

Analysis of Asset-Based Community Development to Transform Rural Schools in South Africa

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Abstract: Rural schools worldwide have been categorised as underprivileged and/or under-resourced, characterised by limited resources, teacher shortages, and lack of access to social and educational amenities, among others. This conceptual paper analyses the potential of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) to transform rural schools. This study is lensed within transformative paradigm as a worldview towards building on a school community's assets, strengths, and resources to promote positive change. The concept of ABCD was presented and analysed using conceptual analysis as a tool to make sense of the ABCD concept and its assumptions which includes community engagement, asset mapping, asset mobilisation, and capacity building. The study presents the assumptions of ABCD vis-à-vis its relationship with schools' transformation. It argues that ABCD can be a practical approach to address these challenges by empowering rural communities to identify

and leverage their strengths and resources to improve education outcomes. The paper concludes by highlighting the potential benefits of ABCD in transforming rural schools, including increased community involvement, improved teacher retention, and enhanced student outcomes.

Keywords: Rural schools, transformative paradigm, asset-based community development, conceptual analysis, community engagement.

1. Introduction

Rural schools worldwide face significant challenges due to their underprivileged and under-resourced nature. These schools are often located in remote areas and have limited resources compared to their urban counterparts (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This shortage of resources manifests in various ways, such as insufficient textbooks, outdated facilities, inadequate technology, and limited extracurricular activities, which also affect the quality of education that students receive and can contribute to low academic performance and limited opportunities for students (Omodan, 2020; Omodan, 2022; Afzal-Tajik et al., 2022).

One of the most significant challenges rural school faces is a shortage of qualified teachers (Hannaway et al., 2019). That is, rural areas often struggle to attract and retain highly qualified teachers due to the isolation of the area, the lack of social and cultural amenities, and the lower pay rates compared to urban areas. As a result, many rural schools have to make do with underqualified or inexperienced teachers, which according to Holmqvist (2019), can negatively impact the quality of education provided to students. Another notable issue with rurally located schools is limited access to social and educational amenities (Chakanika et al., 2012). Libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions are often located in urban areas, making it difficult for rural schools to offer students the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts. On a more significant note, rural schools often face significant financial challenges due to limited access to funding (Mathis, 2003), making it difficult to maintain and update their facilities, purchase new equipment, or offer competitive salaries to attract and retain highly qualified teachers.

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From the above exploration, one can argue that rurally located schools struggle with limited resources, teacher shortages, lack of access to social and educational amenities, and financial challenges. These problems can limit the ability of rural schools to provide students with quality education, perpetuating the cycle of under-resourced and underprivileged schools in rural areas. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, and the broader community to provide rural schools with the resources and support they need to offer students a quality education and ensure they have access to the same opportunities as their urban counterparts. There is no doubt that these stakeholders have, at one point or the other, provided or suggested solutions to alleviate these monumental challenges (Strange, 2003; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Omodan et al., 2019), but it seems rural schools, most especially in South Africa, still wallow in the abyss of limited resources, teacher shortages, lack of access to social and educational amenities, and financial challenges. This is supported by the study that rural South African schools are at their lowest best (Hlalele, 2012). The study of Hlalele (2012) further highlights that most rural schools in South Africa lack basic facilities such as electricity, running water, and sanitation, which affects the quality of education provided to students. Additionally, the study notes that rural schools have a high teacher turnover rate, which further exacerbates the shortage of qualified teachers in these schools.

Another study conducted by Tayyaba (2012) and Mukwevho (2018) supports the notion that rural schools in South Africa face significant challenges. The studies note that rural schools have lower academic performance than urban ones. This is due to a range of factors, including limited resources, teacher shortages, and a lack of access to educational and social amenities. This empirical literature suggests that rural schools in South Africa are facing significant challenges that require urgent attention from policymakers and educators. Hence, there is a need to look inward and use the available assets within the schools and the communities to improve rural schools for better productivity. This conceptual paper, therefore, highlights the potential of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a solution to transform rural schools. The paper suggests that ABCD can be a practical approach to address the challenges faced by rural schools because of its potential to empower the community to identify and leverage their strengths and resources and take ownership of their education system to create a sustainable model towards improving education outcomes.

1.1 Research Objectives

Based on the above problems, the study raises the following objectives to guide the study. That is, the study:

- Presents Asset-Based Community Development approach as a framework for rural schools' transformation.
- Analyses the assumptions Asset-Based Community Development as a strategy to address these Rural Schools' challenges.

2. Methodological framing

This study is situated within the transformative paradigm, which views education as a tool for social change and transformation (Kravia & Pagliano, 2016). The transformative paradigm is grounded in the belief that education should be used to challenge and transform oppressive structures and systems that perpetuate social inequality (Mertens, 2010; Mertens, 2012). The study employs an asset-based approach to promote positive change in school communities by identifying and building on their strengths, assets, and resources. This approach emphasises the importance of engaging with the community to create a sense of ownership and commitment towards achieving common goals. The study recognises that rural schools face significant challenges due to limited resources, teacher shortages, isolation, and a lack of access to social and educational amenities. Therefore, it argues that an asset-based approach that recognises and builds on the school community's strengths can lead to sustainable and transformative change. The transformative paradigm and asset-based approach can

help rural schools address their challenges and create a more equitable and just education system that promotes positive change.

Since the objective of the study is to identify and analyse the essential features of ABCD and its underlying assumptions, which can provide insights into how the concept is used in practice, in this study, conceptual analysis is employed to examine a selected concept. The method (conceptual analysis) aims to make sense of the complex concept and its underlying assumptions by breaking it down into its constituent parts and examining how they relate to one another (Coombs & Daniels, 1991). This approach can help to clarify the meaning of the concept, identify any ambiguities or inconsistencies, and provide a framework for further analysis (Keltner et al., 2001). By using conceptual analysis, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of complex concepts and their underlying assumptions, which informed the development of effective strategies to address the challenges faced by rural schools and other communities. Hence, the concept of ABCD is presented below, followed by its argued assumptions and its transformative tendencies.

3. Conceptualising Asset-Based Community Development

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) emerged in the 1990s as a response to the traditional deficit-based approach to community development (Cameron & Wasacase, 2017; Durá, 2018). According to Roof and McVee, (2020), the traditional approach focuses on identifying the problems and deficiencies within a community and designing solutions to address them. However, this approach has been criticised for ignoring the strengths and assets that exist within a community. ABCD, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of identifying and building on the assets and strengths of a community to promote positive change (Scott et al., 2020). The origin of ABCD can be traced back to the work of John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann, who developed the approach and recognised that communities are not passive recipients of aid and services but rather active participants with valuable assets and resources that can be leveraged to drive positive change (García, 2020). ABCD has since been adopted by numerous organisations and communities worldwide and has been used to address a wide range of social and economic issues. The approach has proven to be effective in promoting sustainable change and fostering community ownership and pride.

ABCD is, however, based on several key propositions. The first key is that every community has strengths and assets that can be leveraged to promote positive change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). The second is that communities are best equipped to identify their needs and priorities and develop solutions to address them (Yeneabat & Butterfield, 2012). The third is that community engagement and participation are essential to creating sustainable and effective solutions (Omodan et al., 2019). The fourth is that building on the strengths and assets of a community can create a sense of ownership and pride, which can lead to long-term change, and the fifth is that collaboration and partnerships between individuals and organisations are essential to creating meaningful change (Forrester et al., 2020). These key views reflect a shift away from a deficit-based approach to community development towards a more asset-based and community-driven approach that emphasises the importance of working with and empowering communities to drive positive change.

Based on the above keys, one can argue that ABCD is a strengths-based approach to community development involving several components. The first component is community engagement, which involves actively involving community members in the process of identifying and addressing the challenges they face. The second component is asset mapping, which involves identifying the strengths and resources that exist within the community. The third component is asset mobilisation, which involves using these strengths and resources to address the challenges faced by the community. The final component is capacity building, which involves developing the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to sustain positive change. Together, these components form a comprehensive approach to community development that emphasises the importance of working

with and empowering communities to identify and build on their strengths and assets to drive positive change. Based on these components, the following assumptions were deduced.

3.1 Assumptions of asset-based community development

As deduced from the above conceptual presentation of ABCD, the following are the assumptions which are discussed briefly below: community engagement, asset mapping, asset mobilisation, and capacity building.

Community engagement: ABCD strongly emphasises community engagement as a key component of self-development and transformation. The assumption recognises that communities are best placed to identify their strengths and resources and develop solutions tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Community engagement enables community members to take ownership of the development process and to work collaboratively to identify and address the challenges they face. Therefore, community engagement is a critical component of ABCD as it fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among community members. It enables community members to identify and build on their strengths and assets (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016), which can lead to sustainable and transformative change (Larey et al., 2021). By meaningfully engaging with the community, ABCD can promote self-development and transformation by empowering community members to take control of their development and work collaboratively to create a more equitable and just society.

Asset mapping: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) strongly emphasises asset mapping as a key component of the approach. Asset mapping involves identifying the strengths and resources that exist within a community (Kramer et al., 2012). The assumption recognises that communities have unique assets and strengths that can be leveraged to drive positive change. That is, asset mapping enables community members to identify their own strengths and resources and work collaboratively to develop solutions that build on these assets. It also helps shift the focus away from deficits and problems and towards the strengths and assets within a community (Roof & McVee, 2020). By identifying and building on their strengths and assets, communities can create sustainable solutions tailored to their specific needs and circumstances and foster a sense of pride and ownership among community members, which can lead to long-term change. By highlighting the unique strengths and resources within a community, ABCD can help create a more resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered community.

Asset mobilisation: ABCD strongly emphasises asset mobilisation as a key component of the approach. Asset mobilisation involves using the strengths and resources identified through asset mapping to address the challenges faced by a community (Xu & Maitland, 2017). The assumption recognises that communities have unique assets and resources that can be leveraged to drive positive change. It also enables community members to work collaboratively to develop solutions that build on their strengths and resources. This is a critical component of ABCD as It helps shift the focus away from deficits and problems and towards the strengths and assets within a community. By mobilising their own assets and resources, communities can create sustainable solutions that are tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. And by using their unique strengths and resources to drive positive change, communities can become more resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered.

Capacity building: ABCD strongly emphasises capacity building as a key assumption of the approach. Capacity building involves developing the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to sustain positive change (Nel, 2015). The approach recognises that communities need the capacity to implement and sustain the solutions that they develop. The capacity building enables community members to develop the skills and knowledge needed to drive positive change and to work collaboratively to develop sustainable solutions. This is important because it enables communities to become more self-sufficient and empowered. It helps shift the focus away from external aid and towards developing internal resources and capabilities. By building their own capacity, communities

can create sustainable solutions that are tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Hence, by developing their skills and knowledge, communities can become more resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered and drive positive change from within.

3.2 Assumptions of ABCD and transformation of rural schools

This section was discussed to correlate how ABCD, through its assumptions, could use to transform deficiencies of rural schools in South Africa and beyond. These were done under the following headings: community engagement and rural schools' transformation, asset mapping and rural schools' transformation, asset mobilisation and rural schools' transformation, and capacity building and rural schools' transformation.

3.2.1 Community engagement and rural schools' transformation

The community engagement component of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is highly relevant to transforming rural schools. Rural schools often face significant challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers (Hlalele, 2012; Tayyaba, 2012; Mukwevho, 2018). These challenges can only be addressed effectively by working collaboratively with the surrounding community. ABCD recognises the importance of involving community members (Roof & McVee, 2020) in the process of identifying and addressing these challenges, which can create a sense of ownership and commitment towards improving education outcomes.

Community engagement can help mobilise the assets and resources within the community to address the challenges faced by rural schools. This can involve identifying community members with relevant skills and expertise and involving them in the school's development and implementation of solutions. Community engagement can also involve partnering with local organisations and businesses to provide additional resources and support. By involving community members in the process of developing and implementing solutions, ABCD can create a sense of pride and ownership over the development of the school. This can help create a sustainable model driven by the community and tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the rural school.

3.2.2 Asset mapping and rural schools' transformation

Asset mapping is a key component of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) that involves identifying the strengths and resources that exist within a community. Asset mapping is relevant in transforming rural schools by identifying the unique assets and resources that can be leveraged to address the challenges faced by these schools. Rural schools often face significant challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers (Hlalele, 2012; Tayyaba, 2012; Mukwevho, 2018). However, they also have unique strengths and resources that can be mobilised to drive positive change. Therefore, asset mapping as one of the assumptions can help identify the strengths and resources within the rural school community. This can include identifying community members with relevant skills and expertise, such as retired teachers or professionals in related fields. Asset mapping can also involve identifying local organisations and businesses that can provide additional resources and support to the school. By identifying and leveraging these assets and resources, ABCD can create sustainable solutions tailored to the rural school's specific needs and circumstances.

By highlighting the unique strengths and resources that exist within the rural school community, ABCD can create a sense of empowerment and engagement among community members. This can help create a more resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered community that is better equipped to address the challenges the rural schools face. Overall, asset mapping is a critical component of ABCD that can be used to transform rural schools by identifying and leveraging the unique strengths and resources of the school community.

3.2.3 Asset mobilisation and rural schools' transformation

Asset mobilisation is a critical component of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) that can be used to transform rural schools. As discussed above, rural schools often face significant challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers (Hlalele, 2012; Tayyaba, 2012; Mukwevho, 2018). However, they also have unique strengths and resources that can be leveraged to drive positive change. Asset mobilisation enables community members to work collaboratively to develop solutions that build on their capabilities as assets.

The argument here is that asset mobilisation can help create sustainable solutions tailored to the rural school's specific needs and circumstances. By leveraging the unique strengths and resources of the school community, ABCD can create solutions that are more likely to be effective and sustainable in the long term. This can help address the challenges rural schools face and promote positive change. Another argument favouring asset mobilisation is that it can help foster a sense of pride and ownership among community members. Using the school community's unique strengths and resources to drive positive change creates a sense of empowerment and engagement among community members. On the other hand, it can also promote a more resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered community that is better equipped to address the challenges the rural school faces rather than waiting for external solutions. Therefore, one can argue that this is a critical component of ABCD that can be used to transform rural schools by leveraging the unique assets and resources of the school community to create sustainable solutions to their problems.

3.2.4 Capacity building and rural schools' transformation

Capacity building is a component of ABCD that is capable of transforming rural schools. It involves developing the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to sustain positive change. This can include developing the skills of community members, such as parents, teachers, and students, to create a sense of ownership over the development of the school. Capacity building can also involve creating opportunities for ongoing community involvement and support to ensure that the community drives the school's development (Nel, 2015). By building the capacity of community members and developing their own skills and knowledge, ABCD can create a self-sufficient and empowered community that can drive positive change from within towards addressing the challenges faced by the schools.

Another argument is that it can help shift the focus away from external aid and towards developing internal resources and capabilities. By building the capacity of community members, ABCD can create a community that is less reliant on external aid. This can help create a more sustainable development model driven by the community and tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the rural school. Therefore, capacity building is a critical component of ABCD that can be used to transform rural schools by developing the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to sustain positive change, creating a more resilient and empowered community, and promoting a sustainable model of development that is driven by the schools' community.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has the potential to transform rural schools by empowering communities to identify and leverage their own strengths and resources to improve education outcomes. The components of ABCD, including community engagement, asset mapping, asset mobilisation, and capacity building, can address the challenges rural schools face, such as limited resources, teacher shortages, and lack of access to social and educational amenities. By involving community members in the process of identifying and addressing these challenges, ABCD can create a sense of ownership and commitment among community members towards improving education outcomes.

The study also concludes that ABCD can create sustainable solutions tailored to the rural school's specific needs and circumstances. By leveraging the unique strengths and resources of the school community, ABCD can create solutions that are more likely to be effective and sustainable in the long term. Capacity building can help to create a more resilient and empowered community that is better equipped to address the challenges faced by the school. The study argues that ABCD provides a holistic and community-driven approach to transforming rural schools, which can lead to positive and long-lasting change. The major knowledge is that the study has been able to highlight the potential of ABCD to transform rural schools and promote positive change in rural education outcomes.

Based on the conclusion of the study, several recommendations were made to the leadership of rural schools in South Africa:

- To promote the transformation of rural schools. The first recommendation is to increase community involvement in the process of identifying and addressing the challenges faced by the school. This can be achieved through community engagement and asset mapping, which can create a sense of ownership and commitment among community members towards improving education outcomes.
- To improve teacher retention in rural schools. This can be achieved by developing capacity-building programs that provide teachers with the skills and resources needed to thrive in rural school settings. By investing in the development of teachers, rural schools can improve the quality of education and promote positive outcomes for students.
- To enhance student outcomes by creating a more holistic and community-driven approach to education. This can be achieved through asset mobilisation and capacity building, which can create sustainable solutions tailored to the school community's specific needs and circumstances. By empowering communities to identify and leverage their strengths and resources, rural schools can promote positive change and improve student education outcomes.
- To increase community involvement, improve teacher retention, and enhance student outcomes as key strategies for transforming rural schools. By adopting a holistic and community-driven approach to education, rural schools can create sustainable solutions tailored to the school community's specific needs and circumstances.

5. Acknowledgement

There are no acknowledgments to declare.

6. Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts, competing or financial interests that could potentially affect the outcome, production, interpretation, or result in any liabilities.

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