Multiple Faces of Power and Learning

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Abstract Power relations are seen by many as an obstacle to reducing poverty and inequality. There is a growing appetite for understanding power and for being more strategic about it, and a number of useful frameworks are now available. But the complexity of power makes it difficult to know *which* concepts to use, or *how* to develop capacities to put them into practice. This article argues that these questions need to be answered together: the multiple faces of power require multiple faces of learning. The case is made for using 'deep', experiential and reflective approaches that combine rational reflection and technical analysis with more embodied, emotional and creative methods of sense-making. Such capacities also need to be supported through adaptive, context-sensitive and applied methods, not imparted in abstract or instrumental ways. Emerging thinking about capacity supports this view, and could benefit from traditions of adult education and reflective learning.

1 Introduction

It has been our experience in the Participation, Power and Social Change Team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) that many organisations, practitioners and activists now identify power relations as an obstacle to achieving their aims of tackling poverty and inequality. Power in its various forms is viewed as an underlying cause of the discrimination and social exclusion that perpetuate poverty; and power is also seen as a resource that challenges these root causes. Some understand power as the ability of actors to dominate or resist domination; others see it as the socialised norms and beliefs that shape everyone's behaviour; and yet others see it as relational, flowing from both actors and structures. However it is understood, there is a growing appetite for getting to grips with power, what it means, how it operates, and how to be more strategic about it in processes of development and social change. There is an interest not just in understanding power, but in strengthening capacities to manage and shift it. This is particularly true for those concerned with the rights and equality of people who are marginalised on the basis of identity, gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, HIV status, etc. Responding to power and building alternative

sources of power is a central pre-occupation in organising, awareness-raising, campaigning and advocacy by civil society groups. It is also a key concern for those wanting to improve the performance of institutions, making the capacity to engage with power a fundamental aspect of policy and management.

As a result of this appetite for understanding power in order to improve strategy, there is a growing body of resources available for conducting power analysis.[1] Useful concepts, frameworks, tools and methods abound, and are making their way into organisational practice and procedures – often by way of various kinds of training. Not all organisations take interest in these approaches, but for those that do, two questions immediately arise: *which* meanings of power to use in which circumstances; and *how* best to develop the individual and collective abilities to understand and engage with power (without reducing it to yet another item in the toolbox). This article argues that these questions need to be answered together: the complex *nature* of power requires multi-faceted methods for *learning* about power. Yet in the rush to build organisational capacities, there is a risk of settling for 'power tools' that skim the surface,

charting only certain kinds of power and in ways that do not shift prevailing practice (particularly in our present managerialist culture). I argue that learning about power in its many guises, and developing abilities to be strategic with it, is best achieved with deep, experiential and reflective approaches that are both personal and professional, individual and collective, and that combine rational and technical analysis with more embodied, emotional and creative methods of sense-making. Such capacities also need to be supported through adaptive, context-sensitive and applied methods, not imparted in abstract or instrumental ways. The multiple faces of power call for multiple faces of learning and capacity.

This idea is explored here through both theory and practice, as they intersect in my experience as a facilitator and teacher working with development practitioners. On the conceptual side, I first review diverse understandings of power, focusing on how difficult it can be to recognise and respond to its more 'invisible' dimensions (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002; Gaventa 2006) and to power in the form of pervasive norms and 'truths' (Foucault 1991) and internalised dispositions (Bourdieu 1980). I then turn to ideas about alternative approaches to learning and capacity development that might contribute to a deeper comprehension of power. I look at methods of 'deep' and 'transformative' learning from higher and adult education, and at traditions of experiential and reflective learning that can shift perspectives. These are contrasted with recent re-thinking about 'capacity' from the development sector (Baser and Morgan 2008; Taylor and Clarke 2008) and as highlighted in this *IDS Bulletin*. My focus then turns to a practical example of facilitating learning and capacity development related to power, looking at the potential of these 'multiple faces of learning' for bringing power into practice.

In arguing for an experiential and reflective approach, there are limits to what I can claim at this stage. My focus is on methods for deepening understandings of power through professional workshops and university courses developed over the past five years. These range from 'learning trajectories' (action-learning sets and workshop series spanning a year or more with organisations) to one-off exposure workshops, to discreet MA courses, to an 18-month action research Masters involving work-based reflection

and learning. My inquiry is into the process of *learning about power*, and observing participants' initial steps of applying this in their organisational practices. The questions are pedagogical, asking what modes of learning appear to be effective and why, and how these approaches might contribute to wider organisational capacities? It is too early to speak of changes in organisational behaviour or impact, but there are promising signs of energy and 'uptake' in many contexts.

2 Getting to grips with power

'Change… is a given but pro-poor social change efforts require conscious actions. Social change is a collective process of conscious efforts to reduce poverty and oppression by changing underlying unequal power relationships.' (Guijt 2007: 4)

Many practitioners and organisations working for equitable social change are interested in how they can bring a deeper understanding of power into their work. Yet there is no one agreed model or theory: power is an 'essentially contested' concept (Lukes 1974, 2005) and the word is used in fundamentally different ways. Yet, how we understand power has a direct bearing on the choices we make about 'empowering' ourselves and others, and on our strategies for challenging power relations. Notions of power actually give us a 'theory of society' (Navarro 2006), and by implication a *theory of change* upon which we justify action (another holy grail for organisations today, see Ortiz Aragón and Giles Macedo, this *IDS Bulletin*). But many organisations lack a shared understanding of power or social change, or a common language with which to communicate, strategise and act. This is a source of confusion for which an intellectual grasp of the concepts alone will not suffice.

So what is all the fuss about? For the most part, it reflects an age-old tension between 'agency' and 'structure' in social theory. At one extreme, power is seen as something possessed and used by certain people and not by others. It is the capacity for deliberate and willful domination, usually seen as negative or as a 'zero-sum' contest with winners and losers. At the other extreme, power is seen as deeply and unconsciously embedded in social and cultural norms and ideology, affecting the beliefs and behaviour of all actors – so internalised that we

Table 1 A spectrum of power

From… Actors and processes (visible, power over)	←——→	…To Norms and beliefs (invisible, socialised power)
Focus on 'visible' and 'hidden' forms of power as forms of wilful domination, observable control and 'power over'	*Emphasis* ←——→	Focus on 'invisible' power reproduced through social and cultural norms, and internalised by powerful and powerless people
Action to strengthen the 'power to' and 'power with' of poor and marginalised people, and to build influence and participation in decision-making processes	*Strategies* ←——→	Action to strengthen awareness, dignity and 'power within', to redefine social consensus on norms and behaviour, and to reshape conditions behind decision-making
Finding ways to ensure women and their issues are represented and have influence in decision-making spaces	*Example: Gender* ←——→	Strengthening dignity and self-esteem of women, and challenging socially constructed biases in men's and women's gendered behaviour

Source Developed for Oxfam GB by Pettit and Rowlands (2008), based on the forms of power in Gaventa (2006), Rowlands (1997) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2002).

usually cannot see it or change it. Power is also seen as relational and dynamic, flowing from the interplay of agency and structure. It is fair to say that most organisations and practitioners tend to latch onto the more visible 'agency' view of power, as something wielded by actors as a means of domination or resistance. This is reflected in the preponderance of tools for 'mapping' actors and stakeholders, which reveal little about the underlying sources of their power relations. Strategies, then, tend to focus on the 'actors' end of the spectrum (Table 1).

The question is not which view is right or wrong; most social change strategies work at different moments on different parts of the spectrum, often simultaneously (e.g. public education against the stigma of HIV, combined with lobbying for access to treatment). The difficulty is knowing which lens to use in a given moment and context, and how to cultivate the capacities to perceive and respond to forms of power across the spectrum. There remains a tendency to see power as actors dominating other actors, and to miss the socialised norms that affect all actors, as well as the positive forms of power that can be mobilised to effect change. The 'capacity challenge' is to facilitate learning about these forms of power in ways that go beyond gaining an analytical or conceptual grasp, and that can be put into practice. This includes not just addressing power in programme work 'out there' but attending to personal and professional

dynamics of power, for example in relationships with family, colleagues and partners. It is worth considering briefly what these concepts of power are before turning to questions of learning – since the argument is that the forms themselves call for particular approaches.

Even on the 'actors' end of the spectrum, there are nuances which are often missed. The classic work of Lukes (1974, 2005) distinguishes three 'dimensions' or 'faces' of power, from observable domination, to behind-the-scenes agenda-setting, to subtle manipulation of public opinion. These are known as 'visible', 'hidden' and 'invisible' power in Gaventa's powercube (2006) and in VeneKlasen and Miller's *New Weave of Power* (2002), providing a shared language that many practitioners have found relatively easy to learn and use, particularly through the use of multi-faceted learning methods.

Also on the 'actor' end of the spectrum, there are forms of agency that counter the view of power as overt domination. Rowlands (1997) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2002), in their work on power in gender relations and feminist organising, identify the three vital expressions of 'power to' (the capacity to act), 'power with' (collective action), and 'power within' (dignity and self-esteem) – all of which come to play in cultivating awareness and becoming 'empowered' to resist norms or to define alternatives. 'Hidden' and 'invisible' power can also be used and

mobilised by the less-powerful as strategies for effecting changes in norms and boundaries (Miller, VeneKlasen, Reilly and Clark 2006).

'Invisible power' lies at the intersection of structure and agency, depending whether it is being 'used' to manipulate people's beliefs, or whether it is simply a pervasive norm affecting everyone, or some combination of these – and this dual meaning can be a source of disagreement. Rather than taking sides on the debate, or just ignoring it, it is useful to explore the various perspectives and allow learners to experience the tension. Some practitioners roll their eyes at all this social theory, which may be why the 'norms and beliefs' end of the spectrum gets so much less attention than the 'actors' end in organisations. But this should be a pedagogical challenge, not a theoretical one. The problem is that the abstract and conceptual treatment of these concepts of power is usually not enough to bring the meanings into comprehension and practice.

Foucault, for example, has been hugely influential in theorising power as something beyond a 'tool' of coercion, and even beyond the structures in which actors operate. His reminder that 'power is everywhere', diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' is a compelling explanation of social inequalities (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1991). But for some, it leaves little room for agency. Hayward (1998, 2000), following Foucault, questions the idea of power as an instrument used by some to limit the freedom of others; instead we are all moulded into our identities by 'social boundaries that, together, define the fields of action for all actors (1998: 12). But she affirms 'the possibility of human agency' and that what matters is people's capacity to 'participate effectively in shaping the boundaries that define for them the field of what is possible' (1998: 20). This resonates with VeneKlasen and Miller's experience that 'invisible power' (as well as 'power within') can be mobilised to shift discriminatory norms. It also supports the idea that empowerment happens when 'people are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty' (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall 2008).

These efforts to take the rarefied language of 'structure and norms' into activist and policy settings, and to show that actors can recognise and challenge social boundaries, can make this end of the spectrum more accessible to practitioners. But the challenge of learning this at a deeper level remains. This is because such forms of power are indeed internalised, and to simply know that they exist is not the same as having the capacity to name and shift them in real life. Bourdieu's views of power help to explain this process of internalisation: power is cultural and symbolic, constantly recreated through the interplay of agency *and* structure. This happens through what he calls 'habitus' or the learned norms and dispositions that shape our behaviour (Bourdieu 1980, 1984).

Habitus is socially formed, but it is also *physically inscribed* in our bodies. Bourdieu is not often cited for this aspect of his theory, as his readers tend to gravitate to the social norms and patterns that habitus underpins. Through habitus, he observes, our social relations are actually 'turned into muscular patterns and bodily automatisms…', into 'a way of bearing one's body, presenting it to others, moving it, making space for it, which gives the body its social physiognomy'. Our intellectualism, he warns, prevents us from recognising that 'we are automatons in three-quarters of what we do' (citing Leibnitz)… and that our values are ultimately 'the primary, primitive dispositions of the body' (Bourdieu 1984: 474). As with Foucault, the body is central to the reproduction of power, and is ultimately where power is really learned.

While this may sound ethereal, it is a profound insight which signals the challenges of really shifting power in practice. It raises the question of how we can best learn about power and nurture the capacities to engage with its social boundaries and internalised habits and norms. Multiple dimensions of power call for multiple dimensions of learning – and bring into question established methods of education and capacity-development.

3 The multiple faces of learning

'…not only are experiences the key building blocks of learning, but action is an intrinsic part of the learning cycle; this implies learning by doing as well as a practical understanding of the world.'
(Dewey 1997/1938: 35)

Like power, learning has multiple 'faces', some of which are more easily recognised and prevalent in the design of education and training curricula. In traditional forms of higher education and professional development, there is a focus on transferring ideas and knowledge at a conceptual level, and on developing capacities for analysis. Where this is done well, through what is called 'deep learning' (vs. 'surface learning') in higher education (Ramsden 1992; Biggs 2003), concepts can be learned and internalised to a better degree. The focus is on is enabling learners to construct their own meanings, at a personal level, by building on their own experiences and motivations (Biggs 2003: 13). Deep learning is 'constructivist' and can lead to profound shifts in a learner's perspective and ways of thinking, but only if the content and approach are relevant to the person's 'intrinsic interest and a sense of ownership' (Ramsden 1992: 65).

The idea of deep learning resonates with principles from adult education, notably the related traditions of 'experiential learning' and 'critical pedagogy'. Experiential learning (rooted in American pragmatism) relies on the principle of 'learning cycles' in which the learner moves from experience, to reflection, to abstract conceptualisation, to action, and the cycle repeats itself (e.g. Kolb 1984). This has been picked up strongly in management science and professional training, e.g. in the work of Argyris and Schön (1974), Schön (1983) and Senge (1990), with concepts such as 'double-' and 'triple-loop' learning in which deeper levels of reflection lead from mere corrective experimentation to a more fundamental questioning of values and purpose – and to perspective change.

For adult education practitioners concerned with how learning can contribute to social and political change, these cycles take a more critical and transformative turn (e.g. Freire 1970; Mezirow 1991). They can be about questioning the orthodoxies and norms behind social inequalities, and about recognising one's own socialisation in structures of class, gender and race. But the principle is the essentially the same: starting with direct experience and personal interests, probing beneath the surface to question assumptions and framings, and doing this through an iterative process of action-reflection (or praxis), usually guided by a facilitator.

In the academic world, differences in perspective are often described as 'competing paradigms', values or epistemologies (e.g. Guba and Lincoln 2005). These knowledge paradigms are themselves a kind of power (in the form of discourse, hegemony, standpoint, ideology, etc.) which are reproduced in our speech and behaviour. Some see educational systems as one of the major vehicles for reproducing these norms in society (e.g. Illich 1970; Giroux and Freire 1987). In more critical and constructivist approaches to education there are usually efforts taken to help learners reveal and question these framings, to be self-critical about given values and assumptions, to expose hegemonic constructs – and to define and articulate alternatives.

The purpose of this very brief review is to begin to draw out some principles of deep, experiential and critical learning that are useful for learning about power, and possibly leading to capacities for being strategic with power. Most of the workshops and courses I have been involved in work in various ways with these principles – grounding in learners' own experiences (personal and professional), building on their interests (through relevant topics and case material) and introducing conceptual and analytical tools (like theories of power) that can deepen reflection in an iterative and critical way, in order to shift perspectives and create new meanings. There is also a process of critical self-reflection on oneself – ones' identities, values and positionality – in relation to actions (reflective practice). My own experience as a learner and as an educator has given me a degree of confidence that these principles work, particularly when combined, and when dealing with issues such as power and social change. However, I have also been concerned about a gap that arises in these models of learning: they tend to privilege rational and conceptual judgement over embodied, emotional, creative, spiritual and other methods of 'reflection' that have much potential to deepen learning.

4 Mind, body and creativity in learning
Learning cycles are often used in linear and instrumental ways, and with a view that experience must be objectified and conceptualised (in rational language or text) before it can provide a basis for changes in behaviour. Even more critical and transformative forms of learning are sometimes focused on changing thinking at an

ideological level, but not on recognising power in its more internalised and embodied forms. There have been feminist critiques of Freire and of the persistence of patriarchal norms in critical adult learning, for example. Likewise, Mezirow's 'perspective transformation' focuses on more rational modes of conceptual lens-grinding than on other ways of 'connected knowing' (Belenky and Stanton 2000). Critical reflection is often seen as a process of reconstructing our mental maps, but less is said about how to change internalised feelings of power, dispositions and emotions – the very reflexes that cause us to contradict our beliefs and widen the gaps between rhetoric and practice.

Learning is therefore largely pursued as a conceptual exercise. We assume that body always follows mind, and that switching our conceptual lenses will lead to changes in behaviour. We hope that by *understanding* we will be able to *do* the right thing. Analysis is essential for action, and I follow these principles in facilitating learning about power. But this model only gives us the analytical scaffolding for the long hard work of building awareness of the habits and boundaries of power within ourselves and in society. It is a starting point for reflection, but taken as a complete process it falls into the linear logic and Cartesian rationalism of 'I *think* therefore I *am*'. We miss the ways in which the body may be leading the dance, with its automated responses and emotions, its involuntary inflections and gestures, its learned dispositions. If we try to articulate the hegemonic and discursive boundaries of power through ideas alone, we will fail to notice the way our bodies – regardless of our clever thoughts – are busy conforming to power.

These perspectives resonate with recent findings from cognitive science about the degree to which emotion is actually linked to reason (Damasio 2006). The growing field of 'embodied cognition' suggests that our thoughts and perceptions extend beyond the brain into our physical bodies and into the lived experience of our social, cultural and physical environment (Thompson 2007). While space does not allow a full exploration of this, there are profound implications for how we might go about learning to engage with the social boundaries and internalised norms of power. Going back to the origins of experiential learning, and Dewey's idea of 'habituation; there are striking similarities with

Bourdieu's idea of 'habitus' or even Foucault's 'disciplinary' and 'bio-power'. 'Habit' for Dewey is not just a 'fixed way of doing things' but 'the formation of attitudes… that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we might meet in living' (Dewey 1997/1938: 35). Because habit is shaped through 'the continuity of experience', then learning needs to be designed to be 'experiential' in a fuller sense of the word than rational conceptualisation of events. If the aim of learning is to be transformative, helping us to reveal and shift internalised power, then it needs to be as multi-faced as power itself. We need to 'know' power through our bodies, senses and feelings.

This insight has not escaped innovative educators who recognise the power of the arts – theatre, movement, creative writing, storytelling and imagery – in deepening learning to facilitate change. A widely adapted approach for example is Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979, 2000), and many other creative and embodied methods are used in diverse contexts – from professional training to social movements to public management to business leadership. In development practice, creative methods are often used to 'raise awareness' at the level of communities and grassroots organisations, but are noticeably absent in the middle and higher echelons of aid organisations, and in their academic counterparts. The exceptions are some branches of feminist activism and scholarship, and techniques of action research and applied anthropology. There are epistemological issues of 'power' behind this resistance to creativity and embodiment as vehicles of sense-making, rooted largely in the rational positivism that prevails in academia and professional practice (Heron and Reason 1997). Which has left us, until recently at least, with methods of learning and capacity development that are partial, cerebral and instrumental. There are promising signs, however, in recent reappraisals of what 'capacity' means in the development sector (including in this *IDS Bulletin*).

5 Questioning capacity
A five-year study of numerous cases by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) calls into question prevailing methods of capacity development – advocating an 'adaptive learning' approach

rather than the transfer of technical knowledge (Baser and Morgan 2008). Implicitly, this approach echoes many key principles from deep, experiential and reflective learning: building on the interests and energies of learners, grounding in experience and context, addressing power relations and cultural norms, and moving from 'first-order' technical solutions to 'second-order or deep change', which 'involves altering mindsets, patterns of behaviour, degrees of legitimacy' (Baser and Morgan 2008: 123). The approach also recognises complexity and systemic change, as opposed to linear notions of cause and effect, and puts logic and rationalism in proper perspective:

> An understanding of capacity must also go beyond the instrumental, the technical and the functional and encompass the human, the emotional, the political, the cultural and the psychological. We can see these aspects of capacity at work in some of the cases. Some organizations lacked technical mastery in certain key areas such as financial management or project management. But they displayed enormous reserves of capacity in the form of collective resilience, social energy, courage, loyalty and ingenuity. These qualities enabled them to persevere and improve over time. (Morgan 2006: 18)

An IDS workshop reviewing capacity initiatives, guided in part by this study, came to similar conclusions about the need to move from technical and instrumental approaches to seeing capacity as 'a process of mutual learning and change' (Taylor and Clarke 2008). The insights reinforce the need to link individual, organisational and systemic levels of change; to build upon what is there and desired; to adapt to context and culture; and to address relationships and power. Three conclusions from both studies stand out as important reminders for experiential and reflective learning in the limited form that they are sometimes applied: valuing the emotional and psychological in human learning (vs. a conceptual bias); accepting complexity and seeing capacity as systemic change (vs. changes in individuals or groups); and the idea of discovering and 'unleashing energies' (vs. just analysing what is wrong). These studies could have benefited from engaging more explicitly with adult education theory and practice, and with creative approaches to learning that recognise embodied

cognition (and power). It is useful now to look at examples of the design and facilitation of learning to see how these ideas about power, learning and capacity might come together in practice.

6 Facilitating learning about power

This section explores one approach to learning about power (and developing capacities to engage with power) in development organisations. The 'Learning Trajectory' approach, used in the Netherlands, is similar to what is sometimes called an 'action learning set', and is an experiential learning or capacity-development process that can be carried out within one organisation or with a group of organisations. It combines a series of short workshops with periods of applied learning and reflection on practice, supported by coaching.[2] A learning trajectory is more intensive than one-off trainings: the length may be anywhere from a few weeks to a few months to a year or longer. It may involve only two workshops with a short period of practice in between, or several workshops spread out over months of practice. Learners work in small groups (e.g. 2–4 people) to inquire into particular challenges they face in their work. The idea is that learning is linked to work experience, and that innovations are embedded in practice – in some cases, leading to changes that can be more widely adapted by others.

In our experience, learning trajectories can provide opportunities to explore and address power at the personal and organisational levels, as well as 'out there' in relation to programmatic aims. This opportunity to connect the levels of 'me, us and them' (first, second and third person) makes it more likely that the learning will 'stick' and lead to changes in practice. By planning the objectives with key actors involved, and clarifying hopes and expectations, and through constant evaluation (e.g. after each workshop), there is a higher chance of the process being owned by the participants. It is vital that people are given the time to attend and prepare for the workshops, to try out practical exercises while on the job, and to reflect upon and document their experiences. This can require getting senior managers to commit to the process – the more so if senior people are taking part themselves. There is a fine balance between planning to meet the time availability of learners, and ensuring there is enough time for the learning process. If the process is too rushed

the possibilities for learning through experience and reflection will be undermined. At the same time, it should not take so much time that participants resent the process because it interferes with their work.

With Oxfam-Novib, Irene Guijt and I carried out a 10-month learning trajectory with 15 staff and partners focused on bringing power analysis into organisational practice. Small groups of 2–3 staff developed an action-research initiative exploring power relations in their work or programmes.[3] There were three workshops interspersed with two periods of 4–5 months for practical application and coaching. This model and other recent examples are contrasted in Box 1.

The learning methods used in the workshops were multidimensional, including drama and storytelling, the use of humour, images, games and other creative exercises, and discussion of concepts and frameworks of power. Personal and professional experience (e.g. of power) provided the basis for learning, both in workshops and during periods of practice. Several things mark these trajectories as facilitating not just 'learning' but 'capacity': the building on energies and interests, the adaptation to context and organisation; the collective and systemic scale; and the focus on outcomes that may have wider impacts. The Oxfam-Novib trajectory, for example contributed lessons and recommendations for approaches to analysing power in country strategies, along with new practical tools for this adapted to the organisation's planning processes. This led to the creation of a revised planning tool being used in developing country strategies. Other outcomes included published materials, case studies, and

additional events on power analysis. The trajectory itself was embedded within a wider effort to bring power perspectives into practice, including workshops for other staff.

Participants' feedback affirmed these strengths, rating the workshops, coaching and the 'power concepts' particularly highly. More challenging were the processes of applying concepts to practice and creating useful tools to share with others. Many commented on the value of taking time to look at their work from a new angle, together with colleagues whom they do not usually have time to interact with, and on the insights they gained about power in their everyday lives and working environment. The process shed light not just on power 'out there' but internally and systemically:

Power analysis made me (more) aware and conscious of my own power in relation to colleagues, partners and allies.

I learned how to better reflect on power and especially I am more aware of my own positioning.

Questioning my role in my organisation and in the relations with others.

Some 'handles' on tackling invisible power in my team.

I would recommend that directors and managers reflect more on power analysis in their work and allow [them to take a] critical view on their own position in power.

(Participant evaluation comments on the Oxfam-Novib Learning Trajectory, 2008–9)

Learning trajectories are not the only method of course. Another approach, taken by Oxfam GB, has been described as 'viral learning', in which workshops, events and coaching are provided or supported on a demand-led basis with country or regional staff who show interest.[4] Like learning trajectories, this informal approach is adaptive and inquiring; rather than 'rolling out' change mandates and procedures from above it supports local staff to bring power analysis into their own context and to adapt the concepts and tools accordingly. The capacity dimensions of this can be recognised in the strong 'energy and uptake' from some regional offices – closely linked to the principle of grounding of concepts and meanings in local contexts and languages. As in the trajectories, methods of experiential learning were used in workshops, including critical reflection, visual images, storytelling and embodied methods. In both cases, staff were able to develop a shared understanding and language around meanings of power, improving their ability to communicate and strategise.

7 Conclusion

Baser and Morgan (2008: 3) define capacity as 'that emergent combination of individual competencies, collective capabilities, assets and relationships that enables a human system to create value'. Their view is useful in extending the process beyond the individual or group learning to the systemic and organisational levels, and attending not just to the challenges 'out there' in programme work but to internal dynamics, resources and relationships. Adaptation to context, culture and the interests of participants is also important. This articulation of capacity, together with others represented in this *IDS Bulletin*, point to a broader notion of 'capacity for a change' (Taylor and Clarke 2008) that links levels of learning and human energies in ways not always apparent in conventional knowledge-transfer approaches. In the case of learning about power, and developing abilities to work with it strategically, this view reinforces and helps to explain key elements of the 'learning trajectory' and 'viral learning' approaches.

It is important also not to lose sight of the principles of deep, experiential and reflective learning in these processes of 'getting to grips with power'. The multiple faces of power, as we have seen, call for multiple faces of learning, and there are rich traditions to be drawn upon for rethinking capacity: higher education, with its 'deep learning' and questioning of core assumptions; critical pedagogy and adult education, with their notions of 'praxis' and 'perspective transformation'; and experiential and reflective learning, with their 'action-reflection cycles' and 'double-loop learning'. Added to these are the methods of creative and embodied learning emerging from popular theatre, storytelling and art, now increasingly used in professional and leadership development in many sectors (and increasingly backed up by cognitive science). Yet many of these educational traditions and sources are strangely absent from the capacity discourse, perhaps reflecting its more technical and mechanistic heritage in development and aid. In the case of learning about power and developing capacities to be strategic with it – particularly when engaging with forms of power that are internalised and embodied – there is no doubt that these critical, reflective and creative methods of learning are indispensable. And combined with a new vision of capacity as collective and systemic, they have the potential to bring power into the practice of development. But without these multiple faces of learning, only some faces of power will be learned, and in more superficial ways, to be added unthinkingly to our ever-expanding 'toolboxes'.

Notes

1 As a partial list, see for example the following methods and tools for power analysis:
- Powercube (Gaventa) and 'Other Forms of Power' (Pettit), see www.powercube.net
- 'New Weave of Power' and 'Making Change Happen' (VeneKlasen and Miller), see www.justassociates.org/chapthreepower.pdf and www.justassociates.org/publications_files/MCH3.pdf
- Carnegie Trust UK (Democracy and Civil Society Programme), http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/democracy/power_tools
- Power Tools (International Institute for Environment and Development), www.policy-powertools.org/index.html
- 'Web of Institutionalisation' (Levy), see www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/publications/working%20papers%20pdf/wp74.pdf
- Net-Map Toolbox (Schiffer) http://netmap.ifpriblog.org/

2 The model shared here was developed by Irene Guijt (Learning by Design) and Jethro Pettit (IDS) with the Dutch NGO consortium PSO and the international NGO Oxfam-Novib, and has also been adapted by Carnegie Trust UK.

3 The Oxfam-Novib action research plans explored power in the following cases: a campaign on extractive mining industries in Africa; a global conference on AIDS in Mexico; the role of partners in shaping the organisation's global Climate Change campaign; the role and spaces of civil society in negotiations between the EU and Central America; and the possibility to engage in a multi-stakeholder initiative on palm oil in Colombia. The learning trajectory was supported internally by Conny Hoitink and Peter Huisman.

4 This work has been facilitated by Jo Rowlands, Eduardo Caceres and other colleagues at Oxfam GB, including demand-led and locally organised workshops for power analysis in the Latin American region (support for social movements in seven countries), the Horn and East of Africa (the pastoralist programme), the Philippines, Liberia and others.

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