

Overstepping authority

Letter to the Editor
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Authority might be arbitrary and brutal, but it's still authority and must be obeyed, at least if you care to avoid its brutality. That, at least, is the view of columnist Laurent Le Pierres ("Ken Fells revisits the Shawinigan handshake," 28 May).

Le Pierres might disagree that that's his view. After all, he agrees that Principal Fells should not have resorted to violence. But let's check that against other things Le Pierres writes.

"When is it acceptable to film your classmates getting into a fight?" Always, I would think. It's always good idea to collect evidence of what happened (Rodney King, Abu Ghraib, Robert Dziekanski—and I hope *Frank* posts whatever it has). "The student should have handed his cellphone to the principal when asked." No, the principal shouldn't have asked. The cellphone was not a weapon and it was the student's personal property. "The student should not have disrespected the principal by walking away." Walking away sounds to me like a fair response to an illegitimate request. A person concerned to exercise his authority responsibly would have noticed that he was attempting to exercise it wrongly.

Le Pierres asked whether we would thumb our nose at a police officer who pulled us over inappropriately. No, we wouldn't, because we know what police officers are capable of doing to us. Le Pierres, it seems, champions principalling-by-intimidation, on the model of policing-by-intimidation.

Le Pierres worries that teenagers have lost respect for authority. Of course, the best way to get kids to respect authority is to give them authorities they can respect.