CHALLENGING THE "APARTHEIDS" OF KNOWLEDGE

in Higher Education through Social Innovation

Joana Bezerra, Craig Paterson & Sharli Paphitis (Eds)

Chapter 3

The problem of power: The practical challenges of power dynamics and power distance in community engagement

Nicola Hayes

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,
RHODES UNIVERSITY

n.hayes@ru.ac.za

1. Introduction

The HE community engagement/volunteering sector space is continually looking for more equitable models of engagement where power and value commitment are shared, moving away from old paradigms of receiver and giver.

This paper is an autoethnographic exploration, grounded in practical experience of my perspective as the school head of a quintile 3 school in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, where I am involved with community engagement in a number of forms. It interrogates the power dynamics that are intertwined in the process, with my own power and powerlessness as a starting point. My interest in this study was sparked by a revelation that, despite my theoretical positional authority, I feel largely powerless in the community engagement arena as regards our school. This comes despite a strong sense of personal confidence, proficiency in public speaking and having English (in which almost all meetings are conducted) as my home language.

This paper critiques the extent to which it is possible to move away from the 'old charity/deficit' model, to a grassroots-up but mutually beneficial developmental approach. In particular, it examines the practical barriers to such a new

model, given the multi-layered power dynamics at play. Different engagement models are contrasted – those offered by various schools, organisations, businesses and the university – and the critical factors in creating a successful model with a sense of co-ownership are explored. Challenges that are faced in forming positive partnerships are highlighted, such as a lack of internal capacity; the multilingual environment in which we engage; the reality of high power distance in the secondary education milieu and the perceived gap between those with 'valued knowledge' (in particular those within the academy) and those without.

Possible solutions include the importance of a multi-layered approach both in the initial phases of project development, as well as during reflection. Possible solutions include the use of mini-meetings, questionnaires and informal discussions within the school in preparation for planning and reflection meetings. The importance of the inclusion of open questions, particularly in the planning phases, is also highlighted. Such techniques will hopefully mitigate against some of the factors which hinder honest interactions in these settings by decreasing power differentials both within the school and between the school and the partner organisations.

This study may have relevance not only to community engagements involving schools but to any engagement where there is an imbalance of power between the two partners, and specifically where there is a high power differential within one or more of the organisations.

By working towards planning and reflection processes in which strategies are engaged that actively work against the pre-existing hierarchies and power distances, open honest communication will be increased, and hopefully the time taken in setting up such processes will be repaid in smoother pilot programmes and greater chances of ongoing success.

2. Context

Two-and-a-half years ago, I was appointed as head of a non-fee-paying, quintile three school in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. The area has a high level of unemployment (42,3% amongst the youth in the municipal district of Makana), and in the environment from which the school draws its learners, 13,2% of households have no income at all according to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2011). Before I arrived at the school it had suffered a scourge of vandalism and neglect. Once a successful and proud school, it was now merely a skeleton of its former self with matric pass rates having plunged. Few classes had window panes, half the school had no electricity and there were three working toilets for girls and three for boys for approximately

1 000 learners. The effects of the absence of fire-fighting equipment was (and still is) evident in the top floor of the boys' toilets having been ravaged by a fire, leaving no roof or ceiling and gutters and the odd tile dangling precariously from charred pieces of timber. In both infrastructure and spirit of place, the school was depressed.

Luckily the city of Makhanda has the advantage of having many willing volunteers from all walks of life – from the retired to the unemployed, from past pupils to teachers in other schools. In addition, it has a number of organisations that are committed to education, including GADRA Education (Grahamstown Area District Relief Association), Rhodes University and a number of private and fee-paying public schools. Each of these institutions, along with countless individuals, has assisted in getting our school back on its feet. Their assistance has been much needed and is deeply appreciated, but this is not to say that such engagements have been without challenges. Thus, over the space of two-and-a-half years, I have had the opportunity to compare and contrast a number of engagement styles. This chapter will highlight some of the major challenges as well as some of the successes. Before delving into this comparison, however, I will sketch a picture of my position within the matrix of power and powerlessness as a 'receiver' in the community engagement arena.

(For details on the incidents that led me to consider my position and that of the school in terms of the power dynamics in community engagement, see Addendum A.)

3. Methodology

This study is autoethnographic in nature. Autoethnography holds that by merging the genre of autobiography with the discipline of ethnography, where the "narrator's lived experience is at the core of the story" (Raab, 2013:2), textured and nuanced facets of culture can be revealed. In combination with other similar or different stories, an accurate cultural picture can be painted. The story of the individual should shed light on the story of the culture as a whole.

Chang (2008) highlights the benefits of autoethnography as a methodology:

Autoethnography is becoming a useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings: e.g., educators, social workers, medical professionals, clergy, and counsellors. Benefits of autoethnography lie in three areas: (1) it offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and (3) it has a potential to transform self and others toward the cross-cultural coalition building. (Chang 2008:11)

In the context of community engagement in our school, the issue of "human relations in a multicultural setting" is central to understanding the dynamics at work. It is hoped that through the interrogation of my specific experience in this field, some light will be shed on how best to engage in this multicultural, power-embedded space.

Drawing from ethnography, three categories of 'other' are distinguished. This classification assists in mapping relationships with stakeholders in community engagement projects:

"others of similarity" (those with similar values and experiences to self), "others of difference" (those with different values and experiences from self), and "others of opposition" (those with values and experiences seemingly irreconcilable to self) (Ngunjiri, W., Hernandez, K.C. & Chang, H., 2010: unpagued).

It is likely that communication between oneself and others of similarity will be more honest and clear than with other 'others'. These are considerations that should affect the design of initial planning and reflection sessions.

4. My position in the matrix of power

Hierarchy is a dominant feature in South African schools, and indeed throughout our society. In terms of this hierarchy, I should theoretically feel strongly empowered compared to many others. In the community engagement field, however, I have felt disempowered by multiple factors including self-censure, expectations of others and responses of others. The realisations of the extent to which I have felt silenced in this arena is what sparked my interest in writing this chapter. It occurred to me that, if I feel disempowered in this space despite my supposed positions of power, how much more must others feel silenced, at a disadvantage and unable to speak the truth of the needs of their organisations. What follows is a dissection of the factors that should contribute to my sense of being empowered, followed by an examination of what undermines this. I also attempt to compare my position to others from different cultures operating in the same milieu.

4.1 *Factors contributing to a sense of empowerment*

Theoretically, I have a position of power as a school head.

"The original French and Raven (1959) bases of power model posited six bases of power; reward, coercion, legitimate, expert, referent, and informational (or persuasion; Raven, 1965)" (Raven, 1993: 227). Raven (1993: 227) later developed a more complex and nuanced model, which adjudges the effectiveness of the

power base in relation to multiple factors including the "implementation of the power strategies",

My professional power is, in theory, based on legitimate (as conferred by the position), expert (from qualifications) and coercive modes of power and on my ability, in general, to implement power strategies in the context of the school.

In addition to this, I have the advantages of white embodied privilege; I have English as my home language, and as English is used as the lingua franca in official meetings, this gives me an advantage over those for whom it is a second or third language. I have a Master's Degree in Education. Besides these extrinsic factors, as a Drama teacher, I have both innate and trained confidence, and have very little anxiety about speaking in public. Additionally, having been brought up by feminist parents, I was encouraged from a young age to speak my mind and fight for what I believed to be right.

This combination of factors should enable me to engage from a position of strength in most interactions.

Another factor that plays a role in engagements with others in a school context, however, is that of culture.

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (n.d.) identify four dimensions of culture, where a culture positioned on each of these six spectra has a significant effect on the way that individuals within that culture will relate to others. The six dimensions are:

1. Power distance index (acceptance of hierarchy)
2. Collectivism versus individualism
3. Femininity versus masculinity
4. Uncertainty avoidance index (face saving)
5. Long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation
6. Indulgence versus restraint

Of particular interest here are numbers one and four. Hofstede *et al.*'s power distance index measures "the extent to which *the less powerful members of organisations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally*". This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders.

Uncertainty avoidance, among other factors, indicates the extent to which members of a culture will seek to avoid public shame (both of themselves and others) (Hofstede, n.d.). For a culture that has a high Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), shame will be more significant than guilt. "Countries exhibiting strong UAI

maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour, and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas." **Figure 1** below indicates my positioning of myself relative to how I perceive my own culture in general as well as my perception of Afrikaans speaking white South Africans and isiXhosa speaking black South Africans with regard to four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, completed as part of my master's research. Although I discussed these perceptions with learners in my English and Drama classes in the course of a different study, and they agreed with my perception of their cultures, the power differential between me as the teacher and them as the learners is too great for their validation to carry much weight, so this should be seen purely as my personal perspective.

Bearing in mind the caveat above, my power-base in interactions with others of different cultures is further strengthened theoretically by the fact that I have very little respect for hierarchy as a concept (low score for power distance); I have a very high sense of individualism, and my uncertainty avoidance is extremely low.

Figure 1: My rating of South African cultures according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions

All of these factors combined should result in me feeling powerful and in control in most circumstances. However, this is not the case in the community engagement environment for multiple complex reasons.

In his more recent power/interaction model of personal influence, Raven (1993) identifies several power preferences and inhibitions of which cost and efforts, norms and values, and relation to self-perception are of relevance here.

With reference to the assessment of the cost of utilising influence strategies, Raven comments:

The agent must also examine the costs of the influence attempt – it may be effective, but at what costs ... The legitimacy of dependence ("I need your help") may lead to loss of respect and perhaps may imply an obligation to return the favour ..." (Raven, 1993:13).

In terms of community engagement, the cost that must always be considered is the potential of the organisation or individual choosing not to support the school at all if one is not prepared to accept their offer or project exactly as they had envisioned it. Furthermore, in a community engagement consultation, the cultural norm that one should not 'look a gift horse in the mouth' creates a barrier to honesty.

Further factors contributing to my sense of powerlessness in community engagement settings will be discussed below.

5. Community engagement, gifts, donations and volunteering

As expressed by the authors of *Literacy and Power: The Latin American Battleground*:

Before long [Paulo Freire] was made aware of the contradictions involved in charity work, in which the benevolent middle classes would do things for the poor but not with them. At the end of the day the caring bourgeois would return home to food and comfort, far away from those whom they sought to help (Archer & Costello, 1990: 197).

In some respects we have come a long way since those ideas of middleclass benevolence, although, at a practical level, until the poverty gap is narrowed, the realities of some returning to 'food and comfort' while others remain without it will persist. Certainly, however, the ideology behind community engagement has shifted from this deficit model to an asset-based model in which the assets of both parties are recognised and the potential gain for both sides acknowledged. It is my contention, however, that unless factors of power are deliberately and explicitly mitigated against at every level of engagement, the new theories will remain forever theoretical.

Below is a comparison of various types of donations and assistance that the school has received. Though not completely comprehensive (for example, solicited material gifts have not been included), I have attempted to give a clear and representative overview.

5.1. Gifts and donations

Although somewhat out of the range of discussion, I have included gifts and donations as I think that the examples give a clear picture of the potential problem with the old fashioned idea of charity. **Table 1** below itemises unsolicited gifts and donations that the school has received in a roughly two-year period. In particular, I would like to draw the reader's attention to column A. The R50 000 rand installation fee that the school funds had to cover could have been avoided if the donor had asked one simple question regarding the alternatives of this particular gift. This was a glaring example of a well-meaning institution making their own decisions about what would be best for the school, at great cost to the school. While we are obviously grateful for all contributions made, so often a smaller contribution with consultation can be much more meaningful than a larger gift given carelessly. The same is true of community engagement projects.

Table 1: Unsolicited gifts and donations received by the school

A	B	C	D	E
Gift of R80 000 worth of equipment, which cost to install R50 000 to install	Gift of 28 tablets, whiteboard with eBeam, server, Wi-Fi	Gift of two laptops	Gift of three projectors	Donations of books, speakers, clothing, soccer boots, soccer kit, water filters
Arrived three hours late, keeping the "welcoming party" of children that they had "ordered" waiting. Supposedly ongoing but have not been heard from since	No-one could use it, passwords did not work, no follow-up. Wi-Fi does not work			
Used sometimes	Never used	Used often	Used often	The more specific the better

Column E also provides a useful contrast. The soccer boots were donated for a specific, keen and talented soccer player, they were the right size for him and

have greatly enhanced his game. The soccer kit was generic, not in the school colours and on the whole too small for our players, we are thus unable to use it.

5.2 Projects

5.2.1 COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

As with community engagement projects, the success of any project is largely determined by the extent to which it is fit-to-purpose and the extent to which the project itself or the individuals within the project are willing to adapt to the circumstances of the school (see **Table 2** below).

Table 2: Success of collaborative projects

A	B	C	D
Existing project not working; substituted for another with consultation; then adapted with minimal consultation	Three existing projects from another school replicated	Internship project; governed, not managed	Individual volunteers willing to adapt to changing needs
Partially successful	Two successful with adaptation; one not	Successful	Highly successful

5.2.2. COMMUNITY-INITIATED PROJECTS

Ironically, although the literature puts community-initiated projects forward as ideal, our experience so far with projects initiated by the school was not good. Factors contributing to this are outlined in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Success of community-initiated projects

A	B
Academic support required	Infrastructural support required
Largely unsuccessful, mainly owing to insufficient coherence on the part of the school	Largely unsuccessful, mainly owing to insufficient input on the part of the community partners

5.3 Engagement with other schools

The engagement with schools has something in common with the engagement with other partners shown above in that School C offers a specific project (Table 4) that adapted over the years until a successful model was established,

which then continues to roll out fairly seamlessly. Unlike any of the other projects, it requires no oversight or commitment from the staff at our school but generates commitment from the learners.

Table 4: Engagement with other schools

School A	School B	School C
Offers the world	Thoughtful, targeted offers in response to needs	Specific ongoing project
Does not deliver or takes months and months to deliver	Delivers instantaneously on what is promised	
Says "yes" but often does not deliver	Said "no" to the first two things I requested	
Much talk of mutual benefit but not much achieved	Little talk of mutual benefit, though there is quite a bit; it is not expected or required though	Quietly, efficiently, effective
Some growing relationships with individuals beginning to bear fruit	Established relationships; regular contact about OTHER things; no attitude of great "giving"	Sustained by the learners

6. Challenges to successful mutually beneficial engagements

Many of the challenges to successful community engagement activities revolve around practical issues and time is a particularly profound issue. Almost all projects, however amazing, come at the expense of time. Time constraints are real for any functioning teacher or school head. In a school context, whatever the community engagement project is, it is almost never our core business (it may assist massively with the core business but it is NOT the core business). This means that such projects will always be lower on the priority list than attending to the core business of the school. I would guess that many outside organisers of projects would consider that their project dovetails perfectly with the core business of the school because most project leaders are at pains to make explicit (especially to funders) the extent to which what they are working on is covered by the curriculum of one of the school subjects. However, it is often not as simple as that.

I will use a fictional example to illustrate this point to protect the anonymity of our partners. Teacher A is a Drama lecturer with a passion for Boal. She is excited

to see that Boal is in the grade 10 syllabus. She thus offers to run three 2-hour workshops at the school. She decides that school time will be the best time to implement it in order for learners to take it seriously. She, however, fails to notice that the time allocation for Boal plus two other theorists is 30 minutes or that the school periods are 45 minutes and not two hours. She thus feels that she is offering a perfectly helpful solution to the teacher, but this teacher now has to make up an hour-and-a-half of tuition time and has to swop lessons with other teachers to accommodate her.

Even in the rare instance where an outside project does feed directly and neatly into the school's core business, it takes a lot of time and planning and coordination that would not have been needed if the teacher had just taught that section him- or herself. This is not by any means to say that such engagements are not worthwhile. Very often, the quality and enthusiasm of an outsider's input is greatly valued by learners and teachers alike. In addition, I believe that outside input gives a message to the learners that they are considered important by the community at large, and thus even if a lesson or activity by an outside individual or group is not strictly speaking successful, the mere fact that it has been offered contributes to the self-esteem of learners at a subconscious level. Nonetheless, time remains a precious resource which a good teacher must use optimally.

I believe that one of the reasons for the success of the school engagements in **Table 4** columns B and C relate to time. In column B, the school assisted with exactly what we asked for (senior learners from their school to assist junior learners from our school with Maths); however, I had the advantage of knowing both organisations well and was thus able to come up with a logistical solution that did not require much more work from teaching staff of either schools. Similarly, school C has created a system in which senior learners in their life skills programme recruit and mentor junior learners, which creates a self-perpetuating programme. I receive a report once a year and report on to our staff and community, and that is the full extent of my involvement. I think it needs stating that it is not at all that I, nor I am sure our teachers, resent the time spent on other projects – it is just that the juggling of responsibilities, people and projects within the limited time available is a real issue.

While it is clear that some projects are successful and some are not, causality is hard to prove. Nation *et al.*, (2011) discuss the issue of power with regard to projects designed to reduce violence amongst youth in Nashville. They identify 'community initiation' and 'community collaboration' as preferable approaches to equalise power. This matches my experience; however, even when utilising these approaches, there are challenges.

A few that I have noticed are:

- We (the school) do not necessarily always know what we need/want/can ask for. (An example that illustrates this is the occasion on which I asked a business if they would sponsor us with materials for a skills club when they wanted to offer a three-year internship programme for two interns!)
- Organisations and individuals in most need sometimes lack the organisational capacity to effectively utilise assistance. This is what I attribute the failure reference in **Table 4** column A to. In this instance, we were unable to cope as an organisation with the individual needs of our matric learners for academic support. Precisely this lack of organisational capacity, however, caused us to not manage optimally the support that was offered.
- The contrast between the 'desirable' and the 'desired' somehow needs to be managed. This distinction is highlighted by Hofstede (1991) who points out that often what we state as being desirable does not match with what we actually desire. I always think of this in terms of weight loss. While it is desirable for me to lose weight, I do not actually desire to be on a calorie restricted diet. We are most likely, in a consultation, especially with others whom we do not know well and who may well fall into the ethnographic realm of 'others of difference' or 'others of opposition', to state the desirable. However when it comes to implementation, the desired comes to the fore. Simply put: consultation does not necessarily mean buy-in even if everyone agrees.
- An organisation is not necessarily cohesive in term of what it desires. Community partners will almost always engage with the principal. Very often this engagement will then move on to consultation with the teaching staff concerned, but the consultation rarely involves learners. What I, as the principal, desire for the learners is not necessarily something that they will buy into with enthusiasm. This makes it very difficult if not impossible for community partners to know if collaboration and consultation has been successful.
- Lastly, and perhaps most significantly in terms of successful consultation, is the issue of power, even within the collaboration process. This will be explored in more detail below.

6.1 Power imbalances as a challenge to successful consultation and collaboration in community engagement settings

Kinchloe and McLaren assert that "... all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constructed" (as cited by Carspecken, 1996:4). Despite the many changes in the concepts behind community engagement in recent years, the underlying feeling of being the 'receiver' of 'generosity' is hard to shake. This creates an immediate power imbalance from the beginning of engagement. Even with community-initiated projects, the community approaches their 'partners' to ask for 'help'.

Again, in terms of Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of culture (power distance – acceptance of hierarchy; collectivism vs individualism; uncertainty avoidance (face saving); and femininity vs masculinity), the power distance in the community engagement relationship between the giver and the receiver is traditionally very high. Add to this the fact that the power distance within schools is very high, and it makes it difficult for many teachers (let alone learners) to contradict the principal in a public forum, especially if any of the parties are also from a culture that has a particularly high power distance, and even more so if that culture also happens to have high uncertainty avoidance.

Casually stated, mix that all together and you get a meeting where teachers will look to HODs or heads or even the outside organisation to find out what their answer should be as to whether or not they are interested in participating in a project. This is where I feel that the project in **Table 3** Column A fell short – the teachers felt that I wanted them to want to be involved in the project. This point ties in with the broader question of: Who is silenced and who may speak?

It is generally acknowledged that those in power and those with privilege are able to speak, however, there is more complexity to it than meets the eye. As discussed earlier, as a principal I am theoretically empowered on many levels. However, there are many ways in which I feel silenced. I perceive myself to be:

- silenced as a woman;
- silenced by heteronormative expectations;
- silenced by religious norms;
- silenced by the fact that I am told that as someone representing white embodied privilege, it is time for me to keep quiet and listen;
- silenced by conversational conventions that are different from mine;
- silenced by the law which says I may not bring my employer into disrepute;

- silenced most surprisingly by my position in the hierarchy (as a principal you should not ...); and
- silenced by my own desire to let others speak lest I quell their voice.

I highlight these silencings not in any way to paint myself as a picture of pathos, because on balance the ways in which I am empowered are far greater than the ways in which I am silenced. (Especially as the choice to be silent is ultimately self-inflicted regardless of the pressures of social mores). I point out these perceptions of silencing rather to highlight the extent to which others who do not share my feelings of empowerment must feel silenced.

Other factors that contribute to increased power differentials are the issues of valued knowledge, the language of engagement and the mode of engagement. Both personal and positional power are (often unwittingly) held by those initiating community engagements. In our setting, this applies particularly to engagements with richer schools and with the university. Related to this is the perceived gap between those with 'valued knowledge' (in particular those within the academy) and those without, which also contributes to the power differential.

In our setting, English is generally used as the language of consultation as it is the language that most stakeholders have in common; however, often the majority of people at a meeting speak English as a second language. This immediately puts those who speak English as their first language at an advantage. For most people working in business or within the university setting, email is a standard and easy mode of communication. Some of my teaching staff (and almost all of our learners) are left out of conversations by not having access to email.

**6.2 *Power in relation to reflection
on community engagement projects***

Whereas the importance of structured reflection as an integral part of any community engagement process is generally acknowledged, the complications of power in an open meeting, where individuals are asked to offer their perspectives, are often overlooked.

Uncertainty avoidance and power distance are again critical factors to consider in a reflection session. While we may all ostensibly value honest reflection, we are also constrained by cultural niceties that prohibit honesty when it may cause offence. In a community engagement arena, this is exacerbated by the desire not to seem ungrateful for what has been so generously offered.

This politeness, in my experience, causes a breakdown in honesty on both sides of the community engagement equation. An example of this is when university students offering assistance to our learners feel that it would be impolite to complain that the learners are not attending extra classes regularly.

All the factors mentioned with regard to collaboration also play a role in structured feedback sessions.

7. Factors that contribute to a successful project

Much has been said of the challenges; however, many projects are highly successful and contribute in immeasurable ways to the lives of individual learners and hopefully also enrich the lives of those offering their time and expertise. Below are the factors that in my limited experience have contributed to successful engagements with schools:

- The project responds to a real rather than a perceived need whether conceptualised by the 'offerer' or the 'receiver'.
- At least one teacher, management, the social partner and preferably many of the learners see the value in the project (this avoids the danger of principal-driven projects that do not receive buy-in from learners).
- Regular two-way feedback is encouraged beyond structured feedback sessions. This is further enhanced if there is a sustained relationship between the two partners. The better the relationship, the less likely that one of the partners will take offence when confronted with honest feedback and the more likely it is that the relationship will bounce back from any temporary offence caused.
- Context specific rules of engagement are important. For example, in a school like ours which is in recovery from a period of 'depression' as discussed in the context section, compulsory sessions work better than voluntary ones because voluntary activities have not habitually been linked with commitment. It is pointless to replicate a structure from a school that has a different history or ethos and expect that it will work in the same way.
- Much of the ground work is done on site. This gives the partners a clearer idea of logistics, atmosphere and ethos.

8. Suggestions for creating a sense of co-ownership

8.1 *Suggestions for creating a sense of co-ownership: Don'ts*

- Do not be too specific when starting off in collaborative discussions – this allows for solutions to be more emergent and context based.
- Try to avoid discourse that reinforces power dynamics (the examples listed below come from real conversations between me and community partners):

"As long as all the schools understand clearly up front that if we don't get cooperation from the participating schools, we will suspend [the project]."

"The faculty and I have decided ..." (in response to a request that we renegotiate an idea and involve the relevant teachers in the discussion)

"The following meetings are MANDATORY"

8.2 *Suggestions for creating a sense of co-ownership: Do's*

- Both partners should, with as much as possible equal power, be engaged in planning (consider: time-equalising techniques in discussion, number imbalance to counterweigh power balance, language factors and flexible starting points); explicitly ask about the 'price' that the school will need to pay in order for this intervention to be successful and whether that is a reasonable price to pay. This price may be the time a specific teacher needs to put into the project, it may be altering the school's schedule or timetable or may be other factors. There will almost always be some 'price' and foregrounding this in planning phases makes it more likely that teachers will consider and be able to be honest about this factor.
- Think of structures that enforce equality in meetings. Some examples might include the use of structures adopted from Kagan (n.d) cooperative learning techniques such as timed pair shares which ensure that partners (or group members) get equal airtime, or jot down thoughts which ensures that everyone has the opportunity to get their most important ideas on the table (literally).
- Those in theoretical power (partner, principal, etc.) should give explicit permission for those with less power (e.g. teachers and learners) to object/reject/refine the proposals and programmes in progress.
- Include learners in initial discussions where possible.
- Before entering into structured reflection sessions, encourage schools to hold micro- meetings to discuss the issues that the teachers and learners

wish to bring up. This technique ensures thoughtful reflection but also boosts the confidence of those unaccustomed to sharing their views and mitigates against language factors for those who will be speaking in their second language, enabling them to consider working before the time. It also allows those from high uncertainty avoidance, communalist cultures to feel secure in knowing that they do not speak alone nor will they bring shame on their peers when responding.

- The Rhodes University Engaged Citizens project requires schools (and other organisations) to request assistance with projects that do not rely entirely on the assistance – it is supplemental rather than absolutely necessary. Despite the fact that we have had challenges in utilising the assistance offered by this programme to its full potential because of various internal factors, I believe that this is an excellent model for community engagement organisations to replicate.

9. Conclusion

This autoethnographic exploration of my experiences as a secondary school principal in dealing with multiple stakeholders with regard to community engagement will hopefully highlight the problems of unequal power in such partnerships, while at the same time adding to the conversation about ways of mitigating against the existing hierarchies.

By working towards planning and reflection processes in which strategies that actively work against the pre-existing power dynamics are used, open honest communication will be increased. Hopefully the time taken in setting up such processes will result in smoother pilot programmes and greater chances of ongoing success.

References

- Archer, D. & Castello, P. 1990. *Literacy and Power: The Latin American Battleground*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Carspecken, P.F. 1996. *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Chang, H. 2008. *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc.
- Hofstede, G. 1991. *Cultures and organizations*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Book Company Europe.
- French, J., & Raven, B. 1959. *The bases of power*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. n.d. Clearly cultural. Making Sense of Cross Cultural Communication [online]. Available from:
<http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/power-distance-index> [Accessed 10 March 2018].
- Hofstede, G. n.d. National culture [online]. Available from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/> [Accessed on 5 August 2018].
- Kagan [online]. Available from: <https://www.google.com/search?q=kagan+cooperative+learning&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab> [Accessed on 5 August 2018].
- Nation, M., Bess, K., Voight, A., Perkins, D.D. & Juarez, P. 2011. American Journal of Community Psychology, 48:89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9414-x>
- Ngunjiri, F.W., Hernandez, K.C. & Chang, H. 2010. Living autoethnography: Connecting life and research [Editorial]. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Article E1. <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/241/186> [Accessed on 5 August 2018].
- Raab, D. 2013. Transpersonal approaches to autoethnographic research and writing. *The Qualitative Report* 2013, 18(42):1-18. <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/raab42.pdf> [Accessed on 11 August 2015].
- Raven, B.H. 1993. The Bases of power: Origins and recent developments. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49:227-251. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1993.tb01191.x
- Statistics South Africa. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=4286&id=554 [Accessed on 5 August 2018].
- Wall, S. 2008. Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1):38-53. [Accessed on 4 August 2018].

Addendum A

Critical incidents that led to my reflections on issues of power around community engagement:

1. Receiving a gift of R80 000 worth of equipment which arrived three hours late – meaning I had to miss another appointment, and learners who should have been at home learning for exams had been standing around for three hours waiting to be part of the reception party that was insisted upon by the donors. The donors made no apology but rather had a "here we are, aren't you lucky, come for a photoshoot" attitude. This gift then necessitated a R50 000 gas installation because nobody bothered to wonder if we would have preferred version A (R0 installation) or version B (R50 000 installation). They came with promises of continued support but none has been forthcoming.
2. Sitting at a meeting in Kirkwood with a partner who was expecting me to solve an insoluble clash – some staff members were required to be at the partner's training and at an Education Department meeting at the same time, both of which had been postponed from previous dates. I then received the following text after my suggestion that the three teachers split themselves between the two meetings:

"As long as all the schools understand clearly up front that if we don't get cooperation from the participating schools, we will suspend [the project]."
3. Following these two incidents, I found the courage to tell someone who was offering a project that I thought it would be better if he first discussed his ideas with the teachers concerned. I then received the following response:

"The faculty and I have decided ..."