

## Appendix G: Teacher Authority as Power

Due to the fact that the teacher is in the role of the manager of the class, they require power in another form: the authority to influence student behavior. This could be termed “teacher authority.” Teacher authority is, in a sense, “the right to ask others to do something.” We ask students to do many things in a day, and we need to make our requests from a basis of authority. Without it, we would have little efficacy. In French and Raven’s (1974) examination of classroom interactions, there are five basic forms of teacher authority. Each needs to operate to some degree, but some will be emphasized and utilized more than others. These five types of authority are: Attractive/Referent, Expert, Reward, Coercive, and Position/Legitimate.

### Attractive (Referent) Authority

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When the teacher relies on personality, relationship building, or the fact that they share common interests with students, they could be said to use *attractive authority*. Attractive authority can be developed through getting to know and emotionally investing in students. In a sense, when the teacher makes deposits in what Covey (1995) calls the “emotional bank account” they can use their withdrawals as opportunities to influence behavior. Attractive authority can also come from the teacher’s having a personality that is perceived by students as being likeable, funny or charming. It is natural, as well as strongly encouraged by our media-driven culture, for students to want to follow and respect those that have qualities that are judged to be “cool.” We could imply that teachers to varying degrees have the ability to cash in these qualities that could be termed “personality capital.”

The use of attractive authority to influence student behavior can be both effective as well as healthy. It is difficult to be effective without having it to some degree. Students work harder for teachers they like and perceive as caring (Murray & Pianta, 2007). However, pandering for student approval and letting the need to be liked drive one’s teaching choices leads to problems. If the teacher confuses relationship-building with an implicit bargain that says, “I will be nice to you if you are nice to me,” they start down a slippery slope that leads to giving away power and being taken advantage of.

### Expert Authority

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When the teacher is perceived as being knowledgeable in the subject, well prepared, or intelligent, they possess what could be called *expert authority*. We have all had teachers who did very little to invest in the affective quality of the class, yet were well respected and able to manage the class to a great degree due to the fact that students felt there was a great deal of value in what these teacher had to say. Expert authority is driven by the students’ desire to know. Some of this power comes from a natural human deference for those who are perceived as wise or possess what could be called “intellectual capital.”

The use of expert authority to lead can be effective. It can translate into respect if the teacher is not arrogant or entirely imperceptive of the needs of his or her students. Humor can be a great asset for the teacher who chooses to integrate it.

To trust exclusively that expert authority will be sufficient has been the downfall of countless teachers (Valli, 1992). Many teachers enter the profession with a passion for their subject but

leave only one year later when their passion is met by a disappointingly high degree of disinterest and disrespect.

### Reward Authority

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Teachers have the ability to reward their students in many forms. Those rewards are usually employed to influence student behavior. This form of influence could be termed reward authority. In Chapter 7, various forms of “rewards” are discussed. They include grades, recognition, prizes, praise, privileges and anything else that students might desire, given to them (externally) by their teacher. The notion of rewarding student behavior can be potentially effective, but effects differ vastly from different kinds of rewards.

The book discusses the need for teachers to maintain the social frame relationship between student success and the corresponding teacher reward. This implicit relationship is important to ensure that students feel valued and competent. Over time it may be desirable for the teacher to help foster intrinsic sources of motivation within students rather than develop an expectation that the only way students will understand success is from extrinsic rewards. In its most healthy form, reward authority is experienced as a deep affirmation and a willingness on the part of the teacher to recognize student effort. In its least healthy form, it is a tangible or emotional token economy (see Chapter 7 discussion related to extrinsic rewards and the use of praise). In this application, student behavior is conditioned by a systematic use of extrinsic rewards and/or the giving of love. It does have the effect of modifying behavior, yet essentially creates “addicts” of reward and praise whose work is primarily undertaken to obtain the reward rather than learning or growth.

### Coercive Authority

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The teacher has in their power the right to use disincentives, to say “no,” withhold privileges, and give consequences or punishments to students. When they do this they are exercising *coercive authority*. Coercive authority implies that if a line is crossed something will happen that will be less than desirable for the student. No matter how much of the other forms of authority a teacher possesses, without some amount of coercive authority, it is likely that some students will take advantage of their freedom to cross lines without concern for boundaries.

Used constructively, this form of authority is important to draw lines and boundaries. It helps promote a sense of security in the class for those students who are not inclined to cross lines and who count on the teacher to take action when necessary. Used zealously (in its traditional form), it can bring a hostile energy to the class. In Chapter 18 related to the 4-Style manager, we discuss how relying on coercive authority can undermine the level of motivation in the class. Shame, punishments, guilt, humiliation, personal attacks, and withdrawal of affection are all forms of ineffective coercive authority.

### Position (Legitimate) Authority

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By virtue of the fact that the teacher is in the position of “the teacher,” they have authority. The governance of the school places each teacher in a position of responsibility for the management of the students in the class. In a sense, it is not so much earned as it just exists. There is no

other person in the classroom who can fulfill the duties of the teacher. We could use the term “*in loco parentis*” (in the role of parental authority) to describe this type of power. The teacher is the sanctioned authority in the room as well as the educator.

Unlike the other forms of teacher authority, *position authority* is not so much earned or cultivated, it exists by default. Nevertheless we can do a better or worse job of projecting our merit of this role. This is especially true of new and of substitute teachers. Those who expect respect usually receive it. While position authority may come essentially from a contract, it is also projected in an air of legitimacy and confidence. Those who project an affect characterized by illegitimacy or doubt that they belong in the position will suffer from a limited amount of position authority and will have problems that come with this.

To be effective, one must incorporate at least some amount of each of these five types of authority. However, each teacher must thoughtfully consider the use of each of them within their goals and personality. Each form will produce different effects on the socially constructed classroom reality and lead to different sorts of results with students. For the most part, they are not mutually exclusive. One could utilize a higher or lower degree of any or all of them simultaneously. As noted in our discussion of each form, it may be more the case that effectiveness will be less related to which forms of power are employed than the manner in which each is employed.