



# A Reflection on Sustainable Curriculum Practices and Emancipatory Postgraduate Supervision

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## ABSTRACT

Professor Sechaba Mahlomaholo's impact in engaged scholarship has significantly influenced the dialogue on sustainable learning settings, highlighting education's transformative potential and ability to elevate underprivileged communities. This study examined how sustainable curriculum practices are a liberatory approach to postgraduate supervision, using Africana Critical Theory (ACT) as the lens for the study. The project utilised the methodology of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), with twenty-five master's and Doctoral (PhD) students and five supervisory staff members. The research incorporated team-building exercises, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, and free attitude interviews (FAIs) to investigate the dynamics and outcomes of this educational approach. The actions were documented through data rigorously examined through three tiers of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These revealed three significant findings: improved student agency in research, heightened collaboration among academic disciplines, and a marked transition towards community-focused research agendas. These findings underscore the necessity of curricular approaches designed to empower and indicate substantial implications for curriculum reformers seeking to rectify systemic educational disparities. This study emphasises the advantageous role researchers play in fostering community transformation, hence promoting a more equal and just society in alignment with Professor Mahlomaholo's ideology. This study encourages scholars to think and elaborate on these issues, promoting a more comprehensive application of these modalities to cultivate global optimism, peace, inclusivity, freedom, and equality within academic environments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable learning environments are educational contexts engineered to promote enduring academic achievement and societal welfare. These environments emphasise inclusivity, equity, peace, freedom, and cultural relevance, guaranteeing that education is accessible and significant to all learners.<sup>1</sup> They integrate environmental, social, and economic sustainability principles to cultivate learners' critical

<sup>1</sup> Bekithemba Dube et al., "Creating Sustainable Learning Environments in the Era of the Posthuman: Towards Borderless Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* 5, no. 1 (2023): i–x.

thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.<sup>2</sup> Sustainable learning environments are defined by their capacity to adjust to evolving requirements and settings, foster lifelong learning, and support the sustainable development of communities and society.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to reflect and expand upon the transformative influence of Professor Sechaba Mahlomaholo's engaged scholarship on the discourse surrounding sustainable learning environments. The study documents the value of sustainable curriculum practices as an emancipatory postgraduate supervision modality underpinned by ACT, emphasising the power of education to uplift marginalised communities.<sup>4</sup> The legacy of Professor Sechaba Mahlomaholo's Engaged Scholarship on Sustainable Learning Environments and his contributions to the field of education, mainly through his engaged scholarship, have profoundly influenced the discourse on sustainable learning environments and their quest to transform educational practices, particularly the postgraduate environment. Mahlomaholo, Nkoane and staff members in one higher learning institution established an incubator to transform the postgraduate field, particularly in master's and PhD students. The incubator was formulated in 2008 and is still operating in more than six international universities. This paper reviews the core themes of Mahlomaholo's scholarship, examining its influence on educational theory and practice.<sup>5</sup> Mahlomaholo's scholarship is rooted in critical emancipatory theory. It mainly draws from the works of Auguste Comte, Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, Patricia Hill Collins, Paulo Freire, Teun Van Dijk, Manuel Castells, Tarra Yosso and other proponents of transformative education. His approach challenges traditional pedagogical models, advocating for an education system responsive to learners' socio-economic and cultural contexts. Key to his framework is the concept of "sustainable learning environments," which he defines as spaces that foster holistic development, critical consciousness, and active citizenship.

### The lens

ACT offers a substantial framework for deep examination and correcting educational disparities and cultural dynamics within African and diasporic environments. This theoretical framework relies on the experiences of African people, histories, and epistemologies; furthermore, ACT provides a critical perspective for analysing systematic injustices and promoting revolutionary change. The choice of ACT for this study is motivated by its distinctive ability to tackle the intersectionality of race, culture, and power within educational contexts, including its aptness to current issues confronting African and diasporic communities.<sup>6</sup> ACT originates from a profound scholarly tradition that investigates the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and racial injustice. Rabaka argues that ACT uses Critical Race Theory (CRT), African-centred epistemologies, and postcolonial studies to examine how these historical and social processes have impacted education.<sup>7</sup> Mahlomaholo also argues that it enhances the perspectives and experiences of African individuals, offering a framework to understand and challenge the systemic

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<sup>2</sup> Sechaba M.G. Mahlomaholo, "Design Research towards the Creation of Sustainable Postgraduate Learning Environments," in *ICERI2013 Proceedings* (IATED, 2013), 4614–23.

<sup>3</sup> Makeresemese R Mahlomaholo and Sechaba M G Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Posthuman Accounting Learning Environments: The Case for Green Accounting in South Africa," *Research in Educational Policy and Management* 6, no. 1 (2024): 90–101.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis A. Francis, Mahlomaholo Geoffrey Sechaba Mahlomaholo, and Molebatsi Milton Nkoane, *Praxis towards Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments in South Africa* (UJ Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Sechaba MG Mahlomaholo, "Design research towards the creation of sustainable postgraduate learning environments," 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Mahlomaholo, "Design Research towards the Creation of Sustainable Postgraduate Learning Environments," 2013; Sechaba Mahlomaholo and Vhonani Netshandama, "Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments: Conversations with Gramsci's Organic Intellectual" (2010).

<sup>7</sup> Reiland Rabaka, "Africana Critical Theory of Contemporary Society: The Role of Radical Politics, Social Theory, and Africana Philosophy 1," in *Handbook of Black Studies* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006), 130–51; Molefi Kete Asante, "Africology, Afrocentricity, and What Remains to Be Done," *The Black Scholar* 50, no. 3 (2020): 48–57.

inequities ingrained in educational systems.<sup>8</sup> A fundamental strength of ACT lies in its emphasis on confronting systemic injustices.

In the context of educational research, Harris opines that ACT allows scholars to examine how institutional practices and policies sustain racial and cultural prejudices.<sup>9</sup> Arguably, ACT challenges the tendency of the curriculum to marginalise African viewpoints, hence reinforcing Eurocentric narratives that detrimentally affect the academic progress and cultural identity of students from these origins.<sup>10</sup> ACT establishes a foundation for proposing curriculum and pedagogical transformations that promote diversity and equity. ACT is especially pertinent for any research that is focused on implementing culturally sensitive pedagogy. This method prioritises the integration of students' cultural origins into educational practices to improve engagement and learning outcomes.<sup>11</sup> It is argued that ACT provides both theoretical and practical guidance for Teachers on designing a curriculum that acknowledges the different cultural heritages of African and diasporic learners, promoting a more inclusive and successful learning.<sup>12</sup> ACT is also quite notable for its empowerment and resistance elements. The framework of the theory helps in understanding how to use educational systems to empower underprivileged communities in their social and political empowerment.<sup>13</sup> For example, ACT scholars can formulate strategies to use education as a tool for social transformation, in the pursuit of more radical strategies to eliminate systemic injustice and advance justice.<sup>14</sup> ACT's revolutionary potential is its capacity to question existing paradigms and put forward other, more equitable and equal alternative perspectives to education. This study aims to work through ACT to identify new forms of educational practices and policies that better serve the needs of African and diasporic learning environments. Brown also writes that this methodology fits in with the overall vision of educational reform in terms of solving inequalities and moving towards social justice.<sup>15</sup>

### Mahlomaholo's Concept of Sustainable Learning Environments

Mahlomaholo's belief in sustainable learning settings looks at the phenomenon from a holistic perspective that goes beyond mere physical infrastructure to also include social and emotional aspects of education.<sup>16</sup> His methodology focuses on the imperative of developing structurally inclusive, equitable, and culturally pertinent robust learning environments. Mahlomaholo's focus on inclusivity and equity highlights the necessity for learning environments that provide all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, access to quality education. This entails the implementation of policies and procedures that address various learning requirements, foster equity, and reduce obstacles to educational engagement.<sup>17</sup> Learning environments with sustainable prospects are more aligned with the students' needs, which are diverse needs, enhancing a sense of belonging and engagement by emphasising these characteristics. As defined in the paradigm advocated by Mahlomaholo, culturally

<sup>8</sup> Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Critical Emancipatory Research and Academic Identity," *Africa Education Review* 6, no. 2 (October 2009): 224–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620903274555>.

<sup>9</sup> Pauline Harris, "Equitable, Accessible, and Sustainable Professional Learning That Makes a Difference," *Innovations in Literacy Professional Learning: Strengthening Equity, Access, and Sustainability*, 2023, 145.

<sup>10</sup> Bonginkosi Hardy Mutongoza, Chrispen Mutanho, and Sive Makeleni, "Ending Curriculum Violence and Academic Ancestral Worship: An Afrocentric Perspective on Decolonising Higher Education in Africa," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 36, no. 1 (2018): 25–36.

<sup>11</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question* (Teachers College Press, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Sean Gordon, "The Father Effect: The Impact of Fathers in the Household on the High School Academic Achievement, Self-Efficacy, and College Readiness of African American Males" (Houston Baptist University, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Gordon, "The Father Effect: The Impact of Fathers in the Household on the High School Academic Achievement, Self-Efficacy, and College Readiness of African American Males."

<sup>14</sup> Sechaba G. Mahlomaholo, "Towards Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments: Unmasking Apartheid Legacies through Scholarship of Engagement," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 24, no. 3 (2010): 287–301.

<sup>15</sup> Kate Brown, "Vulnerability and Social Control at the Margins: A Contribution to an Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Vulnerability," *Human Studies* 47, no. 2 (2024): 287–306.

<sup>16</sup> Sechaba G. Mahlomaholo, *Signification of African Cultural Identity, Individual African Identity and Performance in Mathematics among Some Standard Nine African Pupils in Mangaung High Schools* (Western Cape: University of the Western Cape, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Sechaba G. Mahlomaholo, "Higher Education and Democracy: Analysing Communicative Action in the Creation of Sustainable Learning Environments: Part 1: Exploration of the Critical Relationship between Higher Education and the Development of Democracy in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 28, no. 3 (2014): 678–96.

relevant education refers to incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the teaching methodologies and curriculum. This approach guarantees that educational material is significant and represents students' identities, thus improving their motivation and academic achievement. Qhosola and Mahlomaholo assert that education that is culturally relevant fosters comprehension and respect among varied groups, enhancing a more harmonious and supportive educational atmosphere.<sup>18</sup> Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the transformative paradigm, fundamental to Mahlomaholo's work, seek to induce social change using educational methodologies. This paradigm functions within the PAR approach, engaging educators and students in the research process. By involving these communities as co-researchers, PAR promotes a collaborative methodology for fostering innovation and addressing issues.<sup>19</sup> This kind of methodology promotes knowledge and promotes proactive participation of people to shape and control their learning processes and outcomes.

The paradigm of Mahlomaholo is a collective methodology aimed at improving critical thinking, and creativity together with problem-solving skills. Collaboratively, students can gain important tools for solving complex problems and can contribute positively to the resolution of social issues. The paradigm also equips students with essential skills to address intricate problems and contribute meaningfully to societal challenges and progress. His impact on PhD production and over 100 PhD students with dissertations graduated through the application of his paradigm, highlighting its significance and efficacy in higher education. These dissertations encompass several study areas consistent with the transformative and participatory ideas articulated by Mahlomaholo.<sup>20</sup> The focus on sustainable learning environments within this body of work highlights the practical impact and empirical strength of his method. This approach provokes traditional educational paradigms by introducing social and emotional constructivism into the design of learning environment solutions. His research focuses on the need to create an adequate physical climate that encompasses learners' emotional and cultural climate.<sup>21</sup> The concept of sustainable learning settings advocated by Mahlomaholo highlights a holistic approach that integrates physical, social, and emotional elements. Having incorporated inclusiveness, democracy, and relevance into his practices, integrating the transformative and participatory methods of PAR, his educational practice aims not only at teaching and learning processes, fostering integrated development of the student but also addresses the scope of issues challenging communities. He argues that sustainable learning environments should be responsive to cultural, gender, disability, and linguistic differences as well as socially equitable environments.<sup>22</sup> His work produced both master's and PhD graduates, specialising in the transformative paradigms within the PAR methodology.

### **Inclusivity and Equity**

Central to Mahlomaholo's vision is the notion of equity, inclusivity and culturally responsive education. He highlights the systemic barriers that marginalised communities face and calls for educational practices that recognise and address these disparities. His scholarship focuses on policy and practice that learners from all SES, race, or sexual orientations can fully participate in learning.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Makekesemese Rosy Qhosola and Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Posthuman Adaptive Learning Environments for Pregnant Teenagers," *Agenda* 36, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 54–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2021.2024078>.

<sup>19</sup> Makekesemese R Mahlomaholo and Geoffrey Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Formative Virtual Assessment towards Sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education Learning Environments.," *Alternation African Scholarship Book Series (AASBS)*, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Sechaba M G Mahlomaholo, Glynnis Daries, and Mariëtte Koen, "Creating Sustainable Early Childhood Learning Environments: A Transformatory Posthumanist Perspective," *Educational Research for Social Change* 12, no. 1 (2023): vi–x.

<sup>21</sup> Sechaba Mahlomaholo, Milton Nkoane, and John Ambrosio, "Sustainable Learning Environments and Social Justice Comment," *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 9, no. 3 (2013): V–XIII.

<sup>22</sup> Sechaba M. G. Mahlomaholo, "Design Research towards the Creation of Sustainable Postgraduate Learning Environments," in *ICERI2013 Proceedings (IATED)*, 2013), 4614–23.

<sup>23</sup> Makekesemese Rosy Qhosola-Mahlomaholo, "Early Childhood Care and Education," *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Caribbean and African Studies in Education*, 2024, 286.

### **Cultural Relevance**

Mahlomaholo highlights the importance of culture, students' cultural learning experiences and cultural content in education. This method enhances the students' interest and acknowledgment of their identity and experience and fosters their belongingness and power.<sup>24</sup>

### **Transformative Power of Education**

Mahlomaholo highlights the transformative ability of learning environments to promote social change. He contends that learning environments should convey information and serve as an instrument of social justice and empowerment. Fostering critical consciousness in learners empowers individuals to confront and transform repressive societal institutions.<sup>25</sup>

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Utilising Freirean concepts, he promotes a critical pedagogy that urges learners to interrogate and analyse societal norms and power structures. This pedagogy aims to enhance learners' capacity for critical thinking on their reality and to motivate action toward establishing a more just and equitable society.<sup>26</sup>

### **Community Engagement**

The other hallmark of Mahlomaholo engaged scholarship is community participation. His work claims that education is a collective responsibility of both formal institutions, such as schools and social settings and communities.<sup>27</sup> This comprehensive approach ensures that education considers the needs and dreams of society, hence enhancing sustainable development and unity.

### **Impact on Marginalised Communities**

In general, Mahlomaholo's study has greatly contributed to affected disadvantaged communities with his emphasis on education to break the circles of poverty and inequality. His study shows how FAIR education systems can dramatically uplift marginalised persons and society.<sup>28</sup>

### **Case Studies and Empirical Evidence**

Several case studies and empirical evidence support Mahlomaholo's arguments on Education with CRP and community involvement. When the school incorporated culturally appropriate learning and teaching materials, the Bronx High School of Science recorded an overall improvement in standardised test performance of about fifteen per cent.<sup>29</sup> The Cochrane review shows that, in 15 cases of 22, CRP works to raise the achievements in academics with values of impact between 0.30 and 0.45 in the sample. Mahlomaholo encourages community engagement strategies, illustrated in the Community Schools model, to improve student retention by 20% and a 25% reduction in the achievement gap as observed from marginalised children.<sup>30</sup> These data support the impact of such methodologies in documented academic efforts and educational parity.

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<sup>24</sup> Mahlomaholo Rosy Makeresemese and Mahlomaholo Geoffrey Mahlomaholo, "Understanding Curriculum Transformations towards the Creation of Sustainable Learning Environments: A Posthumanist Reflection.," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 8, no. 4 (2023): 330–44.

<sup>25</sup> Makeresemese Rosy Mahlomaholo, Hilda Israel, and Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Self-Regulation in Sustainable Research Capacity Learning Environments during the Pandemic.," *Alternation* 29, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>26</sup> Mahlomaholo, Daries, and Koen, "Creating Sustainable Early Childhood Learning Environments: A Transformatory Posthumanist Perspective."

<sup>27</sup> Mahlomaholo and Mahlomaholo, "Formative Virtual Assessment towards Sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education Learning Environments.,"; Sechaba M G Mahlomaholo, "Early School Leavers and Sustainable Learning Environments in Rural Contexts," *Perspectives in Education* 30, no. 1 (2012): 101–10.

<sup>28</sup> Mahlomaholo and Mahlomaholo, "Formative Virtual Assessment towards Sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education Learning Environments."

<sup>29</sup> Ladson-Billings, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question*.

<sup>30</sup> Makeresemese Rosy Mahlomaholo, "Cognitive Justice and the Effective Use of the Principles of Good Teaching at Grade 10 Accounting," *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* 5, no. 3 (2023): 1–15; Mahlomaholo and Mahlomaholo, "Formative Virtual

## Service Learning

Service learning integrates community service with academic training, successfully connecting theoretical knowledge with actual practice. Mahlomaholo considers Burner's ecological theory a significant foundation for comprehending the transformative impacts on persons and communities. Mahlomaholo demonstrates that, in Burner's theory, learning and development transpire through interactions across several environmental strata, including family, educational institutions, and broader social systems.<sup>31</sup> This way, service-learning fosters students' personal development and social responsibility, since students participate in collective service projects that cut across different social classes and tiers, thus enhancing their ability to integrate different social environments they may encounter in their lifetime.<sup>32</sup> Participation in local environmental activities is a good way to build contacts and collaboration in professional practice because students have the opportunity to interact with different people within the community.

Thanks to Professor Sechaba Mahlomaholo's active scholarship, it has become possible to expand the topic of sustainable learning settings. He has used his work to demonstrate that education can change the lives of these communities for the better. Mahlomaholo has formulated a concept regarding educational institutions by providing organisational culture among diversity and social justice and relevance, conveyance of knowledge and empowerment for justice in an institution.<sup>33</sup> This principle stays alive in provoking teachers and decision-makers to pursue equity and justice in the premises of education. This paper looks at the nature and importance of sustainable curriculum practices as an emancipatory theory in postgraduate supervision, using ACT as the theoretical framework of research.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is anchored within the CPAR approach that was used as the method for an educational intervention involving twenty-five master's and doctoral students and five supervising staff. This method was intentionally chosen to shed a spotlight on deep inquiry collaboration and its ability to achieve transformative alterations in learning environments. The study used a several data-gathering techniques, including team-building activities, SWOT analysis, and FAIs to explore and document the dynamics and outcomes concerning CPAR.<sup>34</sup> Employing critical discourse analysis in three steps to endeavours the data collected produced substantial findings relating to student voice, interprofessional work, and positioning of the community at the centre. Team-building activities were instituted to enhance unity and cooperation among the members. These exercises were designed to improve interpersonal interactions and foster trust, which is essential for effective CPAR. Activities encompassed problem-solving activities, role-playing scenarios, and collaborative projects. The data output emanating from these activities provides insights into the cooperation and collaboration among co-researchers, the evolution of group dynamics, and the influence of these interactions on their research methodologies. A SWOT analysis was performed to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the CPAR project.<sup>35</sup> Co-researchers participated in group talks to identify and assess internal and external factors affecting their research. This study facilitated comprehension of the project's strategic orientation and pinpointed areas necessitating enhancement. The SWOT analysis data elucidated the perceived advantages and obstacles of the CPAR approach from the viewpoints of both students and supervisory personnel. FAIs were performed to collect

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Assessment towards Sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education Learning Environments.”; Ladson-Billings, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question*.

<sup>31</sup> Mahlomaholo, “Design Research towards the Creation of Sustainable Postgraduate Learning Environments,” 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Sechaba Mahlomaholo and Matobako Thabang, “Service Learning in South Africa Held Terminally Captive by Legacies of the Past,” *Alternation* 13, no. 1 (2006): 203–17.

<sup>33</sup> Sechaba Mahlomaholo and Milton Nkoane, “The Case for an Emancipatory Qualitative Research s on Assessment of Quality,” *Education as Change* 6, no. 1 (2002): 69–84.

<sup>34</sup> Sechaba Mahlomaholo, “Creating Effective Postgraduate Learning Environments: An Analysis of an Intervention from Realist Social Theory,” *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique* 13, no. 1–2 (2015): 229–43.

<sup>35</sup> Mahlomaholo, “Gender differentials and sustainable learning environments.”

comprehensive qualitative data on participants' experiences and viewpoints.<sup>36</sup> The interviews facilitated open-ended responses, providing deep insights into individual and communal perspectives on CPAR. One issue was posed: how can integrating sustainable curriculum practices with emancipatory postgraduate supervision effectively convert researchers to address real-world challenges? The interviews were documented, transcribed, and examined to identify significant trends and insights.

### **Data Analysis**

Data derived from team-building activities, SWOT, and FAIs were analysed using three levels of CDA outlined by Mahlomaholo and Mahlomaholo.<sup>37</sup> This first step involved a data integration to identify patterns and themes that underpinned their understanding. It explains the participation, understanding, and responses of the participants to the CPAR technique. The second level focused on patterns and meanings and their implications within the data set.<sup>38</sup> In this analysis, it was shown how team building affected the practice of established patterns of collaboration, how the use of the SWOT format was correlated with the experiences of the participants, and how general tendencies were considered in the response to FAI questions by students and staff.<sup>39</sup> The final degree of study aimed to point out the relationships between the findings and the social and educational implications. This investigation focused on the effects of the CPAR methodology on research activities, as well as a synthesis of community needs with research efforts.

### **DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The acts were documented using data rigorously evaluated through three tiers of CDA. This meticulous, analytical method revealed three crucial facts illuminating the educational strategy's dynamics and results. CDA was used to analyse the data gathered from team-building activities, SWOT analysis, and FAIs. CDA is a methodology that examines the interplay between language and power within texts and interactions.<sup>40</sup> This study employed three levels of CDA: spoken word, textual, and the examination of content and structure in spoken and written texts to discern significant themes and patterns. Discursive practice analyses texts' production, distribution, and consumption within the social framework of postgraduate supervision. The social practice examines the extensive social and cultural factors that shape the discourse.

### **Enhanced Student Agency in Research**

Co-researchers reported increased confidence and autonomy during their research projects' team-building exercises (TBE). Activities designed to foster collaboration led to greater self-efficacy among students, who felt more capable of leading their research endeavours based on the extracts below.

One master student explained: "Since I joined the cluster team from Manyatseng, my entire life has changed. I have improved from my constant late arrival at functions and occasions, including at my workplace. The team has taught me the importance of adhering to time as a form of respect to others, including myself."

During the SWOT Analysis, co-researchers agreed that the strengths identified included enhanced personal ownership and initiative in research. Weaknesses pointed to initial resistance from some students accustomed to traditional top-down supervision styles.

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<sup>36</sup> Cias T. Tsotetsi and Sechaba M. G. Mahlomaholo, "Teacher Professional Development Programmes: What Is Missing?," *Journal of Educational Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 89–102.

<sup>37</sup> Mahlomaholo and Mahlomaholo, "Creating Sustainable Posthuman Accounting Learning Environments: The Case for Green Accounting in South Africa," 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Sechaba M G Mahlomaholo, "Gender Differentials and Sustainable Learning Environments," *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 3 (2011): 312–21.

<sup>39</sup> Mahlomaholo, "Gender Differentials and Sustainable Learning Environments."

<sup>40</sup> Mahlomaholo, "Design Research towards the Creation of Sustainable Postgraduate Learning Environments," 2013.

During free attitude interviews (FAIs), students expressed that the CPAR approach enabled them to control their research topics and methodologies more. They appreciated the opportunity to make independent decisions and drive their research agendas.

Looking at the above from three levels of CDA Analysis, it can be argued that from the descriptive analysis level, data revealed a general trend of increased student autonomy and involvement in shaping research agendas. Participants' remarks underscored a transition from passive to active engagement in their research. The role of CPAR in improving student agency is through its participatory characteristics that require collaborative decision-making and collective leadership. The timing of this transition corresponds to ACT, an empowerment of the disadvantaged voices in academic environments.<sup>41</sup> The degree of transformation of student attitudes toward research was remarkable and can be asserted. The CDA and ACT frameworks serve to show how this transformation is part of a wider trend in democratising research methodology and without deconstructing conventional hierarchical frameworks.<sup>42</sup> The results of this research suggest that an extensive increase in student agency challenges conventional approaches to supervision. It spotlights the ability of CPAR to alter the course of research dynamics in favour of increased student autonomy and critical participation.

### **Increased Collaboration Across Academic Disciplines**

While the researchers were conducting a TBE, SWOT and FAI, as indicated in the extracts below.

Exercises in which exercises facilitated cross-disciplinary interactions, leading to enhanced understanding and integration of diverse academic perspectives. Co-researchers noted improved communication and joint problem-solving skills.

Doing SWOT Analysis, an opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration was highlighted, though challenges included occasional misunderstandings and conflicting disciplinary norms.

Through FAI, the postgraduate students and supervisory staff noted the value of working with peers from different fields, enriching our research approaches and outcomes.

Looking at the above extracts raised during TBE, SWOT and FAI from three levels of CDA Analysis, it can be concluded that the descriptive analysis of the data indicated a marked increase in interdisciplinary interactions and cooperative research efforts. The co-researchers reported more frequent and active collaboration across academic boundaries. In comparison, the interpretative analysis shows that the collaborative nature of CPAR aligns with ACT's emphasis on creating inclusive and equitable research environments. This approach fosters an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated.<sup>43</sup> The critical analysis shows that the synergy between different academic disciplines was the most interesting aspect, highlighting how CPAR facilitates more profound and holistic research approaches. This finding reflects a broader shift towards collaborative research paradigms that challenge traditional disciplinary silos.<sup>44</sup> The finding shows that the increased collaboration across disciplines suggests that CPAR enhances research quality and promotes a more integrated and collaborative academic culture, which can lead to innovative solutions and insights.

### **Pronounced shift towards community-centered research agendas**

This can be seen in the extracts during TBE, SWOT, and FAI indicated in the following.

TBEs and collaborative projects focused on community issues led to heightened awareness of local needs and a more substantial commitment to community engagement among co-researchers.

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<sup>41</sup> Asante, "Africology, Afrocentricity, and What Remains to Be Done."

<sup>42</sup> Angela Davis, "The Role of Culture in Education: Decolonizing Pedagogy." (University Press, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Ladson-Billings, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question*.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, "Vulnerability and Social Control at the Margins: A Contribution to an Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Vulnerability."

SWOT analysis, strengths included a greater alignment of research with community needs, while weaknesses involved navigating logistical challenges and ensuring sustained community involvement.

In FAIs, co-researchers prefer research that addresses real-world issues and benefits local communities. They noted a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in their work.

Thus, the extracts above are examined using the three levels of CDA analysis from a descriptive analysis. The data showed a clear shift towards research agendas that prioritise community influence. Co-researchers' reflections highlighted a growing focus on social relevance and practical outcomes. The interpretative analysis also shows that this shift aligns with ACT's focus on community empowerment and social justice. CPAR's emphasis on community engagement reflects an understanding of research as a tool for social change,<sup>45</sup> amplified at the critical analysis level to validate that a surprising element in the process of the above analysis was the degree to which co-researchers embraced community-centred research, which challenges traditional academic priorities and emphasises the importance of research that has tangible societal benefits.<sup>46</sup> This further crystallises that the pronounced shift towards community-centred research agendas demonstrates CPAR's effectiveness in aligning academic research with community needs, fostering a research culture that values social influences and responsiveness.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the outcomes of team building exercises, the SWOT analysis and FAIs in conjunction with CDA and ACT gives a profound understanding of the change processes resulting from CPAR. This has been due to the magnified agency of postgraduate students in facilitating interdisciplinary interaction. At the same time, the shift to community-engaged research also highlights that CPAR can dramatically revolutionise research processes and academic contexts. These results imply that integration is highly relevant to the process. From the result of this study, notions emerged since school education can revolutionarily change learning through the incorporation of educational measures that can enhance students' POWER through CPAR. The within-year comparison also shows that CPAR enhances postgraduate student power relations, inter- and trans-disciplinary practice, and research relevance to community needs and issues. These findings stress the importance of learning emancipatory curriculum strategies that provide practical recommendations to curriculum activists who seek to address inequality in education.

The study agrees with Professor Mahlomaholo's worldview and puts more emphasis on the essential role of researchers in fostering significant community transformation. Implementing CPAR techniques allows academics to foster more equal and just educational settings. This study promotes a reflective methodology for curriculum building, urging scholars to build on these findings and implement participatory approaches more extensively.

The implications for educational practice are significant. Scholars, policymakers and educators are distinctly equipped to spearhead curriculum reform that fosters optimism, peace, inclusivity, freedom, and equality. By adopting these strategies, we can cultivate educational environments that promote knowledge and address the urgent social issues of our era. This study encourages the global academic community to adopt and use these concepts, improving educational methods and fostering a more equal society.

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<sup>45</sup> Harris, "Equitable, Accessible, and Sustainable Professional Learning That Makes a Difference."

<sup>46</sup> Gordon, "The Father Effect: The Impact of Fathers in the Household on the High School Academic Achievement, Self-Efficacy, and College Readiness of African American Males."

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