

# Legitimate authority

Politics



While the author of "Power Politics" does a good job examining the types of authority, legitimate and illegitimate, that exist, it works under a series of assumptions that can be problematic when put into practice in a school environment.

One of the problems with this article is that the author insists that choice is an important part of legitimate authority. He says that part of legitimate authority is voluntary compliance with commands, rather than people obeying commands for some other reason (172). The problem with this is that it leaves the subordinate in the superior-subordinate relationship to determine whether or not to obey a command. For instance, everyone can agree that a teacher has the ability to assign students work and grade them on the said work. But, sometimes a teacher assigns work that a student considers inappropriate - the student believes that it is too hard or not to grade level, is too long and so on. Should the student have the right to challenge this assignment? And if the student challenges it, and the teacher insists upon their command, does the teacher have the right to force the student to finish the assignment, or punish them for not doing so by failing them? In the practice of authority relationships in school, the answer is no, the student does not have the right to challenge a command, and yes, the teacher has the right to essentially coerce the student into following it through the threat of a failing grade. This does not mean that the system itself is wrong - the ability to fail students who do not behave or follow instructions is important to run a school or class room, but only that school systems fail to meet the requirement for legitimate authority functionally, meaning that other systems need to be in place to make authority legitimate in the way the author says.

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This problem of choice also extends to other areas of the article. The author talks about principles and students and so on “ accepting” the rules of schools, and entering an “ agreement” with schools and other institutions (173). The words “ accept” and “ agreement” both work under mean the person, such as the student or the principle, has a choice whether they want to be part of the school or not, and that by choosing to do so they agree that all authority above them is legitimate. But students are often forced without their choice by law to attend schools until a certain age, and the school they attend is decided by the where they live or what their parents tell them to do rather than their own choice. So legitimate authority, as the author talks about it involving choice, cannot function for the students; if they need to “ accept” and “ agree” for authority to be legitimate, as the author says, they should be able to say that none of the authority above them is legitimate, because they did not accept or agree to it.

This essay does not intend to say that the organization of teachers, administrators and so on are not legitimate forms of authority, but rather that choice to be part of an organization cannot be part of forming legitimate authority in school environments. This means that other structures have to stand to take their place, for instance the ability to appeal decisions a student or parent questions questions, because coercive forces work on subordinates in school relationships without them having a choice.