Engaging Pedagogies in Catholic Higher Education (EPiCHE)

2016

Immersive Practices: Dilemmas of Power and Privilege in Community Engagement with Students in a Rural South African Village

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Power is manifested in many ways within immersive study abroad experiences. One of the paradoxes of this reality is that structures of power simultaneously create the conditions necessary for immersive community engagement programs to exist as well as limit the action, voice, and autonomy of the actors involved in the community engagement. Unequal power relations are an enduring dilemma of this kind of work even when the intention is to "join in community" with others to learn, create, and build relationships side by side for mutually beneficial purposes. In this paper we offer lessons we have learned, and continue to learn, in a rural South African community called Makuleke. We focus on strategies that we have found effective for mitigating the power differential between ourselves and our community partners in Makuleke. One is arriving without an agenda and another is intentional cross-cultural exchanges that demonstrate our respect for village knowledge and language. These lessons arguably extend well beyond the boundaries of this small village.

Structures of power simultaneously create the conditions necessary for immersive community engagement programs to exist as well as limit the action, voice, and autonomy of the actors involved in the community engagement. Unequal power relations are an enduring dilemma of this kind of work, whether interactions are rooted in self-interest, greed, violence, or in our case, the desire to "join in community" with others to learn, create, and build relationships side by side for mutually beneficial purposes. Our approach recasts the notion of "service" to emphasize the importance of relationship building, dialogue, shared learning, and mutual empowerment rather than simply responding to "community needs." We argue this leads to meaningful and sustainable social change through immersion programs. In this paper we offer lessons we learned, and continue to learn, about mitigating power and privilege in a rural South African community called Makuleke. They are lessons that arguably extend well beyond the boundaries of this small village.

Power is manifested in many ways within immersive study abroad experiences. Of course, multiple definitions of power exist. In this paper, we conceptualize power as the ability for one party to get another party to do something – whether through force, coercion, or hegemony (Lukes, 1974). We take a hegemonic view of power here to highlight the dramatically unequal positions Western academics like ourselves can occupy, either intentionally or not, in relation to rural African villagers. A "power dilemma" often exists in community engagement work because the people who arrive in a community to offer their skills and resources are, by definition, outsiders to the community and they are also in possession of skills and resources that are often otherwise unavailable to the community. Typically, the skills and resources they bring are entangled in their positions of economic, social and political privilege (Catlett & Proweller, 2011; T. D. Mitchell, 2008). A strong temptation exists to ignore the systemic injustice that led to the community being disenfranchised from access to these skills and resources and instead emphasize the moral worthiness of the volunteers who arrive to "help," for "charity," or to "give back" (Wade, 2000). According to Illich (1968), this power dilemma is ubiquitous and cannot be eliminated. Yet we believe it can be mitigated. We argue it is possible to bring a group of privileged university students from

the United States and build meaningful, sustainable, and mutually beneficial relationships with a target community. Certainly, we do not presuppose that we have found the "answers" to these issues. However, like others in the field, we feel confident that it is possible to create immersive programs that take these power dynamics into account (Crabtree, 2013; Ross, 2010).

Literature Review

There is a growing literature on the importance of study abroad courses, cultural immersion, and service abroad, focusing on the benefits of study abroad programs, which include the development of language proficiency, global world-view, global understanding, and intercultural competence (Covert, 2014; Gates, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014; Mitchell, 2015). While study abroad programs will vary, much of the literature suggests that the most effective programs, in terms of providing students with the best opportunities for knowledge acquisition and personal development, are those in which students are placed in situations where they must interact with other cultures on a consistent basis. Simply providing students the ability to live abroad with their peers from U.S. universities does not seem to capture the spirit of what study abroad programs should encompass.

Much of the literature suggests that the most effective study abroad courses are ones that are experiential in nature, that provide the opportunity for cultural immersion and that encourage students to combine reflection and intellectual rigor (Crabtree, 2013; Kasinath, 2013). Of course, creating study abroad programs that do this is difficult, and in many cases, students avoid cultural interactions while abroad for a variety of reasons (Geyer, 2010). There are even some commentators who challenge the importance of experiential or cultural immersion programs and stress that study abroad programs can still be beneficial to students even if they only "get a toe wet rather than to plunge into icy waters" (Woolf, 2007, p. 497). While this may be the case for some students, we contend that study abroad programs that do not intentionally provide opportunities for students to make relationships with

local communities have the possibility of reinforcing stereotypes about "the other" and that study abroad programs should problematize and provide a framework for critical analysis (T. D. Mitchell, 2008).

It is interesting to note that while there are many studies that mention cultural immersion as an important goal, few scholars offer a clear definition of this concept. For example, Martinez (2012) simply notes that it is the process of "becoming immersed in the culture firsthand" (p. 2). Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) provide a more useful and detailed definition, stating that cultural immersion as "an experience that engages individuals in meaningful, direct cross-cultural interactions, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing cultural understanding and empathy. Cultural immersion provides both affective and consciousness-raising learning experiences that may be missing from traditional didactic training models" (p. 167) (see also (Sue & Sue, 2012)). The focus here on the *meaningfulness* of the interactions is important to highlight and we contend that opportunities for students to conduct service, internships, or other hands-on activities will create opportunities for relationships to be made, which likely lead to cultural understanding and empathy. In many ways, a successful cultural immersion program is dependent upon these relationships and it is difficult to conceive of immersion occurring unless these relationships are established.

The benefits of service-immersion study abroad experiences are well documented. They have the potential of being sites of "transformational learning" for students (Kiely, 2005). Plante, Lackey and Hwang (2009) find that students who participated in service learning immersion experiences scored higher on compassion and empathy scales after their immersion trips compared to students who did not take part. There are other studies that have found a correlation between these types of programs and improved student academic performance as well as higher levels of civic engagement (Gutstein, Smith, & Manahan, 2006; Metzger & McEwen, 1999). We also know that service learning and immersion increases academic performance, leadership skills, and the commitment to activism while at university as well as the likelihood that students will choose a service career after graduation (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Gray et al., 1996), While the degree to which students develop identities as activists after service-immersion experiences varies, we know that the benefits are not automatic, they require intentional pedagogy (Cermak et al., 2011; Wang & Jackson, 2005). For example, incorporating critical reflection into the pedagogy can have long lasting benefits on alumni as they bring these reflective practices into their personal and professional lives (T. D. Mitchell et al., 2015).

While we are concerned with the learning and personal growth that our own students achieve on immersion trips to Makuleke, South Africa, we are also deeply concerned with the effects of our visits on the Makuleke community. We are highly sensitive to the power inequity between ourselves and the rural, relatively impoverished villagers who are our community

partners. While university study abroad courses like ours are generally more academic, critical thinking endeavors than typical volunteer tourism or "voluntourism" travel experiences (Bybee, 2015; Forsythe, 2011), we are concerned with the dynamics of "dogooders" who do harm in the communities they visit despite their good intentions (Illich, 1968). Although the terms "service learning" (Kasinath, 2013), or "critical service learning" (T. D. Mitchell, 2008) are appropriate concepts for the immersion component to our courses, we encourage our students to conceptualize our interactions in Makuleke as community engagement instead of service. For us, engagement means that we prioritize joining with community on a daily basis and following the lead of our local partners. Using this framework is an explicit effort on our part to disrupt the sensibility that we are "helping" Makuleke and that our efforts there can have only positive outcomes on the village (Crabtree, 2013).

Toward that same end, we seek to foster "cultural humility" in our students. According to Ross (2010), cultural humility is a multifaceted concept encompassing the acknowledgement of power differentials based on privileges of race, income, education and national origin. It involves ongoing examination of one's own biases through self-reflection and the willingness to "relinquish the role of expert, work actively to address power imbalance in communication to create respectful and dynamic partnerships with the community, and ultimately become a student of the community" (p. 318). While some may find the term "humility" to be problematic, as it can be interpreted as presupposing a cultural hierarchy, we nonetheless desire our students to develop this skill set and to reflect on their own position in the hierarchy. We desire this partly for their own benefit but mainly so that we can foster relationships that demonstrate our respect for the cultural, political and economic sensibilities of Makuleke. We are equally invested in what our visits mean to the members of the Makuleke community as we are in what they mean to our own students.

Brief History of the Program

The site where we have established this immersive community engagement program is Makuleke, a village of 4,500 inhabitants, located in Limpopo province in South Africa, approximately one hour from the Mozambique and Zimbabwe borders It is a community that epitomizes South Africa's past and present. In 1969, under the Apartheid government, the people of Makuleke were forcibly moved from their native land, which is located in Kruger National Park, to their current location. In 1998, the Makuleke people won a land claim from the new democratic, post-Apartheid government as part of national reparations awarded to displaced communities. Makuleke formed a partnership with Kruger National Park to receive concessions from two safari lodges located on their native land. Even with these concessions, however, Makuleke still suffers from high levels of poverty, lack of employment, and a lack of quality education for their children.

In terms of educational challenges, Makuleke is not unique in South Africa. For example, there are approximately 24,500 public schools in South Africa. Of these, 3,600 have no electricity, 2,400 have no water, and over 20,000 (93%) have no libraries, science laboratories, or computer centers (EqualEducation, 2012). Black and low-income communities like Makuleke fare the worst (Ball, 2006; Featherman, Hall, & Krislov, 2010). In terms of student performance, with respect to other sub-Saharan African countries, South Africa ranks close to last in literacy, math and science scores (Bloch 2011, p. 209). It is also ranked 133 out of 142 countries in terms of the quality of the educational system (EqualEducation, 2012, p. 26). The inequalities that were inherited from the apartheid era remain intact. For example, while 65% of Grade 6 students at former Model C (white-only schools during apartheid) in the Western Cape performed at the Grade 6 level on literacy, math, and science, only 3% performed at grade level in former coloured-only schools and only .1% of those at former black-only schools (Bloch 2011, p. 212). As for higher education, only 12% of black South Africans aged 20-24 participate in higher education, as compared to 60% of white South Africans (Scott, 2010, p. 233). While only 30% of students overall graduate within five years, a much smaller percentage, about 5%, of black South African students do (Scott, 2010, p. 231). In Makuleke, the situation is even worse. According to the 2011 Census, only 1.5% of Makuleke residents aged 20 or older had participated in higher education, and only 8% had completed grade 12 (education is mandatory through grade 10).

Makuleke has an unusual advantage, however. In 2010, a non-profit organization *Sharing to Learn* was founded by an American school teacher who had visited Makuleke in 2008 as part of a faculty development experience through Earth Watch. *Sharing to Learn* has established itself as an important and influential social force in the village. Over the last five years, it has built one community library, two school libraries, connected the village to the Internet, and has sponsored a variety of cultural exchange programs with American and European schools. While in South Africa for a study abroad trip in 2011, the lead author, Williams, learned of *Sharing to Learn* through a newspaper article and reached out to its founder about the possibility of bringing USD students to Makuleke the following year. Before leaving South Africa in 2011, Williams visited Makuleke for the first time. It was by chance that this visit occurred on the same evening where a group of seven high school students were holding their first meeting as a newly formed group, called the Equalizers.

The creation of the Makuleke Equalizers is directly tied to *Sharing to Learn*. After learning about the work of a Cape Town based non-profit called Equal Education at a conference in Johannesburg the founder of *Sharing to Learn* encouraged the creation of the Makuleke Equalizer group and for collaboration between Makuleke and Equal Education. While Equal Education is not the first, or only, civil society organization to promote the issue of education, it is perhaps the only one that has combined research, advocacy, and activism. Even more importantly, it is an organization that focuses on youth, both in terms of its leadership and its members. Given what we know about youth interest in political participation being low across South Africa more generally (Mattes, 2012) the ongoing efforts of Equal Education provide an important example of what a young, active civil society organization might offer democratic South Africa.

For many students, becoming a member of an Equalizer group is their first opportunity to engage in participatory politics. Indeed, it is one of the stated principal tasks and goals of the organization to provide for "the political education of members (Equalizers), specifically the development of a leadership core that is informed" (EqualEducation, 2010/11, p. 8). In the words of one Equalizer, quoted in the Equal Education Annual Report: "At one of my first EE meetings I was introduced to the word 'activists.' When EE members were talking about activists I didn't really know exactly what that was, so I looked it up in the dictionary. It said, 'People who fight to bring change with energy.' The confidence that I had never noticed in myself before I became a member of EE was growing up at this time, and I wanted to share my views. I learned how to talk to people and to voice my opinion as I had never done before. I was made into a strong woman who can fight for herself and those who cannot fight for themselves. I learned to bring hope by taking action, by being informed, by being organised, and by singing" (2010/11, p. 19).

It was into this particular socio-institutional context that the first group of University of San Diego students arrived with Williams in 2012. Before our visit, we collaborated with *Sharing to Learn* and we decided that we would spend 2-3 weeks in Makuleke with the goal of getting to know the community, and in particular, the Equalizers. One of the advantages of collaborating with *Sharing to Learn,* which had already established trust with the community, is that it provided USD with entry into Makuleke while simultaneously providing the space to develop our own relationships with the Equalizers.

Mitigating Power and Privilege by not Having an Agenda

A strategy for mitigating the unequal power dynamics between ourselves and the Equalizers in 2012 was to simply show up without an agenda. We came with no preconceived notions of what we would be "doing." Instead, we wanted to just immerse ourselves as much as possible in the everyday rhythms of the village and to see what would emerge from our visit. Of course, this can be read as an agenda in itself: to join community and allow interactions to unfold organically. This turned out to be a very satisfying way to begin our relationship in Makuleke and we believe that what has been co-created since then is the product of the approach we adopted for this first visit.

After about two days in the village, the USD students and the Equalizers began to meet on a daily basis to talk and to learn more about each other's cultures and histories. This led to spontaneous exchanges of friendship building such as the Equalizers inviting the USD students to see their homes one

day. They split up into seven different groups and walked around the village visiting homes and meeting relatives and friends.

Soon thereafter, the Equalizers took the USD students to their high school so that they could see the condition of their classrooms. Despite the fact that the USD students had been in the village long enough to become accustomed to the poverty and the lack of services such as flush toilets, garbage removal, and grocery stores, the condition of the high school was extremely upsetting to many of them. With trash strewn all over, windows broken, desks damaged, and walls covered with graffiti, most of the classrooms looked as though there had been some sort of natural disaster. The Equalizers wanted to share and lament their inadequate school conditions with their new American friends, but they also took the USD students to their classrooms and proudly showed them the desks that they sat in each day and warmly announced the names of the two to three other students with whom they shared their seats. They showed us the teachers' lounges, where they said their teachers would often sit during the school day rather than teach in their classrooms. They also showed us the administrative building where the principal's office was located.   The principal was someone that none of the Equalizers had formally met and he had intimidated them with his demeanor on multiple occasions.

On the day of the school visit, one Equalizer, whom we will call Sipho, decided to leverage the presence of our group, an American university delegation of sorts, to request a face-to-face meeting with the principal. This was a risky move for Sipho. Although this group of village high school students had been active in the Equal Education organization for several months, they had not been able to make any headway at their own high school in terms of improving the quality of education offered. To make an adversary of the principal would mean risking one's success in the school, as the principal has power over the teachers who have power of students' grades. The principal agreed to meet with Sipho and two USD students that day and they discussed school conditions. The principal also arranged a meeting the following day with a larger group including the Director of *Sharing to Learn* and Professor Williams. Although no dramatic changes came out of the meetings, it was nonetheless important headway for Sipho and the other Equalizers to meet their principal face to face.

Building on this success, the Equalizers, devised a plan to leverage our status as visitors from an American university a second time to accomplish another one of their goals: letting their wider community of Makuleke know about their group and about their educational concerns. Many of the Equalizers told us that the community did not know they existed and that youth in the village had a reputation of not caring about education. Immediately, the Equalizers began planning a community meeting to introduce themselves to their village. One of the Equalizers suggested that Williams lead a discussion on something to get people there, hoping that the novelty of an American professor giving a "lecture" in the village would

attract attention. Once there was a captive audience, so the logic went, the Equalizers could then take the floor. Over the following two days the Equalizers fanned out in the village, with USD students in tow, to invite people to the meeting.

Not knowing whether anyone would show up, we sat in nervous anticipation as villagers began arriving. Nearly a hundred people attended, including the vice principal (as a representative for the principal), teachers, past and present high school students, parents, and a representative from the chief's family. The Equalizers wore their bright yellow Equal Education t-shirts that had the symbol of a clenched fist and the words "every generation has its struggle" printed on the back. Each of them had prepared a speech the previous day and had practiced with the USD students right up to the moment the meeting started. They gave their speeches in English and they organized their talking points so that each one logically followed the other. They talked about Equal Education, about their group, about the dire lack of educational resources in the community, and about their desire to have the government provide more services to them. When they finished the audience applauded and they hugged each other and then hugged the USD students. Some of the Equalizers and the USD students were in tears. This was the first time that any of them had made this type of presentation in front of their elders, teachers, and peers. It was quite an accomplishment.

After the event ended, many of the audience members stayed to talk to us. A few of the USD students brought down some chips and pretzels from our kitchen and the event turned into a post-conference reception. In the midst of this, one of the Equalizers whom we will call Alweet, stood on a chair and announced there would be an impromptu Equalizers meeting in five minutes and that any of the high school students who were interested in joining should come. Approximately ten new high school students took part and everyone exchanged cell numbers. Alweet announced there would be a formal meeting the next day, and at that meeting, seven new students showed up. This was another victory for the Equalizers as expanding their group was another one of their goals.

This community meeting was enormously beneficial to the Equalizers. Like the meetings with the principal, it was partially the result of the Equalizers using our privileged status as foreign visitors toward their own ends. We also want to emphasize that both events materialized out of unstructured interactions and discussions. The ideas were co-created by the Equalizers, by *Sharing to Learn*, and by our group. That openness has set the foundation for what has been developed in subsequent years, where the Equalizers articulate how they would like to make use of us, and we do our best to deliver. In particular, in 2014 and 2015, we have offered youth leadership workshops, which came out of a specific request by the Equalizers in 2013. At every step, it has been these village youth who have taken the initiative to structure our visits, and we are confident that this has helped mitigate the power and privilege inequalities between us. We believe that this "agenda" of joining community has the potential of reframing

immersion trips and "service" in a way that empowers community members to take the lead. We further contend that this approach is replicable beyond Makuleke, South Africa.

Mitigating Power and Privilege in Workshop Activities

Once we started the youth leadership workshops in 2014, the days that we spent in Makuleke with the Equalizers each summer had much more structure. For approximately three hours every afternoon, both authors, Williams and Nunn, led various leadership and civic engagement activities. This meant that we were in obvious positions of power and authority as workshop leaders while the Equalizers were participants. While they had asked us to run the workshop because we are college professors, we were highly sensitive to the overall dynamics of whose knowledge was perceived as the most valuable. One small way we endeavored to minimize that dynamic was to have our USD students in participant roles alongside the Equalizers. More intentionally, we invited one of the Equalizers' mentors to co-create workshop content with us. Additionally, we made an explicit effort to mitigate power differences by focusing on the Equalizers' native language as a key segment of our workshops. Each of these strategies stem from our guiding principle that the power dilemma between the Equalizers and ourselves must be addressed directly.

With the native language activity, we tasked the Equalizers with teaching us words and phrases in their mother tongue, Xitsonga. We are very conscious of the role that English language plays in the power dynamics within South Africa as well as in the cross-national interaction between our group and the local community in Makuleke. We arrive each year with no ability to communicate effectively except in our own native tongue, English, which is also a language of socio-political domination in South Africa alongside Afrikaans. Under South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, Xitsonga is one of the eleven official national languages, however, English is the main language of government and Xitsonga is the mother tongue of only about 4.5% of South African citizens. The Equalizers are secondary students, which means they have been studying English much of their school lives. So, it was not unreasonable for our group to expect the Equalizers to be willing to interact with us in our own native language, and in fact many Equalizers expressed eagerness to practice their English with us.

Nonetheless, we did not want to ignore the fact that the use of English in our workshop and friendship building with the Equalizers was a constant recreation of the unequal power dynamics between us. Language is powerful, it does not merely reflect speakers' ideas and realities, it shapes ideas and realities (Kramsch, 1998). Indigenous societies across the globe who have been colonized tell us that the requirement to communicate in their oppressor's language has devastating effects on the subordinated group's culture (Davis, 2013; Druviete, 1997; Jacob, 2013; Kapā'anaokalāokeola Nākoa Olviera, 2014; Schmidt, 1990). Further, even when colonized peoples express grievances against their colonizers or secure international rights, they must articulate their needs and the abuses they have suffered in their oppressor's language (Mikaere, 2011). In South Africa in particular, English is the former colonial language but was not rejected in the post-apartheid era. It is used "in the central economy, in government, and for national and international communication…English has accrued high social status as a marker of modernity, class affiliation, and urban sophistication" (Wright, 2012, p. 112). This creates a complex set of power dynamics around its use. In villages like Makuleke, these dynamics are stark: "in rural South Africa English is virtually a foreign language, seldom spoken in the home, hardly used outside the classroom, and rarely accessed or present in relevant print and broadcast media" (Wright, 2012, p. 114).

Thus, building a segment of the workshop around Xitsonga language teaching and learning was a strategy to show our respect for the dignity of the people, culture, and language of Makuleke, even as we have few options other than demanding that the Equalizers communicate with us in English. In small groups, the Equalizers selected a few useful words or phrases (such as counting to 10; good morning; and thank you) and devised a way to teach them to us that involved interactive learning rather than rote memorization from dictionary translations. To model the style of language teaching that we hoped the Equalizers might use, Nunn modeled a few brief interactive lessons where Equalizers and USD students alike learned words and phrases in Latvian, a language with which no one in the group was familiar, neither USD students nor Equalizers.

Nunn had learned Latvian while in the Peace Corps in Latvia in the late 1990s. She used the same immersive language teaching techniques that Peace Corps used. It involves demonstrating words and phrases in conversation-style context and asking learners to orally repeat the phrases, mimicking authentic dialog interactions. This method produces a lively and humorous experience for learners as they collectively stumble through the process of figuring out how to pronounce new words and when to give an appropriate response in the target language. For example, we modeled pairs of people introducing themselves, shaking hands, and responding with "It's nice to meet you." We lined the group up and had them move down the line to shake hands with several different people one after the other. The group found this to be a hilarious bonding experience because the phrase "It's nice to meet you" in Latvian is very cumbersome to pronounce and difficult to remember. While some were better at it than others, the spirit of the exercise was one of everyone equally fumbling and bumbling followed by good natured laughter. We chose Latvian purposefully, hoping to inspire this kind of team spirit in the challenge. We could have easily used Spanish for the language demonstration, but then our USD students would have had the benefit of already being familiar with basic Spanish, a language taught widely in U.S. public high schools. We wanted to avoid that advantage to foster a sense of shared discovery.

In small groups, Equalizers developed Xitsonga lessons of their own, with a USD student or two in each group to serve as the lesson's guinea pig. We scheduled time every afternoon for the groups to work on their language lessons and on they gave presentations several days later during the workshop. The lessons they created were a colorful array of songs, raps, dance and other physical movements that we all learned to accompany our new Xitsonga vocabulary. We certainly cannot claim to have mastered much of Xitsonga from this brief exposure to it, but we do feel that the systematic inclusion of Xitsonga teaching/learning in our workshop successfully communicated our intention to show respect for and interest in the Equalizers' native language.

A second strategy we used to mitigate the unequal power dynamics was an activity on civic engagement that started with identifying the most pressing issues faced by the local community. There is a tendency for individuals who live in developing countries to imagine that nations like the United States are immune to the kinds of problems that plague their own communities. To some extent this is true, as U.S. has excellent access to clean drinking water and reliable transit systems, for example, something that is not a reality for much of the global population. Of course, the U.S. is a society with vast economic and social inequality, so poor and low-income Americans struggle with many of the same issues as poor communities around the world. We hoped that some of the similar challenges in U.S. and South African societies would emerge in the following activity. We created small groups of 5-6 Equalizers and 2 USD students. We asked them to create a list of the most pressing problems in Makuleke on one side of a large posterboard and a list of the most pressing problems in the U.S. on the other side. In the end, nearly every issue that the Equalizers listed was matched identically by our American students. Most lists included: Health Care; High School Drop Out Rate; Teen Pregnancy; Unemployment, etcetera. We listened in as the groups independently discovered that a rural South African village and a wealthy industrialized world power share the same problems.

The lists of community issues were the starting point for a series of activities led by Williams that asked each group to 1) Select one Makuleke issue to focus on; 2) To generate potential solutions; and 3) to develop an action plan for implementing one solution. Thus, the bulk of the civic engagement component of the workshop focused on Makuleke. The goal was to empower the Equalizers to envision themselves in leadership roles tackling community problems by utilizing their local political and social resources. It was important to us to start the process from the position of shared concern over our similar problems rather than giving the false impression that our workshop was intended to impart "first-world" wisdom down to the small village to "help" them resolve issues that the U.S. had already figured out for itself. The intention was to foster dignity and solidarity in both directions: from us toward Makuleke and from the Equalizers toward the U.S.

Conclusion

By no means do we feel that we have resolved the power dilemma in bringing privileged American students and ourselves on cultural immersion trips to Makuleke. However, we are confident that others can utilize the same strategies we employed with successful results in mitigating the power differences inherent in this kind of community engagement work. We strongly advocate for a rejection of the perspective that these experiences are ones of "helping," "charity," or "giving back." Such a perspective positions the volunteer as morally virtuous while the community receiving the "charity" is positioned as "in need" or somehow deficient (Forsythe, 2011). We encourage our students to see themselves as curious about the world and practicing cultural humility rather than as humanitarians. Dignity and respect for the host community's culture, language, and economy flow much more easily from such a perspective. To that end, we assign our students to read and discuss Illich's (1968) well-known essay on volunteer experiences, "To Hell With Good Intentions" and we require them to keep daily self-reflection journals while in the village.

Further, we advocate for arriving without an agenda as the relationship with a new community gets underway. This allows the community members to imagine for themselves the way they would like to best take advantage of the resources or skills offered, what is described in the literature as: meeting the community's articulated needs (Crabtree, 2013; Kasinath, 2013; Ross, 2010). Lastly we advocate for infusing structured activities, such as workshops, with attention to drawing parallels between the host community and ourselves, and on ways to share knowledge and transfer skills in both directions between ourselves and the community we engage.

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