

Why do what teacher says?

Purpose: To convey the basic nonviolent understanding of power – that power comes from the obedience of others, and that there are various kinds of sources of power. This exercise can be used with 'Who has power in a school?'

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation: Flip chart paper and pens

Description: Ask people to work in pairs. Ask them to make a list of all the reasons why, when a teacher tells a class to open their books at page 3 and do exercise 1, the pupils do it. Allow about 5 minutes for this.

Write up a list of what they have come up with, by taking one suggestion from each pair in turn until everything is written up. Leave spaces between the items.

Use the list to draw out the generalised sources of power (with discussion), and make the basic point that the power of some depends on the obedience of others.

The list is likely to include:

- Fear of punishment (sanctions)
- Desire to do well in exams (incentives)
- Because Miss Smith is wonderful (charisma)
- Because that's what you do in school (social tradition, habit)
- Because teachers have a right to ask this (legitimacy)
- Because everyone else is doing it (pressure to conform)
- Because Miss Smith has knowledge which I want (knowledge, skills)

It probably won't bring out money or resources as sources of power, but interestingly a further reason 'because it interests me' alters the power dynamic so that the teacher becomes an aide to the pupil's attaining his/her goal.

N.B.: Teachers especially might protest that classroom activity is a cooperative process, but the experiences of many people supports the analysis presented here.