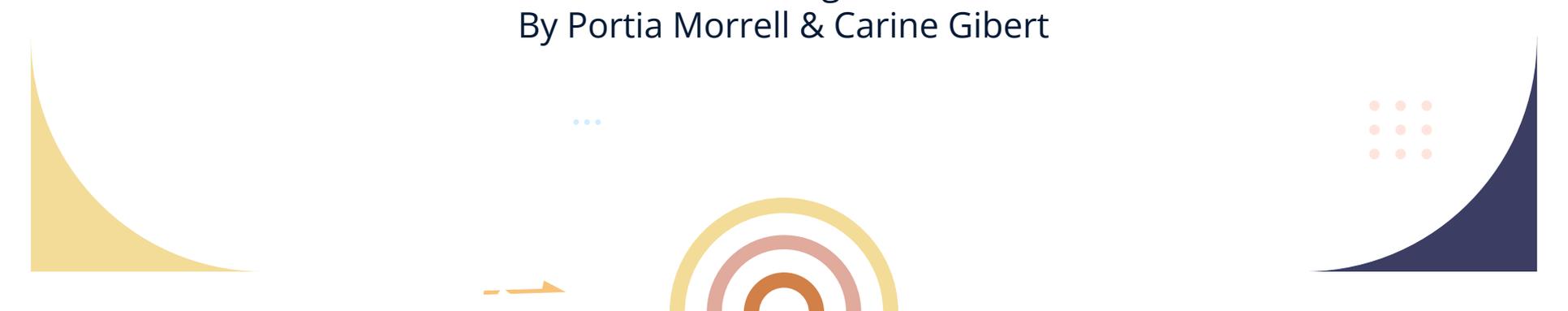




Rewriting the Story - Integrating Multiple Narratives

Where is the Bridge? Theme 4
By Portia Morrell & Carine Gibert



...

ACKNOWLEDGING HOW YOU CURRENTLY FEEL

Do you have power, feel empowered, both or neither ?

OBJECTIVES

- Analyzing forms of power
- Power and Empowerment
- Visible, Hidden, and Invisible Power - Where some of this power lives
- Cycles of Liberation

1. Sources and Positions of Power

The following two frameworks specifically look at personal experiences of power and where this power comes from.

a. Sources of power⁸

This framework is about the different sources people can draw on to gain personal power. Power is gained by drawing on various sources which include capital (financial, natural, physical, social, human), labour and consumer power, culture, location and geography, information, knowledge, networks, technology, physicality (e.g. age, sex, health or physicality ability) and personality (e.g. charisma). This understanding challenges the view of power as limited to a zero-sum game – in other words, a finite resource that needs to be taken away from others.

b. Positions of Power⁹

When thinking about positions of power – and about ‘who has’ power – it is helpful to think of power as contextual. In other words where power lies and who has power will always change according to the context and setting. Someone can be in a dominating position on one issue and be relatively weak on another matter. Similarly, someone who appears marginalised from national decision-making can be the most influential person in his/her local area.

Discussion questions

- **Try to think about times when you have drawn on your own personal sources of power to help you to achieve something. When might these same sources of power have been an obstacle to achieving change?**

LET'S
TALK



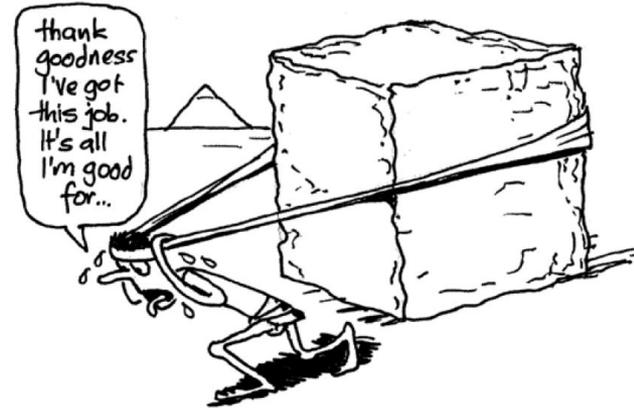
Faces of Power:
Visible, Hidden
& Invisible
Power



Visible Power



Hidden Power

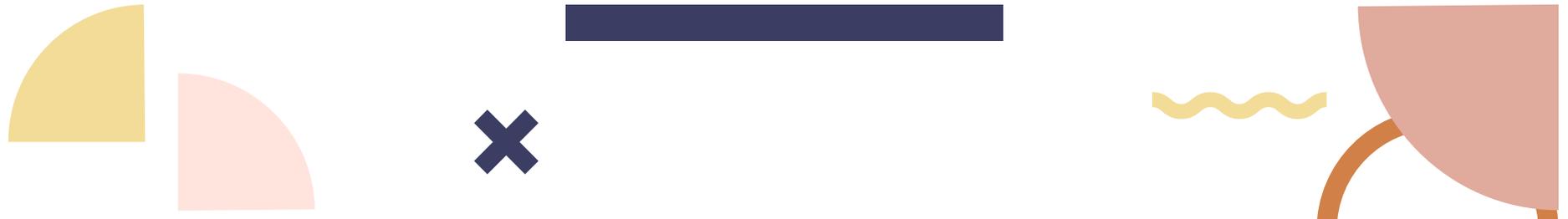


Invisible Power

2. Faces of power: visible, hidden, invisible¹¹

Power analysis is not simple because most of the time power does not operate in visible and tangible ways.

| Visible | Hidden | Invisible |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Visible power includes the aspects of political power that we ‘see’– formal rules, structures, institutions and procedures informing decision-making. In other words, it is about how those people with power use existing procedures and structures to control the actions of others. <i>Examples include: elections, political parties, budget, laws etc.</i></p> | <p>Hidden power is exercised when powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by setting and manipulating agendas and marginalising the concerns and voices of less powerful groups. Those with power see and understand these rules of the game; others don’t. <i>Examples include: quality of some consultation processes that exclude some voices; and setting the agenda behind the scene.</i></p> | <p>Invisible power operates in ways in which people will adopt belief systems that are created by those with power. Problems and issues are kept away not only from the decision-making table but also from the minds and hearts of different people including those affected by these decisions. This is when powerlessness is internalised. <i>Examples include: negative stereotypes that limit the roles of certain groups.</i></p> |



It is often easier to engage with visible power holders such as policy makers than to engage with power that is exercised behind the scenes, or is embedded in cultural and social norms and practices. However, ignoring hidden and invisible forms of power is likely to lead to a limited understanding of how change could happen, how

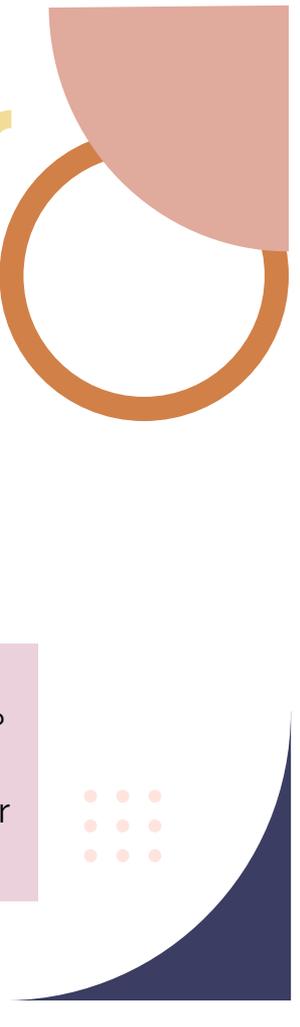
alternative sources of power could be mobilised, and which change strategies should be developed. Challenging the social and cultural boundaries that condition all actors (powerful or powerless) may require strategies other than challenging the "power-holders" alone, whether they are visible or hidden in the way they exercise power.



Discussion Questions

Looking at the Faces of Power framework, can you think of institutions or people that exercise hidden power on the issues you are addressing or trying to change?

Looking at the Expressions of Power framework, can you think of examples under each of the categories to our school?



3. Power: Spaces and Levels

The following three frameworks look at where power is being exercised.

Power is exercised by various people in different ways in any given context. Understanding the characteristics of arenas in which different people exercise their power is key to identifying the different entry points for change.

a. Closed, invited, created/claimed spaces¹²

'Spaces' is understood in this framework as the places where opportunities for formal and informal interaction help people to shape the decisions and rules that affect their lives.

| Closed | Invited | Created/claimed |
|---|--|---|
| Spaces are closed when decisions are made behind closed doors – often without providing opportunities for inclusion. This may include formal spaces open only to those in official positions or as formal representatives. | Spaces are invited when various kinds of authorities invite people to participate in decision-making processes as citizens, beneficiaries or users. Although these spaces could become opportunities for genuine collaboration, agendas are often pre-determined. | Spaces are created/claimed when less powerful people come together to create their own space, and set their own agendas. |
| Eg. Cabinet meetings, boards of directors, local government councils | Eg. public consultations | Eg. grassroots campaigns, neighbourhood meetings, social movements |

b. Public, private and intimate realms of power¹³

The **public** realm of power concerns aspects of one's public life – what is visible such as employment or role in the community.

The **private** realm of power includes family, relationships, friends, marriage.

The **intimate** realm of power means the psychological – such as self-esteem and confidence.

This framework builds upon the work of gender theorists and advocates who argue that power takes shape on three interacting levels of a woman's life with women often having contradictory experiences of power in these three realms.

LET'S
TALK



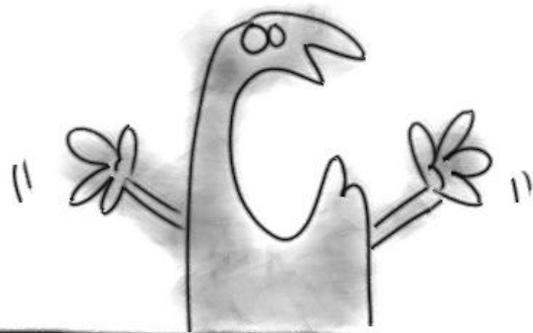
Discussion Questions

Can you name the type of spaces that are closed, invited or created at our school?

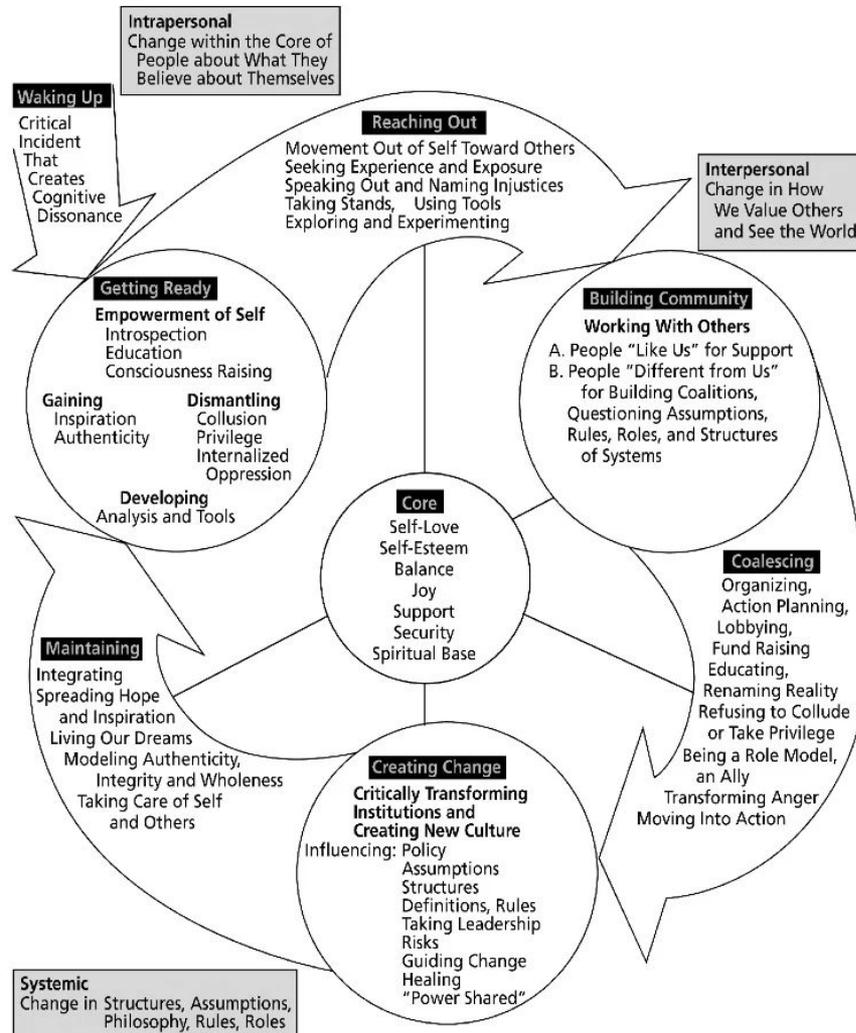
In our school, what sort of spaces currently exist?

What are the contradictory experiences of power in these three realms?

Now What?!!



CYCLE OF LIBERATION



Source: Developed by Bobbie Harro



WHO DEFINES REALITY, HOLDS POWER...

The stories we tell each other, the gossip we pass, and the media representation of events shape the meaning of our lives. To heal our communities, we must regain authorship of our own stories and tell the tales we conceive as our futures. In the words of Mehl-Madrona (2007), the power of narrative medicine stems from the “impossibility of separating treatment from the stories told about the treatment, the audience and the context in which the stories are told,” (p. 6). Treatment for racial disparities stems from the stories we tell each other. The context in which we frame our story is malleable, so why not choose a framing that encourages hope and instructs on how to begin healing? Mehl-Madrona (2007) concurs, “Healing rises or falls on the quality of the story, not the modalities chosen,” (p. 8). To begin healing from racial trauma, our story needs to consider the larger societal picture and reclaim authorship over the outcomes.



**RESPECT MY EXISTENCE OR
EXPECT MY RESISTANCE**

PRACTICE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I undertake this project:

1. Aware that my privileged position in our society affects my perspective on this issue – both theoretically and practically – and that I must continually educate myself by reading works of people of color who address this issue.
2. Aware that I must avoid the bad habit of assuming that the people of color I know personally want to help me solve the oppression which victimizes them;
3. Acknowledging that “race” is a social construction that affects many people who are not descendants of slaves, and that racism is clearly not simply a question of black and white;
4. Acknowledging that there are many other forms of oppression and injustice – such as sexism, classism, and hetero-normativity – that effect many groups, which we must address as well. In this regard, we must educate ourselves about “intersectionality;”
5. Admitting that this project is modest – particularly in comparison to the depth and breadth of systemic racism in our nation today. This project is meant as part of the larger, more challenging paradigm shift towards a more radical reallocation of public and private resources to help repair the damage already done to countless people and communities of color; and
6. Acknowledging that reparations to descendants of slaves is complicated – that it is difficult to identify precisely who has been most harmed by race-based oppression and to decide how to repair most effectively. I hope this project contributes to a national discussion with African American cultural leaders to determine the form that reparations will take.