (Sihle, boy aged 12, from Muntu Primary: focus group interviews)

> 'As a real man … you should ensure that your family is well taken care of. I cook for my family and I'm okay with that. I'm not very sure how old I was, but with other boys in my neighbourhood we used to go to the Inkhundla centre to collect food parcels for our families and also cook. So there is nothing new or strange about cooking.' (Ngwemash, boy aged 12, from Muntu Primary: focus group interviews)

The data reveal that vulnerable boys' socio-economic status and family responsibilities had shaped their engagement and constructions of masculinities (Gergen 2009). Vulnerable boys seem to have crafted their own interpersonal scripts (Elliott 2015) to fit the context of their family and home situations, which required alternative performances of masculinities (West & Zimmermann 2009). The findings show that some of these vulnerable boys embraced what was generally regarded as feminine responsibilities, and they did so with meaning, passion and pride (Lee & Lee 2016), because for them 'it signified real manhood'. While vulnerable boys who cooked at Muntu Primary school were idealised (probably thanks to the principal of the school who encouraged vulnerable boys to be responsible and help elders with cooking and collecting water) and celebrated (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), in the other schools, such masculine constructs were restricted by hegemonic constructs of masculinities (Medved 2016). Thus, vulnerable boys who cooked were predisposed to name calling, ridicule and stigmatisation. The following statements by participants would explain this phenomenon:

> 'Even though some of these clever boys [showing anger] call us 'young wives' but I just do not see anything wrong with boys cooking, in fact most boys in my class cook for their families. Your family should never go to bed hungry only because you are just lazy to cook. At home, I stay with my elder brother; he is 17 years old and works in town. My mother died when I was 7 years old and my father when I was 9 years. We are three and the youngest is a boy too. Every day I have to rush home to cook for the family.' (Sisanda, boy aged 14, from Mazingela Primary: individual interviews)

> 'We cook auntie … but once these guys know that we cook, they make fun of us. They call us 'gogo Ntoza*' [gogo Ntoza was the school cook and boys who cooked were then given the name gogo Ntoza].' (Mbuso, boy aged 13, from Mjikaphansi Primary: focus group interviews)

The name calling of vulnerable boys who cooked was highly derogatory and demeaning. Viewing cooking and fetching water as gender-neutral responsibilities was therefore a powerful way through which vulnerable boys navigated their dilemma of having to cook and fetch water for their families, the name calling and the hurtful discourse from the dominant masculinities. They perceived the two (cooking and fetching water) not as feminine roles, but as falling under their jurisdiction of providing for their families, hence signifying real manhood (Hunter, Riggs & Augoustinos 2017; Lee & Lee 2016). The authoritative manner in which Sisanda says 'I just do not see anything wrong with boys cooking', denoted how
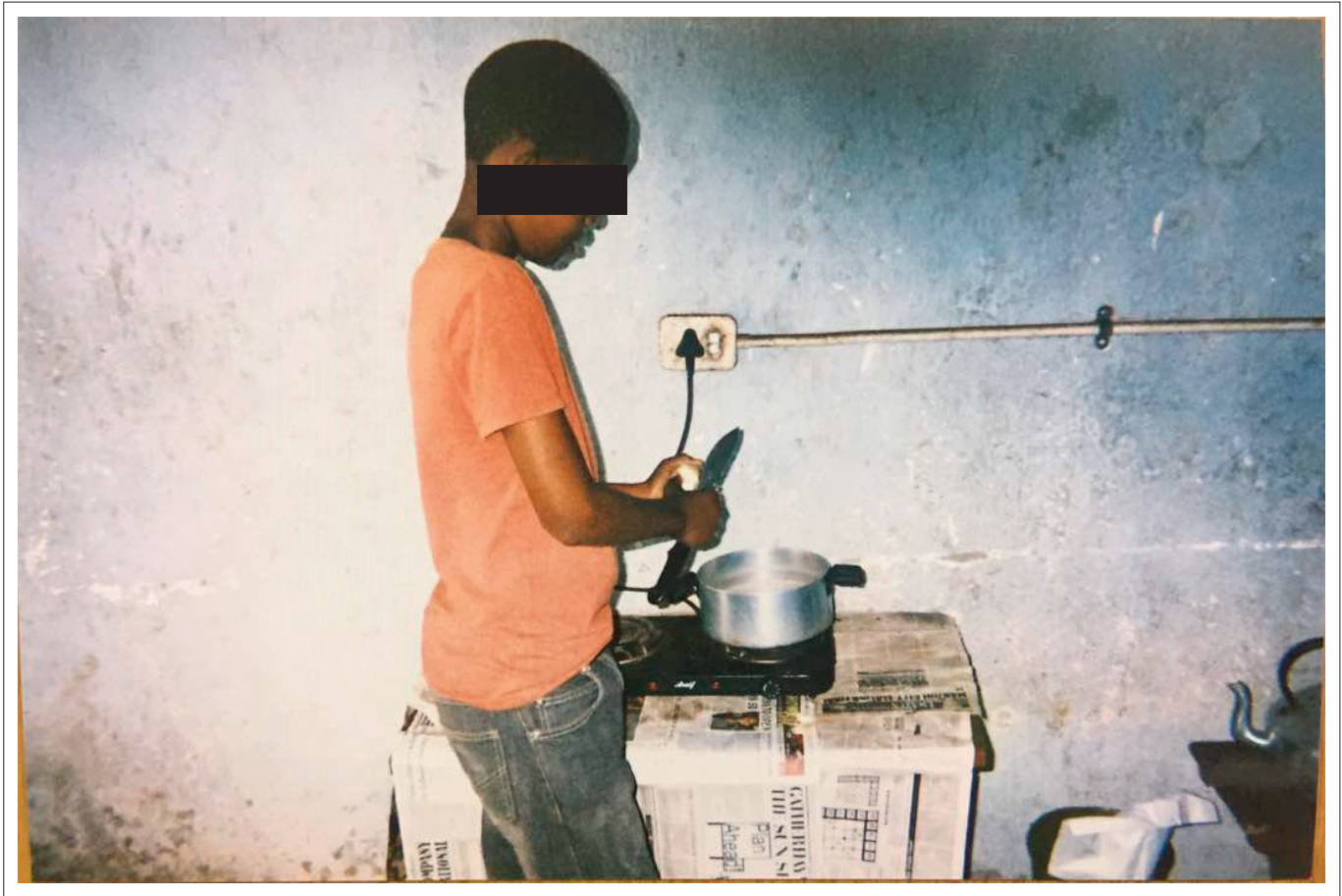
Source: Photo courtesy of Ncamsile Motsa.

FIGURE 2: From the picture we can see Ngwemash cooking a meal for his family, which consisted of his very old grandmother and siblings aged between 4 and 9 years. Ngwemash provided this picture to illustrate his responsibilities.

he distanced himself and undermined the hegemonic gender discourses that considered cooking as effeminate (Campbell et al. 2016). This points to the fragility and fallacious nature of hegemonic masculinities, especially when they are rooted in expectations that are not relevant to vulnerable boys' social lives and responsibilities. Notwithstanding, the versatility of vulnerable boys' strategies for alternative masculine performances amidst a highly patriarchal schooling context indicates the critical contributions they (vulnerable boys) are ready to make in informing policy and practice. Aimed at promoting gender equality in these schools, vulnerable boys' logic of gender equality is not to ascribe certain chores and responsibilities as feminine or masculine. All children should therefore freely express their human abilities to assist and provide for their families without fear of being ridiculed as effeminate or otherwise.

Recasting of traditional masculine identities – Masculinities as caring

Vulnerable boys further constructed alternative masculinities established on the perceived feminine caring discourse, in ways that were astounding considering their age. Some vulnerable boys had responsibilities that went beyond being mere breadwinners to being caregivers and nurturers for their siblings in the absence of parents or elders. Owing to the

fact that masculinity is perceived through hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), vulnerable boys therefore had to construct their masculinity in ways that would embrace both expectations (Hunter et al. 2017), that is, embracing the traditional masculine provider identity and caregiving.

Mbuso, a boy aged 13, from Mjikaphansi primary provided this picture (Figure 3) to illustrate the caring responsibilities that he had. The following statements illustrate this fact:

'This is my younger sister, Sno*. I have literally become her parent and she loves me (very wide smile). In my family there are three girls and a boy (me) and presently my mother is very sick and she has been sick for a number of years now. As for my father … eish I don't even know what happened to him. But we are okay without him. I am old enough to take care of my mother and siblings, the youngest (seen in the picture) is 4 years and she attends the crèche just before the church building. I ensure that she is well taken care of … her uniform is clean … she has something to eat, etc.' (Mbuso, boy aged 13, from Mjikaphansi Primary: individual group interviews)

'Both my parents are dead and I am the eldest so I take care of my sisters. One of them is old enough to be at school but without a birth certificate it is hard. I asked my cousin to help us and she promised that she would do it next year because it was already late for this year.' (Listo, boy aged 16, from Muntu Primary: individual interviews)

Source: Photo courtesy of Ncamsile Motsa.

FIGURE 3: This picture shows Mbuso's younger sister who forms part of his primary responsibilities besides caring for his sick mother and whole family.

Vulnerable boys in this study seem to have effectively embraced the nurturing role into their performance of masculinities (West & Zimmerman 2009). Contrary to the stereotyped belief that perceived nurturing and housekeeping as effeminate, it appears that these vulnerable boys rejected the traditional norms of masculinity that construed masculinities as distant and detached (Elliott 2015). Instead, they adopted more life-affirming and valuable masculine identities that served not only their identity and responsibilities but also masculinities that were more compassionate and nurturing. For Mbuso, the caring masculine identity enabled him to take care for his sister, his family and also nurse his sick mother as a 'real man' would. Mbuso construes himself as 'old enough' to not only protect and provide but also to care for his family. This emanates from the wider societal discourse that constructs boys as never too young to be the men in the family, *budvodza abukhulelwa*. Mbuso, therefore, had to man up in this situation; hence, he believed they 'are okay without him [the father] because he [Mbuso] could be a man himself'. Caring for his family for Mbuso was therefore part of his duties as a 'man'. From this, we learn that vulnerable boys' resilience to care for their siblings needs to be supported and nurtured by family and supported by community and school for a more balanced lifestyle that would not compromise their educational success (Theron 2012). Again, being a primary caregiver might have socialised Mbuso to have a mutual and caring relationship with girls in the school (Lee & Lee 2016), which is a cornerstone for educational success and gender equity. The following statement is indicative of this phenomenon:

'Ahh girls … yoooo … (laughs) … I no longer love her auntie but I'm worried about hurting her feelings. She has been through so much and in me she has found a friend, we share so much. So even though she annoys me at times but I can't leave her … it would break her heart. I have to protect her too from other boys who would want to take advantage of her. I think boys have to protect and not hurt girls.' (Mbuso, boy aged 11, from Mjikaphansi Primary: focus group interviews)

Mbuso's narration challenges the myths of 'pathologically narcissistic' (Watkins 2000:70) masculinities, as his constructions of masculinities are rooted in expressions of emotionality and the ethics of good care (Medved 2016). Mbuso is empathic and is 'worried about hurting her [the girlfriend's] feelings'. In ways that subverted the hegemonic masculine identity of being emotionally distant, uncaring (Morojele 2011) and without respect for girls (Swain 2006), vulnerable boys tend to reject patriarchal ideologies and embrace values of care and equitability, in ways that may foster sustainable positive social change for masculinities and improved gender relations (Elliott 2015). Caregiving seems to have sensitised vulnerable boys to the perceived feminine discourse of caregiving and nurturing (Hanlon 2012). Advancing Elliott's (2015) assertion that, when masculinities are immersed in care-work, they develop feminine perceived caring and nurturing attitudes. Such alternative masculine constructions could be harnessed to enhance gender-equitable spaces in the schools, where all boys, vulnerable boys inclusive, can perform gender in more positive ways (Clowes 2013), beyond the limiting prescripts of hegemonic masculinities, thus opening up possibilities for gender-

equitable spaces, where the very same boys would become advocates for gender equality (Lee & Lee 2016). As socialised by their family situations (Gergen 2009), which required caring modes of masculinities, inculcating caring masculinities as part of children's gender socialisation does indeed have a greater potential to widen boundaries for permissible gender behaviours, where multiple forms of masculinities can peacefully co-exist (Campbell et al. 2016). Vulnerable boys' voices have evoked possibilities for gender flexibilities, which the school gender equality policy and practice reformists could harness and inculcate. Noting that the societal inability to accept the fluidities and non-essentialist constructions of gender is a functional source of gender inequalities, they concomitantly thwarted gender relations, gender-based violence and all sorts of such social ills. Vulnerable boys in this study exercised their creative human agency to adopt alternative masculinities best fitting to their contexts and life experiences.

Recommendations

The study has revealed the need for these schools to provide resilient affirmation resources to vulnerable boys so as to allow them to transcend experiences where they feel pressured to conform to prevailing discourses which are harmful to their well-being. To support initiatives aimed at supporting inclusive school spaces and addressing gender inequalities in these primary schools, the schools should adopt coordinated strategies to encourage the liberation and expression of alternative forms of masculinities. This could be in the form of programmes in schools that would inculcate vulnerable boys with self-efficacy skills and confidence to deal with their lived experiences the same way girl programmes are operated in the country's schools. Noting that adopting caring attitudes sustains masculinities in physical and emotive ways (Elliott 2015; Lee & Lee 2016), vulnerable boys whose expression of masculinity is established on ethics of care should therefore be encouraged and supported by the broader society rather than be shamed and ridiculed, as that compromises efforts towards gender equality.

Conclusion

Social constructionism provided analytical insights to understand the complex processes of gender socialisation that tends to exalt hegemonic masculinities at the expense of downgrading vulnerable boys to subservience. Vulnerability and poverty formed structural contexts for vulnerable boys' constructions of masculinity. The article has shown how the intersecting of poverty, vulnerability and gender places vulnerable boys at a subservient social position in the hierarchy of masculinities in the schools. Financial strength and heterosexuality featured strongly as bases around which the dominant masculinities were predicated. Being orthodox providers was therefore one social pressure and obligation confronting vulnerable boys. In ways that were antithetical to vulnerable boys' abilities; they could not financially sustain heterosexual relationships because of poverty. This actually placed them in a catch-22 situation – in which not

engaging in heterosexual relationships was equally relegated, as engaging in heterosexual relationships but without the financial ability to support them. The result was resounding disgrace, ridicule and social exclusion. Indeed, the hegemonic notions associating masculinities with financial prowess deeply compromised vulnerable boys' ability to engage in meaningful social interactions with both boys and girls in the schools. For vulnerable boys who rejected traditional masculinity, the experiences were fulfilling and self-gratifying. Some vulnerable boys in the study embraced the orthodox feminine identity of being nurturers as they constructed alternative masculinities and navigated their spaces of vulnerability and poverty. Lending support to Elliott's (2015) caring masculinities, being immersed in situations where vulnerable children were forced to provide care for their siblings enabled them to develop masculinities with caring attitudes, indeed agreeing with Connell (2005b:24) that vulnerable boys in the schools could be inculcated with information on the importance of 'contradiction, distancing, negotiation and sometimes rejection of old patterns, which allows new historical possibilities to emerge', with life-sustaining possibilities and better schooling and lived experiences.

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Competing interests

Authors' contributions

N.D.M. performed all fieldwork, preliminary data analysis and write-ups. P.J.M. was the project leader and made conceptual and analytical contributions.

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Vulnerable femininities: Implications for rural girls' schooling experiences in Swaziland[1]

Ncamsile Motsa
University of KwaZulu-Natal
ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper draws on social constructionism to explore girls' constructions of gender within three rural primary schools in Swaziland. HIV and AIDS in Swaziland have resulted in an unprecedented number of parental deaths, rendering young children, especially girls, susceptible to poverty, various forms of gender-based violence, and unwanted pregnancies. The paper sought to understand the ways in which these girls actively perform gender to navigate challenges associated with schooling within highly patriarchal contexts, and the implications of these on gender equality and the girls' social and academic wellbeing. A qualitative narrative inquiry methodology was adopted, utilising individual and focus group interviews and participatory photovoice for data generation. The participants comprised of 15 purposively selected girls, aged between 12 and 16 years. The paper contributes to the ongoing debates on gender by raising consciousness of how understanding and addressing the schooling plight of girls (as a diverse social group) could be a useful strategy for social change and improved gender equitable relationships in schools.

Keywords: gender equality, femininity, poverty, girls, schools, Swaziland

Introduction

According to Mollel and Chong (2017), education inculcates self-efficacy. Indeed, education can be seen as "the light that shines the way" (Akpede et al., 2018, p. 1). Vidya and Kadam (2017) argued that investment in the education of girls, in particular, increases the productivity of families and nations. Hence, the importance of high quality and equitable education for girls in Swaziland, a group already affected by the indigent socioeconomic status of the country, cannot be overemphasised. Swaziland

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has a population of around 1.1 million, 63 per cent of whom live below the poverty line (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2017). Swaziland has also been greatly affected by HIV and AIDS, hence, the escalating number of vulnerable children in the country—150 000 in 2016, according to Simelane (2016).

Swaziland's education policy defines vulnerable children as children who are orphaned, living in child-headed households, and children from resource-poor social and economic backgrounds (Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). These children are locally referred to as *bantfwana bendlunkhulu* [those cared for by the whole community]; their educational fees are catered for by the government (Motsa & Morojele, 2016). HIV and AIDS, the main precipitators of parental deaths in Swaziland, expose many schoolgirls to the above-stated vulnerabilities. In their endeavour to determine their lives and transcend their plight, these girls are often exposed to further social ills, such as gender-based violence and unwanted pregnancies, which increase their likelihood to remain trapped for the rest of their lives in the vicious cycle of poverty and premature death—just like their parents (Mkhatshwa, 2017).

In order to ensure that vulnerable children are not denied access to education, the Swaziland government introduced free primary education in 2010 so they can have "special attention in respect of equity, access, equality and protection—particularly from stigma and discrimination" (Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training, 2011, p. x). However, this policy did not provide any practical strategies on how the education system would eradicate gender inequalities skewed against girls in the schools (Khumalo, 2013), or on how teachers should attend to issues of gender inequality, discrimination, and sexual abuse that suffuse the educational system of the country (Mkhatshwa, 2017). The country's constitution does not obligate the state to provide social protection for the poor; rather, Section 27 makes social protection contingent upon the availability of resources (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005). Hence, many girls in the country face daily struggles to survive within the country's patriarchal ideologies, where domination and exploitation of girls and women is not only prevalent but normalised (Mhlongo, 2017). Studies have highlighted that, despite the inception of free primary education, girls in Swaziland schools still drop out of school in large numbers (Mkhatshwa, 2017).

Crenshaw (1989) has long argued that poverty and vulnerability intersect in complex ways to ensure that the scheme of gender inequalities continue unabated. There is a paucity of research that focuses on girls as a social group that is uniquely affected by poverty and gender inequalities in sub-Saharan countries. Little is known about how vulnerable girls construct femininities, or about the effects of orphanage, child house-heading, and poverty on the social and academic wellbeing of girls. This is despite the body of literature (for instance, Bhana, Nzimakwe, & Nzimakwe, 2011; Maphanga & Morojele, 2016) pointing to these factors as key determinants of children's experiences of schooling—with implications on whether or not children continue to attend school, the quality of education they receive, and their educational success in general.

Against the backdrop of the Swazi peoples' patriarchal society, this article provides a sociological glimpse on what it means to be a girl, looking at three rural primary schools in Swaziland. It seeks to explore ways in which girls affected by vulnerability understand their femininities in these contexts, some of the factors that influence these constructions or understandings of femininities, as well as how these girls' constructions of their femininities impact their lives. The aim is to contribute to ongoing gender debates by foregrounding girls as a social group that is uniquely impacted by the complex and pervasive magnitudes of gender myths and stereotypes inequitably skewed against them—a group already relegated to vulnerability by its socioeconomic status in Swaziland (Mkhatshwa, 2017; Raza, 2017).

The article used the schoolgirls' voices, as the *voice of experience* (Raza, 2017)—a missing, but central, voice necessary in the efforts to understand how to curb the scourge of gender equalities in Swaziland. Its value lies in how social change agents and gender equality reformists in Swaziland and other similar contexts may use the insights gained from this article in their strategies for enhancing inclusive education and gender equitable schooling experiences for all.

Swazi Femininities

West and Zimmerman (2009) defined femininity as an act of *doing girl*, that is to say, what it means to be a girl in a particular context and time. Individual societies and institutions, through their dominant structures and discourses, govern, construct, and define their subjective feminine gender performances (Gergen, 2009). Rather than being a natural attribute for all girls and women, femininity is a shared gender identity that is both time specific and meaningful within a particular context. Schools, as social contexts, also construct girls' femininities in diverse ways. In South Africa, Bhana et al. (2011) found that school processes give hegemony and control to boys whilst militating against the girls. In Swaziland, Fielding-Miller et al. (2017) reported that schoolgirls are prone to sexual exploitation and abuse by older men and even by teachers who make sexual advances in return for cash—an offer that girls in vulnerable socioeconomic situations cannot decline even though the consequences (like pregnancy and HIV) are dire for them and also often spell an end to their educational aspirations and economic success later in life as adults.

Swaziland is a strongly patriarchal country in which girls and women not only occupy the lower tiers of the hierarchised strata of unequal gendered power relations (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017), but are also considered and treated as second-class citizens (Nxumalo, Okeke, & Mammen, 2014). They are inferior to men in strength and in law (Kuper, 1986; Mabuza, 2017). Respect is therefore imperative for feminine performance, and women and girls are obligated to respect all males who, in essence, command veneration in all avenues of social life (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017). N'guessan (2011) called it, a "mask [they are] compelled to wear and that sticks with [them] like [their] own shadow" (p. 199)— the deep, unchallenged assertion of masculine power and privilege at the expense of femininities, embodied by the country's dominant discourses of respect (Nxumalo et al., 2014). In essence, men and boys and women and girls culturally occupy completely different hierarchical positions, hence, gender equality is ridiculed, viewed as a foreign concept (Nxumalo et al., 2014), and perceived to be against the founding principles of the Swazi nation. It is within these dominant hierarchal ideologies and masculine structures that Swazi women and girls "coexist" with masculinities. Bhana et al. (2011) provided insights into how gender inequities, founded in the wider community and family context, manifest in the schools; in most instances, schools' regimes replicate the hegemonic gender norms and beliefs of the wider society in which they are located. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) found that in school contexts, as in the home, boys tend to be exalted in assumptions of power at the expense of downgrading girls to subservience. Constructions of gender along patriarchal ideologies have been found to be one reason girls in Swaziland drop out of school, further constraining them to persistent poverty and vulnerability (UNICEF, 2009).

Femininity and Vulnerability

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argued that feminine constructions are multiple and vary according to cultures and societies. Experiences of gender domination are therefore diverse and in varying degrees; other variables (like race, class, and age) intersect with the existing gendered hierarchy to influence femininities' constructions of gender, which are often supportive of gender inequality and dominance (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Hence, according to Crenshaw (1989), girls, who by virtue of their social status occupy the subordinate position, are "multiply-burdened." (p. 140). This is because their experiences of gender are not only gendered but also classed (Luft, 2016). Consequently, even though

girls in school contexts belong to the broader social category of femininities, their constructions and experiences of gender are both different and aggravated (Raza, 2017). Girls' feminine identity, which is already a socially disadvantaged position, intersects with their vulnerable social positioning to compound their suppression and difference. In essence, the girls' social menial status not only adds an additional layer to the dynamics of gender inequality militating against femininities (Luft, 2016), but also forms structural contexts for their performance of gender (Chowdhury, 2017), thereby exaggerating their subordination and domination (Raza, 2017). Likewise, Banerjee (2016) established that destitution subordinately positions femininities, making their experiences of gender different from other girls not affected by vulnerability. The gendered inequalities prevailing in the schools, as reported by Khumalo (2013), Mkhatshwa (2017), and Nxumalo et al. (2014) are therefore not only an infringement of the basic human rights of girls, but also act as a barrier to their learning and their social and economic development—and that of their vulnerable, destitute families (Vidya & Kadam, 2017).

As Chege and Arnot (2012) said, the relationship between gender, poverty and education is very complex, considering the role poverty and school processes play in perpetuating gender inequalities. Parnarouskis et al. (2017) reported that, in Libya, girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds had sexual relations with their teachers for grades. For these girls it was imperative that they pass, whatever the cost, even though their situations did not allow for effective learning and good educational outcomes. Similarly, Selepe, Ngwenya, Albers, and Janke, (2017) in Botswana found that girls in destitute situations engaged in sexual relations for financial gain. Indeed, in such dire situations chances of educational continuity and success are steeply skewed against the girls. According to Reddy and Dunne (2007), comprehending how girls in indigent situations construct their feminine identities within gender relations is one way towards enhancing gender equitable school spaces, hence, the purpose of the study. The article is premised on the notion that raising consciousness about the plight of girls in vulnerable situations in Swaziland could be a functional basis upon which to initiate reformist efforts to bring about positive social change and address the prevalent inequitable gender relations in the country. A country's initiative to improve the lived experiences of all girls calls for transformation towards inclusive educational policies, amongst which is gender equality. Understanding the constructions of gender of girls in vulnerable situations could be one method educational stakeholders could use to encourage and maximise inclusive and gender equitable school spaces, and school satisfaction for all girls.

Social Constructionism: The Theoretical Framework

According to Lorber (1994), social constructionism is of the view that, gender "is created and re-created out of human interactions, out of social life, and it is the texture and order of that social life" (p. 54). Feminine identities are not mere products of natural creation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) as determined by human genitalia (Lorber, 1994), but are reliant on cultural ideologies and reflect socially constructed notions of what it means to be a girl in a certain culture and context (West & Zimmerman, 2009). Besides social contexts, vulnerability and poverty also provide structural contexts for constructions, performances, and experiences of gender (Chowdhury, 2017). Social constructionism therefore provided analytical insights to understand the complex processes of feminine socialisation that tend to exalt masculinities (Pitikoe & Morojele, 2017), whilst subserviently positioning girls. Hence, factoring in the gender socialisation and cultural influences on the schoolgirls' experiences and constructions of gender was central to this article.

Research Design

Geographical and socioeconomic context of the study

Swaziland is an ethnically homogenous country in southern Africa, ruled by an absolute monarch. Seventy-six per cent of its population lives in the rural areas (UNICEF, 2009). The people of Swaziland share a common language and preserve their conventional way of life, founded on Christianity and patriarchy (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017). The country is made up of four geographically diverse regions: Lubombo, Shiselweni, Hhohho, and Manzini. The study was conducted in three primary schools: Muntu[2] primary school, located in the deeply rural Lubombo region: the poorest region in the country, hardest hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS (UNICEF, 2009), and with the highest number of orphaned children in the country (Braithwaite, Djima, & Pickmans, 2013). Mjikaphansi primary school is located in the rural areas of the Hhohho region, where young children (both boys and girls) are usually found roaming the dirty roads, imbibing alcohol, and with no prospects of learning beyond Form 5 and getting work in the nearest pine-tree plantation. Mazingela primary school is located in the rural areas of the Manzini region.

Methodology and Data Collection Methods

The data was collected from January 2017 and took a period of six months to complete. A period of two months was allocated to each school at a time. The study used a qualitative narrative approach as methodological design, chosen for its credence to comprehend human phenomena in context (Creswell, 2014). Through this approach, the study was able to examine the girls' individual and societal actions and perceptions towards femininity (Gergen, 2009) in their contexts of vulnerability (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Narrative inquiry was chosen based on the perspective that people are storytellers, and lead lives that are full of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Besides questions and answers in focus groups and individual interviews, the participants were requested to tell stories that would best describe their experiences and meaning making of femininities. Hardy (1968, p. 5) asserted that people "dream in narratives, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." In the same vein, Gergen (2001) argued that, "language is our means of conveying our mind to others therefore; language is the bearer of truth" (p. 806). Through the girls' stories therefore, the author could comprehend their daily lived experiences and meaning making of femininity; when they narrated their life experiences, therefore, the words they used were a reflection of their minds and their truths in relation to gender as predicated by the context of their vulnerability (Creswell, 2014).

The participants were 15 girls affected by vulnerability, five girls from each of the three schools, and aged from 12 to 16 years. To collect data, the study used individual interviews and focus group interviews in order to place participants in the centre of the study—to make them not only active participants who can contribute to a drive for change but coresearchers who have a credible voice in matters affecting their lives (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). For that reason, a participatory photovoice technique was also utilised (Wang & Burris, 1997). First, the participants were given disposable cameras with 27 frames each, and trained on how to use the cameras. Then, they were urged to capture their chosen salient spaces and places that held meaning for their real-life gendered schooling experiences—either in an affirmative or undesirable way (Joubert, 2012)—for a period of four days. After the four days, the cameras were collected and frames developed. The photo imagery was then used as a basis for both individual and focus group interviews as ingress into the views, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants (Harley, 2012).

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[2] All school names are pseudonyms

The researcher is a native Swazi, all interactions and interviews with the girls were therefore conducted in the native language, siSwati, to allow participants to talk and express themselves without any linguistic restrictions (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010). This was also to ensure that what the participants said was not only what they meant but also that the researcher understood well what each participant meant. Each participant had the liberty to choose pictures that she liked to discuss with the researcher, and each picture told a distinct story on the girl's constructions of femininity. Focus group interviews, which involved all five participants in each school, were held to discuss the girls' shared constructions of gender. Individual interviews were then conducted to provide more in-depth data. With permission from the participants, the use of a digital voice recorder assisted in the accurate capturing of what each participant said, and to make up for data not recorded in notes. Field notes were used to record the participants' emotions and body language. The tone and voice of the participants were also closely monitored to comprehend their emotions. Even though there were psychological counsellors on call for each school, none of the participants utilised their services.

Data Analysis Procedures

All data was transcribed then translated into English. An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive patterns and themes in the data (Creswell, 2014). Data was then organised, linking pseudonyms with participants. This was followed by reading line-by-line, and listening to the recordings again for familiarity with the data and to identify emerging themes related to the girls' constructions of femininity. The emergent themes were then analysed and discussed in view of the theoretical framework of the study.

Ethical Considerations

As a way of respecting the rights of the participants, various ethical considerations were observed (Creswell, 2014). Consent was sought from the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland through the director's office. Written permissions were obtained from the school principals through a letter stating the purpose and objectives of the study. Ethical clearance was then obtained from the university research office, after which letters of consent were written to the parents or caregivers of the girls in siSwati, elucidating the issues of confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation. Considering that some girls had neither parents nor guardians, letters of consent for such participants were written to the *umgcugcuteli* [community caregiver]. Given that the study considered children to be competent human beings who can decide on issues that concern their lives, the girls' assent was also sought. Trust and respect was maintained throughout the research process, with all the research participants. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study if and when they so desired, without any undesirable consequences. Before taking and discussing the pictures, participants were informed that some of their pictures would be used. Their permission to use these was sought from caregivers and the participants themselves. For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this paper to depict all schools and participants.

Findings and Discussions

Femininities as economically reliant: Exposure to sexual abuse

Despite common understanding that construes primary school children as sexually innocent (Bhana et al., 2011), heterosexuality in this study was at the centre of the girls' feminine constructions. The financially dependent feminine discourse, around which heterosexual relationships are organised, exposed the girls to violence and provided structural spaces for their oppression and domination, as the following data illustrates:

> *It's nice having a boyfriend who gives you money . . . but not when he forces you to do things you do not want. Like this day my friend Zuzu's boyfriend told her to come to his house. He had promised to give her money. Zuzu did not want to go there because, the last time she went there, the guy forced her to have sex . . . but she had no alternative . . . she needed the money. Besides, had she refused the guy would have simply had another girl visit him. (Swakhy, 16 years old, Mjikaphansi, individual interview)*

> *One Friday afternoon, on my way home with my friends, my ex-boyfriend [the boyfriend was 7 years older and worked as a bus conductor] assaulted me using a belt all over the body. All he kept saying was, "I want my money. . . I want my money!" Now I know that the best thing is not to take these people's money, because at the end you suffer for it. It is tempting though when you see other girls bragging about their money and the things they buy. For example, one day I asked my friend to let me use her lip-gloss, and she just said "Haaaa Futhy . . . find a man!" (Futhy, 14 years old, Mazingela, individual interview)*

> *My sister Zanele had a boyfriend here at school. The boy was doing Grade 7 but his family was not well off. When schools opened in May, she had a new boyfriend. One day after school, just next to this dam, Zanele was with the new guy and the ex-boyfriend came. I saw them arguing and within a short space of time I saw Zanele bleeding. We were all scared, but it was never reported to the teachers. The teachers would have punished Zanele instead because she was the one who started all this. So being a cry-baby wouldn't have helped her. (Lindz, 14 years old, Muntu, focus group interview)*

The girls' socioeconomic status shaped their constructions and experiences of femininity, and poverty was the major factor influencing girls in these contexts to engage in heterosexual relationships (Selepe et al., 2017). The importance of heterosexual relationships for girls, in terms of being provided for within these rural and poverty stricken-contexts, cannot be overemphasised. Being a girl meant that one way they could navigate their penurious situations was "to find a man." They saw men as their only way to financial freedom, and their idealised feminine identities were therefore established around a masculine figure that could provide for them. The narrations reveal the wider societal Swazi discourse that ascribes the financially dependent position to femininities. Futhy's narration evidences that such stereotypical perceptions were even regulated by the other girls in the school: it was considered a norm and one way to get what they wanted. According to Swazi culture and tradition, after the death of a father, male children (and not females) or uncles take over as heads of the family; and, in marriage, the woman is supposed to depend on and submit to the husband (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017). In essence, the normative discourse is that females live their lives as subordinates, owned and provided for by men—a logic that enhances gender inequality. At first glance, the girls' need for money could be viewed as mere fascination for a good life (of lip-gloss) that they could not afford (Selepe et al., 2017). Spending time with loved ones may also seem to be exciting, especially for teenage girls (Arai, 2009). However, love and affection did not seem to be the legitimate reason for these girls' engagement with heterosexual relationships. Rather, it was their desperate means to be provided for in the absence of available options to ensure their survival and that of their destitute families (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, such constructions, in most instances, exposed the girls to gender-based violence and sexual abuse. Financial strength provided structural contexts for the dominant masculinities to be domineering and violent towards the vulnerable girls, when they did not conform to the normative feminine discourse (Morojele, 2011). The girls had to conform to the submissive feminine discourse and be subserviently positioned in order to be provided for (Groes-Green, 2011). The girls in the study expressed that they felt pressured by their boyfriends to have sex and, due to their socioeconomic status and desperation to be provided for, they consented. If sexual coercion failed, the fear of being replaced was also enough to make the girls conform to the boys' sexual advances, whatever the cost

(Parnarouskis et al., 2017), to ensure that they had stable providers and means for survival. For example, Swakhy's friend was so desperate for money that she had to give in to her boyfriend's sexual advances, because that was the only way she could get the money. According to Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004), by unwillingly and helplessly enabling the dominant boys to provide for them, the girls limited their sexual choices and made their bodies "site[s] for male control" (p. 456)—physically and sexually disregarding their choices, body integrity, and independence. Raza (2017) noted that girls are not only oppressed because they are feminine and belong to a group that is subserviently positioned, but also because their indigent situations compound with their feminine identity in ways that expose them to exploitation and, hence, exacerbate their experience of gender inequalities. As N'guessan (2011) rightly put, for the girls in the study, it was trivial that their bodies had become "a land of conquer" (p. 187) because they passively and compliantly looked beyond the submission and its negative consequences to what they stood to gain. What mattered most was the money and being provided for in the contexts of their vulnerable circumstances, hence, endorsing inequitable gender and heterosexual relationships.

The vulnerable girls' refusal to be "cry-babies" could be viewed as reflecting the broader cultural issues around girls' socialised indifference and subordination in relation to challenging sexual violence (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). However, by not reporting incidences of gender-based violence, this could imply that these girls have embraced and normalised domination and exploitation. Being subserviently positioned and accepting inequitable gender and heterosexual relationships seems to be their only survival strategy. This logic reveals a bleak future for efforts towards curbing the spread of HIV (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017), promoting gender equality, and the elimination of gender-based violence in these contexts. To help girls in vulnerable circumstances transcend this predicament and enhance gender equality would mean calling for the state to implement poverty alleviation strategies and consider the social needs of the girls beyond providing them with free education. This could open up gender equitable spaces and effective learning experiences for girls in these contexts.

Alternative femininities: Pathways to self-destruction?

The intersection of femininity and vulnerability in these contexts (Luft, 2016) gave birth to cunning and scheming femininities. The findings revealed that the girls at Muntu and Mjikaphansi primary schools had propensities to adopt ingenious performances of gender as expressions of alternative feminine performances. The girls expressed that, in most instances when they engaged in heterosexual relations, the motive was money and not love. However, these inventive feminine constructions heightened the girls' susceptibility to unfavourable situations like pregnancy and sicknesses, thus, exacerbating their poverty and vulnerable situations as the three narratives below illustrate:

> *Being a girl is not good sometimes. My friend Sno (she was 14 years by then) had a lot of boyfriends and her mother liked it because the men gave her [Sno] a lot of money. When we came back to school last September, Sno was a changed person and was no longer the cheerful girl we used to know. She also had a foul smell and other learners refused to sit next to her in class. One day I heard one of the boys in her class shouting, "wena Sno soyadayisa" [Sno you are now a prostitute]. She cried the whole day. Towards the end of the term, she disappeared from school and we later heard that she had committed an abortion and nearly died . . . Now she works as a maid in town. (Owethu, 15 years old, Mjikaphansi, focus group interview)*

> *Life is difficult here and without money you cannot survive. My brother once told me to go and look for a job, but I cannot do that, I want to learn. The easiest way therefore is to find a boyfriend . . . and just hope that he gives you money (laughs). (Zwakele, 16 years old, Muntu, focus group interview)*

True… all we need from them [males] is money…… siyabahlahlambisa [we are taking our power back] just to prove how weak and foolish they are. It is not like we love them . . . we just need their money . . . and we will not stop taking it! Even though they call us names, but we do not mind. (Hlutjy, 13 years old, Muntu, focus group interview)

The girls in these contexts all seem to have adopted cunning feminine identities. Whilst having multiple partners is a dominant masculine norm in Swaziland, and a male can have as many heterosexual relationships as he possibly can (Fielding-Miller et al., 2017), for females it is unheard of, frowned upon, and ridiculed. The girls' behaviour, though, seems to be sanctioned by parents or caregivers—like Sno's mother—in these contexts. The family's needy situation seems to have been the reason the mother was prepared to "sell her daughter to the highest bidders" without minding the consequences, even at the expense of Sno's education and welfare. Sno's experience resonates with the Swazi people's feminine investment discourse, whereby through payment of bride-price women are reduced to the level of acquired property (Kuper, 1986). The way in which Sno maintained multiple heterosexual relationships cannot be comprehended for a 14-year-old girl. In a poverty-stricken context, though, this seems to have been the only means for Sno and her family to survive. This archetype of gender hierarchy, though, consequently militated against the girls in ways that directly negated gender equality and the creation and adoption of powerful social identities for them (Parnarouskis et al., 2017). Furthermore, forcing girls like Sno to drop out of school, and exposing them to sexually transmitted diseases, increases their vulnerability. These feminine performances were also likely to be emotionally and physically overwhelming for the girls, considering their age. Conforming to the feminine monogamous discourse did not seem to be an available option for girls like Sno because they would then be deprived of means of survival for themselves and their destitute families.

The cunning ways used by the girls to get money were not only insensible and selfish (N'guessan, 2011), but also revealed how far they were prepared to occupy the subservient position in order to get financial support from boys and older men. Even though the girls established themselves as clever because, through their ingenious feminine identities, they could get the money they so desperately needed, their loving façades still reflected the orthodox feminine submissive discourse. Whilst heterosexual relations provided a space where the girls could draw financial resources and enjoy relationships that, on the surface seemed mutual and more beneficial to them, in the end, such relationships seemed destructive for the girls. Hence, by constructing themselves as inventive and loving, the girls were not only actively submitting to patriarchal norms but also heightening their vulnerable situations and unequal heterosexual relations. This consequentially made them allies in their perpetual dominance (N'guessan, 2011), especially in cases where they fell pregnant and dropped out of school, as these narratives illustrate:

This is my elder sister's son. He is four years old and my sister dropped out of school immediately after passing Grade 7. The child doesn't have a father. In fact, my sister refuses to even talk about him [the father]. Now, the child has become an extra problem. It hurts to see him cry because of hunger and so I usually bring him food from school. At least we are adults and we are used to going to bed without having had anything to eat . . . but for him . . . it is difficult. (Lindelwa, 13 years old, Muntu, individual interview)

These boys are just too easy . . . they want love right . . . and we need their money . . . so it's a 50/50 situation. But when you get pregnant, then you are in hot water. Most of these boys either disappear or do not want anything to do with the child. (Qondile, 13 years old, Mjikaphansi, focus group interview)

Phumlile [the participant's 15-year-old sister] dropped out of school in Grade 6 because she was five months pregnant. The baby's father is doing Form 3 [equivalent to Grade 9].

>*She seems so happy though because the boy still gives her money and the boy's mother too takes care of her and the unborn baby. (Wenzy, 12 years old, Mazingela, focus group interview)*

By virtue of their social status, survival means for these girls and their families were challenging and an extra responsibility was unquestionably overwhelming. An additional mouth to feed was not only an extra load and the responsibility of the young mother but other family members were equally affected. For some of the girls, like Wenzy's sister, pregnancy came with an idealised life of being loved (Mkhatshwa, 2017), a sense of belonging, and an escape from a life of poverty (Arai, 2009). But for most of the girls, pregnancy limited their future employment opportunities and inhabited their life of poverty with an overwhelming responsibility—fatherless children. Whilst pregnancy spelled the end of the girls' schooling, the boys responsible usually continued with their education, thus enhancing gender inequality. N'guessan (2011) said girls who become pregnant at a very young age are on the path of being constructed as a "man's subaltern, a constructed subject, an abject . . . [the] dependant other" and a subject of male domination, with no value in society for life (p. 198). Without education, rising above poverty and vulnerability and, by extension, male dominance, for the girls in these contexts seems to be a far-fetched dream (Selepe et al., 2017). It also meant these girls were inclined to remain subordinated and poor within the dominant patriarchal ideologies of their individual societies—remaining subserviently positioned, passive, and obedient in order to be provided for, hence, validating their oppression.

Even though teenage pregnancy in Swaziland has been prevalent in the recent years, it is still stereotypically considered a taboo and perceived as signalling promiscuity for young girls. Principals and teachers therefore find it difficult to take priority of the girls' education over their own ethical views about teenage pregnancy (Simelane, Thwala, & Mamba, 2013), and most girls who fall pregnant are expelled from the school system. In order to enhance inclusive school spaces for girls, the government needs to have proper structures put in place to ensure that pregnant girls are not expelled because, without education, the girls' lives, those of their families, and of their children are doomed (Mollel & Chong, 2017). By performing femininities through expressions of heterosexuality, the girls seemed to be contesting the normative society's gender discourses of young girls as being innocent and untouched by the cares of the adult gendered world (Bhana et al., 2011). The girls positioned themselves as active social agents in the construction of femininities (James, 2010), albeit influenced by their vulnerable situations that, unfortunately, had the likelihood to further relegate them to hardship that perpetuates the vicious cycle of gender inequalities. Hence, there is need for social change reforms in these contexts to capitalise on the young girls' agency to subvert dominant constructions of femininities. However, this would not yield positive social change in these girls' experiences and social positioning without simultaneously strategising to remove the socially induced structural barriers of poverty and HIV and AIDS, which were found to be the source and compounding factors on girls' vulnerability. These girls require urgent implementation of strategies that work towards the inculcation of self-efficacy so that they could be assisted in their performances to navigate indigent situations in ways that are more sustainable and life affirming.

Teachers' scolding and shaming is not helping us

Even though there was evidence to suggest that the principal of Muntu primary school did not expel pregnant girls from the school, the hurtful discourse used by both teachers and other learners directed to the vulnerable girls, especially when they fell pregnant, was equally destructive, as this narrative illustrates:

Fine, our principal does not expel pregnant learners, but I don't think I can continue with school when I am pregnant. I cannot stand the rude words from teachers . . . and other learners call you "hluphekile's mother" [implying that you are carrying a baby that you will not be able to take care of]. The best thing is to stay home and give birth to your baby and just forget about school. Right now, teachers . . . tell us that we are loose, not real women and we like boys. How much more then, if you are pregnant? (Hlutjy, 13 years old, Muntu, individual interview)

Even though the girls' narratives highlight that, being feminine and living in destitute situations exposed most girls to undesirable situations like pregnancy (Mkhatshwa, 2017), the country does not have a policy clarifying the issue of pregnant girls in schools. It is therefore left to the principal's prerogative whether or not to expel girls who are pregnant. It is commendable that the principal did not exclude pregnant girls, but the teachers' and other learners' actions compromised efforts for inclusive and gender equitable school spaces in this school. For example, other learners called the girls who fell pregnant a name that was highly denigrating and condemning. Teachers too, rebuked the girls for performing gender unacceptably—without giving them correct, positive, and constructive ways of doing girl (West & Zimmerman, 2009). The teachers' use of the shaming discourse to regulate the girls' sexual performances was equally destructive, oppressive, and enhanced gender inequity. However, ridiculing girls and telling them that they were not real women did not seem to deter them from their destructive feminine constructions as the narrative below illustrates:

It's not like I love my boyfriend but I need the money. Our teachers always rebuke and advise us to take good care of ourselves because our bodies are God's temple . . . but still, we find ourselves doing it [sex]. The only thing I am scared of is getting pregnant because I want to learn. (Smise, 15 years old, Muntu, focus group interview)

In spite of the reprimands and advice given by the teachers, the vulnerable girls "still found themselves doing it [sex]." This was probably because their gender performances were not only guided by their feminine identity but also influenced by destitution (Luft, 2016). Being "loose" was therefore the only way they seem to have constructed the feminine persona and transcended their penurious situations. Hence, without giving the girls support or informing them of available options to transcend their vulnerable situations, scolding could and would not yield the desired results. From this, we learn that teachers should refrain from being judgemental on girls for straying outside normative and traditional feminine discourses. Judging girls not only disregards their socioeconomic and cultural situations but also makes situations like pregnancy an individual instead of a sociological problem (Gergen, 2009)— hence, disregarded and allowed to continue unabated. Rather, viewing the girls' sexual identities as social problems, contextually specific (Chowdhury, 2017), and propelled by their penurious life would aid the teachers to be better positioned to provide efficient solutions to these girls' problems, which are obviously deeper than just being loose. Teachers should strive at empowering and inculcating girls with knowledge on how to deconstruct patriarchal ideology and construct self-efficacy feminine attributes with egalitarian attitudes (Groes-Green, 2011) beyond the limiting prescripts of orthodox femininities. For example, teaching girls how to transcend their penurious life without conforming to the conventional "investment" feminine discourse would be one way towards enhancing inclusive, affirmative, and gender equitable spaces for the vulnerable girls.

Conclusion

The findings denote that poverty and vulnerability were strong determinants of the schoolgirls' constructions and performances of gender. In their desperate efforts to get financial support, in the absence of available options for ensuring their survival and that of their poverty-stricken families, these girls constructed their femininities around heterosexuality. Unfortunately, such constructions

predisposed them to situations like sexual coercion, exploitation, pregnancy, and gender-based violence. The socioeconomic context of Swaziland's schooling was found to deprive vulnerable girls of their self-efficacy, thus relegating their lives to become dependent upon boys and older men, who mainly provided financial rewards in return for sexual favours. The findings denoted that the dominant discourses of gender, poverty, and social destitution in Swaziland relegated schoolgirls to construct and perform femininities in ways that were detrimental to social change aimed at improving gender relations in these contexts. Even though the girls belonged to the broader social category of femininities, their destitute economic status made their experiences of gender different from other girls who were not affected by vulnerability. The prevailing androcentric gender discourses, poverty, and vulnerability did not only provide structural contexts on which their performances of femininities were predicated but also added a layer to their subordination, suppression, and experiences of gendered inequalities. Heterosexuality formed the basis for the girls' constructions of femininities. Love and affection were not the reason for heterosexuality; the girls invested in these relationships as means of survival. The dominant boyfriend–girlfriend culture in the schools predisposed girls to the experiences of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and gender inequality in far-reaching ways. The passivity with which the girls expressed these experiences revealed a deep rooted complacence towards gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. For these girls, such experiences could not equate to the benefits of being in relationships that gave them a life-line. The girls' financially dependent position compromised their entitlement to gender equality and mutual heterosexual relationships. Some of the girls claimed ingenuity in relation to the dominant masculinities but their efforts to establish powerful feminine identities and performance of gender along this logic was destructive and consequentially militated against them.

Acknowledgments

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Masculinities and femininities through teachers' voices: Implications on gender-equitable schooling for vulnerable children from three primary schools in Swaziland

1 author:

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa
University of KwaZulu-Natal
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AOSIS

Masculinities and femininities through teachers' voices: Implications on gender-equitable schooling for vulnerable children from three primary schools in Swaziland

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Author:
Ncamsile D. Motsa[1]

Affiliation:
[1]School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Ncamsile Motsa,
ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Informed by social constructionism and the intersectionality framework, this article focuses on the fight for sustainable gender-equitable and inclusive school environments for vulnerable children. It foregrounds the centrality of teachers' constructions of gender within prevailing dominant gender discourses and the implications these constructions have on gender equality, the vulnerable children's welfare and experiences of gender in three rural primary schools in Swaziland. The article draws on a qualitative narrative study and utilises semi-structured individual interviews and open-ended questionnaires with nine randomly selected teachers (three teachers from each of the targeted schools). The findings revealed that the absence of gender in the school curriculum left teachers with no option but to resort to dominant constructions of gender in their pedagogical practices. These gender constructions were inundated in paradoxes of equality of opportunities for all children, in ways that held different expectations for boys as compared to girls. The teachers' constructions of masculinities and femininities as two diverse homogeneous groups made the gendered experiences of vulnerable boys and girls invisible, hence perpetuating the social injustices against them. Generally, the teachers were found not to concede the social inequalities and hierarchies within each social group of boys or girls. The study recommends the need to make teachers aware about the limiting and adverse effects of constructing gender and socialising vulnerable children in ways that affirm unequal gendered power relations, as a strategy for promoting gender-inclusive and gender-equitable school environments.

Introduction

With an HIV and AIDS prevalence of 27% among the adult population between ages 15 and 19 years in 2016, the issue of vulnerable children in Swaziland (The Kingdom of eSwatini) continues to be a challenge (Ministry of Health 2017). The country's education system defines vulnerable children as children who are orphaned, living in child-headed households, and children from poor social and economic backgrounds, locally referred to as *bantfwana bendlunkhulu* (those cared for by the whole community) and whose educational fees are catered for by the government (Mkhatshwa 2017). In 2014, vulnerable children made up 71% of the overall number of children in the country as compared to 45% in 2010 (CSO & UNICEF 2016), and in 2016, about 150 000 of these children were within the primary school system (Simelane 2016). Although the reasons that render children vulnerable may differ, for instance orphaned children, those experiencing childhood poverty, and children living in child-headed households in Swaziland, these children share one thing – that is, vulnerability and poverty (Mkhatshwa 2017).

Guided by the country's constitution of 2005, the Ministry of Education and Training through the Swaziland Educational Sector Policy of 2011 committed the education system into providing both vulnerable boys and girls equal opportunities to education (The Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training 2011). However, Mkhatshwa (2017) found that gender inequalities and discrimination still permeate school contexts, with devastating effects on the vulnerable children – a group already supressed by their socio-economic status. Raza (2017) found that when gendered experiences are intersected with poverty and vulnerability, the vulnerable boys' and girls' lived and schooling experiences are aggravated. Crenshaw (1989:140) says vulnerable boys and girls in the school contexts are 'multiply-burdened'. This is because their experiences of gender are not only gendered but also classed (Luft 2016). In essence, the vulnerable boys' and girls' social status is not their only site for oppression (Raza 2017), but also the inequalities and hierarchies within each social group masculinities and femininities.

The complexities of the young vulnerable children's everyday school experiences therefore call for gender issues to be considered, with a view to promote equitable schooling experiences. Luft (2016) points out that to create gender-equitable school environments and positive schooling experiences for the vulnerable children, it is imperative to be both gender- and class-sensitive. The importance of teachers' role in the creation of inclusive and gender-equitable school spaces cannot therefore be overemphasised (Bhana, Nzimakwe & Nzimakwe 2011), hence the focus of this article. The first call would be to understand the teachers' own constructions of gender and their individual perceptions of vulnerability and vulnerable children as a social group. This would help in devising intervention strategies that could help teachers devise pedagogic practices that would not only assist the vulnerable children to produce, resist and confront social relationships of gender domination, but also to teach other learners within the school contexts about the importance of a socially just world. By bringing the voice of teachers to the fore, as the primary socialising agents of vulnerable children, the article therefore adds a critical component in the equation, which education policymakers should take into account in their efforts and strategies for enhancing inclusive education- and gender-equitable schooling experiences for the vulnerable boys and girls.

Hence, the article aimed to understand the teachers' constructions of gender in the context of three primary schools in the rural areas of Swaziland and the local factors that inform such constructions. Furthermore, the article aimed to comprehend the implication of the teachers' constructions on the vulnerable children's gender socialisation and, most importantly, the effect of all these on gender equality and equitable schooling for the vulnerable children in these contexts.

Teachers' constructions of gender: A review of literature

According to Mollel and Chong (2017), education inculcates self-efficacy. Akpede et al. (2018:1) argue that it is 'the light that shines the way'. Education is also important for the socio-economic development of individuals, families and communities (Katz 2016). Hence, the importance of education for the vulnerable boys and girls of Swaziland cannot be overemphasised. Bowe, Desjardins and Clarkson (2015) highlight that learners' attitude towards education and individual beliefs about their educational capabilities is affected and influenced by the teachers' confidence and expectations on the individual learners' performance. For example, viewing boys and expecting them to be more studious and brilliant than girls would indeed yield positive results for the boys whilst relegating the girls to poor performances. Bowe et al. further argue that boys perform better than girls because they receive more attention from teachers, and their performance and behaviour are more controlled in most instances. Yet, studies by Mollel and Chong (2017) and Vidya and Kadam (2017) have accentuated the importance of girls education for the socio-economic

development of families, communities and nations. This therefore highlights the need for teachers to treat all learners equally in the school contexts. It is a sad reality to see teachers on whose responsibility the education of vulnerable boys and girls is entrusted supporting gender stereotypes that uphold inequalities. Understanding the teachers' overall pedagogic approaches and content is therefore important not only in creating inclusive and equitable school spaces for the vulnerable children but also in improving their socio-economic life situations.

Whilst Bowe et al. (2015) in a study involving African-American students found that teachers worked hard to deconstruct stereotypes of gender in the school. Gansen (2017) revealed that teachers in school contexts reinforced and normalised gender stereotypes, often to the detriment of the learners they teach. The same way, Bhana et al. (2011) in South Africa highlighted how teachers draw from the society's dominant discourses to actively and stereotypically construct gender in the school contexts, thus socialising their learners to approach and making meaning of their masculinities and femininities along the same lines. In Swaziland, the curriculum in teacher training colleges was found not only to be silent on issues of gender but also 'reproducing the dominant patriarchal culture' (Lumadi & Shongwe 2010:47). Social stereotypical perceptions about children and gender therefore guide most schools' and teachers' pedagogic practices in the country. For example, children are perceived to be too young to listen to or understand issues of gender (Nxumalo, Okeke & Mammen 2014). Through their overt and inherent gender norms though, teachers regulate gendered behaviour that reinforces unequal gender relations (Vidya & Kadam 2017), hence creating gender inequitable school spaces. Through the school processes, teachers also uphold the most violent domination of girls in line with what they already experience in the society and home (Bhana et al. 2011). For the vulnerable boys and girls whose experiences of gender intersect with poverty and vulnerability, their experiences of gendered social injustices are aggravated (Raza 2017). For instance, Mkhatshwa (2017) found that an orphaned boy was deprived of privileges afforded to other children in the school only because he was a male, and hence perceived to be independent and self-reliant. What needs to be considered therefore is the ways in which the boys' masculine identity intersects with their vulnerable social positions, highlighting the intersectionality of their vulnerability, in a sense of emasculation tied in with gendered stereotypes of men being independent and self-reliant. However, these gender norms aggravate the vulnerability that afflicts this learner. Indeed, this illustrates one of the troubling, but real-world and highly esteemed constructions of gender in the schools.

Social constructionism and intersectionality

The study was guided by social constructionism and intersectionality. Social constructionism states that gender 'is created and re-created out of human interactions, out of social life, and it is the texture and order of that social life' (Lorber 1994:54). Gender identities are not mere products of

natural creation (Berger & Luckmann 1991) but culminate in cultural and social processes that are customarily rooted in traditions, values and social relations within diverse societies (Gergen 2009). Social constructionists such as Berger & Luckmann (1991), Gergen (2009) and Lorber (1994) conclude that it is on these individual society's discourses of gender that the teachers' constructions of gender are founded (Gergen 2009). Norton (2006) describes discourse as societies' individual culture and tradition, their way of talking, thinking and doing things, which sets them apart from other communities. In essence, the teachers' constructions of gender are not only closely entwined with the social structures and processes of gender in their contexts (Gergen 2009), but are also governed and predicated by the social discourses of gender, traditional norms and gender ideologies in their given contexts (Ratele 2013). This means that boys tend to be exalted in assumptions of power at the expense of downgrading girls to subservience, which is the founding logic of the gender inequality scheme, thus socialising learners in the school contexts into unequal gender positions and performances.

Intersectionality, on the other hand, states that vulnerability amplifies gender disparities (Raza 2017). Davis (2008) defines intersectionality as:

> the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power. (p. 68)

That is to say, the vulnerable boys' and girls' experiences of gender are compounded by and intersect with other variables such as poverty and vulnerability (Banerjee 2016). The teachers' stereotypical constructions of gender, compounded with the vulnerable boys' and girls' social positioning, are therefore likely to affect the vulnerable boys and girls not only in different but also in more devastating ways than other children not affected by vulnerability (Raza 2017). To understand how vulnerable children are affected by the scheme of gender inequality in the school contexts, one has to look at their intersecting social identities within the system of gender inequality. This study therefore focused on how the teachers' subjective constructions of gender intersected with the vulnerable boys' and girls' vulnerability and experiences of gender.

Research design
Geographical and socio-economic context of the study

Swaziland is an ethnically homogeneous country in Southern Africa ruled by an absolute monarch. It covers a region of 17 364 km² with a population of approximately 1.1 million (Braithwaite, Djima & Pickmans 2013), 76% of which live in the rural areas of the country (UNICEF 2009). The people of Swaziland share a common language and preserve their conventional and static traditional way of life, founded on Christianity and patriarchy (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016). The country is divided into four geographically diverse regions: Manzini, Hhohho, Shiselweni and Lubombo.

Muntu* primary school is located in the Lubombo region, about 42 km from the nearest town of Siteki. Lubombo is largely rural and is the poorest region in the country and severely hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS (UNICEF 2009). Hence, it has the highest number of vulnerable children in the country (Braithwaite et al. 2013). Mjikaphansi* primary school is located in the rural areas of the Hhohho region, about 25 km from the capital city of Mbabane. The young children (both boys and girls) are usually found roaming the dirty roads, imbibing alcohol with no prospects of completing school. They end up working in the pine tree plantations nearby. Mazingela* primary school is located in the rural areas of the Manzini region, about 18 km from Manzini city and 11 km from Matsapha, which is known as the industrial town of the country. This area is densely populated and it is where most of the country's illiterate population is found, working in the firms as cheap labour. The children stay either on their own or with parents, usually women who are single parents working in the textile industry.

Study methodology and data collection methods

The study used a qualitative narrative approach as its methodological design. The participants, who were randomly sampled, consisted of nine teachers: three teachers from each of the three targeted schools. The teachers' were aged between 24 and 60 years. Open-ended questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews were used as a platform to solicit the teachers' own constructions of gender and their individual perceptions of vulnerability and vulnerable children as a social group, and how this affects or intersects with the vulnerable children's own experience and constructions of gender. The questionnaires, which each respondent was to fill out individually, were intended to allow the respondents to express their meaning making of and experiences of gender without restraints, at the same time giving them enough time to respond to the questions in their spare time and space without having to worry about learners and school timetables. The researcher addressed all issues of clarity to ensure that the respondents were clear about what they were required to do. The questionnaires were written in English, as this is the second language in Swaziland and a medium of communication in most schools. However, teachers were free to answer either in Siswati or English. Individual interviews were then conducted after all the questionnaires had been filled in to complement the questionnaires and provide more in-depth data. The individual interviews too were conducted in both languages – Siswati and English. Therefore, teachers had the liberty to express themselves in any language they felt comfortable (Mcmillan & Schumacher 2010). With permission from the respondents, the use of a tape recorder helped in the accurate capturing of what each respondent said and to make up for data not recorded in notes.

Data analysis procedures

All data were transcribed and then translated into English. An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive

patterns and themes in the data (Creswell 2014). This necessitated listening and re-listening to the recorded data whilst reading the transcriptions for accuracy in interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Data were then organised, linking pseudonyms with informants. This was followed by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again for familiarity with the data and to identify emerging themes related to the teachers' constructions of gender and their individual perceptions of vulnerability and vulnerable children in their schools. This was guided by the research questions of the study. The tone and voice of the participants were also noted, especially in comprehending their emotions. The emergent themes were then coded, analysed and discussed in view of the theoretical framework of the study.

Ethical considerations

As a way of respecting the rights of the participants, ethical issues were observed (Creswell 2014). Consent was sought from the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland through the director's office. A written permission was also obtained from the school principals through a written letter stating the purpose of the study. Ethical clearance was then obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Office. Letters of consent were thereafter written to the teachers elucidating the issues of confidentiality, privacy and voluntary participation. For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this article to depict both the schools and participants. Protocol reference number is HSS/1914/016D.

Findings and discussions
Construction of gender in ambivalent ways – Boys and girls as similar but different

The findings revealed that teachers in these schools constructed boys and girls as similar and in need of same and equal educational opportunities. Their constructions however were in ambivalent ways. Their understanding of boys and girls seems to be in ways that were contradictory and also re-inscribed notions of inequity between the boys and girls in the schools. The teacher's narratives illustrate the following:

> This year I teach English Language in Grade 7. Even though the boys here do not like reading novels but I try to motivate them, by giving them sports magazines instead, because I know they like sports. Come exam time, then I do not expect the girls to perform better than my boys. I know they are equally capable of doing me proud. (Miss Gama, individual interview, 38 years old, Mazingela Primary School)

> It is important that as teachers we give all children equal learning opportunities and resources for their overall development without discrimination. In fact, teachers who treat girls differently from boys are not doing justice to the education system. The right and correct thing is to treat them equally. I personally feel girls especially need education more than the boys do. Especially because most of the vulnerable girls and women here are head of households and without education, life could be very difficult for them. (Mrs Mvulane, questionnaires, 45 years old, Muntu Primary School)

The above narratives highlight that both teachers (Miss Gama and Mrs Mvulane) believe in the importance of giving both boys and girls equal educational opportunities. For example, the boys in Miss Gama's class 'do not like reading' as much as the girls did. Buying reading material that they liked was therefore her way of motivating them to read so that they could do well in her subject, the same way the girls did. By so doing, she recognises the boys' agency to pass 'English Language', provided that she gives them the right support (Ungar, Russell & Connelly 2014), probably because Miss Gama is aware of how important passing English is for these boys. It is also commendable that Miss Gama understood her 'boys' capabilities, and thus motivated rather than castigated them for not getting into the culture of reading which she was trying to inculcate in her English Language class. What Miss Gama did was to tap into the boys' needs, providing them a springboard to use their agency in doing well in English as a strategy in her pedagogic approach (Juan & Visser 2017).

However, even though Miss Gama's actions could appear to be responsive to the boys' educational needs, it appears to be in the ways that polarised the boys and girls. Whilst her use of the words 'the girls … my boys' could highlight the good relationship she probably had with the boys in her class, which Katz (2016) believes could motivate the boys to try harder. Her nurturing tendencies however were in ways that made her look more concerned with the boys' education than that of the girls (Mollel & Chong 2017). It appears that she made no serious investment towards the girls' educational achievement (Olasunkanni 2009). This differentiated approach was not only inclined to compromise her efforts towards the creation of equitable educational opportunities, but also to exclude and demotivate the girls towards educational attainment. The different ways in which Miss Gama treated the boys and girls in her class in ways also re-inscribed and reproduced the long-standing patriarchal notions that perceived boys as future heads of families, hence making their education more important than that of the girls (Vidya & Kadam 2017). Yet, with the prevailing scourge of poverty, HIV and AIDS in the country, causing mainly girls to become head of households, educating the girl child is equally imperative. Miss Gama's perception therefore compromises efforts towards the education of girls and creation of gender-equitable education. Yet, Vidya and Kadam (2017) argue that educating a girl child could bring drastic changes for individual communities, countries and the African continent as a whole.

Mrs Mvulane, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the vulnerable girls' education in ways that were gender stereotypical because by putting emphasis on the girls' education, Mrs Mvulane seems also to trivialise the boys' education, the same way Miss Gama prioritised the education of boys. This differentiated approach could imply that Mrs Mvulane has recognised the changing nature of family setup in Africa, and especially the rural and destitute contexts in which the vulnerable children lived (Akpede et al. 2018). That is to say, being a teacher in the school for 9 years meant

she was well informed about the diverse gendered challenges faced by vulnerable girls as compared to boys in this context. Mrs Mvulane could also be aware of the responsibilities the vulnerable girls had or that awaited them in adulthood, that is, 'being heads of households', requiring them to be educated (Mkhatshwa 2017). According to Mrs Mvulane, the most feasible practicality for the vulnerable girls for acquiring these responsibilities and indeed transcending their poverty and vulnerability and that of their families therefore meant they had to work twice as hard and indeed receive more help than the other learners (Mollel & Chong 2017).

Her logic could also have been that, even though boys and girls have to be treated equally, there are certain situations where differentiation is necessary in order to be truly responsive to the specific needs and dynamics of vulnerable boys and girls in a given context. The differentiated perception she had of the vulnerable girls and boys could be a way of appreciating the complexities of gender, which transcend notions of gender equality as sameness to a notion that construes gender equality as equitable treatment for girls and boys. From this, we learn that gender equality and equitable treatment should be perceived as an idealised reality for both the vulnerable boys and girls in these contexts, which makes it imperative for teachers to employ individual strategies in their pedagogic approaches, tapping into individual needs and capabilities (Juan & Visser 2017).

Boys and girls as different social groups

Masculinities as strong and ferocious

The Ministry of Education and Training's initiative to introduce the school feeding programme, where learners in all public schools are assured of a meal, is a commendable initiative, especially in enhancing inclusive school spaces for the vulnerable boys and girls in these rural and poverty-stricken contexts. The findings however reveal that the school feeding was a source of gender contestations in the schools and had the propensity to create gender inequitable spaces for the vulnerable boys and girls. The interview with Mr Hlata, from Mazingela primary school, below illustrates this:

> Mr Hlata: Biologically, boys are stronger than girls. I am not sure then how they can be equal. For example, during the lunch hour, our learners eat rice and beans. What happens is these 'children' literally fight for the food. Hence, we tasked the grade 7 boys and not the girls to control the situation and ensure that the learners make straight lines than pushing each other over the food. Someone would then say, maybe that is not gender equality… like why do we prefer boys over girls… but seriously girls cannot do that job effectively, these children fight…and they fight violently!

> Researcher: Ohh that's bad! I would like to know what criteria you use as teachers in choosing the boys who control the lines.

> Mr Hlata: For now there is no specific criterion, but mostly it is the 'big' boys in the class. We do not choose those who come from poor family backgrounds… the vulnerable too. The problem is – those boys are either timid or, at most instances, unruly. So we cannot expect them to control the other learners, when they also need to be controlled.

> Researcher: Ok I understand sir… you said they fight … and are the grade 7 boys able to calm the situation?

> Mr Hlata: … (silence) Not really (silence again) … because, not all learners get the food. Some cannot stand the chaos but I've seen those who really want to eat patiently waiting in the queues. The vulnerable children especially, because they usually do not have anything to eat at home so they have no alternative but to do as told. The [*vulnerable*] boys just do not listen…. they push and you can see that they are desperate for the food. We've had complaints that the responsible boys use violence to control them but there are also cases where the [*desperate*] boys fight them [*the grade 7 boys responsible*] but we haven't yet found a solution to that. (Mr Hlata, 31 years old, Mazingela Primary School)

The above interview highlights the vulnerable boys' and girls' desperation for food, which unfortunately becomes sites of their subordination and suppression in the school (Chowdhury 2017). Because of their indigent situations, the vulnerable children are heavily reliant on the meals provided by the school. The teachers' act of tasking the grade 7 'big and strong boys' therefore did not only dominate and supress the vulnerable girls who were forced to submit in order to get a meal but also the vulnerable boys who because of their socio-economic status, which rendered them 'timid', powerless and subordinates, as they did not belong to the perceived hyper-masculine powerful group in the school (Connell 1995). In so doing, the teachers upheld the domination of hegemonic masculinities at the same time positioning both 'the weak' girls and the vulnerable boys in a lower stratum with respect to their social positioning and power relationships with hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Endorsing the grade 7 boys to positions of power could also highlight the ways in which teachers in the school treated the vulnerable learners differently from other learners. For instance, whilst the grade 7 boys were perceived to be capable of bringing order, the vulnerable boys were perceived to be 'timid and unruly', hence not only controlled but also excluded from positions of power, in ways that exacerbated stereotypes associated with vulnerability in this contest.

Mr. Hlata's response further highlights some contradictions. At one point, the vulnerable boys are different because of being vulnerable; at another, they are still classical boys who are strong and ferocious, and hence they 'do not listen'. Such contradictions denote inconsistencies in teachers' constructions, which denote that teachers' constructions were mere social constructions meant to feed into general societal expectations of these boys, but with little relevance to the lived experiences of these boys, and their genuine potential as humans. Again, as much as he says, the vulnerable boys and girls 'have no alternative but to do as told', he also acknowledges that the very same boys 'do not listen'. Here, Mr Hlata seems to ignore the vulnerable boys' agency in getting what they want. Yet, the vulnerable boys' defiant behaviour could have been their way to get what they desperately needed – food. The findings point to important intersections of poverty and masculinity in the vulnerable boys' gender performances (Crenshaw 1989) and indeed the transactional nature of gender performances. Hence, it was not enough for Mr Hlata to view these boys'

capabilities to simply denote boys' 'timid and unruly' behaviour. There seems to be some form of material gains associated with the choice and timing of boys' unruly masculine behaviours. It appears therefore that the more inclusive and responsive to the learners' needs schooling is, the less likely boys would feel compelled to engage in transactional masculine performances that could be regarded as unruly or unbecoming.

Mr Hlata's stereotypical belief that construes girls as being 'weak', hence 'cannot [manage the lines] do that job effectively', could also be viewed as strengthening particular gender stereotypes, associating management and power with men and boys (Moosa & Bhana 2017:377). In complete disregard of the vulnerable girls' propensity to be violent and strong as observed by Morris and Perry (2017). Morris and Perry (2017) found out that girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds became violent as a means to navigate and negotiate challenges brought by their destitute situations. Mr Hlata's stereotypical perceptions of vulnerability and gender therefore had the propensity to nurture and encourage defiant and violent behaviour in the school (Ungar et al. 2014). Rather, treating all learners in the school equally could encourage a mutual relationship among all the learners where the vulnerable boys and girls would be encouraged to express their desperation through words than through 'uncontrollable or unbecoming' actions.

The same violence was noted at Muntu primary school, where during one of the interviews a teacher came running, and immediately the two teachers (including the participant) left in haste. On his return, he narrated how a group of boys in the school were becoming uncontrollable:

> Mr William: I am sorry for the disturbance. We are having a big problem here … there is a group of boys that is becoming a nuisance. Just now they came with a 5 litre Oros bottle, filled it with rice and beans then ran away. The other learners caught them just before they could cross the road, and there was a fight that nearly turned nasty. So Miss Zitha* wanted my help in calming the situation. This is stressful, because tomorrow it will be the same issue … boys running away with food. We are tired!
>
> Researcher: That is bad. But who really is responsible for seeing to it that all the learners get the food and there is no chaos in the queues?
>
> Mr William: When I came to the school 3 years back, we had prefects, both boys and girls doing that job. With time the girls could not take it, as the learners always fight for the food. We then decided that the boys should do it, especially the older boys from each class. But what has just happened is a clear indication that these children are becoming uncontrollable by the day. (Mr William, 52 years old, Muntu Primary School)

The irony is that, according to Swazi culture, preparing food and cooking is not only boys' responsibility but also that of women and girls (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016). Ndlangamandla (2010) says the kitchen is not only perceived as a space inhibited by girls and women but also it symbolises their subjugation and taming within a patriarchal society. These findings denote a deviation from this cultural norm

and dominant discourse in these schools, particularly because it bestowed the boys a position of power, control and responsibility (Connell 1995). The violent reactions by some vulnerable boys to this school practice denoted the multiplicity of forms of masculinities (Connell 2005). Also the likely contestations over power and control among the boys all point to a deep flaw in the scheme of using the 'older' boys to signify particular dominant forms of masculinities for power and control within these schools. Indeed, the teachers' constructions of hegemonic masculinities as strong and good managers did not only re-inscribe the disgraceful notions that bequeath hegemonic masculinities with absolute power (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), but was also the functional source of violence, contestations and unpleasant gender relationships. With vulnerable girls and boys bearing the minority social status in these contexts, they are likely to withstand the worst of the situation (Crenshaw 1989). Investing in constructions of gender as multiple, fluid and acquired girls' and boys' human abilities would go a long way in the creation of gender-friendly, equitable and peaceful schooling environments (Morojele 2011).

Girls as beautiful and fragile

The findings of the study revealed that some teachers constructed the difference between boys and girls through the girls' sexuality. For example, a teacher from Mjikaphansi* primary school felt expecting the same things from boys and girls would be detrimental to the girls' future prospects for marriage. This emanated from the wider society's discourse where girls are socialised to live their lives for the approval of men – as good wives and good wife material (Akpede et al. 2018). The following narrative illustrates this:

> The learners here take turns collecting firewood from the mountains [to cook their meals]. Even though, both boys and girls are expected to go there … but sisi Ncami, I do not like that. Manual work is for boys…how then do we teach our girls to always be neat and beautiful when we expect them to work in the scotching sun. Personally I do not send the girls to the mountain. Even though the principal once complained, but then that is what I believe in. Besides, the boys in my class too… they do not mind doing all the work because they are aware that…it is the kind of work only men are expected to do. Honestly speaking, besides girls being fragile, no one wants to come next to a girl who smells of sweat [rolling her eyes and smile] [then a loud laugh] do you think sis Ncamsile … any man would ever want to come next to you, if you smelled of sweat??? So let us not be unfair on our girls! (Miss Lukhele, individual interview, 24 years old, Mjikaphansi Primary School)

The learners in this school were expected to collect firewood from the mountain as a school routine. But just because Miss Lukhele believed that the girls were 'fragile and had to stay neat and beautiful', the girls in her class did not go to the mountains, lest the 'scorching sun' spoils their beauty. Gender stereotypes are again reinforced with girls being expected to be neat and beautiful. This is problematic. Earlier responses from teachers referred to girls as frequently having to head households. This would suggest that they too would need to do labour or work that has been previously defined as

a 'man's job'. Yet, whilst Miss Lukhele says that it was tolerable for boys to smell of sweat, it was completely obnoxious for the girls. Miss Lukhele's view seems to reinforce division of labour in gender stereotypical ways (Moosa & Bhana 2017) because there were jobs that she felt were meant only for men or boys and not for women or girls. This therefore raises the question on how the vulnerable girls could head households (as mentioned earlier) if they are socialised in ways that restricted them from doing manual work, because 'it is the kind of work only men are expected to do'.

Although Miss Lukhele seems to be showing love and affection for the girls, this is in ways that re-inscribe patriarchal notions of gender that have always relegated women to poverty (Watkins 2000). In essence, Miss Lukhele was socialising the girls in her class that their mere existence was for men, 'so they should not smell of sweat because men would not come closer to them'. This logic draws from the wider Swazi normative discourse that women live their lives as subordinates, owned and provided for by men (Fielding-Miller et al. 2016), and hence had to stay beautiful for the same men. Miss Lukhele was therefore 'teaching' the girls that physical appearance and beauty but not education was their ticket to a better livelihood. This dependent feminine mindset and chauvinistic way of thinking had the disadvantage of making the vulnerable girls – a group whose gender identity intersects with poverty – to think that their value and contribution to the society lies in only being beautiful (Watkins 2000). Hence, this not only encourages male dominance but also traps the vulnerable girls in destitution for years and, indeed, makes gender equality a far-fetched dream for them. Yet, affirming the vulnerable girls through their capabilities and not their attractiveness would go a long way in helping them thrive to come out of their poverty and be inspired to aim higher and not be restricted by their femininity and sexuality (Ungar et al. 2014).

Again, socialising the vulnerable girls within the feminine beauty discourse predisposed them to being sexually abused by rich men who embodied conformist masculinities. This is because the vulnerable girls are being 'taught' that their mere existence and livelihood depend on masculinities that would normatively provide for them (Mollel & Chong 2017). The below narratives illustrate this:

> One of my best students has just dropped out of school because of pregnancy. It is so sad that the person responsible is married. Such sad stories are prevalent here and as a teacher it is very sad to see these children being taken advantage by men only because they are poor and need men who can take care of them. I just wish the government could do something in that regard; otherwise these children will live their lives as sex slaves. (Mr William, questionnaires, 52 years old, Muntu Primary School)

> We have a big problem here. The girls, especially who are destitute, usually have sex with the older men who work in the nearby farms in order to buy things for themselves, their siblings or even take care of their families. These men give them something like 50 cents or E10/E20 (equivalent to R10/R20) on better days. It is a very sad situation because as teachers there is very little we can say against that, because these children are

being pushed into this 'prostitution' by their home situations. For example, the other day I talked to a grade 5 learner and she told me that she needed the money in order to buy sanitary towels. Unfortunately some get raped and end up being pregnant. (Mrs Hlatjwayo, individual interview, 60 years old, Mjikaphansi Primary School)

Even though Mrs Hlatjwayo associates the vulnerable girls' act of engaging in transactional relationships with older men to 'prostitution', but by considering its motivating factors, it could be understood as the vulnerable girls' way of navigating their destitute life situations. Selepe et al. (2017:169) argue that in prostitution, the 'payment to a *client* is predetermined'. The fluctuation of the price, from '50 cents… E10 or E20', therefore highlights that the vulnerable girls had no power over what the men gave them in exchange for sex. Jewkes et al. (2012) call this kind of sex 'sex for survival' and not prostitution. Again, whilst the 'blesser' discourse in South Africa implies that girls find rich men to fund their lavish lifestyle (Selepe et al. 2017), but for these vulnerable girls, engaging in sex for money was for their minimal survival. From a young age, Swazi girls are socialised to be submissive and respect male adults (Jones 2006) and for the marriage system where they would become men's properties. After the payment of lobola (dowry), of course, the husband is often considered as a guardian, a provider and a father to his wife, thus privileged to have the same (if not more) power, control and authority over the wife, as the wife's father (Kanduza 1996). Therefore, the logic of vulnerable girls receiving money from elder men is normalised as part of a bigger scheme of gendered heterosexual ritual, where marriage serves merely to formalise this exploitative gender regime. Such stereotypes get reinforced by the knowledge and/or lack of alternative information on gender provided in the school, and broader societal discourse. The following narrative further illustrates this:

> Gender is not part of our curriculum and I do not have the opportunity to talk to my learners about issues of gender. Even though I'm well aware that most of the children here no longer have parents to talk to them, but I just do not do it. (Miss Juana, questionnaires, 43 years old, Muntu Primary School)

Clearly, gender was not regarded as a primary subject of discussion and curriculum in these contexts. Morojele (2011) has found how indeed gender was regarded as not a subject of discussion in South African and Lesotho primary schools, respectively. This notion is mostly premised on notions of primary school children's innocence and immaturity, which are thought to render gender education inappropriate for them – as if 'gender does not matter'. However, the findings indicate that, in these contexts, gender matters, especially for the vulnerable girls. The gender stereotypes gave exaltation to gender performances that signified hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) and generally made vulnerable girls to internalise as the norm (Morojele 2014) subordination based on their sexual identity, hence making them easy targets for sexual abuse and exploitation, where information on how to confront and navigate gendered spaces would have come handy. This therefore evokes the concern over the logic of not mainstreaming gender in the

Swazi primary school curriculum, where there is a population of more than 150 000 vulnerable children (Simelane 2016).

Therefore, having a formal curriculum on gender would allow teachers a targeted opportunity to educate vulnerable children about the social processes of gender socialisation and reinforcement that produce unequal gender relations, and what the school, communities and vulnerable girls and boys could do to break this vicious cycle of gender socialisation in order to enhance gender equality. Teachers should expose both vulnerable girls and boys to schooling environments that are not gender-stereotyped to enable their analytical minds to flourish, rather than be supressed. Only when the schooling environments are underpinned by these values are gender-equitable school spaces for their learners likely to be created, as teachers would work towards the best interests of both vulnerable girls and boys without discrimination and suppression of other group's capabilities. Gender-sensitive and responsive schooling environments also need to play a critical role in nurturing the resilience of and alleviating the plight of vulnerable girls especially (Ungar et al. 2014), who bear a double burden of being positioned in menial works based on both their gender and status of vulnerability (Crenshaw 1989). This would also go a long way to help mitigate the vulnerable girls' and boys' plight as a group already supressed by their socio-economic status (Raza 2017) by ensuring that they do not get exposed to further suppression because of a school regime which socialises acceptance rather than confrontation of gender spaces of constraints, dominance and exploitation.

Conclusion

The teachers in the study drew heavily on the dominant discourses of gender in their wider societies. The findings highlighted the various sociocultural dynamics that informed the teachers' constructions of gender in ways that were inequitably and variably skewed against the vulnerable boys and girls. Whilst generally constructing femininities in somewhat menial terms, they exalted hegemonic masculinities above other ways of being and performances of gender. Such constructions drew their logic from the biological differences of girls and boys as a predetermining factor for children's abilities, gender performances and sexual preferences. Using the intersectionality lens, this study has illustrated how teachers' stereotypical constructions of gender compounded with the vulnerable boys' and girls' social identities, and hence worsened the social injustices against them. This therefore made gender equality an idealised reality for both vulnerable boys and girls in these contexts. For example, it was found that masculine strength as ascribed to masculinities did not define the vulnerable boys, yet the teachers affirmed or discriminated the boys based on these. The vulnerable boys were victims of such discrimination if they did not conform to the normative masculine performances as expected by the teachers. This was because their poverty and vulnerability intersected with their masculine performances and subserviently positioned them as compared to hegemonic masculinities. Again, socialising the

vulnerable girls along the normative dependant discourse did not only constrain their human abilities but also made them easy targets for sexual abuse and exploitation. 'Rich' men as embodying conformist masculinities were found to be taking advantage of the vulnerable girls' indigent situations, and hence sexually exploited them. The absence of any school policy that obligated the teachers to educate vulnerable children about gender issues was found to play a role in rendering the current scheme of gender inequalities invisible. As such, teachers found themselves either actively reinforcing inequitable gender relations among the children or being complacent in this social order by not challenging it (Morojele 2014). The findings indicate the urgent need to change the manner in which gender relations are construed in the wider society, how vulnerable children are socialised into unequal gender relationships and enhancement of vulnerable children's agencies to transcend constraining gender polarisations.

Recommendations

The teachers' stereotypical perceptions of gender were found to be re-inscribing particular gendered notions that serve to differentiate the vulnerable boys and girls in these contexts, hence compromising efforts towards the creation of gender-equitable school spaces. It is the government's obligation therefore to help teachers deconstruct these perceptions if indeed the education of both vulnerable boys and girls is equally prioritised in the country, as enshrined by the 2011 Education Sector Policy. The following recommendations are meant to support initiatives aimed at addressing gender inequities and improving the quality of the vulnerable boys' and girls' welfare and lived gender experiences in these school contexts:

- Pre-service training and in-service workshops should be held where teachers would be skilled on how to deconstruct dominant constructions of gender because of the implications it has on the vulnerable children's own constructions of gender and general well-being at the schools.
- In these workshops, teachers should be informed on the intersectionality of gender and the adverse effects their stereotypical constructions have on the vulnerable boys and girls – a group already supressed by its socio-economic status.
- Introduction of gender issues in teacher training colleges where patriarchal notions of teachers' perceptions of gender could be both deconstructed and transformed.

However, the suggested strategies would be futile without foregrounding teachers' views and experiences, as key role players in caring and supporting vulnerable children, and those of the vulnerable girls and boys as the brand bearers of the scheme of gender inequalities within the schools.

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NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE AMONG LEARNERS IN A RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SWAZILAND

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa
University of KwaZulu-Natal
ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Pholoho Justice Morojele
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Drawing from the concepts of social constructionism, the article provides insights on how six purposively sampled Grade 6 vulnerable children, aged between 11–15, from poverty-stricken families, child-headed households and those allegedly orphaned by AIDS, resiliently navigated their schooling spaces and places in one rural, primary school in Swaziland. The article uses qualitative data from semi-structured individual and focus group interviews and a participatory research method, photovoice, to foreground narrative accounts of the vulnerable children's creative coping mechanisms aimed at overcoming the unfavourable circumstances of their schooling experiences. Despite facing some home- and school-based challenges, the vulnerable children were found to display deep-rooted resilience, with or without social support and aspiration for educational attainment, seen as a viable alternative for a better future. Creative coping mechanisms that vulnerable children adopted included calculated rebellion against abusive teachers and consignment to solitude or isolation when feeling overwhelmed by unpleasant experiences. It is recommended that support strategies should involve affirming vulnerable children's voice and resilience, drawing on how these children already creatively navigate their challenges.

Keywords: children; vulnerable; resilience; experiences; school; rural; Swaziland

INTRODUCTION

This article explores narratives of resilience among rural primary school learners against the backdrop of major structural economic and social inequalities in Swaziland,

which all converge in complex, but complementary ways to render and increase the number of vulnerable learners in this context. Swaziland has over the years failed to alleviate poverty and uphold the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG). In 2015, the country stood at 0.541 in the Human Development Index (HDI), placing it in the low human development category at position 148 out of 188 countries (UNDP 2016). In Swaziland, poverty has been caused by a number of factors, such as the low employment rate, which in 2013 was at 30 per cent of the total population, with 52 per cent of the people in the rural areas not employed compared to 23.6 per cent in the urban areas (Swaziland 2012). Swaziland's effort for economic growth has over the years been undermined by misuse of public funds and resources (UNDP 2012), which has led to a wide discrepancy between the poor and rich, with the economy skewed towards the rich people (Kingdom of Swaziland 2010). The misappropriation, mismanagement and misguided priorities of public funds has carried on unabated in the country because Swaziland does not have an ombudsman to deal with issues of corruption and financial accountability (Khumalo 2013).

Swaziland is thus practically incapable of sustaining itself economically and heavily relies on the customs revenue from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which supplies about 60 per cent of the country's overall budget (Braithwaite, Djimba and Pickmans 2013). The funds from SACU are also not consistent. For instance, in the 2010/2011 year, the customs revenue was reduced from R5.1 billion in 2009/2010 to R1.9 billion, which led to a huge national budget deficit that was cut by 14 per cent in 2010/2011 and 20 per cent in 2011/2012 (Khumalo 2013). Even after SACU slightly increased the proceeds for the country in 2012/2013, the state is still a long way from being capable of paying for its expenditures (Swaziland 2012). Access to education is still unsatisfactory and most inclusive educational policies in Swaziland only exist on paper and their actual implementation is very poor (Khumalo 2013). For example, the government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010, but because of scarcity of funds, it is still unable to make payments in time and the money paid to schools is not enough to cater for the learners' education (Sukati 2013). Hence, principals demand additional fees dubbed "top up fees" from parents or guardians and children who cannot pay are punished or even expelled from school (Nordveit 2010). Deeply-rooted dynamics of patriarchy and the undemocratic nature of the Swazi society do underlie many social challenges of inclusivity and support for vulnerable children.

These structural socio-economic problems in the country coupled with the effects of HIV and AIDS (with 26.1% of people between the ages 15–49 being HIV positive [Swaziland 2012]) have made life almost unbearable, especially for the rural population where 84 per cent of Swaziland's children live (UNICEF 2009). The disastrous effects of HIV and AIDS are, indeed, enhanced in a country where there is already a high level of socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, the number of children who have been rendered vulnerable has drastically increased. In 2016 alone, schools in Swaziland had about 150 000 vulnerable children (Simelane 2016) in a population of about 1.1 million

people (Braithwaite, Djimba and Pickmans 2013). The Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training (2011) considers vulnerable children to be: orphans, children living in child-headed households, and those from poor social and economic backgrounds mostly due to the effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. These children are locally referred to as *bantfwana bendlunkhulu* (those cared for by the whole community) and their school fees are paid by the state. Although the reasons that render children vulnerable may differ, these children share one thing – and that is vulnerability and poverty (Nordtveit 2010).

Historically it took a village to bring up an African child, but with the status quo caused by the unprecedented challenges of poverty, unemployment and AIDS, the means of survival are hard to get by, forcing most Swazi communities and families to concentrate on the livelihood of their own families, which Jans (2004) defines as individualisation. The lack of responsibility and willingness for extended family members and communities to help children in dire circumstances is an indication of the disintegration of the African family, and indeed a drift away from the spirit of African communalism (Garutsa 2012) – commonly known as *Ubuntu* or *Buntfu* in SiSwati. Furthermore, the deaths of a number of family members due to AIDS has rendered most affluent families unable to adequately cater for the vulnerable children's basic needs (Nordtveit 2010), including educational prerequisites.

Societal stereotypes that permeate school contexts affect the educational experiences and academic attainment of vulnerable children (Lekule 2014). In the communities, vulnerable children, especially orphans, are discriminated against and socially excluded because they are associated with HIV as their parents' death are attributed to HIV and AIDS (Nyabanyaba 2009). Local community members believe that vulnerable children are spoiled (Lekule 2014) and they are further socially excluded because of the perceived preferential treatment they receive from Western organisations (Voyk 2011). Vulnerable children are also easy targets for violent acts like bullying and ostracising by teachers because of their failure to meet school requirements such as doing homework and coming to school on time (Nordtveit 2010).

In the rural areas of Swaziland particularly, most vulnerable children have dropped out of school due to the aforementioned problems (Nordtveit 2010) and the state's inability to abide by its promise of providing education that is completely free (Braithwaite et al. 2013). Under such conditions child and human development in general is certain to deteriorate further. Without education, which is regarded as the foundation of social and economic development (Sutton, Smith, Dearden and Middleton 2007), the circle of poverty and vulnerability for vulnerable children is set to be perpetuated and furthermore to increase the strain on the weakening economy of the country. Swaziland's currency is a legal tender regarded as equivalent to the South African rand, even though the economic realities of Swaziland make this equivalence unfeasible. This currency agreement with South Africa has had a downside, causing Swaziland to be considered as a lower-middle income country, which is thus not eligible to benefit from certain

donors that could support desperately needy children who require financial assistance to survive (Naysmith, Whiteside and Whalley 2008). Certainly an independent currency would show the world how poor this country is and therefore enable commensurate aid support systems to alleviate the plight of the vulnerable Swazi children.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Lubombo region, (where the study was undertaken) is one of the four geographically diverse regions in Swaziland. Wabo Primary school (a pseudonym) is located in the rural Lubombo region, which is the hottest and driest region, located on the far-east side of the country, bordered by Mozambique. Lubombo is largely rural, with 76 per cent of its schools being in the rural areas (Kingdom of Swaziland 2013). It is also the region most affected by poverty, drought, HIV and AIDS (UNICEF 2009), making it the region with the highest percentage of vulnerable children in the country, which in 2011 stood at 37 per cent (Braithwaite et al. 2013). Unfortunately, it is also the most deprived in terms of education (UNICEF 2009) with a large number of children engaged in child labour (Nordtveit 2010). Retrenchments in the local sugar companies have complicated things for the local people who have been forced into employment for food and some households generate cash through the sale of home brewed beer as their only source of income.

RESILIENCE, AGENCY AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Resilience is defined as an ability to overcome hardships in life (Malindi 2014; Ungar 2005). Hence, a resilient child is one who strives for a better life and remains effective and proficient (Glover 2009) even in the most difficult circumstances (Ungar 2005). Studies (e.g. Malindi and Theron 2010; Malindi 2014; Noltemeyer and Bush 2013; Ungar 2008) suggest that childhood resilience is reliant on both the child's individual characteristics and the support offered by his or her community in fostering wellbeing. Resilient qualities in children include qualities such as humour, boldness and agency (Malindi and Theron 2010). For the vulnerable children resilience, therefore, involves the ability to exercise the human capital of agency to navigate and negotiate their way towards educational success supported by their social context (Malindi 2014). In essence, vulnerable children's capability to be resilient relies on their assertive personality, society, the support structures around them (Ungar 2008) and how the environment continuously nurtures their insistent disposition (Theron 2012).

Resilience is an important skill needed by all vulnerable children to cope with the harsh reality of their schooling experiences and life in general. Pooley and Cohen (2010) posit that vulnerable children's resilient abilities can be inculcated by affirming their voice, and helping them have a sense of belonging and self-efficacy with a strong

understanding of the strengths they possess to engage with their trying situations. A critical point of emphasis is that, whatever could be imagined or done about resilience would first need to draw on how vulnerable children's propensities and attributes to be naturally resilient, and the support they receive, help them to overcome challenges in their lives.

Hence, the objective of this paper is to highlight how vulnerable children creatively exercised their resilient agency as a mechanism to navigate their complex schooling lives and how their environment developed and nurtured their resilience in a positive or destructive way. Although this article tends to understand children's resilience in individualistic terms, the aim was to foreground the creative and innovative individualistic ways through which children navigate the structural socio-economic inequalities, as a vantage point of entry into the personal lives of children and their creative potential. The article is premised on the assumption that understanding children's narratives of personal resiliencies, in this context, would shed critical light on how to harness the children's creative capacities in order to improve broader issues of social transformation and inclusivity in education. As illustrated, clearly the central problem lies with the exclusion of these vulnerable children from participating fully in school and society. Hence the article makes recommendations concerning how educational reformists could capitalise on children's creative personal resilience to devise strategies aimed at improving vulnerable children's educational attainment and the quality of their schooling experiences.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study draws on notions surrounding social constructionism. Social constructionism suggests that, all that we take to be truthful (including resilience) develops from and is consistently imbedded in our society's traditions and values (Gergen 2009). Resilience is therefore a social construct that is contextually and culturally located, making individual communities' cultures and social relationships responsible for how people perceive, construct, and approach challenges in life (Ungar 2008). It is both an individual capacity used to navigate to wellbeing and also has to do with the community's resilience formation (Ungar, Russell and Connelly 2014) and how able the individual's family, community and culture are to provide resources for resilience in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar 2005).

Social constructionism further places emphasis on discourse and social relations as bases on which learners' resilient abilities are predicated (Gergen 2009). Gee (2011) sees discourse as a socially accepted association among ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group. A resilient community is therefore one that provides its people with resources for the formation of resilience (Noltemeyer and Bush 2013). In

essence, vulnerable children's resilience is subject to both their individual personalities that seek to help them rise above their poverty and vulnerability, and their support structures, in the form of the community, culture and their social relationships with peers, family, and the school. Discursively constituted social relations are therefore a key phenomenon informing learners' resilient abilities.

In this regard, this article shows how the learners' resilient abilities are intricately entangled with the dominant social discourses of resilience in their communities. How the vulnerable children thrive and cope with their adversity goes beyond their individual capability to do so and extends to how they perceive this capability, which is informed, supported and rooted in their social relationships and the dominant discourses of resilience in their society (Gergen 2009). The paper further highlights how the vulnerable children creatively used their hidden resilient agency as a mechanism to navigate their complex schooling lives, and how historically constituted repertoires of the vulnerable children's relationships with their community and school spaces informed their subjective resilient abilities in the school context.

The theoretical perspective enabled the article to illuminate the broader societal resilience or structural deficiencies in dealing with the hardships that the vulnerable children's individual communities and the school presented. Through the participants' stories, we understood that, the poverty, structural socio-economic inequalities, and the effects of HIV and AIDS that the community has experienced for the past two decades have disintegrated families and communities and that in most instances the vulnerable children coped through their hidden resilience, which, albeit, proved insufficient to foster educational excellence. Our analyses and recommendations thus concern how vulnerable children's individualist resilience capacities could be harnessed to achieve broader imperatives of social transformation and their meaningful participation and inclusion in education. We further learnt how the environment can provide a basis for the reinforcement of delinquent behaviour, as the vulnerable children's only alternative pathway to resilience (Ungar 2005). Indeed, the learners' narratives on resilience proved to be an embodied reflection of the dynamics of social relationships in their family, school and community contexts.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Research Methodology, Design and Methods

Drawing from a case study of one school in the rural Lubombo region of Swaziland, the study used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach as its methodological design. The participants consisted of six Grade 6 vulnerable children (aged between 11–15 years), three males and three females, who were purposively sampled. Two were orphans, two were from child-headed households and two were from poverty-stricken families (1

male and 1 female for each pair). Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews were used as a platform to solicit vulnerable children's stories about how they navigated their community and school spaces. A children's participatory photovoice technique was also employed. For photovoice, each participant was given a disposable camera with 27 frames. The participants were trained to use the cameras, and were then urged to capture their chosen salient spaces and places that held meaning for their real-life schooling experiences either in an affirmative or undesirable way (Joubert 2012) for a period of four days, after which the frames were developed. The photo imagery was then used as a basis for both individual and focus group interviews as ingress into the views, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants (Mitchell, Moletsane, Stuart, Buthelezi and de Lange 2005), and further enabled the active involvement of the participants as they took the images and helped in their analysis. This situated the participant children as active agentic actors not only in shaping the dynamics of their lives, but also in shaping the knowledge they would like this study to produce in respect of their real-life schooling experiences. With permission of the participants, the use of a tape recorder helped to capture accurately what each participant said and to make up for data not recorded in notes. All interviews were conducted in SiSwati to allow participants to talk and express themselves without any linguistic restrictions (Mcmillan and Schumacher 2010) as the vulnerable children narrated deep details of how they navigated and coped with their complex schooling spaces and places.

The aim of this study was to place vulnerable children in the centre of the study – to make them not only active participants who can contribute to a drive for change but co-researchers who have a credible voice in matters affecting their lives (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Thus the choice of photovoice with its potential to make participants collaborate in research and not just become passive contributors. Photovoice was also chosen for its ability to act as a voice for the society's most vulnerable population in expressing not only their socio-economic challenges (Wang 1999) but also issues of concern to them and by extension to their communities. Considering that the vulnerable children's narratives and voices were socially and historically situated, they thus reflected the socio-economic status and dynamics of their individual societies (Gergen 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was translated from SiSwati into English for easy analysis. An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive patterns and themes from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). We listened to the recorded data while reading the transcriptions for accuracy in interpretation (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Data was then organised, linking pseudonyms with informants. This was followed by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again to familiarise ourselves with the data and to identify sub-emerging themes related to vulnerable children's schooling experiences. This was guided by the

research questions of the study. The tone of voice of the participants was also noted especially in comprehending their emotions. The emergent themes were then coded and the pictures selected and contextualised with assistance from the participants. The themes that emerged from all the data (photovoice, individual and focus group interviews) were then analysed and discussed in view of the theoretical framework of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Consent for the research was sought from the director of schools in Swaziland, the school principal and from parents and caregivers of the participants. Considering that some vulnerable children had neither parents nor guardians, letters of consent for such participants were written to the community caregiver (*umgcugcuteli*). Ethical clearance was then obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office. As the study views children as competent human beings who can decide on issues that concern their lives, their consent was also sought. In this paper, pseudonyms which the participants chose themselves are used to protect their identities.

THE FINDINGS

Resilience, Hope and Optimism

The findings revealed deep-rooted resilience, agency and perseverance displayed by the vulnerable children in their daily struggles to negotiate and traverse even the worst conditions of their educational life. A sense of hope and optimism, a deeply-held belief that education is the only viable alternative that could alleviate their plight and life challenges in the future (Sutton et al. 2007) seemed to have been a catalyst behind the vulnerable children's display of agency towards resilience. The narratives below illustrate the vulnerable children's positivity, faith and resilient behaviours, based on a strongly held conviction that once educational goals are achieved, all their life difficulties will be a thing of the past:

> I am one person who forgives easily, so even with the bad treatment here I am never bitter. Each time I come to school I do so because I know that once I am done with my education, all this will be history. I will only have a faint memory of all the challenges I am facing now.
>
> (Sfiso*, boy aged 12; focus group interview)

> I am a hard worker. Even though I have so much work to do at home, I still try to give myself time with my books. If there has been no candle the previous night, I make sure that I wake up as early as 4.30 am so that I get to school early and write my schoolwork before the teachers arrive. It is not an easy thing but I understand that, I have no one to help me therefore I have to work harder than other learners do. Otherwise, I will die poor.
>
> (Precious*, girl aged 13; focus group interview)

Precious also provided the picture below to illustrate her strength of character as she gets ready for school in the morning.

Figure 1: Picture 1

Interviewer: Precious please tell me what is happening in this picture?

Precious: Remember auntie, I told you that I wake up at 4.30 am. I have to heat water and cook my breakfast in the open, even on rainy days. Other children have domestic workers to help them and their homes have electricity, but not for us, we do not have electricity or anyone to help. Therefore, I have to do all this without any help, and then rush to school to ensure that by 7.40 am, all assignments are written.

(Precious*, girl aged 13; individual interview)

The findings illustrate that even though the vulnerable children's home lived experiences were challenging, they were able to utilise their human capital agency to deal competently with threats to their education (Ungar 2008) and by extension their visualised future lives. They relentlessly continued with their education because they were motivated by the assurance of a better future, seeing that education and educational achievement is the key component for personal and social development (Sutton et al. 2007). Children's assertive personalities seemed to have played a significant role in nurturing their hidden resilience (Ungar 2007), thereby affirming children as creative, active social agents and the unique individuality of every child (Van Blerk 2005). Each vulnerable child in the

study seemed to have had a unique resilient personality upon which to draw to navigate daily struggles in order to cope with their life challenges. Such was the only recourse these children had to facilitate educational success (Malindi and Theron 2010) in the absence of structural and institutional support mechanisms available to alleviate their plight.

Precious's narration further illustrates a strong sense of determination. Waking up at 4:30 am in the dark and making a fire in the open on cold days so that she could have hot water and breakfast before rushing to school to write assignments before school resumes is one such example. This shows the strong willpower of a child who has risen above her circumstances and mastered how to navigate her home situation, which was different from other learners not affected by vulnerability. A resilient mindset, hope, and optimism were found to be the founding pillars informing these children's creative agency in navigating their schooling experiences. Hence, even though the vulnerable children had challenges in meeting the expectations and values of both their school and home worlds (Cooper, Denner and Lopez 1999), these challenges were surmountable. Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of these worlds, the findings indicate that the vulnerable children were more focused on how to overcome their challenges than merely lamenting them.

Precious's response "I have no one to help me" is also a strong indication that, even though the vulnerable children used their hidden resilience to work towards their dreams, they could still feel the void of a helper's absence. In concurrence with Ungar et al. (2014), we assert that resilience goes further than a personally resilient behaviour – it also involves the availability of an effective support system that protects these children from further vulnerability by developing their strength and social wellbeing. Therefore, whatever assertive personality the vulnerable child might have to bolster resilience, it has to be supported and nurtured by the society (Ungar 2008). It is lamentable to state that, even if the vulnerable children could strive for their education, without adequate support from external structures such as extended family, school or government to help them, this can become a daunting task. The vulnerable children's active resilience is therefore no guarantee of their educational success and alleviation from unpleasant schooling experiences. The school and community should therefore play their supportive roles to build on these children's agency, resilient personalities and inventiveness in order to help them better adjust to the challenges of their schooling experience and of life in general.

Rebellion against Abusive Teachers

The study found that rebelling against abusive teachers, who reprimanded and embarrassed the vulnerable children in the presence of other learners, was one of the subversive ways through which these children navigated their schooling experiences. This took the form of a tacit, but carefully orchestrated and calculated behaviour of defiance (for example refusal to take punishment) and opposing school rules and adult

authority in general. This behaviour ended up fuelling a damaging and denigrating discourse about vulnerable children as ill-disciplined, which placed these children in a vicious cycle and justified further abuse against them. The data below illustrates some ways vulnerable children used to navigate this experience:

> We rebel because teachers make us work in the garden as a form of punishment; they then expect us to come to school in clean uniforms the following day. How is that possible?
>
> (Ayanda*, boy aged 11; focus group interview)

> Once a teacher tells me that we I am lazy and useless, I start hating that teacher and I do not concentrate but make noise in their classes. The rebuking and embarrassment in front of other learners also make me not respect the teachers.
>
> (Precious*, girl aged 13; focus group interview)

From the findings, we determine that, the vulnerable children used their agency to seek compassion, appreciation and understanding from the teachers. Unfortunately, the teachers in this school provided forms of punishment for delinquent behaviour as illustrated above, which on the contrary aggravated the predicament of the vulnerable children. As the vulnerable children navigated the school spaces, they were confused by the illogical expectations of the teachers. For example, after working in the garden their uniforms were understandably dirty and because of their plight and poverty it was not possible to afford soap to wash on a daily basis, thus wearing a clean uniform the next day was just an irrational expectation for them. Furthermore, instead of being thoughtful of the vulnerable children's plight and supporting their educational endeavours, the teachers perceived them as being "lazy", as expressed by Precious*, which was not only a misjudgement but also literally ignored the extent to which the vulnerable children had worked to rise above their life situations. This misconception did not only leave the vulnerable children with a deep sense of confusion that further exacerbated their vulnerability, but provided a basis for, nurtured and encouraged the development of defiant behaviour in the school (Ungar 2007). From this we learn that teachers should provide the correct social structure through creating caring and sensitive social relationships that nurture and develop socially acceptable resilient behaviours of vulnerable children.

Besides being a survival strategy, the vulnerable children rebelled in order to assert their identity, and become powerful in the school (Ungar 2005). It further served as a defence mechanism and retaliation for the bad treatment they received from their teachers. Being in a defensive mode helped the vulnerable children manage the most controlled school spaces and wield some psychological power that gave them comfort to live with their experience of ill-treatment by teachers.

> Rebelling also helps me because it makes me feel like I am in control of my emotions as I give the teachers a taste of their medicine (three of the six vulnerable children in the study nodded their heads in agreement and one clapped hands).

Fortunate* provided this picture to illustrate their defiance in the class (as she took it out, she was delightfully smiling and about three of the other vulnerable children laughed).
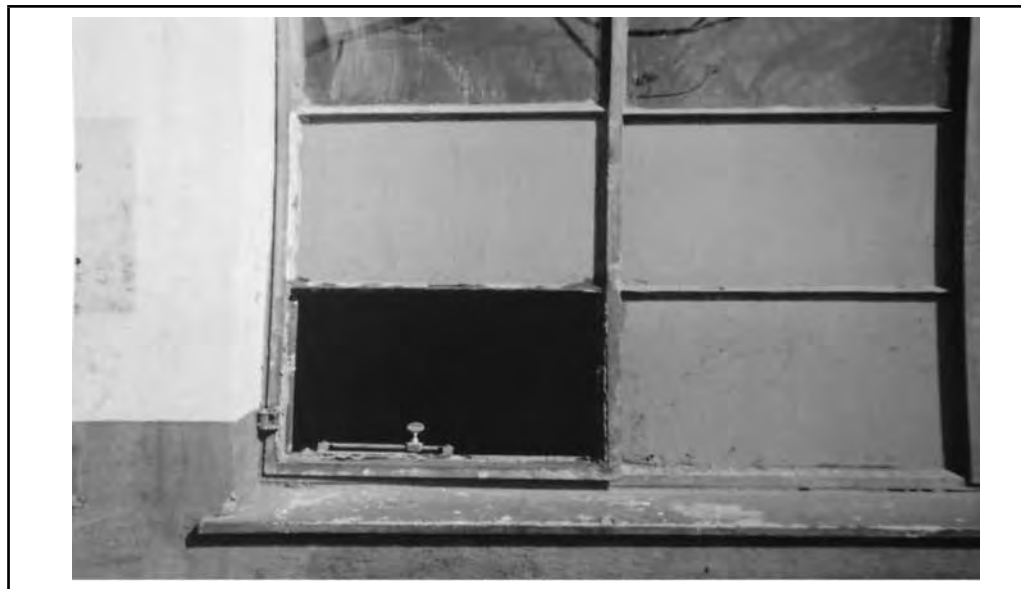
Figure 2:   Picture 2

One rainy and cold morning, Miss Kunene (a pseudonym) punished one of my friends who had come late to school. When the teacher came for her lesson, with a few of my friends we made noise. In fact, we were discussing what she had done to the "poor" child and we were not happy about it. The teacher was so infuriated that she threw a duster at us. The duster missed then hit and broke the glass in this window. For a moment, we were all shocked but eventually, we all laughed at how her anger against us embarrassed her.

(Fortunate, girl aged 15; focus group interview)

The data above demonstrates the agency that was employed by vulnerable children in this context to navigate school spaces that oppressed them. Large unruly groups strengthened not only their visibility in the school (Sutton et al. 2007) but also acted as a base from which the vulnerable children could draw their resilience. This denotes a sense of solidarity, amenability and the importance of peer social relationships as a strong base from which the vulnerable children could draw their resilience and thus cope with the negative schooling experiences. The level of wit and adaptability with which these children constructed themselves in the face of a furious teacher is noteworthy. They seemed to have gained a vast experience in dealing with their teacher, and they were able to trigger her weak temper in ways that accorded them moral power as they

subversively navigated their power relationships with teachers. There is no sense that these children displayed a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of their abusive teachers. Instead, how they responded to this reveals that when teachers are not responsive and in support of vulnerable children's plight, they (teachers) become the architects of chaos and disorder in their classrooms (Ungar 2005), and thereby compromise the quality of teaching and learning. As exposed by the narratives, it is very difficult for vulnerable children to participate in an educational system in which they are relentlessly dominated and demeaned by adults (Sutton et al. 2007). This is besides the dangers associated with furiously and indiscriminately throwing a duster at children in the classroom.

We learn from this the value of creating a friendly learning environment and peaceful social relationships between teachers and the vulnerable children, where teachers are approachable and encourage dialogue with vulnerable children to communicate their emotions through words rather than actions (Ahn 2010). This would help not only nurture correct resilient behaviours for vulnerable children but also help the vulnerable children to efficiently express their feelings on issues that concern them and thereby make their schooling experiences positive and effective.

Recourse to Isolation and Solitude

When all other strategies failed and the vulnerable children continued to feel overwhelmed by the challenges related to their home and school environments, they resorted to isolating themselves from other learners. The feeling of having to mingle with the other learners when they were faced with shameful situations in their lives was hard to bear. The data below illustrates:

> My uniform no longer fits me well and it shows skin in the armpits and belt line. This makes me not comfortable to be with other learners, thus decide to hide because even though some learners feel bad for us but there are those who make fun of our plight.

> (Fortunate*, girl aged 15; individual interview)

Figure 3: Picture 3

> I have been wearing this pair of shoe for two years and now it is torn. When I see a student looking at my feet (shy smile) I feel embarrassed. I enjoy being with my friends, because they do not laugh at me, but other learners do. Unfortunately my friends are in a different class (Grade 6B), so most of the time, to avoid the scorns and mocking from my classmates, I prefer being alone.
>
> (Precious*, girl aged 13; individual interview)

Gustuff* further provided the photograph below to illustrate how he became emotionally attached to the playground each time he was overcome by his lived experiences, both at home and at the school. The playground gave him a sense of solace and a base from which he could draw his strength to face his daily life challenges.
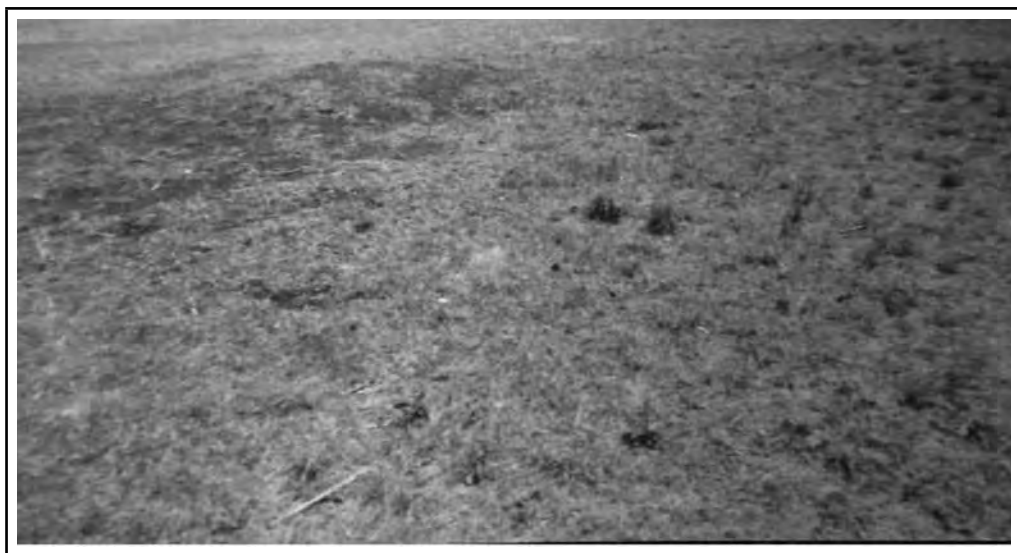
Figure 4: Picture 4

> This picture shows the playground. This place is very quiet and conducive for studying. Each time I am here, I forget about the difficulties I face at home or at school and I am able to study [concentrate].

> (Gustuff*, boy aged 13; focus group interviews)

Gustuff's picture is a representation of a lonely life of a vulnerable child. It exposes the extent of social exclusion faced not only by the participants of the study, but the daily lived experiences of vulnerable children in the country's schools (Nordtveit 2010). It is a bleak example of the devastating effects of the lack of support systems for vulnerable children in this Southern African region (Lekule 2014), which prompts such children to detach themselves from the school community when the idea of being poor and thus different from other learners has been firmly inculcated (Peace 2001). Gustuff found solace in socially isolating himself, as this was better than the exclusionary and demeaning social relationships of discrimination based on his socio-economic status. Therefore, a creative resilience option for Gustuff was to execute an emotional attachment to the playground, which afforded him a private space, away from the ridicule and discrimination he experienced at home and the school. This also acted as a space from which he could draw his strength towards resilience and educational success, in the absence of any support.

If vulnerable children, through their hidden resilience, could find solace in isolated and remote spaces from their schooling environments, this is a serious indictment on how uncaring and unsupportive the school system is for these children. From the narratives there is no evidence that the vulnerable children excelled or even did well in their school work, but without social support, a sense of belonging, these children's educational

resilience is unlikely to be effectively inculcated (Pooley and Cohen 2010). It is clear though, that taking the vulnerable children to school and paying for their educational fees is not enough. There is a need to address teachers' and other learners' attitudes towards vulnerable children and to support them with basic human needs like proper school uniforms, which we argue could go a long way towards mitigating vulnerable children's compromised life circumstances and fostering their resilience (Ungar et al. 2014).

The willpower of these children to learn and adapt themselves in favour of their educational attainment is not at all in question. A reciprocal response from the other stakeholders though was found to be a missing link between the vulnerable children and the quality of their schooling experiences. The actions of the other learners and teachers might not have been intentional. However, these do indicate a need to sensitise teachers, learners and community members about the plight of vulnerable children as individuals and a social group requiring consideration in policy formulation endeavours, and pedagogical and social interactions in and out of school. Only through such support could vulnerable children's individualist resilience abilities be reinforced and harnessed to improve broader structural issues of social transformation, educational inclusivity and their meaningful participation in life (Ungar 2008). This would ensure that the vulnerable children's adverse schooling experiences, as exemplified above, which might compel them to drop out of school, thus entangling them in a vicious cycle of vulnerability and poverty, become alleviated, or at least mitigated.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In traversing the school places and spaces, vulnerable children revealed themselves to be resilient, confident, and very optimistic for a better adult life through education. To bolster their resilience, the vulnerable children drew from social and personal capital as immediately available resources against treacherous schooling spaces. Their agentic prowess was not limited to how they stood in solidarity with other vulnerable children abused by some teachers – they also displayed inventive agency in how they defied the power relationships between teachers and vulnerable learners and continued to see themselves and other vulnerable children in a positive light despite their general denigrating and demeaning schooling experiences. The school on the other hand provided no social support for these children's positive resilient behaviour; on the contrary the teachers provided a basis for rebelliousness as the vulnerable children sought consideration and to assert their identity in the school. Hidden resilience was found to be an overriding coping mechanism used by the vulnerable children to cope amidst the challenges caused by their schooling experiences in the absence of an effective support structure to nurture them in their path to resilience. Through assertiveness and isolation from other learners, the vulnerable children demonstrated competency as sound, reasonable, and intelligently adaptive human beings.

To help build on the creative ways vulnerable children used to navigate their schooling experience, the study recommends:

- Schools should infuse resilience affirmation and self-efficacy as a cross-cutting component of the school curriculum, and teachers could implement this in their pedagogical and social interactions with vulnerable children.
- There is a need to foreground vulnerable children's ingenuity as a foundation for strategies and reforms aimed at improving the quality of their schooling experiences.
- The creation of a friendly environment of care and support for improved teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships, with strong emphasis on social diversity tolerance and acceptance enhancement.

The above recommendations could further be enhanced through the alleviation of patriarchy and the creation of democratic civil organisations in Swaziland. These would cultivate a platform for conducive and democratic schooling environments, which accentuate the importance of foregrounding sensitive, thoughtful and caring social relationships from all educational stakeholders in the development and nurturing of resilience and self-efficacy in vulnerable children. This could be possible through concentrating not only on the teaching and learning aspect, but also the emotional wellbeing of the child. Equally important is the implementation of pedagogical practices that would foster a sense of belonging for the vulnerable children. Other learners in school contexts need to be sensitised regarding the importance of an equitable school environment where vulnerable children are equitably affirmed, not discriminated against.

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Further Research

Although the use of six participants provided valuable qualitative insights, the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond these six participants and the time and space within the context of the school in which the study was conducted. Further qualitative research using a larger sample of participants, over a long period, within a variety of school contexts in this region, is needed to provide further insights into dynamics of resilience for vulnerable children within the schooling contexts of Swaziland. Notwithstanding, this current study serves a pioneering role providing information to sensitive researchers in the country about the plight of vulnerable children, and the need to conduct research that foregrounds their voices regarding the kind of support they need to augment their overall resilience in order to overcome challenges related to their schooling.

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High Aspirations Amidst Challenging Situations: Narratives of Six Vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

Pholoho Justice Morojele
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

Abstract

Informed by social constructionism, this article explores the educational aspirations, fears and support mechanisms required to enhance the schooling experiences of vulnerable children in one rural school in Swaziland. It uses data from semi-structured interviews and photovoice based on a qualitative study of six vulnerable children, aged between 11 and 15 years. Vulnerable children viewed education as a vehicle for their aspired better adult life. These children held anxieties regarding anticipated lack of support to complete further education. Support mechanisms included the need for the community and teachers to assist with basic survival necessities like candles, clothing, and general parental guidance.

Introduction

Swaziland (the Kingdom of eSwatini) covers a region of 17,364 km² and is located in the southern part of Africa, with a population of approximately 1.1 million (Braithwaite et al., 2013). Swaziland is also one of the countries in Africa that have been hard hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS (UNICEF, 2009) relegating the majority of the young population to extreme poverty and vulnerability. In 2016, there were about 150,000 children affected by vulnerability in Swazi schools (schools in Swaziland) (Simelane, 2016) in a population of about 1.1 million people (Braithwaite et al., 2013). The Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training (2011) considers 'vulnerable children' to be; orphans, children living in child-headed households, and those from poor social and

Corresponding author:
Pholoho Justice Morojele, Gender & Social Justice Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Room G025, Memorial Tower Building, Howard College Campus, Durban, 4000, South Africa.
Email: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

economic backgrounds mostly due to the effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. These children are locally referred to as *bantfwana bendlunkhulu* (those cared for by the whole community). Although the reasons that render children vulnerable may differ, these children share one thing; and that is poverty (Nordtveit, 2010).

Poverty characterises many Swazi families, and the country is far from achieving the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG), of alleviating poverty. After, 49 years of independence, Swaziland is in no way close to sustaining itself economically. The country therefore heavily relies on the customs revenue from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) which supplies about 60% of the nation's overall budget (Braithwaite et al., 2013). In 2015, the country stood at 0.541 in the Human Development Index (HDI) placing it in the low human development category at position 148 out of 188 countries (UNDP, 2016), with a very low employment rate. For example, in 2013 unemployment was set to be at 30% of the total population, with 52% of the people in the rural areas not employed as compared with 23.6% in the urban areas (Swaziland, 2012). The high employment rate in the country combined with the effects of HIV and AIDS (which stands at 26.1% HIV rate in people between the ages of 15–49) (Swaziland, 2012), has made life almost impossible especially for the rural population where 84% of Swaziland's children live (UNICEF, 2009).

In 2010, the Government introduced FPE, especially to cater for the educational fees of vulnerable children, even though from the past year there have been reports that the state is struggling to fund the FPE (Sukati, 2016). Either funds get to the schools very late or they are not enough to cater for the learners' educational needs. Hence, principals demand additional fees dubbed 'top up fees' from parents or guardians and children who cannot pay are often punished or even expelled from school (Sukati, 2013). This is one example, illustrating the fact that most inclusive educational policies in Swaziland, merely exist on paper and their actual implementation is very poor (Khumalo, 2013), which adversely affect children's access to education. Consequentially, in the rural areas of Swaziland particularly, most vulnerable children do not go past secondary school education (Braithwaite et al., 2013). Education is widely regarded as the foundation for social and economic development (Sutton et al., 2007), and thus, lack of access to quality educational opportunities further relegate vulnerable children to a vicious circle of poverty. More research is therefore required to understand the effects of the current socio-economic situation in Swaziland, on how vulnerable children perceive their educational aspirations and anxieties. Furthermore, to comprehend the support mechanisms necessary to enhance the vulnerable children's educational opportunities and schooling experiences.

In this paper, we draw on social constructionism to foreground the voices of vulnerable children in a rural primary school in Swaziland. The aim is to articulate their educational aspirations, fears and provide insights into the kind of support the vulnerable children themselves feel would be effective in sustaining them towards attaining their educational aspirations. We regard the vulnerable children as both active participants and co-researchers with a credible voice in refining the country's inclusive educational policies (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). By fore-fronting their voices, we seek to harness the vulnerable children's agency as a social group, and accentuate the value of their meaningful participation in devising and refining strategies aimed at improving vulnerable children's educational attainment, enhancing the quality of their schooling experiences and fostering inclusive education.

Understanding vulnerable children's aspirations and fears

Brown (2011) saw a close relationship between human aspirations and fears. Kintrea et al. (2011) describe aspirations as desires and ambitions held by children about their future, which has a

potential to help them escape from painful life situations. Thus, for vulnerable children, aspirations are an escape route from their poverty and vulnerability towards a happy fulfilling future. However, due to their compromised socio-economic situations, vulnerable children's ambitions are always entangled with trepidation and doubt as to whether they would be able to achieve their educational goals or remain poor (Kintrea et al., 2011). This is largely due to the challenges they face as they attempt to manoeuvre societal and institutional obstacles that inhibit their educational success for a better life.

In Northern Ireland, Horgan (2007) revealed that, children from poverty-stricken families feared being in new environments, being victims of bullying and being stigmatised. In the United Kingdom, Kintrea et al. (2011) found that, children from poor backgrounds were constantly worried about their future, not completing school and not getting employed in adulthood. In Zimbabwe, Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) pointed out that children affected by vulnerability, worry about sheer survival and being discriminated by other learners, and in South Africa, Nduna and Jewkes (2012) established that, children in vulnerable situations worried about their basic needs and general threats to their education. Zembylas (2009) saw all these fears and stresses as resultant from social, political and educational forces coming together in the children's lives.

According to Ungar (2008), for vulnerable children to rise above their fears, achieve their ambitions and probably live a happy adult life, they need resilience. Ungar et al. (2014) describes resilience as a child's ability to overcome hardships in life which is reliant on both the child's individual characteristic and the support offered by his or her community in fostering wellbeing and nurturing self-efficacy. For the vulnerable children, resilience therefore, involves the ability to exercise human capital of agency to negotiate their fears and navigate their way towards their aspirations supported by their social context (Malindi, 2014). Ambitions for vulnerable children are closely related to their desire to escape from adverse life circumstances and living a prosperous adult life (Brown, 2011). It follows logically therefore that most vulnerable children, considering their dire circumstances, certainly need support mechanisms in order to help them attain their educational goals. Even though the determination that comes with their desires assists them to transcend the most difficult challenges in their lives, but the key here is to realise the critical roles that teachers, school administration and all education stakeholders could act as a support structure (Ungar, 2008) to continuously nurture their assertive disposition (Theron, 2012).

It is therefore important to understand the aspects that can be influential in harnessing the vulnerable children's resilience, aspirations and ambitions amidst their circumstances (Noltemeyer and Bush, 2013). For example, USAID (2008) suggested that communities should work at changing their own attitude towards vulnerability and further deconstruct present dominant discourses on vulnerability. This could pave way for shaping new discourses that would be more inclusive of children affected by vulnerability. Communities should further make available more resources for the vulnerable children's resilient abilities (Cooper and Cefai, 2013). Schools on the other hand, should ensure that vulnerable children are visible and affirmed through inclusive school practices, which uphold their rights (Glover, 2009). Teachers could also assist these children to identify their goals by offering praise and enhancing their coping strategies, building their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Mitchell, 2011). This could assist them in facing the world and successfully navigating their life circumstances in order to attain a better future through education (UNICEF, 2009).

Social constructionism as a theoretical framework

This study was guided by a sociological theory of social constructionism (Burr, 1985). Social constructionism promotes the notion that, all that we take to be truthful (including fears, and aspirations) develops from and is consistently imbedded in our society's tradition and values

(Gergen, 2009). Similarly, our resilient ability to rise above uncertainties towards our ambitions is entangled in context. In essence this makes individual communities' culture and social relationships responsible for people's fears and aspirations (Ungar, 2008). The same way as the social relationships and resources made available by our societies could maximise or constrain our motivation to achieve our life goals (Cooper and Cefai, 2013). Central to these relationships are the dominant discourses, which act as bases on which educational ambitions and fears are predicated (Gergen, 2009).

Gee, (2011) saw discourse as a socially accepted association among ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that could be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group. In essence, vulnerable children's educational ambitions and fears are subject to both their social circumstances and relationships, as well as their individual abilities to navigate the hardships of poverty and vulnerability. The centrality of vulnerable children's school, family and community-based support structures as well as their social relationships with peers (Ungar, 2008), could be drawn upon as a means to overcome their fears. They could also act as resources for resilience in rising above the same fears related to attainment of their educational aspirations. So, in order to understand the vulnerable children's fears and educational aspirations, it is imperative to understand the socio-ecological systems underlying their poverty and vulnerability.

For instance, vulnerable children in this study consisted of Sisi*, a girl aged 12 years, coming from a child-headed household, where she was the eldest and stayed with her very old and sickly great-grandmother who was this girl's responsibility. Nonhlanhla* a girl aged 15 years, was abandoned by her parents and now stayed with a very poor family. Thandiwe* also a girl, was aged 13 years, a double orphan and she stayed with her sister-in-law; her brother too had died. Bafana* was a boy aged 11 years, came from a very poor family background, and both parents were alive but the mother had suffered a stroke and was now disabled. Akon* was a boy aged 13 years, a double orphan and he stayed with a distant cousin. Lastly, Wishful,* was a boy aged 12 years, coming from a child-headed household who stayed with his siblings. In conformity to standard ethical practice meant to protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms have been used throughout the article.

It was within these family socio-economical frameworks that these children lived their childhood. Noting the vulnerable children's social backgrounds, it is evident that their social relations and lack thereof were hugely responsible for their fears and how they perceived their future educational ambitions. This article shows the broader structural context of poverty in Swaziland and how this exacerbates the fears and hardships that the vulnerable children endure within their individual family situations, communities and the school. Indeed, the vulnerable children's educational aspirations and fears were intricately entangled to and embedded in the structural dynamics of their communities' dominant discourse, which did not generally affirm their value and status in society. These insights further allowed the paper to denote how the vulnerable children's attempt to transcend individual fears towards their educational ambitions went beyond their individual capabilities to do so. Other key social structures in these children's lives played a role in determining how they perceived their educational ambitions, fears and required support, which highlighted the centrality of the vulnerable children's social relationships or lack thereof in this equation. Through the participants' stories, we understood that, poverty, the effects of HIV and AIDS have disintegrated families and communities that in most instances the vulnerable children thrived through their hidden (individual) resiliencies (Malindi and Theron, 2010). Indeed, the vulnerable children's narratives were found to be an embodied reflection of the socially and historically situated relationships' dynamics and socio-economic status of their families, school and community.

Research methodology

Geographical and socio-economic context of the study

Swaziland is largely rural and 76% of the people live in the rural areas (UNICEF, 2009) where poverty prevails. Since the inception of FPE in 2010, meant to enable all children to attend school, there has been a great influx of vulnerable children (children who are orphaned, from child-headed households and children from poor socio-economic backgrounds) into the country's schools. The school upon which this article is based is located in the rural Lubombo region (one of the four geographically diverse regions of the country) on the far east of Swaziland, bordered by Mozambique. Lubombo is largely rural with 76% of its schools being in the rural areas (Swaziland's Schools List, 2013) and it is the poorest of the four regions. It is also the hardest hit by the effects of HIV and AIDS and consequently has the highest percentage of children affected by vulnerability in the country (Braithwaite et al., 2013). Extreme poverty in the Lubombo region is at 37% followed by Hhohho at 28% and poverty stands at 76% (Swaziland Central Statistical Office and United Nations Children Fund, 2011). Due to unemployment, most people survive on piece jobs where they are paid with food in exchange for the labour they provided. Some households generate income through the sale of home-brewed beer as the only source of income. Children in Lubombo are also the worst deprived in Education (UNICEF, 2009), have fared the worst in the Junior Certificate exams for the past 3 years (The Examination's Council of Swaziland, 2016) and are mostly engaged in child labour (Nordtveit, 2010).

Study methodology and data collection methods

Drawing from a case study of one school in the rural Lubombo region of Swaziland, the study used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach as its methodological design. Qualitative research was aligned with this study for its credence to be generative (Gergen, 1985) and its ability to comprehend human phenomena in context (Creswell, 2014). The social context of the phenomena in this case was significant because vulnerable children's narratives and voices were socially and historically situated, and indeed they reflected the socio-economic status and dynamics of their individual societies (Gergen, 2009). The narrative inquiry was chosen based on the perspective that, people are storytellers and lead lives that are full of stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), thus through the stories the study could better comprehend the daily lived experiences of the vulnerable children. The participants consisted of six Grade 6 vulnerable children (aged between 11 and 15 years), three males and three females, who were purposively sampled. Of these, two were orphans, two were from child-headed households and two from poverty-stricken families (one male and one female for each pair). Purposive sampling enabled for the recruitment of participants who were suitable to inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007). Based on the characteristics being sought (Cohen et al., 2007) and their ability to provide the richest data related to the study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews were used as a platform to solicit the vulnerable children's educational aspirations and fears, and suggested support mechanisms to enhance their schooling experiences. The individual interviews (which used the same participants as in the focus group interviews) aimed at exploring issues that the participants were not comfortable to share in group situations and helped in eliciting rich and detailed information from the perspective of each participant (Liamputtong, 2007).

A children's participatory photovoice technique was also employed. For photovoice, each participant was given a disposable camera with 27 frames. The participants were trained on how to use the cameras, and were then urged to capture their chosen salient spaces and places that held

meaning for their real-life schooling experiences either in an affirmative or undesirable way (Joubert, 2012) for a period of 4 days. After the 4 days, the cameras were collected and frames developed. The photo imagery was then used as a basis for both individual and focus group interviews as ingress into the views, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants (Mitchell et al., 2005). The aim of this study was to place vulnerable children in the centre of the study – to make them not only active participants who can contribute to a drive for change but co-researchers who have a credible voice in matters affecting their lives (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). The interviews were conducted during sports time in a room used as a community clinic within the school. With permission of the participants, the use of a tape recorder helped to capture accurately what each participant said and to make up for data not recorded in notes. All interviews were conducted in SiSwati to allow participants to talk and express themselves without any linguistic restrictions (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Field notes were also used to record the interviews especially the participants' emotions and body language.

Data analysis

Data from individual and focus group interviews recorded in both the filed notes and tape recorder was transcribed from SiSwati into English. One of the authors is a Swazi which thus helped with the analysis of transcriptions from SiSwati to English. A thematic process of analysis was adopted, whereby patterns and themes of generated data in relation to vulnerability and learning were identified (Creswell, 2014). Careful re-listening to the recorded data was useful to ensure transcriptions' accuracy (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006) during generation of themes and with linking names of the actual informants to the pseudonyms used in this study. This was followed by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again for familiarity with the data, which allowed the generation of theoretically informed themes related to the research objectives of the study. The emergent themes were then coded and the pictures selected and contextualised with assistance from the participants. The themes were then analysed and discussed to derive the findings of this study, informed by key debates in the field and creative interpretive abilities of the researchers.

Ethics

Consent for the research was sought from the director of schools in Swaziland, the school principal and from parents of the participants. Considering that, some vulnerable children had neither parents nor guardians, letters of consent for them were written to the community caregiver (umgcugcuteli). Ethical clearance was then obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office. As we viewed children as complete human beings, who can decide on issues that concern them, their consent was also sought (Christensen and Prout, 2002). A psychological counsellor was also on call to help in the event that the research invited negative emotions. The participants were assured of confidentiality and that their identities would not in any way be divulged. To avoid stigmatisation of the participants, we encouraged discussions of general questions in focus groups and more personal questions in individual interviews. In addition, the principal was requested not to announce participation of the learners and the nature of the research to the school.

Findings and discussions

We have high aspirations despite our fears and hopeless situations

The findings revealed that, instead of the vulnerable children's aspirations being shuttered by their adversarial schooling experiences, they still held on to some hope, on education as a vehicle that

Picture 1. This picture shows Nonhlanhla's bedroom with the only clothes she owned. Unlike other learners, especially in high school, who had more clothes that were decent.

would enable them to achieve their dreams. That, amidst their concerns they were still capable of working towards the attainment of their dreams. For example, Sisi inspired to be a nurse, Bafana, a doctor and Nonhlanhla desired to be a teacher. Their vulnerability status however, made these children harbour deep insecurities and fears, particularly related to the financing of their future educational endeavours.

> *I know that if I give myself enough time with my studies, I will do well. I always imagine myself sitting on a swinging chair, having a good life-but the thought of who will cater for my tertiary education, makes me feel like giving up. I also wonder who will pay my school fees and buy me uniforms in high school.*

> (Sisi, girl aged 12; individual interview)

Nonhlanhla (girl aged 15) provided this picture to illustrate the fear and worry that she had about high school.

> *This is my room and you can see how horrible it looks (laughing and hiding her face with both hands), and those are the only clothes that I have. By coming to school despite the difficulties I face, I hope to change my life. I therefore have no alternative but to work hard when it comes to my schoolwork, but auntie, I am a bit worried about high school. I usually see students who go to Mkhulamini* High wearing designer label shoes and clothes. I worry that I will not be able to fit in.*

> (Nonhlanhla, girl aged 15; individual interview)

The above illustrations validate the vulnerable children's strong desire to escape from a life of paucity (Brown, 2011). It shows a very clear plan and agency on how the vulnerable children aim to achieve academic success and that is by "*giving themselves enough time with* [their] *studies*" and "*to work hard when it comes to school work.*" Even though the vulnerable children's ambitions acted as a catalyst towards success but without the school and community continuously nurturing their resolute personalities (Theron, 2012) there is no assurance that, such desires would be achieved. Their aspirations brought locomotion of hope, joy and uncertainty, agreeing with Brown

(2011) that, for every ambition for children in dire circumstances, there is a feeling of worry and uncertainty centred on possibilities for attainment of their educational dreams. From this, it is clear that, the Government of Swaziland is not doing enough in supporting the vulnerable children towards their education (Cooper and Cefai, 2013). Seeing that, Sisi's fears were in fact an expression of a lack of adequate support from the Government especially, that needs revision in order to be inclusive of vulnerable children. Surely, the Government can do more than just providing free primary education for these children. For example, the vulnerable children's unrelenting agency to alter their life situations as exemplified by the above illustrations, could be harnessed to maximise their resilience (Noltemeyer and Bush, 2013), by providing more resources like assurance for high school and tertiary funding.

The data further reveal the challenges that low economic capital relegated vulnerable children in this context as illustrated by Nonhlanhla's narration. Part of her uneasiness was being in a new environment (Horgan, 2007), the high school, where the dominant perception was that students at that level "*wear* [expensive] *fashionable clothes.*" From this, we learn the level of uneasiness that vulnerability rendered this child and the multiplicity of ways in which vulnerability affected the vulnerable children's schooling. Whereas these children could see high school and tertiary education as a way through which to achieve their educational aspirations, but as exemplified by Nonhlanhla, they could also perceive these spaces as avenues where their lack of financial resources and social vulnerability might be exposed and exploited. Such exposure and potential exploitations at variable social levels of their lives thus bring tacit fear and discomfort, which if left unaddressed might discourage vulnerable children from continuing further with their education.

We learn also that a lack of support for the educational needs of vulnerable children is a serious economic resource exclusion issue, which renders vulnerable children to extreme levels of poverty and social exclusion. This denotes a need for the educational support for these children to focus both on their educational and social needs, including their sense of acceptability in new learning environments (Ridge, 2002). At a pedagogical level, teachers need to inculcate self-esteem and a sense of belonging to help vulnerable children attain a positive psychological advantage, which is essential for effectively overcoming their academic challenges. A comprehensive and coordinated socially responsive approach for economic resource access and mobilisation is required for the above strategies to become successful. Especially noting that, self-efficacy is not enough to foster the vulnerable children's individual resilient ability to negotiate difficult circumstances towards their aspirations (Noltemeyer and Bush, 2013). This would involve a convergence of efforts from all the stakeholders aimed at addressing the socio-economic challenges facing vulnerable children.

For example, it would be foolhardy to try to address issues of vulnerable children at pedagogical levels when there are children who always worry about a place to stay. A desire for a stable and reliable family upon which to bank hopes for the future was admittedly a serious issue of concern for vulnerable children like Thandiwe, as narrated below:

> *I worry that who will pay for my high school education if the family that took me in decides they can no longer care or even stay with me.*

> (Thandiwe, girl aged 13; focus group interview)

Having a place to stay constitutes one of the most human basic needs, without which a life of dignity is compromised. Thandiwe's fears about this were equal in magnitude with fear for life in essence. The psychological damage that might derive from this and its devastating consequences on vulnerable children's education and social lives need not be over-emphasised. The findings indicate deep and confounding deficiencies in how the Government of Swaziland or the communities have

liberalised its economy resources in respect of vulnerable children's access to shelter. From this we learn that the limited resources provided by the country for the resilience of its young vulnerable population on basic necessities like shelter, not only make children like Thandiwe to persistently become worried and psychologically troubled (Ganga and Chinyoka, 2010) but are inclined to limit their hopes and aspirations for a better future. Assuring that children like Thandiwe have a secure place to stay therefore, has a potential to play a critical role in addressing the vulnerable children's educational fears and helping them attain their goals.

Seeing other learners failing and finally dropping out of high school further provided a basis for fear for the vulnerable children (Cooper and Cefai, 2013), which dampened their resolute and resilient spirit towards a better life. This left them with a sense of despair regarding sustainability of their efforts to overcome their schooling challenges without assistance and reassurance to allay their fears.

> *The school does have good results and that is encouraging for us but seeing learners who did well here dropping out of school because they have failed Form 3 makes me unsure if I will attain my dreams. For example, from the community, I have not seen many students going to the University though there are so many schools here.*

> (Bafana, boy aged 11 years; focus group interview)

Seeing other vulnerable children's dreams crushed because of an education system that requires them to pass the bridging Form 3 examinations before they could be admitted for high school education was discouraging to vulnerable learners like Bafana. The Ministry of Education and Training and the Government of Swaziland should therefore probably reconsider the effectiveness of the Junior Certificate Exams in the country. Considering the role they play in restraining Swazi children's educational aspirations and thus perpetuating their entanglement with poverty. Currently, there does not seem to be formally organised alternatives for children who cannot progress to high school (Khumalo, 2013), and for children living in vulnerable situations, such worry might spell an end to their educational and economic beneficiation prospects.

We need support in transcending our difficult life situations

The vulnerable children were asked to give their opinions on different strategies that could be employed to help them have positive schooling experiences under their circumstances. The sentiments denoted the expectations and hopes that these children had on their school and community for alleviating their schooling plight and educational fears.

> *We would appreciate help from the community, teachers, and other learners and we beg for respect from everyone so that we may also respect them. Teachers should not give us too much work to do at home but give us more time to study at school-during school hours, because as vulnerable children we face problems when we try to study or write assignments at home.*

> (Akon, boy aged 13; focus group interview)

Akon also provided this picture (Picture 2) as evidence of the amount of work that they were given by teachers to write at home.

The data shows that even though the vulnerable children might be under pressure from the dominant discourse to accept themselves as less fortunate and therefore in the margins of society, these children perceived themselves differently from the dominant discourse. They knew their
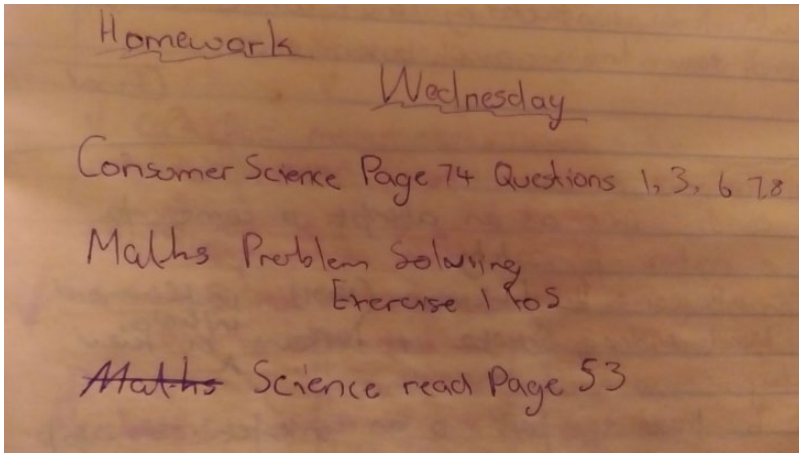
Picture 2. Akon took this picture from an exercise book (sort of a diary) where he wrote his assignments for the day. From the picture we can see the amount of homework he had for that particular Wednesday.

right to be considered as complete human beings who deserve to be treated with proper human respect. They also demonstrated an understanding of the reciprocity of human respect to other positive and productive human relationships, for instance, how respect is closely linked to effective learning and teaching. We learn that, for effective teaching and learning to take place in the school, teachers should exercise mutual respect for the vulnerable children. Not affording these children respect has a potential to make them defiant of the school rules and regulations (Sutton et al., 2007). In turn, this may constrain the vulnerable children's chances of achieving their educational goals of a better future, away from their penurious life, as the school might expel them for bad behaviour (Smiley, 2012).

> *The community should at least donate food for us, clothing, candles, and other basic things so that we do not worry about things beyond our reach. Our teachers should be equipped with skills to work with vulnerable children and if they cannot, they should be taken to other schools.*

> (Nonhlanhla, girl aged 15; focus group interview)

> *We would appreciate if people could give us advices on life in general. Our neighbours should at least help buy us candles and food and teachers, should first find out why we have not written our assignments, washed our uniform, or came to school late before resorting to corporal punishment. In addition, there should be a study period here at school so that we study and write our homework because we face challenges at home and end up not studying or writing.*

> (Bafana boy aged 11; individual interview)

The narratives determine that, understanding the contextual realities that inform the vulnerable children's behaviours, abilities, and inabilities features strongly as an appropriate approach to dealing with these children (Mohlokwana, 2013). Indeed, what these children could do or not do was not of their own invention, but an indication and consequence of societal enablers and restrictors in their contexts (Cooper and Cefai, 2013). We learn that, the vulnerable children's inabilities to

meet school expectations, like writing homework was a microcosm of a bigger problem or challenge in these children's life requiring deeper intervention than mere corporal punishment (Mohlokwana, 2013). Instead of teachers giving vulnerable children homework, an effective evaluation strategy would be to dedicate time during school hours for learners to write homework and study due to the limiting nature of their family contexts.

Administering corporal punishment on the vulnerable children was based on a misguided understanding of the sociological nature of human abilities and societal dynamics bearing on these children. Particularly because, corporal punishment has been found to increase the number of school drop outs thus spelling an end to the vulnerable children's aspirations and a continuance of a life of poverty for generations (Nordtveit, 2010). The call here is for teachers to try to understand these children's arduous world (Siope, 2011), as a basis for the responses and interactions, they make with these children.

For teachers' pedagogic practices to be inclusive of vulnerable children, they further need to possess expertise to use alternative means to corporal punishment with the view of providing educational support rather than to punish the learners.

> *If people cannot say good things to us then they should not say a thing. As for teachers, mmmm, the insults and scorning is not helping us, instead it makes us feel useless and incapable. They should say things that would motivate and not to hurt us. If they cannot say good things to us then they should not say a thing. They should also give us time to ask questions if we had not grasped a concept in class and also change their attitude towards us and give us an ear.*

> (Sisi girl aged 12; individual interview)

The findings indicate a need for mutual reciprocity and harmony between knowledge impartation, love and care (Wood and Goba, 2011). Flooding these children with information, punishment and ridiculing is rejected with contempt. Teachers' insults and scorning as expressed by Sisi, has the likelihood to relegate vulnerable children to feelings of incapability and thus restricting their life aspirations. Noting that, once the idea of incompetence is successfully permeated the vulnerable children are indeed likely to feel hopeless and incapable (Morojele, 2012). We therefore found it imperative for schools to work hard to avoid inhibiting the vulnerable children's tenacious spirit, by avoiding the execution of 'hurtful' discourse.

Even though vulnerable children are marginalised and not given a voice in most societies (Lekule, 2014), the findings indicate that, these children are complete human beings who could take decisions and contest (given the opportunity) unpleasant dynamics about their lives (Christensen and Prout, 2002). The moral uprightness of what these children suggest could be done to assist their schooling, denote an unprecedented sense of maturity, social sensitivity, and high regard to universal humanistic approaches to educational support acceptable to all conscience bearing humans. Expressions like "*if they cannot say good things to us then they should not say a thing*" by Bafana, reveal that vulnerable children can be very analytical of the treatment they get in school contexts. Sisi even had solutions for teachers who did not have the expertise to deal sensitively with children's social diversities, which included suggestion for relocation to other schools, perhaps with lesser numbers of vulnerable children.

We also learn that, being a teacher should go beyond the mere academic pedagogic qualification to include being sensitive of individual learners' plight, affirming the vulnerable children and being sensitive to their challenges. Such is a noble strategy that teachers could use to avoid being a source of further pain to these children, who mostly look up to, and genuinely require teachers' help and solace (Wood and Goba, 2011). Owning that, teachers too are not their own product, we suggest

that the Ministry of Education and Training prioritise, through pre-service and in-service capacitation of teachers on matters of social diversity, inclusivity, particularly in relation to vulnerable children.

Conclusion and recommendations

Like all children, children affected by vulnerability have high hopes and aspirations for life. Their vulnerability however predisposed them to many challenges, fears, and anxieties regarding resources available for the support and attainment of their educational success. Thus, their perceived chances of success in life were indeed intertwined with uncertainty and fear given the obstacles they faced. The vulnerable children's hope for a better adult life stirred them to resiliently persevere through treacherous life and schooling experiences, with education viewed as the only feasible way for a better future life. Despite their resolve to persevere, there was a high risk of dampening these children's aspirations, especially when some tribulations they faced verged on a lack of access to basic human survival necessities such as food and a secure family.

The findings denoted the critical role that social relationships, which are regulated by dominant societal discourses, play in informing bases for the vulnerable children's fears about attaining their educational aspirations. This points to the centrality of promoting and harnessing positive and supportive societal and institutional discourses and practices as a strategy for nurturing the vulnerable children's resilience to help them transcend their fears, towards attainment of their educational aspirations. It is important therefore, to foreground and cultivate socially responsive, diverse, sensitive and caring social relationships from all educational stakeholders in order to support vulnerable children's attainment of their educational aspirations. This could be made possible by nurturing the vulnerable children's social development, resilience and self-efficacy.

The following recommendations are made as possible ways through which educational stakeholders could provide resources meant to support vulnerable children's aspirations for a better life through education:

- The Government through the schools should formulate educational policies that would ensure active and meaningful participation of all education stakeholders (children affected by vulnerability inclusive), in formulating and implementing social, economic and pedagogical strategies aimed at alleviating educational challenges faced by vulnerable children.
- Teachers should be inculcated with information and expertise on creating social relationships that would nurture the vulnerable children's resilience towards their life goals.
- The Swazi Government should enforce the banning of 'top up fees' in schools because if left unattended they can be a source and basis for the vulnerable children's worry and school dropouts.
- The Government should also consider providing free secondary education for vulnerable children and further provide them with high school and tertiary funding, seeing that these also become the basis for the vulnerable children's worry about the future.

The above recommendations will not be realised unless the stakeholders foreground vulnerable children's views, fears and educational aspirations, and secure their active and meaningful participation in all matters related to both their social and academic lives.

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Author biographies

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa is currently a PhD candidate in the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and a rural high school teacher in Swaziland. Her research interests are in gender, children's vulnerabilities and social justice in education.

Pholoho Justice Morojele is currently the dean of Research: College of Humanities and former academic leader: Research & Higher Degrees in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is a Commonwealth scholar and studied as part of his PhD at the Institute of Education, University of London. His research interests and publications are in gender, children's geographies and social justice in education.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUDING A STUDY OF GENDER AND VULNERABILITY IN ESWATINI SCHOOLS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis comprises of eight published articles, whose collective aim was to explore vulnerable children's experiences of school in three rural primary schools in Swaziland. It further sought to understand the ways in which these girls and boys made meaning of gender, as well as the implications of these gender constructions on their social welfare and quality of education. Firstly, the thesis put forward how my personal life experiences formed an important basis for the conceptualisations and analyses of this study. It then provided an overview of the vulnerable children's real-life schooling experiences. The study further explored how the vulnerable boys and girls constructed gender and how their social relations contributed to these constructions and in essence towards gender inequality/equality in the schools. Lastly, the study examined the ways through which the vulnerable boys and girls navigated their emotionally winding school spaces and further highlighted what these children felt could be done to improve their educational experiences and quality of schooling.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the gendered schooling experiences of vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in Eswatini?

2. How do vulnerable children in three rural primary schools in Eswatini construct gender?

3. What implications do teachers' constructions of gender have on:

   (a) vulnerable children's constructions of gender

   (b) gender inequality/equality in the school contexts?

4. How do vulnerable children navigate the gendered power laden spaces and places in these school contexts?

5. In what ways could the vulnerable children's quality of schooling and educational experiences be enhanced?

10.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The overall significance of the study is that it contributes insightful knowledge to the complexities and intricacies of inclusive education by adding vulnerable children in the equation as one of the social groups to be considered in efforts towards the enhancement of inclusive and equitable school spaces. The findings have revealed the divide between vulnerable children and those not affected by vulnerability, hence having the potential to inspire educational stakeholders to work towards creating an educational society that not only appreciates diversity but also encourages equality. By so doing more educational and life opportunities for the vulnerable children of Eswatini will be created in ways that would also benefit the country.

Significantly each of the eight chapters (publications) has made a unique contribution towards the objectives of this study, as briefly discussed below.

10.2.1 Chapter 2- Researcher Identity and Childhood Memories in a Study of Vulnerable Children in Swaziland

This chapter contributes to scientific research by illuminating how researchers' reflexivity and positionality could act as important variables in knowledge production. It shows how my childhood experiences and memories formed a basis for, acted as a point of reference and provided a deeper insight in understanding the gendered and schooling lives of vulnerable children in the contexts of this study. Understanding the underpinnings of knowledge acquirement is imperative not only for researchers but also for teachers, to help them formulate pedagogic practices that appreciate and are responsive of the challenges and burdens that learners carry into the schools, hence forming a basis for their learning (Motsa, 2017). Consequently, teachers in the school contexts can be better equipped to attend to the diversity of their learners in ways that would encourage inclusivity and equitable school spaces, as one of the ways to improve the educational lives of the vulnerable children and their retention rate especially in the rural primary schools of Swaziland and in similar contexts.

10.2.2 Chapter 3- Vulnerability and Children's Real-Life Schooling Experiences in Swaziland

By privileging the voices of the vulnerable children as the voices of experience, this chapter contextualised the vulnerable boys' and girls' realities. By so doing, the chapter added a critical component in the equation, where the children's lives are viewed and understood from their point of view away from the conventional belief that construes children as immature and too young to understand issues around them (Kay, Tisdall & Punch, 2012). The chapter accentuated the real-life schooling experiences of these children, as one of the means to create the potential to identify intervention strategies that would ensure that they get effective and appropriate education (Motsa & Morojele, 2016). These findings have the potential to attract the attention of all educational stakeholders and be of great benefit in their quest to create inclusive and quality educational spaces for children classified as vulnerable. The other significance of this chapter is that, it has conveyed to the forefront new and related data on the vulnerable children's real life schooling experiences. This is in ways that would enable policy makers have an idea on how to fill the critical gap between policy and practice prevailing in the educational context of the country hence, meeting the real needs of the children affected by vulnerability.

10.2.3 Chapter 3- Vulnerable Children Speak Out: Voices from One Rural School in Swaziland

By foregrounding the vulnerable children's voices, the findings highlighted the broader constructs that influence their experience of school. Using social constructionism has been significant in illuminating how the intersection of the vulnerable children's society, family and school values play out in complex ways and further presents them (the vulnerable boys and girls) with conflicting ambiences and attitudes towards school in ways that lead to negative schooling experiences (Motsa & Morojele, 2017a). The findings expand the discourse we use to understand the vulnerable boys' and girls' real- life schooling experiences and influence of the social relationships to their wellbeing. Hence revealing the need to deconstruct broader societal discourses of education and educational success especially in these rural contexts where there is usually little value for education as one of the key entry points for efforts aimed at improving these children's educational welfare.

10.2.4 Chapter 4- Vulnerable Masculinities: Implications of Gender Socialisation in Three Rural Swazi Primary Schools

This chapter contributed to gender studies by highlighting the complex processes of patriarchal gender socialisation that not only emasculates vulnerable boys but also subserviently positions them in the hierarchal masculine order in the schools. The findings accentuated how poverty and vulnerability form structural contexts for the vulnerable boys' masculine performances, hence predisposing them to humiliation and ridicule in the school contexts (Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Such knowledge disputes the common discourse that construes all boys as possessing dominant masculine qualities hence less vulnerable than the girls. For example, these qualities include being strong, ferocious and inborn providers. This finding indorses gender equality and equity as an idealised reality for both vulnerable boys and girls. The findings do not only seek to deconstruct the discourse that prioritises girls over boys but also alerts educational stakeholders to be more vigilant and look deeper into problems faced by the vulnerable boys in the school contexts the same way girls' challenges are given attention, as one of the ways to improve the vulnerable boys' schooling experiences.

10.2.5 Chapter 5- Vulnerable Femininities: Implications for Rural Girls' Schooling Experiences in Swaziland

By encouraging the girls to talk about their gendered experiences, this chapter refuted the present discourse that construes children as being too young to talk about or even listen to any talk about gender and sexuality (Nxumalo, Okeke & Mammen, 2014). This discourse has been used not only to silence children but also to ignore and reaffirm stereotypical perceptions about girls' realities within the Swazi societies. Unfortunately, this has been in ways that encourage these problems to continue unabated. The findings highlight the imperativeness of not only deconstructing such a discourse but also illuminating the need to encourage vulnerable children to talk about their life experiences as one of the ways to improve their gendered schooling experiences. For example, the girls in the study invented alternative femininities as means to navigate their life situations (Motsa, 2018a). However, these femininities militated against them and further predisposed them to poverty and gender inequalities. The findings reveal the need to give support to these girls in ways that would rather than compromising their schooling and dignity help them use their inventive

minds to create positive femininities that would work to their best interest and the interest of their education.

10.2.6 Chapter 6- Masculinities and Femininities through Teachers' Voices: Implications on Gender Equitable Schooling for Vulnerable Children from Three Primary Schools in Swaziland

The key contribution to knowledge made by this chapter is the illumination of the broad constructs that teachers in the three schools used to construct gender and further used as basis for the vulnerable boys' and girls' gender socialisation. Social constructionism places teachers as the primary socialisers of the vulnerable children hence their (teachers') way of constructing reality has a huge implication on the children's own ways of engaging with the world (Gergen, 2009). The teachers' constructions of gender were not only found to be stereotypical and reaffirmed gendered inequalities but also negatively affected the vulnerable boys' and girls' experiences of school in more devastating ways (Motsa, 2018b). Eradiating the societal discourses within which the teachers' orthodox constructions were based and governed, provide understandings and strategies that could be used to help teachers deconstruct their own understandings of gender for the benefit of the vulnerable children they teach. At the same time this would initiate an egalitarian and a non-conformist way of thinking that would create gender equitable school spaces and improving the vulnerable boys' and girls' quality of schooling.

10.2.7 Chapter 7- Narratives of Resilience among Learners in a Rural Primary School in Swaziland

The chapter accentuated the prominence of societal discourses and social relationships in developing resilient abilities for the vulnerable boys and girls. This illuminated the need to have positive social relationships and social capital from the wider communities as one of the ways by which the vulnerable boys' and girls' resilient abilities could be inculcated (Motsa & Morojele, 2017b). The vulnerable boys' and girls' narrations highlighted that the poverty and destitution prevailing in their communities formed structural contexts for their educational experiences and success, hence intervention strategies would also have to consider ways to improve the prevailing economic situation in these rural contexts as one of the ways to improve the vulnerable boys' and

girls' school experiences. This reveals the need for the Government of the country to have an immediate and systematic plan of action to improve the individual lives of its communities and by extension its people. Another area of significance is the use of the new sociology in ways that illumined the children's agency and inventiveness to change their life situations. It was interesting to note how the vulnerable children used their valiant prowess to navigate their challenging schooling experiences, though in ways that revealed the inefficiency of their individual agency to do so. Hence, this invites their society at large and all educational stakeholders to provide support that would harness the children's agency and efficiency as a starting point towards social transformation and the creation of positive schooling experiences for the vulnerable children.

10.2.8 Chapter 8- High Aspirations amidst Challenging Situations: Narratives of Six Vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland

The chapter highlighted the broader social discourses and socio-ecological systems underlying the vulnerable boys' and girls' fears and anxieties about their educational future. Understanding these, points exactly to the aspects that can be significant in nurturing the vulnerable boys' and girls' self-efficacy and at the same time harnesses their resilience towards their aspirations and more positive educational experiences. The findings also accentuated the value of children's participation in formulating effective strategies intended at nurturing inclusive education and improving their experiences of school. The need to lessen the gap between vulnerable children and those not affected by vulnerability by attending to the needs of the vulnerable boys and girls beyond free education needs to be highlighted. The valuable information provided by the vulnerable boys and girls highlights the need to modify educational discourses that obscures children's views and at the same time nurturing positive social relationships that would be more inclusive of the vulnerable boys' and girls' social and educational needs. This will foster the vulnerable children's social development, resilience and self-efficacy, qualities they need in order navigate their fears towards their educational life aspirations (Motsa & Morojele, 2018).

10.3 THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was rooted in social constructionism, a framework that engages the new sociology of childhood and children geographies. The use of social constructionism has exposed two broad issues that need to be considered in efforts towards inclusive and equitable school spaces. Through social constructionism the study illuminated the broad constructs of the patriarchal Swazi society that formed a basis for the vulnerable boys' and girls' stereotypical gender constructions and negative schooling experiences. Had it not been for social constructionism I would not have understood how the intersection of the Swazi culture and education not only compromises the vulnerable boys' and girls' education but also leads to negative schooling experiences. This requires understanding the immediate need to deconstruct orthodox societal discourses in order to open r an independent outlook on gender that engages critically with what constitutes childhood and gender and how culture instead of restricting education and educational attainment can be used as a strong driving force behind inclusivity. Granted that Eswatini is a deeply traditional society such an outlook would ensure that culture and education both deserve priority within the communities.

Through social constructionism the study was also able to illuminate the subjective diversity of the vulnerable children's experiences of school and gender constructions even within their commonality. The vulnerable boys' and girls' narratives revealed how their eccentric engagement with their education is socially and contextually constructed by their diverse situations and social contexts. Hence, there is just "no one size fits all" solution into trying to bring a solution to their challenges. For the vulnerable boys and girls of Eswatini the study argues for both equity and equality. That is, whilst school spaces aim for equality and fairness amongst all children, they should also ensure that they provide the vulnerable boys and girls with educational opportunities according to their needs as structurally contextualised within their subjective delirious family situations.

Using the new sociology of childhood studies, the study acknowledged and had confidence in the reliability of childhood agency. By harnessing the vulnerable boys' and girls' voices, the study was in a privileged position to grasp how these children coped under their daily challenges. I

understood that, even though the boys' and girls' individual schooling experiences and gender constructions are predicated and are largely determined by their penurious life situations, through their agency and enough social support, they are proficient enough to change their life situations towards a better future. Through the vulnerable boys' and girls' narrations the study also irradiated how stereotypical gender constructions are reproduced, affirmed and at the same time how they can be deconstructed for the benefit of the vulnerable children of Swaziland. The same way as societal discourses are the root cause of stereotypical gender constructions, widening these same discourses to accommodate inclusivity and vulnerability can also be a foundation and basis for help towards these children's social and educational welfare. Children geographies made me appreciate and read into these children's silence and varying emotions as being the result of the daily exclusionary and discriminatory challenges they face in their quest for education.

10.4 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The study adopted a qualitative narrative methodology. The qualitative approach was an allinclusive and friendly methodology for the vulnerable children. Liamputtong (2010) concurs that, the qualitative approach is friendly for even the most marginalised in the society. Through this approach I was able to illuminate even the most in-depth and critical aspects of the vulnerable boys' and girls' subjective realities in ways that did not make them feel exploited and further ostracised. This is because the interactions were based on optimal empathy and respect, contesting the normative discourse within the Swazi contexts that construes children as less deserving of respect. Subsequently, the participants willingly and excitedly talked about issues of gender and sexuality, to me as an elder although such talk is considered a taboo in the Swazi context. The narratives were effective in illuminating the vulnerable children's subjective realities as contextually located at the same time capturing their personal experiences as expressed by their individual stories. Observing their emotions as they told their stories also helped me understand their emotions, the pain as well as the confusion as a result of their vulnerable situations.

Through the participatory method- photo voice, the vulnerable children were able to tell their real life experiences which have all along been obscured. In the Swazi context, children are considered immature thus lacking intelligence and reasoning. Such a discourse coupled with vulnerability

which also places them at the socially marginalised position means their voices and experiences go unnoticed yet greatly affects their wellbeing and their educational experiences. This methodology captured the idiosyncratic voices of the participants as expressed through the images they captured, hence giving a voice to the voiceless as observed by Wang (1999). Through photovoice the study also gave ascendancy to a group occupying the subservient position, as the boys and girls took the pictures of the salient places and spaces of their schooling experiences and gender constructions without being patronised. Similarly, using focus group interviews provided a casual setting for the participants to tell their shared stories without feeling like they are treated with condescension. Individual interviews on the other hand enabled the study to illuminate more personal realities of the participants, some of which were just the girls' and boys' ways of expressing their frustration emanating from the social relationships they had both in the family and school contexts. For example, a girl at Muntu primary during one of these interviews confided how she felt her mother's sickness has not only affected her concentration on school work but has also made her an angry child. This expresses the need for teachers to exude empathy, build respect, be attentive and give all children an ear as being one of the means to improve the vulnerable boys' and girls' educational experiences.

10.5 PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

On reflection, I realise that the research on gender and vulnerability has not only enriched my intellectual capabilities, helped me unlearn my preconceived ideas on gender and vulnerability, but has also led to my personal and professional growth in far reaching ways. Social constructionism made me appreciate reality, childhood and childhood experiences as being social constructs. It helped me have a deeper insight and understanding of the sociological implications of the social constructions of reality to the vulnerable children's schooling. I realised that the vulnerable children's behaviour and attitude towards education is not of their making but resultant from their societal discourses and the individual situations they face. Hence regarding them not just as empty vessels waiting to be filled by me as their teacher, but by acknowledging their personal experiences and socialisation as rooted in vulnerability and poverty formed a basis for their learning. This knowledge made me more sensitive, compassionate and inclusive in my pedagogic practices at the same time appreciating the diversity of the learners I teach. The findings

of the study have also brought my attention to gender discourse and schooling in Swaziland. In retrospect, I realise that both the educators' gender constructions (mine inclusive), were in direct contrast to the rights of the children, as enshrined in the 2011 Swaziland Education Sector Policy (Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training, 2011), by which we as educators in the country pledged to abide. This hastens the need to deconstruct my (other teachers too) preconceived conceptions about vulnerability and gender in ways that would encourage gender inclusivity and gender equitable school spaces. At the same time empathy needs to be encouraged to extend help especially to learners in need, granted that as teachers we have always shied away from the needs of the destitute faces around us with extensive consequences for both the welfare and schooling experiences of children in vulnerable situations. On reflection, after having identified myself only as a female and an educator for so long, now I can also look at myself as a feminist and an advocate for social justice in the school contexts.

Personally the findings have also made me understand that, as human beings and as people of Eswatini we cannot just keep complaining about gender imbalance that is, reminding masculinities how abusive and violent they have been to femininities, yet forgetting to help them deconstruct the hierarchy and structural drives that have always been the basis of their behaviour and attitude towards femininities, which unfortunately or fortunately have worked to their advantage. Consequently, it is these same practises, for instance that have led to gender inequality and violence in the school contexts, where the young vulnerable boys assert their masculine identity through violence, as one of the ways they know how (Nxumalo et al., 2014). Regardless of my new understanding and positioning as far as gender and vulnerability is concerned, I understand that culture and tradition form a basis for gender disparity in the country, hence gender stereotypes in our (Swazi) societies are inflexible and have a "devilish resistance" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004: 523). Despite my staunch embedment, I do believe that by highlighting how such stereotyped ideologies and social constructions of gender act at the detriment of the vulnerable boys and girls-the future of the Swazi nation, the Swazi society's mind-set in this regard will change. Revealing the social injustices of gender might finally bring about the idealised inclusivity and gender equity in the school contexts.

10.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Significant as studying gender and vulnerability in Eswatini schools is, the study was not without limitations. Firstly, concentrating only on the vulnerable children's schooling did not only ignore other aspects of their lives but might have also created a distorted version of their daily lived experiences that might have equally had an implication on their education. Again, disregarding the views of other learners in the schools was also a limitation. This is because, social constructionism views these children's existence, views, opinions and meaning making of gender as also having an influence on the vulnerable children's experiences of school and gender constructions. Furthermore, carrying out research on gender as an insider and within a patriarchal space, I was inclined to negatively impact the research process. For example, my early conversations with the vulnerable boys and girls, felt like I was walking on egg shells for I was sceptical I would be perceived as acting outside known societal norms. These limitations, though unavoidable were not reason enough to avoid researching about gender in the school contexts of Swaziland. To address these limitations- reflexivity was always at the centre of this research process.

The theoretical framework of the study also had its flaws and limitations. According to social constructionism, social relationships form a basis for vulnerable children's constructions of gender and such relationships are closely governed and monitored by societal discourses (Gergen, 2009). It is highly possible that such a view point and the questioning did not give freedom to the girls and boys to express their eccentric feelings, views and intellectual reasoning for fear of being viewed as atypical and acting outside norms. Hence the vulnerable boys would risk being emasculated and viewed as effeminate whilst girls would be perceived as less feminine. This mindset might have forced some of the vulnerable boys and girls in the study to stick with what were the societal norms hence repressing their subjective constructions and experiences of gender.

Though qualitative research does not rely on numbers, but on the number of participants in a position to inform fully all- important aspects of the phenomena being studied but using thirty (30) children classified as vulnerable felt like a limitation. This is because; this number only makes a very small percentage of the vulnerable children in the country. As such, the findings cannot be generalised to other groups of vulnerable boys and girls. The triangulation of photovoice and

individual and focus group interviews ensured that saturation of data was reached, and it is my sincere belief that this study has the potential, (that is if given the significance it deserves), to change the lives of all vulnerable children whose vulnerability is contextualised in similar ways as the participants of this study. The qualitative methodology also emphasises the importance of collecting data in the natural setting in order "to interpret the phenomenon in terms of the meaning people give to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; p.3). Collecting data in the natural setting proved to be a limitation for this study. This is because it meant I had to travel very long distances at times on inaccessible muddy roads, which was physically and mentally taxing which might have had an influence on the number of trips made to the schools hence limiting the amount of data collected.

My identity, which is; being an educator and having been a vulnerable child myself also had certain repercussions for my own subjectivity, understanding and analysis of the data. As an educator I was very concerned with the issue of heterosexuality which came out dominantly in all the schools, an issue which I understood to be one of the root causes of school drop outs. Hence, I found myself prioritising heterosexuality over certain issues which might have also made up the vulnerable children's gender constructions and thus equally important. My identity as an educator again might have limited the depth of questioning and amount of data collected. This is because, some of my professional code of ethics did not allow me to explore some questions especially on sexuality as I risked being viewed as not only encouraging immorality but also sexualising the participants.

My childhood identity, having my childhood contextualised in poverty and vulnerability and having to research on vulnerable children- my people, had its limitations. Having grown up as a vulnerable girl child myself, also meant I was inclined to be biased especially when reporting about girl child experiences. Rather than being biased though, being an empathiser and an insider to the vulnerable children's lived experiences in ways enthused me to report the experiences of "my people", the best way I could probably to break their vulnerability and poverty, at the same time acting as a driving force and stimulus for this research process. Being raised by avid patriarchal Swazis and with my constructions of gender contextualised in rural and patriarchal Eswatini also had its limitations. This contextualisation meant patriarchal ideologies were inculcated in me, hence researching gender meant a wrestle between my socialised and "new found" beliefs on

gender, particularly on the gender imbalances and gender- based violence prevailing in the schools and our societies.

Creswell (2014), views having face-to-face interactions with participants as one of the strengths of qualitative research, but for me, having intimate contact with the vulnerable boys and girls proved to be one of the major challenges of the study. This was in regard to the emotional effect the interviews and interactions had on me as the researcher because interviewing the vulnerable boys and girls felt more like I was re-living my own childhood vulnerabilities and the participants' painful realities always left me emotionally and mentally drained. These feelings resonated with Gaskell (2008) who stated that emotional transference usually occurs on both the participants and researcher especially if the research has to do with personal experiences. The assertiveness and bravado the vulnerable children showed was amazing. Hence, even though there were psychological counsellors on call for each of the three schools their services were never utilised. Despite these limitations, the research process was an intellectually and professionally rewarding journey. Reflecting throughout as a researcher, on the implications, consequences and my position as a researcher helped me address and mitigate the limitations that might have come with my position in this inquiry. Again, in order to listen to the participant' realities I had to put my own reality in the background - an art I learnt as I continued with the study.

10.7 IN CONCLUSION

This study concludes that, international and domestic policies adopted by the country aimed at improving the educational welfare of the vulnerable children of Eswatini have not been effectively implemented. As testified by the children who participated in this research, the vulnerable children are still faced with many challenges that compromise their schooling and educational success. For example, school spaces are still discriminatory and exclusive of vulnerable children. The findings warrant immediate attention from policy makers to review and design new policies and practices that would address these imbalances, and avail equal opportunities to all children. The study argues that, whilst the country aims for first world status (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2013), if the education of the escalating number of vulnerable children in the country is not given the priority it deserves, vision 2022 will remain a far-fetched dream for the nation.

The study further argues that, for educational policies to be effective, the policy makers should also ensure that the people that are expected to execute them- the teachers, are in the loop and are inculcated with enough knowledge on how they need to be put into effect for the benefit of the vulnerable boys and girls they are meant to serve. What emerged from the study is, teachers the very people who are responsible for the welfare and education of the vulnerable boys and girls in the school contexts, compromised efforts towards inclusivity and gender equity. Without their conjoint effort drafting policies will therefore remain a futile and lost cause at the detriment of the vulnerable children whilst more state funds are wasted in their drafting and conceptualising.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF ™ KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

26 January 2017

Ms Ncamsile P Motsa 214581500
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Motsa

Protocol reference number: HSS/1914/016D
Project title: Constructions of Gender among young vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland.

Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

In response to your application received 4 November 2016, 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

....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Scinces Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Prof Pholoho Morojele
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc School Administrators: Mrs B Mnguni, Ms P Ncayiyana, Ms M Ngcobo & Ms T Khumalo

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Letter for the Director of Schools - Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini

The Director of Schools in Swaziland

The Ministry of Education and Training

Mbabane

Dear Madam

<u>REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THREE (3) PRIMARY SCHOOLS; ONE FROM MANZINI, ONE FROM HHOHHO AND ONE FROM THE LUBOMBO REGION.</u>

I am a PhD student in the school of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZuluNatal. I am conducting a research on the schooling experiences of young vulnerable children in the country. The title of my study is, **CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND.**

I humbly request for your assistance in this research project by being granted permission to conduct a study at the schools mentioned (attached letter: appendix 2). The participants in the study will be *teachers and learners from the Grade 6 class*. The learners will be required to participate in individual and focus group interviews that are expected to last between 20-120 minutes. They will also be expected to take pictures of the places and spaces that make up their constructions of gender in the school contexts for a period of five (5) days. The teachers and parents/guardians will only be involved in individual interviews.

Please note that:

- The school and participants will not receive any material gain for participating in the research project.
- The participants will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own opinion and feelings.
- The school and the participants` identities will not be divulged under any circumstances and all learner responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (real names of the participants and the institutions will not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary: therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to them.

- The participants will not, under any circumstances be forced to disclose what they do not want to reveal.
- Audio-recording of interviews will be done if the permission of the participant is obtained.
- Data will be stored in the University locked cupboard for a maximum period of 5 years thereafter it will be destroyed by burning.

Thanking you in advance for your assistance. For any questions that you might have, you may contact me, my supervisor, or the research office at KwaZulu-Natal, through Prem. Mohun.

SUPERVISOR

Professor Pholoho Morojele

Associate Professor: Gender and Social Justice Education

College Dean of Research: College of Humanities

College Research Office

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Howard College Campus

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2602327

Fax: (27)31-2602372

Cell: +27(0)78 675 0652

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Prem.Mohun

University of KwaZulu-Natal

HSSREC Research Office

Govan Mbeki Centre

Contact details: Tel: 031 260 4557

E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za   Thank

you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Faithfully

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa 76356800 ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Consent Letter from the Director of Schools in Eswatini

The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland

Ministry of Education & Training

Tel: (+268) 2 4042491/5
Fax: (+268) 2 404 3880

P. O. Box 39
Mbabane, SWAZILAND

3rd February, 2017

Attention:
Head Teachers

| ~~Primary School~~ | ~~Primary School~~ | ~~Primary School~~ |

THROUGH
Manzini, Hhohho & Lubombo Regional Education Officers

Dear Colleagues,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA FOR UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL STUDENT – MS. NCAMSILE DEPHNE MOTSA

1. Reference is made to the above mentioned subjects.

2. The Ministry of Education and Training has received a request from Ms. Ncamsile D. Motsa, a student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, that in order for her to fulfill her academic requirements at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, she has to collect data (conduct research) and her study or research topic is: *Constructions of Gender Among Young Vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland.* The population for her study comprises of eight learners from each of the above mentioned schools; three parents and three care givers of the learners from the above mentioned schools. All details concerning the study are stated in the participants' consent form which will have to be signed by all participants before Ms. Motsa begins her data collection. Please note that parents will have to consent for all the participants below the age of 18 years participating in this study.

3. The Ministry of Education and Training requests your office to assist Ms. Motsa by allowing her to use above mentioned schools in the Hhohho, Manzini and Lubombo regions as her research sites as well as facilitate her by giving her all the support she needs in her data collection process. Data collection period is one month effective from February 2017 to allow schools to settle down after opening in January 2017.

DR. SIBONGILE M. MTSHALI-DLAMINI
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

cc: Regional Education Officers –Hhohho, Manzini, and Lubombo
        Chief Inspector – Primary
        3 Head Teachers of the above mentioned schools
        Prof. Pholoho Morojele – Research Supervisor

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Letter for School Principals

Date...

Dear Principal

<u>**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**</u>

My name is Ncamsile Daphne Motsa and I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student under the supervision of Professor P Morojele in the school of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZuluNatal. The title of my study is "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE**

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND". I am seeking consent for your school/learners` participation, which will involve intensive interviews, story account sessions, and they will be required to take photographs of the places and spaces that make up their schooling experiences for 5 days. Your learners` participation in this research is voluntary, and continued participation is also by choice. You have the right to withdraw your learners from participation at any time.

There is no penalty if a learner chooses not to participate in this research or chooses to withdraw from participation at any time. The outcome of this research may be published. In the event of this being the case, the learner`s name and identity will not be used. All information you and your learners give will be confidential. A code or number will identify the information your child provides. Only authorized persons from the University of KwaZulu-Natal will have access to review the research records that contains your learners` information. There is also no benefit to your school/learners` participating in this research.

Please note that:

- Any information given by your learners cannot be used against them and the collected data will be used for the purposes of this research only.

- Data will be stored in secure storage at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and destroyed after 5 years.

- If you are willing for your learners` interviews and discussions to be recorded by an audio equipment please indicate (by ticking as applicable):

Willing	Not willing

- Also the participants will be carrying disposable cameras and taking pictures of their schooling experiences for 5 days. If you are willing to let that happen, please indicate by ticking where applicable:

Willing	Not Willing

If there is any question you wish to ask concerning the research or the participation of your learners in this research, please you can contact me or my supervisor Professor P Morojele. You may also contact the research Office through P. Mohun. Below are our contact details respectively:

Miss N Motsa

Email: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Cell: 00268 76356800/ 00268 78025800

Supervisor	**Research Office**
Professor P Morojele	PremMohun
Main Administration & Tutorial Building	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
University of KwaZulu-Natal	HSSREC Research Office
Edgewood Campus	Govan Mbeki Centre
Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432	Contact details: Tel: 031 260 4557
Fax: (27)31-2603650	E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Cell: +27(0)71 041 0352	
E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za	

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Faithfully

Ncamsile Motsa

DECLARATION BY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

I...(Full name of principal), principal of……………… (Full name of school). Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I hereby give my consent for my school/learners to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my school from the research project at any times should I so desire, and any participant is at liberty to withdraw from the research project at any time, should he/she desire.

PRINCIPAL`S SIGNATURE:.. **DATE:...................**

Appendix 5: Consent Letters from the School Principals School 1: Hhohho Region

~~Primary~~ Primary School

P. O Box ▓▓▓

Mbabane

Tel: +268 ▓▓▓▓▓▓

28 September 2016

To Whom It May Concern

Permission to Conduct Research at the Above Mentioned School

This serves to confirm that **NCAMSILE DAPHNE MOTSA**, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has been granted permission to conduct research at the above mentioned school.

The title of her study is **"CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND."**

For further enquiries regarding this matter, you can contact the principal.

Yours Faithfully

▓▓▓▓▓▓ (Principal)

▓▓▓▓ PRIMARY SCHOOL
P.O. Box ▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓
Tel: +268▓▓▓▓▓

School 2: Manzini Region

~~Strikethrough~~ Primary School

P.O Box ~~redacted~~

Manzini

Tel: +268 ~~redacted~~

29 September 2016

To Whom It May Concern
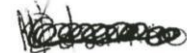
Permission to Conduct Research at ~~redacted~~ Primary School

This serves to confirm that **NCAMSILE DAPHNE MOTSA**, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has been granted permission to conduct research at the above mentioned school.

The title of her study is "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND.**"

For further enquiries regarding this matter, you can contact the principal.

Yours Faithfully

~~signature~~

~~redacted~~ (Principal)

Cell: +~~redacted~~

~~redacted~~
PRIMARY SCHOOL
3 0 -09- 2016
P.O.Box ~~redacted~~, MANZINI
Tel: ~~redacted~~
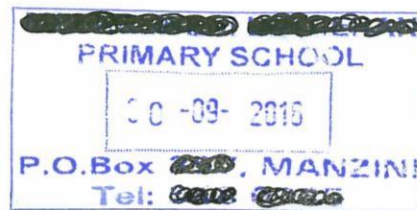
School 3: Lubombo Region

~~Nkhlangatsha~~ *Primary School*

P.O Box ⬛

Siteki

SWAZILAND

TEL: 2⬛⬛⬛⬛

To Whom It May Concern

This serves to confirm that **Ncamsile Daphne Motsa, STUDENT NUMBER: 214581500**, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, has been granted permission to conduct research at the above-mentioned school.
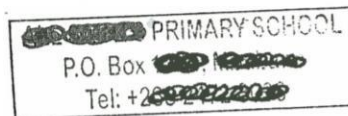
The title of her study is: **CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND.**

For further enquires you can contact the principal.

Yours Faithfully

THE HEADTEACHER
DATE: 2016/07/24
TEL: (+268) 2⬛⬛⬛⬛

~~Name~~ (Principal)

Cell: +268 ⬛⬛⬛

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Letter for Teachers

Date: ....

Dear Sir/Madam

<u>INFORMED CONSENT LETTER</u>

My name is Ncamsile Daphne Motsa and I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research student under the supervision of Professor P Morojele in the School of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus University of KwaZulu-Natal. The title of my study is, "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG**

VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND".

Your school has been chosen for the research and in order to gather information for the research, you will be asked questions about the issue of gender and the young vulnerable children in the school. Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed, as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member only.

- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.

- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.

- Data will be stored in secure storage at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and destroyed after 5 years.

- You have a choice to participate or not participate in the research and you will not be penalized for taking such an action.

- The research aims at understanding the young vulnerable children`s construction of gender in the school context.

- You involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- Please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the equipment mentioned:

WILLING	NOT WILLING

If there is any question you wish to ask anything concerning the research and your participation, please you can contact me or my supervisor Professor P Morojele. You may also contact the research Office through P. Mohun. Below are our contact details respectively:

Miss N Motsa

E-mail: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Cell: 00268 76356800/ 00268 78025800

Supervisor   **Research Office**

Professor P Morojele   Prem. Mohun

Main Administration & Tutorial Building   University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal   HSSREC Research Office

Edgewood Campus   Govan Mbeki Centre

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432   Tel: 031 260 4557

Fax: +27 (0)31-2603650   e-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Cell: +27(0)71 041 0352

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Sincerely

Ncamsile Motsa

DECLARATION BY TEACHER

I...(full names of teacher) herby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

SIGNATURE OF TEACHER:.. **Date**:....................................

Appendix 7: Informed Consent Letter for the Regional Psychological Counsellors

The Career Guidance and Psychological Counsellor

Lubombo Region of Swaziland/ Manzini Region of Swaziland/Hhohho Region

Dear Sir/ Madam

REGUEST FOR YOUR SERVICES

My name is Ncamsile Daphne Motsa and I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student under the supervision of Professor P Morojele in the school of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZuluNatal. I am conducting a study and the title of my study is, "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG**

YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND". I have been granted permission to conduct the research in one of the schools. The name of the school is …………… primary school. The study will involve intensive interviews, story account sessions, and participants will be required to take photographs of the spaces and places that make up their schooling experiences for 5 days. The learners` participation in this research is voluntary, and continued participation is also by choice. The school also has the right to withdraw the learners from participation at any time.

Due to the nature of the research, and the participants being persons who have experienced traumatic life experiences, it is likely that the research will trigger distressing emotions. I therefore humbly request you to provide your services during the research. I request your presence at the school at all times during the interviews, which will be group discussions and individual interviews and I will keep you updated on the times in advance.

If there is anything you do not understand about the research, you can contact me, my supervisor or the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal research office.

Email: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Cell: 00268 76356800

Supervisor   **Research Office**

Professor P Morojele   Prem.Mohun

 Main Administration & Tutorial Building   Govan Mbeki Centre

University of KwaZulu-Natal   University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood Campus   HSSREC Research Office

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432

Fax: (27)31-2603650

Cell: +27(0)71 041 0352

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Contact details: Tel: 031 260 4557

e-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thanking you for your contribution in this research.

Yours Sincerely

Ncamsile Motsa

Appendix 8: Informed Consent Letter for Parents/ Caregivers in English

Dear Parent/ Caregiver

My name is Ncamsile Daphne Motsa. I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), research student under the supervision of Professor P Morojele in the school of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a research study entitled, "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND".** I am seeking your consent for your child`s participation which will involve extensive interview and story account sessions and he/she will be required to take photographs of the places and places of his/her schooling experiences. Your child`s participation in this research is voluntary, and continued participation is by choice. You have a right to choose not to have your child participate, and to withdraw your child from participating at any time.

There is no penalty if your child chooses not to participate in this research or chooses to withdraw from participation at any time. The outcome of this research may be published. In the event of this being the case, your child`s name and identity will not be used. All information your child will give will be confidential. A code or number will identify the information your child provides. Only authorized persons from the University of KwaZulu-Natal will have access to review the research records that contains your child`s information. There is no benefit to your child participating in this research.

Please note that:

- Any information given by your child cannot be used against you; him/her and the collected data will be used for the research only.
- Data will be stored in a secure storage at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and destroyed after 5 years.
- If you are willing for your child to participate in this research, please indicate (by ticking as applicable):

Willing	Not Willing

- Also indicate if you are willing that whatever your child says be recorded through an audio equipment:

Willing	Not Willing

If there is any question you wish to ask concerning the research or the participation of your son/daughter in this research, please you can contact me or my supervisor Professor P Morojele. You may also contact the research Office through Prem. Mohun. Below are our contact details respectively:

Miss N Motsa

E-mail: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Cell: 00268 76356800/00268 78025800

Supervisor

Professor P Morojele

Main Administration & Tutorial Building

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood Campus

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432

Cell: +27(0)71 0410352

Contact details: Tel: 031 260 4557

Email- Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Research Office

Prem. Mohun

University of KwaZulu-Natal

HSSREC Research Office

Govan Mbeki Centre

E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Cell: +27(0)31 260   4557

Yours Sincerely

Ncamsile Motsa

LETTER OF DECLARATION BY PARENT/CAREGIVER OF PARTICIPANTS

I……………………………… (full name of parent/s), parents of..(full name of learner), hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I hereby give my consent for my child/children to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my child from the research project at any time, should I so desire, and my child is at liberty to withdraw from the research project at any time, should he/she desire.

Signature of Parent/s... **Date**……………………………..

Appendix 9: Incwadzi Yebatali nome Banakekeli Yesicelo Semvumo Yemntfwana Kungelena Lolucwaningo

Libito lami ngingu Ncamsile Daphne Motsa. Ngingumfundzi weticu te budokotela eNyuvesi ya KwaZulu Natal. Ngenta lucwaningo lolunesihloko lesitsi, *Constructions of Gender among Young Children in Swaziland*. Lolucwaningo lucondze kubuka kutsi, njengobe imphilo lesiyiphilako umphakatsi ubheke kutsi siphile ngekubhekeka kwebulili betfu. Njengebantfwana, loku lokubhekekile, kukutsikabeta njani emphilweni yakho yekufundza nasekuphumeleleni kwakho esikolweni.

Ngibhala lencwadzi kucela imvume yekutsi umntfwana wakho abe yincenye yalolucwaningo. Lolucwaningo lutawufaka ekhatsi kubutwa imibuto ngalokujulile, nekucoca kanye nekutfwebula titfombe ngemphilo yakhe yasesikolweni. Kute kuphoceleleka kumntfwana wakho uma anganaso sifiso sekuba ngulomunye webantfwana labatophatseka kulolucwaningo. Umntfwanakho phindze uvumelekile kuyekela kulolucwaningo noma nini uma angasafisi kuchubeka nalo. Umphumela walolucwaningo kungenteka ushicilelwe, uma loko kungenteka libito lemntfwana wakho neke lisebentiswe. Tonkhe timphendvulo lengitatinikwa ngumntfwana wakho titoba yimfihlo yami. Ngeke ngibhale ligama lakhe kepha ngitosebentisa tinombolo esikhundleni selibito lakhe kucondzane netimphendvulo takhe. Bantfu labaniketwe emagunyati yinyuvesi ngenca yebuchwepheshe babo, labavumeleke kufinyelela elwatini umntfwanakho lekatobe aluniketile kulolu lucwaningo.

Kumcokwa mtali kutsi wati naku lokulandzelako:

☐ Kute imbadalo letoniketwa umntfwana wakho ngekuba kulolucwaningo.

☐ Konkhe lokutokhulunywa ngumntfwana wakho angeke kusebentiswe ekumcindzeteleni yena, noma wena njenge mtali. Loko lekatabe akushilo kutosebentiswa kulolucwaningo kuphela.

☐ Tonkhe timphendvulo letiphuma kulolucwaningo titovalelwa endzaweni lephephile ngiyo inyuvesi bese kuyashiswa emva kweminyaka lesihlanu.

Uma uniketa imvume kutsi umntfana wakho abe ngulomunye kulolucwaningo nekutsi lokushiwo ngumntfwana wakho kutfwetjulwe, khombakalisa umuvo wakho ngekumaka kunye kuloku lokulandzelako:

NGIYAVUMA KUTSI UMNTFWANAMI ALUNGENELE LOLUCWANINGO

☐

ANGIVUMI KUTSI UMNTFWANAMI ALUNGENELE LOLUCWANINGO

☐

Uma kukhona longafisa kucaciselwa kona ngalolucwaningo nekutsi umntfwana wakho abe ngulomunye kulolucwaningo, ungatsintsana nami, kunayi inombolo ngentansi:

Ngiyabonga kubambisana nawe kulolucwaningo.

Ngimi lotitfobako

Ncamsile Daphne Motsa

Mahlalekhukhwini: 00268 76356800

UMELULEKI   **LIHHOVISI LELUCWANINGO**

Professor P Morojele   Prem. Mohun

Main Administration & Tutorial Building   University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal   HSSREC Research Office

Edgewood Campus   Govan Mbeki Centre

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432   Tel: 031 260 4557

Fax: +27 (0)31-2603650   e-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Cell: +27(0)71 041 0352

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

IMVUME YEMTALI/UMNAKEKELI WEMNTFWANA

Mine..(ligama leligcwele lemtali/umnakekeli), wa.. (ligama lemntfwana leligcwele), ngiyacinisa kutsi ngiyacondza kutsi konkhe lokushiwo kulencwadzi kanye nalolucwaningo. Nginiketa imvume kutsi umnfwana wami angalungenela lolucwaningo. Ngiyacondza kutsi ngivumelekile kuyekelisa umntfwana wami nome ngusiphi sikhatsi uma ngiva kanjalo. Ngiyacondza phindze nekutsi naye umntfwana lona uvumelekile kuyekela kulolucwaningo noma nini nakeva angasafisi kuchubeka nalo.

Kusayina kwemtali/umnakekeli............................... Lusuku:......................................

Appendix 10: Informed Consent Letter for Learners in English

Date:.............................

Dear Learner

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Ncamsile Daphne Motsa and I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research student under the supervision of Professor P Morojele in the School of Education and Development, Edgewood Campus University of KwaZulu-Natal. The title of my study is, "**CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AMONG YOUNG VULNERABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SWAZILAND".**

Your school has been chosen as one of the schools for the research and I request your participation in this study. In order to gather information for the research, you will be asked questions about the issue of gender and the young vulnerable children in the school. Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed, as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member only.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate or not participate in the research and you will not be penalized for taking such an action. The research aims at understanding the young vulnerable children`s construction of gender in the school context.
- You involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- Please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the equipment mentioned:

WILLING	NOT WILLING

If there is any question you wish to ask anything concerning the research and your participation, please you can contact me or my supervisor Professor P Morojele. You may also contact the research Office through P. Mohun. Below are our contact details respectively:

Miss N Motsa

E-mail: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

Cell: 00268 76356800/ 00268 78025800

Supervisor   **Research Office**

Professor P Morojele   Prem. Mohun

Main Administration & Tutorial Building   University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal   HSSREC Research Office

Edgewood Campus   Govan Mbeki Centre

Contact details: Tel: +27 (0)31-2603432   Tel: 031 260 4557

Fax: +27 (0)31-2603650   E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Cell: +27(0)71 041 0352

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Sincerely

Ncamsile Motsa

<u>DECLARATION BY LEARNER</u>

I..(full names of teacher) herby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

SIGNATURE OF LEARNER:.. **Date**:....................................

Appendix 11: Incwadzi Ye Mntfwana Yesicelo Selucwaningo

MNTFWANA

Libito lami ngingu Ncamsile Daphne Motsa. Ngingumfundzi weticu tebudokotela eNyuvesi ya KwaZulu-Natal, phansi kwebucwepheshe ba Professor Pholoho J. Morojele. Ngenta lucwaningo lolunesihloko lesitsi; *Constructions of Gender among Young Vulnerable Children in Swaziland*. Lolucwaningo lucondze kubuka kutsi, njengobe imphilo lesiyiphilako umphakatsi ubheke kutsi siphile ngekubhekeka kwebulili betfu. Njengebantfwana labanaletinye tingcinamba ekuphileni, loku lokubhekekile, kukutsikabeta njani emphilweni yakho yekufundza nasekuphumeleleni kwakho esikolweni.

Sikolwa sakho sikhetfwe kutsi kube ngulesinye lesingenela lolucwaningo. Lolucwaningo lutawufaka ekhatsi kubutwa imibuto ngalokujulile, nekutfwebula titfombe macondzana nekuphila ngebulili lapha esikolweni. Kumcokwa kutsi wati naku lokulandzelako:

- Kute inkhukhelo kuwe nome sikolwa sakho kungenela lolucwaningo.
- Uniketwa siciniseko kutsi konkhe lokutokhulunywa kulolucwaningo kutoba yimfihlo. Lowutokusho angeke kutsintsane nawe wedvwa kodvwa kodvwa kutotsatfwa njengemuvo webantfwana bonkhe.
- Imibuto ingatsatsa li awa ngekuya ngekukhetsa kwakho. Konkhe lotokukhuluma angeke kusebentiswe ekukuhlukubeteni. Loko lowutabe akushilo kutosebentiswa kulolucwaningo kuphela.
- Tonkhe timphendvulo letitophuma kulolucwaningo titovalelwa endzaweni lephephile ngiyo inyuvesi bese kuyashiswa emva kweminyaka lesihlanu.
- Unelilungeko lekuvuma nome kungavumi kuba kulolucwaningo, ngekwenta njalo kute lotokubamba umbalo. Unelilungelo futsi kutsi nome sowuvumile kulungenela loluhlolo, nasewuva ungasafisi kuchubeka nalo, utovumeleka kutsi uluyekele ngaphandle kwekubutwa sizatfu.
- Kuciniseka kutsi timphendvulo atimataniswa nawe kunye nesikolo sakho, ligama lakho nome lesikolwa sakho angeke lisebentiswe kululuhlolo. Sikolo sakho kanye nawe nitophiwa emagama ekusebenta kulolucwaningo kuphela.
- Uma uvuma kuba ngulomunye kulolucwaningo nekutsi lotowukusho kulolucwaningo kutfwetjulwe, khombakalisa umuvo wakho ngekumaka kukunye kuloku lokulandzelako:

- **NGIYAVUMA KULUNGENELA LOLUCWANINGO KANYE NEKU RECORDER KWETIMPHENDVULO TAMI:**

<div style="border:1px solid; width:60px; height:60px;"></div>

- **ANGIVUMI KULUNGENELA LOLUCWANINGO:**

<div style="border:1px solid; width:60px; height:60px;"></div>

- NGIYAVUMA KULUNGENELA KOPHA HHAYI KUTSETJULWA:

Uma kukhona longafisa kucaciselwa kona ngalolucwaningo nekuba ngulomunye kulolucwaningo, ungatsintsana nami, nemeluleki wami noma lihhovisi lwelucwaningo enyuvesi ye KwaZulu-Natal kunati tinombolo:

UMELULEKI

Professor Pholoho Morojele

Associate Professor: Gender and Social Justice Education

College Dean of Research: College of Humanities

College Research Office

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Howard College Campus

TINOMBOLO: Tel: +27 (0)31-2602327

Fax: (27)31-2602372

Cell: +27(0)78 675 0652

E-mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za   Siyabonga

kubambisana kulolucwaningo.

Ngimi Lotitfobako

Ncamsile Motsa

76356800   E-mail: ncamsiledaphne@gmail.com

LIHHOVISI LWELUCANINGO

Prem.Mohun

University of KwaZulu-Natal

HSSREC Research Office

Govan Mbeki Centre

TINOMBOLO: Tel: 031 260 4557

E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

IMVUME YEMNTFWANA

Mine...(ligama lemntfwana) ngiyacinisa kuts ngiyacondza konkhe lokushiwo kulencwadzi kanye nalolucwaningo. Ngiyavuma kulungenela lolucwaningo. Ngiyacondza kutsi ngivumelekile kuyekela kulolucwaningo noma nini nangiva ngingasafisi kuchubeka nalo, ngaphandle kwetinkinga noma tincabekelwano.

KUSAYINA KWEMNTFWANA...

LUSUKU..............................

Appendix 12: Biographical Data Capture Form for Learners

Please tick in the appropriate box and be assured that all information either personal information about yourself or the study will be taken with the strictest confidentiality.

1. Gender Female

☐

Male

☐

2. Age

☐

3. Years in the school

☐

4. Grade

☐

5. Please describe your family set up

☐

Appendix 13: Imininingwane yeBafundzi

1. Bulili

Ntfombatana

☐

Umfana

☐

2. Iminyaka yakho

☐

3. Iminyaka ulapha esikolweni

☐

4. Libanga lekufundza

☐

5. Ngitsandza kwati ngelikhaya lakini nebantfu lohlala nabo

☐

Appendix 14: Interview Questions for Learners in English

Reminders

- Welcome and thank the interviewee for participating in the research study.
- Completion of biographical data
- Explain the use of the tape recorder and ensure that the participants consent to be recorded
- Assure participants of confidentiality and let participants choose own pseudonyms to use in the research process
- Remind participants of importance of turn taking in focus group interviews
- Talk about the importance of explaining their answers in full that is, giving complete details.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. Can you please tell me a story about your study time/writing of assignments at home.
2. What do you think can be done to make your study time more effective?
3. What are your experiences of being in this school?
4. Explain 4 things that you like most about your school?
5. Please tell me a story that explains why you like some of the things you have mentioned.
6. I would like to know 4 things that you do not like about your school.
7. Can you please tell me a story about an incident that happened to make you dislike the things you have mentioned above?
8. What challenges do you face at home (if any) each time you want to study or write your homework?
9. Can you please share with me, how your home situation affects your schooling experience?
10. Tell me about things that you think affect your learning in this school.
11. Can you please tell me how that, affect your schooling.
12. Can you briefly describe to me your relationship with teachers in this school?
13. In what ways does your school (principal and teachers) help to support your schooling?
14. Tell me how the kind of relationship that you have with your teachers and students affect your schooling experience.
15. I would also love to know the kind of relationship that you have with other students in the school.
16. Tell me how the kind of relationship that you have with other students affect or help you in your academic life?
17. What are the perceptions of other learners/ teachers in the school about orphaned children?

18. Let us talk about the school rules and regulations. Do you think they are fair to everyone

19. How do you handle the problems you face at home daily that affect your schooling?

20. I would also love to know how you cope with the problems you face here at school?

21. What is it about you personality that enhances your efforts to overcome some of the challenges you face in your quest for education?

22. What are the factors in the community/school that support your efforts in overcoming some of the challenges you face in your academic life?

23. What are the factors in the school/community that impede/undermine your efforts in overcoming some of the challenges you face in your academic life?

24. Please explain 4 things that you think can be done to support your efforts in overcoming the challenges you face in your academic life;

i. By your peers ii. By

the teachers iii. By

the community

25. Is there anything else you wish to share with me about your schooling experience?

26. Please explain to me what you do in the school during playtime.

27. Tell me who your friends are and how do you choose your friends?

28. Do you have friends of the different sex? YES/NO. Please explain your reasons.

29. What challenges do you face for having friends of the different sex?

30. Society expects that there should be a difference between boys and girls, from behaviour, actions and has different expectations from boys or girls. Furthermore, in most societies for example, patriarchal societies like Swaziland, boys are believed to be superior to girls and that should always occupy the dominant position whilst girls are subordinates. Can you please explain, your personal feelings, views and opinions regarding such beliefs?

31. Do you think there are any implications of such beliefs, either in the community or in the school, especially for vulnerable children? YES/NO. Please explain.

32. What do you understand about the word "gender"?

33. Please also tell me what gender equality means.

34. Please tell me your feelings about gender equality.

35. Do you think girls and boys (men and women) should be equal and treated equally? YES/NO. Please explain in detail.

36. Do you ever discuss gender issues and its complexities with your parents/caregivers? YES/NO. Please explain.

37. In a family set up, community or school where there is no gender equality, who do you think is the most affected and why?

38. How do you think that can be changed?

39. Please tell me stories about incidences where you felt, had there been equality in the school for boys and girls, such incidences would have been avoided.

40. Is there any policy or rule on gender equality in the school? If there is, please tell me about it. If No….do you think there should be such rule in the school?

41. Please give me your reasons for that.

42. What do you like and not like about gender equality?

43. Do you think our tradition and culture encourage gender inequality?

44. Is there anything else you would like to say about gender issues and how they affect you as vulnerable children?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS YOUNG VULNERABLE CHILDREN`S UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF GENDER

1. Explain to me how you perceive the difference between boys and girls according to our culture.

2. Give specific example of what you think constitute the difference in boys and girls.

3. Do you think this difference is morally justified?

4. Please tell me a story on what you understand by gender equality in the school.

5. Do you think gender equality is important in the school? YES/NO. Please explain why you think so.

YOUNG VULNERABLE CHILDREN`S EXPERIENCES OF GENDER IN THE SCHOOL

6. How do you feel by being a girl or a boy in the school?

7. Can you please tell me a story about something that happened in the school and made you feel like you were not a girl or a boy?

8. Do you think boys are treated differently than girls in the school? Please explain.

9. Do you think teachers promote gender equality in the school? YES/NO. If yes, please explain and if no, please explain.

10. How do you think teachers can promote gender equality in the school?

11. Tell me about your playtime outside the classroom. Do you play with members of the opposite sex? If NO explain why? And if YES, tell me about your experience.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE YOUNG VULNERABLE CHILDREN`S UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF GENDER

12. Do you think gender inequality affect your experience of school as a vulnerable child? Please explain.

13. Do you think the teachers respect every vulnerable learner irrespective of their gender? If NO, tell me why you believe so and if YES, please tell me a story of anything that happened to show that there is gender equality in the school.

14. Explain to me factors out of the school that affect your understanding and experience of gender in the school.

15. In what ways do you think such factors affect your understanding and experience of school?

16. Please tell me the difference according to gender as detected by our culture.

17. Please tell me a story explaining in detail how you feel about such difference.

18. Do you feel, culture has a role in gender inequality in the school contexts. YES/NO. Please explain in detail.

HOW THE YOUNG VULNERABLE CHILDREN NAVIGATE THE COMPLEX AND VARIED SPACES AND PLACES OF GENDER IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXTS.

19. How do you ensure that your schooling experience is not affected by the gender dynamics in the school?

20. How do you think gender equality can be promoted in the school contexts?

21. Explain what you think can be done, by the following people, to ensure that gender does not become a hindrance to your experience of school:

    I.   The government

    II.   Teachers

    III.   Community

    IV.   Families

    V.   Boys

    VI.   Girls

22. Any more suggestions on how the issue of gender inequality can be addressed in the school

PHOTO VOICE

23. What is happening in this picture?

24. Why did you take this picture?

25. Tell me a story about what happened in that picture, that has a meaning in your construction of gender in the school.

26. Is there anything else you want to tell me about this picture, maybe your feelings on what happened here?

THANK YOU

Appendix 15: Imibuto yeBantfwana ngeSiswati

<u>**TINKHUMBUTO**</u>

- Bamukele ubabonge ngekungenela lolucwaningo
- Gcwalisa imininingwane yebahlanganyeli
- Chaza ngekusebenta kweku tsatsa livi uciniseke kutsi bayavuma kusentjetiswe
- Bacinisekise ngekufihlakala kwalolucwaningo
- Bavumele bakhetse emagama labatowasebentisa kulolucwaningo
- Bakhumbute ngekunikana sikhatsi sekukhuluma nekulalelana emibutweni yenhlanganyela
- Bacele uma baphemdvula imibuto bachazisise imivo yabo

IMIBUTO YENHLANGANYELA

1. Ngitocela ningicocele indzaba letonginika sitfombe ngekudadisha kwakho ekhaya.
2. Yini lenicabanga kutsi ingentiwa kute kudadisha kwenu kube yimphumelelo?
3. Nikukhandza kunjani kuba lapha esikolweni?
4. Ngicela ningicocele ngetintfo letine lenititsandzako ngesikolo senu.
5. Ngicela ningicocele indzaba letongikhanyisela kutsi kungani nitsandze loku lenitsi niyakutsandza ngesikolo senu
6. Ngicela phindze ningicocele ngetintfo letine leningatitsandzi ngesikolo senu
7. Ngicela ningicocele indzaba letongikhanyisela kutsi kungani ningakutsandzi loku lotsi uyakutsandza ngesikolo sakho
8. Yini tingcinamba leniye nidibane nato uma nifuna kudadisha ekhaya?
9. Ngicela ungicocele kutsi simo sasekhaya kini sikutsikameta kanjani ekufundzeni kwakho.
10. Yini tinkinga lodibana nato lapha esikolweni?
11. Ngatise phindze kutsi loko kukutsikabeta kanjani ekufundzeni kwakho.
12. Bunjani budlelwane bakho nabothishela lapha esikolweni?
13. Bothishela bakusita kanjani emsebentini wakho wesikolo?
14. Bunjani budlelwane benu nabothishela bakho kanye nalabanye bafundzi?
15. Budlelwane loninabo bunilimata noma bunikhutsata kanjani ekufundzeni kwenu?
16. Labanye bafundzi baniphatsa kanjani lapha esikolweni?
17. Asesikhulume ngemitsetfo yesikolo. Niyikhandza ikanjani?
18. Yini leniyentako kuciniseka kutsi tinkinga tasemakhaya atitsikameti kufundza kwenu?
19. Tinkinga talapha esikolweni tona nenta kanjani?
20. Yini ngani leyenta nikhine kuphila kulesimo?

21. Indzawo nome sikolwa senu sinisekela kanjani?

22. Indzawo nome sikolo senu sinicindzetela kanjani?

23. Ngicela ungitjele lokune lokungentiwa kute nisitakale ekufundzeni kwenu, kwentiwe: i. Bontsanga yenu

  ii.   Bothishela

  iii.   Ngummango

    24. Ngicela ningichazele kutsi nenta ini ngesikhatsi sekudlala lapha esikolweni.

    25. Ngicoceleni phindze, ngebangani benu lapha esikolweni nekutsi nibekhetsa kanjani?

    26. Bangani lababulili lobehlukile ninabo yini? YEBO/CHAKE? Ngicela ninginikete tizatfu tenu?

  i.   Uma ninabo. Nobukhandza bunjani lobungani?

  ii.   Uma nite, yini tizatfu tenu?

27. Yini tinkinga lenidibana nato nekuba nebangani labaneblili lobehlukene uma ninato.

28. Nicondza kutsini neligama lebulili?

29. Nicondza kutsini phindze ngekulingana kwebulili?

30. Ngicela ningicocele imivo yenu ngekulingana kwebulili.

31. Ngekubona kwenu, bafana nemantfombatana (emadvodza nebafati) kufanele yini kutsi balingane ngebulili? Ngicela ningichazele kabanti ngemivo yenu.

32. Batali noma banakekeli benu bayanikhulumisa yini ngetindzaba tebulili? YEBO/CHAKE. Ngingatsandza wandze kuloku.

33. Emuphakatsini, emundenini nome esikolweni, uma kungalinganwa ngebulili, bobani labatsikbeteka kakhulu? Batsikabeteka kanjani nekutsi leni?

34. Yini lenicabanga kutsi kufuneka ishintje kuze kutsi kube bete locindzetelekako?

35. Ngicela ningicoceleni tindzaba ngetintfo lenitibone tenteka lapha esikolweni, tanenta nafisa kwangatsi kuyalinganwa ngebulili.

36. Ukhona yini umtsetfo wekulingana ngebulili lapha esikolweni? Uma ukhona, utsini? Uma kute, beningafisa kutsi vele ube khona yini?

37. Ngicela ninginike tizatfu talemivo yenu.

38. Yini lenikutsandzako naleningakutsandzi ngekulingana kwebulili?

39. Ngekubuka kwenu buve nemasiko etfu ayakugcugcutela yini kungalingani ngebulili?

40. Kukhona yini lokunye leningafisa kukusho kusita lolucwaningo

IMIBUTO NGAMUNYE

KUCONDZA TINDZABA TEBULILI, BANTFWANA BENDLUNKHULU

1. Ngicela ungichazele kutsi bulili ubuva kanjani.

2. Ngicela ungicondzise unginike sifananiso lesikhomba umehluko emkhatsini webafana nema ntfombatana ngekubuka kwakho.

3. Ngekubuka kwakho kufanele yini kutsi lomehluko ube khona? Ngicela ungicocele indzaba lekhombisako kutsi kufanele nome akukafaneli kube nalomehluko.

4. Ngekubuka kwakho kufanana ebafaneni nemantfombatana kukuphi?

5. Ngicela unginike imininingwane yalokufananana ngebulili.

6. Ngekucondza kwakho, lomehluko uyitsikabeta kanjani imphilo yebantfwana bendlunkhulu lapha esikolweni?

7. Yini longagadza kutsi kwentiwe bafana kodvwa emantfombatana angakwenti lapha esikolweni?

8. Ngicela ungichazele kutsi ucondza ini ngekulingana kwebulili.

9. Ngekubuka kwakho, kulingana ngebulili kumcokwa ngani lapha esikolweni?

IMPHILO YEBULILI YEBANFWANA BENDLUNKHULU ESIKOLWENI

10. Ukuva kunjani kuba ngumfana noma intfombatana lapha esikolweni. Ngicela ungichazele kabanti.

11. Ngicela ungicocele indzaba ngalokwake kwenteka lapha esikolweni lokwakwent awafisa kuba ngumfana noma yintfombatana.

12. Ngekubuka kwakho, bafana nemantfombatana lapha esikolweni baphatfwa ngendlela lefanako yini.

13. Ngekubuka kwakho bothishela baya kugcugcutela yini kulingana ngebulili lapha esikolweni? Uma babugcugcutela

    i.   Babugcugcutela kanjani

    ii.   Uma bangabugcugcuteli, bangenta kanjani kute babugcugcutele

14. Ngekucabanga kwakho bothishela bakho bangakugcugcutela kanjani kulingana ngebulili lapha esikolweni?

15. Ngicela ungicocele indzaba ngalokuyaye kwenteke uma nidlala nebantfwana labangasiko bebulili benu.

TINTFO LETITSIKABETA BANTFWANA BENDLUNKHULU EKUCONDZENI NASEKHUPHILENI IMPHILO NGEBULILI ESIKOLWENI

16. Ngalendlela locondza ngayo tindzaba tebulili, ngekucabanga kwakho yini letsikabeta kutsi ucondze kutsi kuba yintfombatana nome umfana kusho kutsini?

17. Ngekubona kwakho, bothishela babahlonipha ngalokufanako ngebulili bantfwana bendlunkhulu lapha esikolweni? YEBO/CHAKE?

    i. Ngicela ungichazele kabanti ngalomuvo wakho.

18. Ngicela ungicocele ngetintfo letenteka ngephandle kwalapha letitsikabeta kulingana ngebulili lapha esikolweni?

19. Ngekucondza kwakho, loku lokushito kukutsikabeta kanjani kulingana ngebulili nemphilo yakho nje lapha esikolweni?

20. Ngekucondza kwakho, buve betfu bubheke ini entfombataneni, bubheke ini nase mfaneni?

21. Ngicela ungicocele kutsi buve betfu buyigcugcutela nome bubacindzetela kanjani bantfu labasikati?

22. Ngicela ungicocele indzaba kukhomba kutsi lomehluko ukutsikabeta njani wena.

23. Ngekubuka kwakho, buve betfu buneligalelo lobulidlalako yini ekutsini bantfu bangalingani ngebulili? Ngicela ungichazele kabanti ngemuvo wakho.

BANTFWANA BENDLUNKHULU BAKHONA KANJANI KUPHILA PHINDZE BACHUBEKE NEKUFUNDZA NOMA BULILI BULETSA TINGCINAMBA EMPHILWENI YABO YEKUFUNDZA

24. Uciniseka kanjani kutsi imphilo yakho yasesikolweni ayitsikametwa tinkinga tebulili?

25. Ngekubuka kwakho, kulingana ngebulili kungagcugcutelwa kanjani lapha esikolweni?

26. Ngicela ungicocele kutsi yini lengentiwa ngulaba labalandzelako, kuciniseka kutsi tidzaba tebulili atikutsikabeti kufundza kwebantfwana bendlunkhulu:

    i. Ngu Hulumende

    ii. Ngumumango iii. Yimindeni iv. Bothishela

    v. Ngumumango

    vi. Bafana

    vii. Mantfombatana

27. Kukhona yini lokunye longatsandza kukusho lokungasita lolucwaningo?

IMIBUTO NGETINTFOMBE LETITFWETJULILWE

28. Kwentekani kulesitfombe?

29. Usitsetseleni lesitfombe?

30. Ngicela ungicocele ngalokwenteka kulesitfombe nekutsi kuyichaza kanjani imphilo yakho yebulili lapha esikolweni.

31. Kukhona yini longatsandza kungicocela kona lokunye ngebulili nome ngalokwenteka kulesitfombe.

NGIYABONGA

Appendix 16: Biographical Data Capture Form for Teachers

Biographical Information for the Teachers

Please tick in the appropriate box and be assured that all information either personal information about yourself or the study will be taken with the strictest confidentiality.

1. **Gender**

   Female

   Male

2. **Age**

3. **Years in the school**

4. **Qualifications you have**

Appendix 17: Questionnaires for Teachers

1. Please explain to me what you think is meant by gender and gender equality……….

2. Do you think there is a difference between boys and girls? YES/NO. Please explain………….

3. Please also explain what you perceive as the difference between boys and girls……………….

4. Can you please provide me with specific details of such differences…………………………..

5. Do you think there are similarities between boys and girls? YES/NO. Please explain…………………….. 6. Please also explain what you perceive as the similarities between boys and

girls………………………………….

7. Do you think the similarities and differences affect the young vulnerable children`s experience of school? …………………………………………………………………..

8. As a teacher, do you expect different behaviours from boys and girls? YES/NO. Please explain …………………………………………………………………………..

9. How do you think gender inequality affect the young vulnerable children in the school? …………………………………………

10. Do you think a school with good standards of gender equality would make learning easier for the young vulnerable children? Please explain ……………………………………………

11. Do you think gender equality is important in a school? ………………………………………..

12. Do you discuss issues of gender and its complexities in your class? YES/NO. Please explain.

13. Do you encourage gender equality in your class or the school? YES/NO. If yes, please explain to me what challenges do you face as the principal of the school? If NO, do you have any reasons for not doing that? …………………………………………………………………………………

14. Do you have anything else to say about the young vulnerable children and issues of gender? …………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 18- Individual Interview Questions for Teachers

<u>**REMINDERS**</u>

- Welcome and thank interviewee for participating in the research study.
- Completion of biographical data
- Explain the use of the tape recorder and ensure that the participants consent to be recorded ⬜ Assure participants of confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms

1. Can you please tell me a story of your experience of gender inequality in the school.
2. What do you think are the parents/caregivers perception of gender equality in this context?
3. How do you think their perception of gender affects the way they raise their children?
4. How do you think the young vulnerable children in the school make meaning of gender?
5. If YES, please tell me of a story where you observed gender dynamics playing out in the school.
6. How do you think parents/caregivers/community contribute to the way the young vulnerable children perceive gender in the school?
7. What do you think could be done in your community/school to improve gender equality in the school?
8. Does your school have a policy on gender equality?
9. If it does, why and when was this policy formulated.
10. What are the main points about gender equality that this policy covers?
11. If it does not, do you think your school should have this policy and why do you think so.
12. Would you say teachers in the school are committed to improving gender equality? Why do you think so?
13. Do you think the parents` attitude towards gender equality in this area is any different from how parents in semi-urban or urban schools view such issues?
14. Can you think of any cultural practises and beliefs or values that perpetuate gender inequality in the community and school context? I would like to know more about that.
15. Do you think young vulnerable children in the schools should be informed of their right to be treated as equal (boys and girls as equal people)? YES/NO. If yes, how do you think that would improve the life of the young vulnerable children in the school? For:
   i.   the community
   ii.   the school
   iii.   the principal
   iv.   teachers
   v.   boys vi.   girls?

16. If NO, what problems do you think this would cause for?

    i.   the community

    ii.   the school

    iii.   the principal

    iv.   teachers

    v.   boys

    vi.   girls

    vii. the young vulnerable children in the school?

17. What do you think can be done by the following in ensuring that there is gender equality in the school context?

    i.   The Ministry of Education and Training

    ii.   the principal

    iii.   The teachers

    iv.   The learners

THANK YOU

Appendix 19: Turnitin Report

214581500

Ncamsile D. Motsa. "Masculinities and Implications on gender-equitable schooling for vulnerable children from three primary schools in Swaziland", The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa, 2018
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Morojele. "High Aspirations Amidst Challenging Situations: Narratives of Six Vulnerable Primary School Children in Swaziland", Journal of Asian and African Studies, 2017
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Appendix 20: Letter from Language Editor

Angela Bryan & Associates

6 Martin Crescent
Westville
3629

04 March 2019

To Whom It May Concern

This serves to confirm that Gendering Children's Vulnerability and Schooling in the Kingdom of Swaziland written by Ncamsile D Motsa has been edited by me for language.

Please contact me should you require any further information.

Kind Regards

Angela Bryan

angelakirbybryan@gmail.com

0832983312