



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**NATHAN JACKLIN**

BMus (University of Victoria, 2011)

**“What Happens When “We” Forget about Authority?: Legitimizing  
Student-held Authority”**

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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11:00 a.m.  
Clearihue Building  
Room B019

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Graham McDonough, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria  
(Supervisor)

Dr. David Blades, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Member)

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## **Abstract**

It is undeniable that schools and classrooms must function according to some conception of authority, but contemporary educational theory often overlooks this concept. This ‘forgetting’ of authority can lead to misconceptions about the concept itself or to conflating it with other concepts such as autonomy, agency, self-regulation, or power. In turn, these misconceptions can then diminish the role that students play in education by ignoring or overlooking any authoritative aspect of it. The authority relationship between student and teacher in educational theory—and in classrooms—then often defaults to an unbalanced binary structure in which teachers hold authority but students do not. To rectify this problem, authority and its importance in the classroom must be remembered and reconsidered. This thesis undertakes a critical analysis of authority to state its complex features clearly. Moreover, this analysis will show how authority is distinct from importantly related concepts like autonomy, agency, self-regulation, and power. The analysis then moves to examine the education models of Peters, Dewey, and Neill, with the purpose of highlighting the prevalence and importance of authority in education. With these distinctions and boundaries drawn, the final section of this thesis will describe the strengths of an authoritative student role in epistemic, political, and moral realms, positioning student-held authority alongside the socio-critical theory of Freire, Apple, and Giroux.