

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The current study compared teachers' school-based psychosocial support following their participation in STAR. The thematic analysis revealed that teachers used asset-based competencies to address barriers resourcefully. The findings provide empirical evidence of how teachers can function as protective resources to promote psychosocial support in the face of adversity.

I firstly refer to the initial theoretical assumptions in relation to empirical evidence. Thereafter, I present findings that lead to insight in teachers' implementation of the asset-based approach for school-based psychosocial support. I discuss possible contributions of the current study on both a theoretical and practical level and refer to potential limitations of the current study. Lastly, I make recommendations for future research and practice, and for training and development.

7.2 REVISITING THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Based on my review of existing literature, I formulated initial theoretical assumptions for the current study. I next query these initial assumptions in relation to the findings.

Theoretical assumption 1: Each school-community context functions as a system, consisting of various subsystems that are interconnected and dynamically influence each other. Within the framework of this assumption, I was able to view and compare each school-community context as a whole and obtain a better understanding of the interrelationships between the different subsystems in each of the participating cases. Based on data obtained in the current study, this theoretical assumption was empirically confirmed that each case had distinctive influences, relationships, assets and barriers that were connected to each other in unique ways. The dynamic interrelatedness in each school-

community context was confirmed through the community maps that the teachers in each school-community context created. Their community maps illustrated unique relationships between the school and the various subsystems in their communities. Each participating case consisted of educational institutions, local businesses, health organisations and faith-based organisations that influenced each other in unique ways. The asset-based initiatives at each participating school seemingly influenced the community; for example, community members reportedly became involved and local business provided their support, which again gave rise to psychosocial support. However, irrespective of context, the teachers established networks and partnerships between schools and community organisations.

I posit that this finding, namely that each participating school-community context functions as a system consisting of various interconnected subsystems (with the dynamic influences of both assets and barriers), could be transferred to school-community contexts similar to those of the four participating cases in the current study (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Schofield, 2002).

Theoretical assumption 2: Both assets and barriers are present in each of the four school-community systems that participated in the study.

a) The presence of assets in school communities.

As evident from data in the current study, teachers identified various assets and resources in different subsystems within their schools and communities (see Chapter 4, theme 1). The identified categories of assets were similar in all four schools. Teachers in all the schools identified individual assets in their classrooms (for example children), the school context (for example teachers and other personnel) and their communities (parents and community members). Furthermore, teachers in all four schools identified similar types of community resources, which included physical resources (for example buildings, apparatus and equipment); natural and environmental resources (for example a dam, under-utilised land, fertile soil); community organisations and institutions (for example faith-based organisations, educational institutions, health-related organisations, local businesses, non-government organisations and government organisations). In the community organisations and institutions subcategory, the rural secondary school only identified local businesses with the intention to mobilise for psychosocial support. A possible reason could be that rural schools (as in the case of the rural school in the study) may have fewer community organisations and

institutions available as resources in their communities than those in urban communities (for example the two urban primary schools and the informal settlement primary school).

Framing findings through an asset-based lens, I posit that teachers could identify both individual assets and community resources that can result in the mobilisation of assets and resources for psychosocial support (see theoretical assumption 3). Although teachers in all four schools identified both individual assets and community resources, specific assets and resources across contexts differed. Specific individual assets (traits, strengths, talents, skills and competencies) differed from individual to individual. For example, teachers from the informal settlement primary school identified the potential of children as peer educators; teachers from the rural secondary school identified practical skills in children; teachers in one urban primary school referred to children's helpfulness; and teachers in the other urban primary school identified the progress that children made on an academic level. In addition, community resources differed according to each unique school-community context, for example teachers from the rural secondary school and one of the urban primary schools identified fertile soil as a natural resource while teachers from the other urban primary school identified water as an available natural resource. The ways in which internal assets and community resources are identified warrants further exploration in future studies.

b) The presence of socio-economic barriers in school communities.

The barriers in each of the four participating school-community contexts are evident from the findings. Barriers between schools varied according to each school's unique context and circumstances. Teachers in all four schools identified barriers related to socio-economic factors, which include the presence of HIV/AIDS (evident in the informal settlement primary school, the rural secondary school and one of the urban primary schools); financial constraints due to poverty and unemployment (evident in all four schools); and child abuse (evident in the informal settlement primary school and the two urban primary schools). Although teachers in all four schools identified socio-economic barriers in their school-community contexts, the barriers were different. Plausibly the teachers identified the socio-economic barriers according to the priorities of the needs in their communities at the time of the research.

In the current study, the teachers from the informal settlement primary school and one urban primary school identified HIV/AIDS, financial constraints due to poverty and unemployment,

and child abuse as socio-economic barriers in their communities. Their asset-based interventions therefore focused on addressing these barriers resourcefully. Teachers from the rural secondary school identified HIV/AIDS and financial constraints due to poverty and unemployment as the main socio-economic barriers in their school-community context. Teachers from the other urban primary school identified financial constraints due to poverty and unemployment and child abuse as the main socio-economic barriers in their school-community context. The teachers in this urban primary school therefore focused on establishing support initiatives for financially vulnerable children and families in their communities and building networks with external parties to address child abuse.

With specific reference to HIV/AIDS as socio-economic barrier, teachers in Schools 1, 2 and 3 placed a different emphasis on the underlying influences of HIV/AIDS in their school-community contexts, as summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: HIV/AIDS-related barriers identified by teachers from four school-community contexts.

HIV/AIDS-related barriers	Informal settlement primary school	Rural secondary school	Urban primary school	Urban primary school
Growing presence of HIV/AIDS	✓	✓	✓	
HIV/AIDS as barrier to learning	✓		✓	
Changing roles of individuals	✓		✓	
Beliefs, customs and traditions with regard to HIV/AIDS	✓	✓		
Stigmatisation and discrimination	✓		✓	

The rural secondary school focused on traditional beliefs and customs as HIV/AIDS-related barriers, which could be explained by reported witchcraft practices in the community and community members' scepticism in the scientific existence of HIV/AIDS. Because community members reportedly do not believe in the scientific existence of HIV/AIDS, discrimination and stigmatisation tends to be rare in their rural community. I posit that similar challenges in the context of HIV/AIDS may be encountered in other rural communities in South Africa, where witchcraft practices persist and exposure to westernised scientific knowledge may be limited. In line with these HIV/AIDS-related beliefs, teachers from the informal settlement primary school reported that parents were often reluctant to speak to their children about HIV/AIDS-related matters. The reluctance of parents to speak about

HIV/AIDS could possibly be a result of the reported lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS in the informal settlement at the time of the study. On the other hand, teachers from one urban primary school reported fewer traditional views and practices with regard to HIV/AIDS. However, these working assumptions should be investigated further in future studies.

c) The presence of barriers related to teaching.

Although teachers from all four participating school-community contexts identified barriers related to stressors to teaching, the specific barriers in this category varied according to each case's unique context, as summarised in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Stressors to teaching identified by teachers from four schools.

Stressors of teaching	Informal settlement primary school	Rural secondary school	Urban primary school	Urban primary school
Workload and related time constraints of teaching	✓	✓	✓	✓
Attrition of group members		✓		
Poor parental involvement and communication		✓	✓	✓
Context-specific factor: Teachers' homes are not in communities where they work	✓	✓		
Context-specific factor: Pressure from external bodies		✓		
Context-specific factor: Shortage of classrooms, high teacher-to-child ratios and absence of teachers			✓	

Based on the results presented in Table 7.2, it seems as if the teachers regard workload, limited time, and poor parental involvement and communication as stressors of teaching irrespective of the school context (urban/rural school or primary/secondary school). In the rural secondary school, teachers reported the attrition of group members as a challenge to the implementation and management of asset-based initiatives. Teachers reportedly left the school to pursue career opportunities in urban areas. Teachers in the rural secondary school and informal settlement primary school experienced the fact that they lived relatively far from the schools where they worked, as a stressor of teaching. In the only participating rural secondary school, the teachers identified pressure from the Department of Education to implement curriculum and to improve academic results as stressors of teaching. This context-

specific factor was not identified by teachers from the three primary schools. It seems that pressure from external bodies (such as the Department of Education) is much higher in secondary than in primary secondary schools. Teachers in one urban primary school reported a shortage of classrooms, high teacher-to-child ratios and teacher absenteeism as stressors of teaching. This urban primary school is funded by government and therefore seems to be a school of choice for many parents, which leads to high numbers of children being enrolled in the school. However, this working assumption could be further explored in future studies.

Theoretical assumption 3: Identifying existing assets and barriers could enable teachers to mobilise identified assets for psychosocial support. Findings indicate that following STAR, teachers in all four schools were seemingly able to mobilise identified assets and resources in their school-community contexts to address barriers. Firstly, teachers demonstrated the ability to mobilise individual assets. Teachers in all four schools mobilised their own assets (signified as asset-based competencies). They shared acquired knowledge and available resources with colleagues, children, parents and community members on relevant psychosocial matters. Teachers informed colleagues, children, parents and community members about HIV/AIDS-related matters and referred them to the necessary resources to obtain relevant support. In addition, teachers mobilised their individual assets to provide emotional and spiritual support to children, parents and community members (for example through home visits and prayers).

Furthermore, teachers in all four schools reportedly mobilised assets in children, parents and community members. Children's practical skills were utilised for vegetable garden initiatives. The teachers persuaded parents and community members to help in their vegetable gardens (informal settlement primary school and rural secondary school); a beadwork initiative (rural secondary school), and in cleaning classrooms and starting food kiosks (urban primary school).

Teachers in all four schools seemingly mobilised natural and environmental resources in the form of under-utilised land on their school grounds to start vegetable gardens. Similarly, teachers in all four schools mobilised physical resources in their asset-based initiatives. Teachers from the informal settlement primary school transformed an under-utilised room into a counselling room; teachers from the rural secondary school made an under-utilised classroom available to the members of the beadwork initiative; teachers from one urban

primary school organised additional classrooms in an assembly hall and teachers from the other urban primary school transformed an under-utilised building into a kitchen.

Crucially, teachers in all four schools seemingly used networks and partnerships with organisations and business within their immediate community as well as on a broader level to mobilise assets. I posit that when teachers identify barriers (as well as previously unrecognised assets and resources), this identification could lead to the mobilisation of assets and resources through networks to address barriers through psychosocial support.

Theoretical assumption 4: Teachers would be able to provide psychosocial support following an asset-based intervention. Findings from the study confirm that after the teachers participated in STAR, they provided psychosocial support by identifying, mobilising and managing assets and resources. The outcomes of the asset-based process reportedly included emotional and spiritual support, material support, participation of children, parents and community members in various asset-based initiatives, knowledge sharing and skills acquirement, and supportive school-based community relationships. The school-based psychosocial support findings demonstrate that STAR (based on the asset-based approach) is an example of a workable intervention enabling teachers to identify, mobilise and manage assets and barriers in promoting psychosocial support.

7.3 THEORISING THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION OF THE STUDY

In this section, I theorise in terms of the primary research question of the current study, namely: *How do teachers in four schools implement the asset-based approach aimed at school-based psychosocial support?* Figure 7.1 graphically represents my theorising.

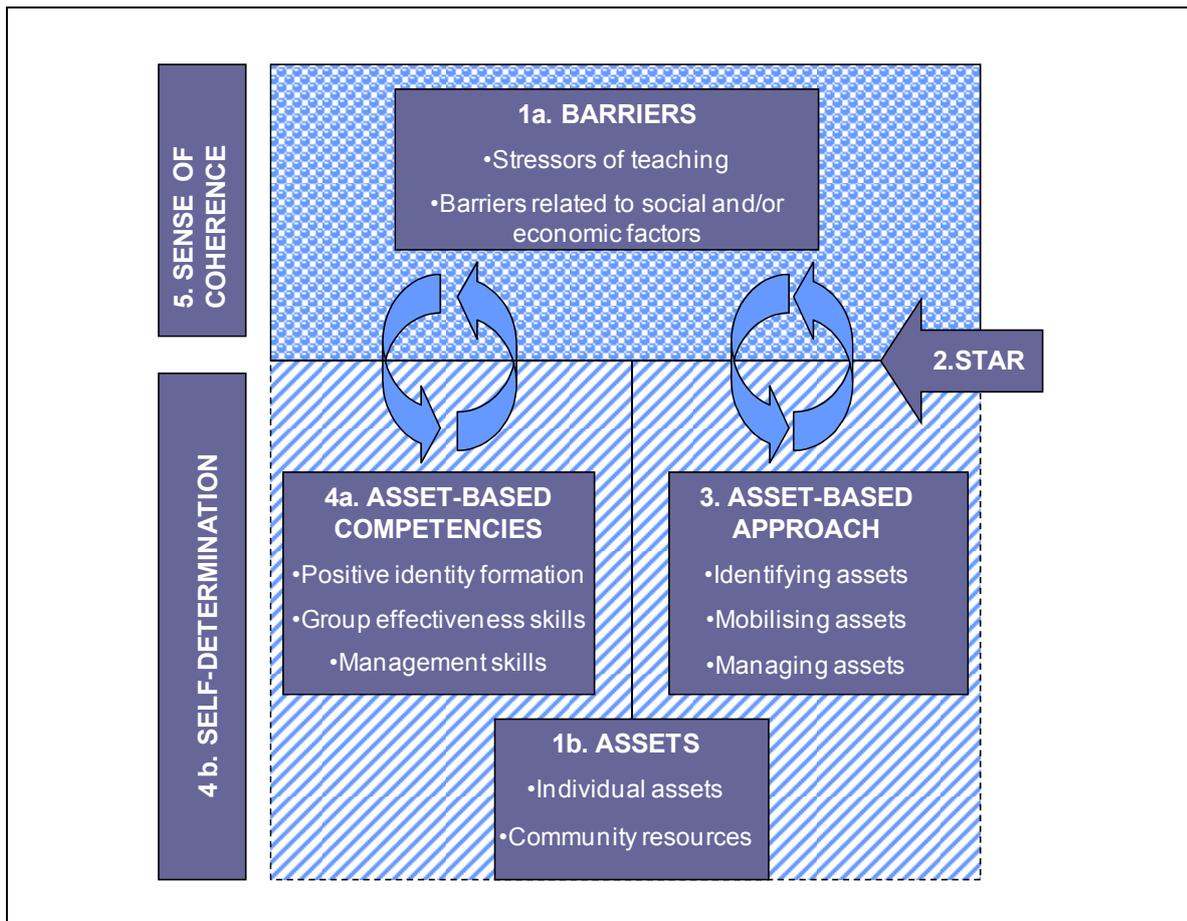


Figure 7.1: Theorising the primary research question of the study.

When our research team initially entered the research field, barriers were evident in all school-community contexts. The participating school-community cases were dominated by barriers, including variables characteristic of high incidences of HIV and AIDS, poverty and unemployment (all synonymous with chronic, cumulative risk). During the initial phase of the current study, participating teachers voiced problems, needs and barriers within their school-community contexts. In terms of the current study, the teachers voiced barriers as specific to stressors of teaching and socio-economic barriers (see 1a in Figure 7.1).

At the onset of the longitudinal study, although assets were available in each school-community context, teachers seemingly did not mobilise existing assets and resources to provide psychosocial support (see number 1b in Figure 7.1). However, an assumption of STAR (see 2 in Figure 7.1) is that teachers could provide psychosocial support by implementing the asset-based approach (identifying, mobilising and managing individual assets as well as community resources) to address barriers (see 3 in Figure 7.1). This

assumption was empirically supported as teachers identified, mobilised and managed individual assets and community resources for psychosocial support in their school-community contexts. I consequently posit that the presence of chronic, cumulative barriers serves as prerequisite (signalling a need) for feasibly implementing an asset-based intervention with teachers.

In addition, I posit that the competencies teachers demonstrated can be viewed as asset-based competencies. I posit that asset-based competencies for psychosocial support include: positive identity formation (personal growth and reflective thinking, commitment, optimism, accomplishment and pride, as well as feelings of competence and enhanced self-confidence); group effectiveness skills (group communication skills, group roles and responsibilities, and positive group relations); as well as management skills (goal-setting skills, problem-solving skills, networking skills, leadership skills, and agency towards pastoral support and care) (see 4a in Figure 7.1).

Teachers demonstrated self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002) in actively searching for and engaging in challenges in their school-community contexts. Simultaneously, the teachers actualised asset-based competencies. By demonstrating their asset-based competencies, they fulfilled the underlying psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy (see 4b in Figure 7.1). Implementing the asset-based approach may have enhanced teachers' sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) as they viewed the existence of barriers as being comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (see 5 in Figure 7.1). Teachers seemed to subsequently address barriers at an intrapersonal and, interpersonal level and by deploying management skills (see 4a in Figure 7.1). I link these different levels of addressing barriers to teachers' asset-based competencies. In this regard, I argue that teachers' asset-based competency of positive identity formation was utilised to address barriers on an intrapersonal level; their group effectiveness skills addressed barriers on an interpersonal level and their management skills were deployed to address barriers on a level of administrating barriers efficiently.

I therefore formulate the following working assumptions: a) teachers' positive identity formation is indicative of competence to apply skills, knowledge and capacities to address barriers; b) teachers' group effectiveness skills fulfil a psychological need for relatedness, in the sense that teachers support and care for others and are supported and cared for in their

groups; c) by applying management skills, teachers take charge of their lives, take ownership for psychosocial support, and concurrently fulfil a psychological need for autonomy; d) teachers' identified needs or barriers may lead to their willingness to promote psychosocial support and thus participation in an intervention (such as STAR) and; d) when teachers have asset-based knowledge, they may attain an enhanced sense of coherence over needs as a result of asset-based competencies and a self-determination stance. However, these suppositions need further exploration in future research studies.

7.4 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Prior to the study, little was known about specific assets (as identified by teachers) in school-community contexts. Similarly, knowledge on barriers that teachers would acknowledge and choose to address was limited. In addition, the way in which teachers could implement the asset-based approach to provide psychosocial support and promote resilience was an area that required research. Likewise, teachers' role for mobilising schools as protective resources of psychosocial support needed research. The current study provides empirical evidence to extend existing knowledge bases of the asset-based approach, resilience and school-based psychosocial support.

7.4.1 Asset-based approach

The current study contributes to the existing knowledge base of the asset-based approach by highlighting social capital as potential outcome of the implementation of the asset-based approach. The findings indicate how teachers could link various resources through building partnerships and establishing networks, in order to promote psychosocial support and resilience. The potential contribution therefore lies in the notion that partnerships and networks (as basis of the asset-based approach) could be indicators of social capital in school-community contexts.

In addition, the current study may contribute to existing knowledge on the asset-based approach in terms of asset-based competencies. Teachers demonstrated competencies during the implementation of the asset-based approach, which manifest as asset-based competencies.

As stated earlier, these asset-based competencies could be summarised in three categories, namely positive identity formation, group effectiveness skills and management skills. Moreover, the current study highlights a dynamic relationship between asset-based competencies and fundamental psychological needs (competence, relatedness and autonomy) signified in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). However, these asset-based competencies and the dynamic relationship between the fundamental psychological needs, warrant further investigation in future research.

Within the context of mobilising assets to address barriers, as fundamental principle of the asset-based approach, the current study highlights the potential interconnectedness between the asset-based approach and a sense of coherence. Findings suggest that the implementation of the asset-based approach could result in enhanced eustress (Simmons & Nelson, 2005) and sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993) when faced with and addressing barriers. I recommend that these findings be further explored in future studies.

7.4.2 Resilience and school-based psychosocial support

The current study can contribute to the existing knowledge base in the field of resilience in schools and school-based psychosocial support. The findings suggest that resilience in schools could be promoted by teacher-driven psychosocial support initiatives.

This study can firstly contribute to greater insight in teachers' perspective on the potential assets and resources available in school-community contexts that could be mobilised for psychosocial support and the promotion of resilience. Assets in school-community contexts, as identified by teachers, range from individual strengths and assets in families, schools and communities. Teachers have the potential of mobilising individual strengths (for example in children, teachers, parents and community members), natural and environmental resources (for example open land), and physical resources (for example buildings, apparatus and equipment); and for building networks and partnerships with various individuals and organisations within their communities (for example community organisations, businesses and institutions as well as neighbouring schools) but also within a broader context (for example international organisations).

Findings provide empirical evidence that teachers (in a school context) can mobilise resources in order for schools to serve as protective resources to promote resilience through school-based psychosocial support. In this regard, teachers (in a school context) are well placed to put networks in place for psychosocial support. Teachers can thus initiate networks and partnerships with organisations and institutions, for example community businesses, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, community organisations, educational institutions and health-related organisations.

Furthermore, the current study may contribute to insight in the type of psychosocial support that could be expected from similar school-based interventions. Teachers could promote psychosocial support and resilience in a number of ways such as:

- emotional and spiritual care and support to community members (home visits, care and support);
- material support to HIV/AIDS-affected and needy households (food and clothing parcels);
- mobilising the participation of children, parents and community members in various asset-based initiatives (a school-community vegetable garden);
- sharing knowledge and skills (for example on HIV/AIDS-related matters);
- building supportive school-based community relationships (enhanced parental involvement and communication).

Moreover, findings in the study shed light on barriers that teachers in the current study encounter daily. Barriers encountered can be categorised in two main categories, namely stressors of teaching and socio-economic factors. Stressors of teaching include workloads and related time constraints of teaching, attrition of group members, and poor parental involvement and communication, together with context-specific factors, for example that teachers' homes are not in the communities where they work, pressure from external bodies and shortage of classrooms, high teacher-to-child ratios and the absence of teachers. Socio-economic barriers include HIV/AIDS, financial constraints due to poverty and unemployment, and child abuse.

Findings also provide insight in potential ways in which teachers can address barriers on an intrapersonal level, interpersonal level and by deploying management skills. Addressing barriers on an intrapersonal level could include optimistic thinking and solution-oriented

beliefs, believing in the own skills and competencies as well as demonstrating personal commitment in mobilising individual assets to the benefit of themselves and others. On an interpersonal level, barriers could be addressed by building supportive relations, providing emotional support within a group, engaging in open communication and teamwork, sharing responsibilities, involving role-players, recruiting new members and mobilising assets within a team. Addressing barriers by the deployment of management skills could include problem-solving, setting goals, managing time effectively and networking with various role players.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

I next discuss the limitations of the study. I refer to limitations with regard to selection of participating teachers, complexity of teachers' competencies, differences in language and culture, and the researcher as an educational psychologist.

7.5.1 Selection of participating teachers

Although each of the four participating school-community contexts consisted of unique characteristics, challenges and assets, the four participating cases shared similar characteristic socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and high HIV/AIDS prevalence, which limits the transferability of findings to resource scarce contexts with similar barriers. Moreover, the participants were predominantly female teachers (see Table 3.6 to view the particulars of participating teachers in each case), implying that the current study is limited to a specific career and to a lesser extent, limited to gender. I acknowledge that the current study's findings could have differed in other contexts and with participants in different careers. However, the aim of the current study was specifically to understand the way in which teachers implemented the asset-based approach aimed at school-based psychosocial support. The onus of transferability therefore resides with the reader in determining similarity in corresponding cases. In this regard, I aimed to provide the reader with rich descriptions of each case (Janesick, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Participating teachers in the current study consisted of a specific group of teachers partnering in the broad, longitudinal STAR study. Teachers were therefore familiar with the purpose of the current study. This could have led to a possible Hawthorne effect (Cohen *et al.*, 2003) in

the sense that teachers were aware that they were under observation and might have wanted to respond favourably in order to satisfy the research team. In a similar way, the presence of the research team as well as growing relationships could have influenced participants' responses and behaviour (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000; Patton, 2002).

7.5.2 Complexity of teachers' competencies

Another limitation of the current study is related to the complexity of the teachers' demonstrated competencies. I acknowledge the dynamic nature of their personalities, skills, knowledge and other variables that could have influenced their demonstrated asset-based competencies in the current study. Therefore, one of the limitations relates to the possibility that the competencies that teachers demonstrated were not necessarily asset-based competencies. These demonstrated competencies could arguably have been intrinsic competencies or personality traits that teachers inherently possessed prior to the STAR intervention and which in fact might have motivated them to participate in supporting vulnerability.

Additionally, the teachers' demonstration of asset-based competencies was not measured specifically, but rather emerged as a phenomenon. In this regard, Hall (2002) indicates that the effectiveness and success of collaboration and partnerships is a complex construct to measure, as the perception of effectiveness varies amongst different members. It is important to acknowledge that one cannot quantify such participating teachers' demonstrated competencies as a direct consequence of the implementation of the asset-based approach. Literature agrees that it is often difficult to argue with certainty the likely effects of collaborative community-based intervention efforts at individual and community level, as various factors in the broader context often exist that could have an influence on observed changes (Kreuter, Lezin & Young, 2000; Minkler, Vásquez, Warner, Steussey & Facente, 2006). Kegeles *et al.* (2005) report similar challenges to the evaluation and measurement of their outcomes on community-based interventions. They state that it is difficult, as one cannot always attribute change to the specific intervention that was implemented. In their study, they attempted to develop evaluation tools, but found this problematic as well.

I aimed to address this limitation of the complexity of teachers' competencies by providing the reader with detailed descriptions of teachers' observed and reported behaviour and competencies during the implementation of the asset-based approach. Furthermore, I compared results of the current study with the indicators that were put in place to determine the effectiveness of participatory research and interventions. However, I recommend that the phenomenon of asset-based competencies be researched in more depth in future studies.

7.5.3 Differences with regard to language and culture

I entered the research field as an Afrikaans-speaking middle-class woman, whose culture, background and home language was widely different from those of the participating teachers (see Table 3.6 to view the particulars of participating teachers in each case). Literature agrees that it is important to keep potential ethical considerations in mind when conducting research across culture and language (Hole, 2007; Koné *et al.*, 2000; Muula, 2005; Patton, 2002; Redmond, 2003; Shklarov, 2007; Sullivan *et al.*, 2005; Temple, 2002).

As indicated in Chapter 3 (see 3.8.4), I attempted to address this limitation of language and culture differences by acknowledging it in the first place. I reflected on my viewpoints and was open to expanding my understanding of participants' life worlds. I made use of a research journal to reflect on my possible preconceived ideas, my background and frame of reference. I also engaged in debriefing sessions with my supervisors and co-researcher. In addition, I attempted to obtain an understanding of each school-community context's culture, background and perceptions (Hoosan & Collins, 2004). I built open and trusting relationships with participating teachers, which assisted me in verifying any possible uncertainties. I also made use of member checking to ensure that I understood and reflected teachers' perspectives truthfully (Fritz & Smit, 2008; Hole, 2007; Janesick, 2000; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Poland, 2002).

7.5.4 The role of the researcher

Despite being a researcher in this study, a co-researcher for related studies in STAR and a facilitator during the intervention phase of the current study, I am also a practicing educational psychologist. It was therefore important to distinguish between these various roles. One way in which I addressed this challenge was through constant awareness, self-reflection and debriefing sessions with my supervisors (Arber, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hole, 2007).

Our research team spent extensive time in the research field and therefore I became more accustomed to the participating teachers in the current study. Subsequently, I could gradually move in the direction of an insider observer role. Similarly, participants seemingly became more comfortable with me as researcher; they thus shared their stories honestly and invited us into their worlds. Although I attempted to guard against observer bias, I also acknowledge the fact that observational research is based on interpersonal interaction and therefore cannot be solely objective in nature (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). In this regard, I aimed to be open towards participating teachers' views, but in the same time attempted not to become too involved or too close to participating teachers in the current study.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, I make recommendations for future research and practice and for training and development.

7.6.1 Recommendations for future research

Based on the current study's findings and generated working assumptions, I recommend the following possible future research studies:

- The current study reported on unique influences and interconnectedness between different subsystems in four unique school-community contexts. The findings highlighted unique relationships between assets, resources and barriers prevalent in these systems. Future

studies could further explore potential dynamic influences and relationships between subsystems in different school-community contexts.

- The findings of the current study argue the prevalence of both assets and barriers in each of the participating school-community contexts. Assets are broadly categorised in individual assets and community resources. Barriers are categorised in two main categories, viz. socio-economic barriers and stressors to teaching. Future studies could investigate the transferability of these two broad categories of assets and barriers in different contexts. Additionally, future studies could further explore context-specific barriers and assets with regard to different school-community contexts (for example rural/urban schools and primary/secondary schools).
- The current study found that existing assets and barriers could help teachers to mobilise such identified assets for psychosocial support. Future studies could explore transferability of this finding to other school-community settings or extend STAR to other contexts.
- The findings of the current study show that participating teachers were able to provide psychosocial support following STAR. Future studies could implement STAR (or similar strength-based interventions) with different teachers in diverse circumstances to establish the possibility of transferability to other school-community contexts.
- Participating teachers in the current study mainly consisted of female teachers. A possible future study could extend STAR to predominantly male teachers.
- Participants in the current study were teachers. A possible future study could be conducted on the way in which participants in other professions may implement the asset-based approach for psychosocial-related support.
- Based on the outcomes of change and development in the current study, a follow-up study may be conducted to determine the sustainability of established asset-based initiatives in each of the four school-community contexts.
- In the current study, our research team acted as facilitators in conducting asset-based workshop/intervention sessions. Ebersöhn and Ferreira (forthcoming) are currently

collaborating with participating teachers to act as facilitators for similar asset-based workshop/intervention sessions in neighbouring schools. A future study could investigate the role of teachers as facilitators for asset-based workshop/intervention sessions.

- Although teachers identified and mobilised children's strengths to assist in their asset-based initiatives, the findings of the current study suggest that children were not fully utilised. I therefore recommend that future studies focus on the potential contributing role that children could play in asset-based school-based initiatives. Similarly, within the context of mobilising children's strengths, a future study could explore the advantages and disadvantages of mobilising children as peer educators in the context of psychosocial support.
- The findings suggest that participating teachers demonstrated certain competencies while implementing the asset-based approach, which I posited as asset-based competencies. I suggest that a follow-up study be conducted on the identified asset-based competencies, categorised as positive identity formation, group effectiveness skills and management skills.
- I recommend that my working assumption with regard to teachers' demonstrated self-determination in exploring barriers and engaging in challenges in their school-community contexts warrants further investigation. Future studies can explore the influence of teachers' positive identity formation and their apparent competence in applying their skills, knowledge and competencies in addressing barriers, teachers' group effectiveness skills for fulfilling the psychological need for relatedness as well as the application of teachers' management skills in fulfilling the psychological need for autonomy.
- In the study, I posited that when the asset-based approach is implemented, the identified asset-based competencies are present and subsequent psychological needs fulfilled, it could lead to increased levels of well-being, empowerment, resilience, flourishing and optimal functioning, and subsequently to community change and development. I recommend that future research focus on this formulated working assumption.
- I recommend that more research be conducted on the possibility that an asset-based approach orientation could lead to greater eustress and sense of coherence when teachers are faced with and address barriers.

7.6.2 Recommendations for practice

Existing literature highlights various challenges with regard to teachers' pastoral role. Different opinions exist on whether or not teachers should be or are capable of providing psychosocial support (Bhana *et al.*, 2006; Hall, 2004; Harley *et al.*, 2000; Jansen, 2001; Loots & Mguni, 2008; Ogina, 2007; Schierhout *et al.*, 2004; Smit & Fritz, 2008). However, teachers are nevertheless well positioned to act as protective resources in providing psychosocial support and promoting resilience in schools (Adelman, 1996; Bhana *et al.*, 2006; Condly, 2006; Doll & Lyon, 1998; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, forthcoming; Ferreira, 2006, 2008; Giese *et al.*, 2003b; Lambert, 1991; Loots & Mguni, 2008; Mguni, 2006; Richter, 2003a; Schorr, 1997; Swart & Pettipher, 2001; Wilson *et al.*, 2002).

Based on the outcomes of the current study, I argue that STAR is one way in which teachers could be enabled on a practical level to facilitate the implementation of the asset-based approach (identifying, mobilising and managing assets) to address barriers and build networks across systems in order to promote psychosocial support and buoy resilience in their schools and communities. I therefore recommend that the application of STAR be extended to teachers in other schools, which could lead to similar outcomes than obtained in this study. In addition, I recommend that community-based organisations (for example youth organisations, NGOs, faith-based organisations and health institutions) facilitate STAR in their communities, which could result in psychosocial support on a broader scale.

7.6.3 Recommendations for future training and development

Based on the findings, I recommend that teacher training programmes and in-service teacher training include content on asset-based competencies (positive identity formation, group effectiveness skills and management skills) in order to enable teachers to promote resilience in schools by means of psychosocial support. In addition, training programmes could make prospective teachers and teachers in practice aware of possible barriers (stressors of teaching and socio-economic barriers) as well as potential individual assets (for example in children, teachers, parents and community members) and community resources (for example physical resources and natural resources) they could be expected to encounter in school-community

contexts. Teachers could be trained to identify, mobilise and manage both individual assets and community resources to address barriers. Furthermore, teachers could be trained on building networks and partnerships in school-community contexts, by mobilising assets and resources. Moreover, the study suggests the potential of teachers to act as research partners in similar future research studies. I recommend that tertiary institutions progressively establish research partnerships with schools and communities.

In addition to teachers, individuals in other helping professions may also be trained in the theory on the asset-based approach, resilience and psychosocial support, in order to support vulnerable communities. Individuals that could potentially benefit from both formal and informal training include employees and volunteers from faith-based organisations, NGOs and health organistaions.

7.7 FINAL REFLECTION

Against the background of the many stressors to teaching and socio-economic barriers that teachers face, the current study attempted to demonstrate a new understanding of the application of the asset-based approach as one way in which teachers may address these barriers and promote psychosocial support in school-community contexts.

Despite many challenges, barriers and sometimes frustration on my road, I end my journey by expressing appreciation for the assets and resources in my life that I could mobilise to support and guide me in this worthwhile and life-changing experience. I am thankful for the participants and their contributions. I conclude with Figure 7.1 representing the participants and researchers in this study.



Photograph 7.1

Participating teachers and our research team during the seminar in Port Elizabeth.

