

# Challenges in Minimizing Teacher Authority While Facilitating a Student-Owned Activism Project

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## Abstract

Students who take critical sociology courses often report feeling discouraged about their ability to change large-scale social-structural problems. To redress this perceived lack of agency and control, we modified an upper-division sociology of popular culture course to include a student-owned activism project that would entail minimal teacher direction. In this paper we describe our efforts through two iterations of the activism project and reflect on the obstacles and successes of the project.

Students taking critical sociology courses often report feeling discouraged about their ability to change or even challenge the large-scale structural problems they learn about in class. Some research suggests that merely informing students about social problems convinces students such problems are irresolvable. Buechler (2008) notes that sociology's identification of social-structural inequalities and injustices can lead students to see the status quo as immutable. Seider's (2009) study of high school students taking a social justice course reveals that after taking the course students were actually less enthusiastic about attempting to eradicate world hunger. He contends that learning about daunting social problems can lead students to become overwhelmed and convinced that such problems cannot be solved. Seider concludes it is important not only to inform students about social problems, but to also provide them with avenues for ameliorating them. Dallago et al.'s (2010) study of Italian high school students suggests that teachers can provide students opportunities to effect change, especially by facilitating, rather than directing, student efforts.

Efforts to bring social activism into the college classroom via service learning, public sociology projects, applied research, and internships are evident within the sociology curriculum (cf., Mobley 2007; Nyden, Hossfeld, Nyden 2011; Rajaram 2007). However, in our experience, most student activism has been extracurricular and/or teacher-directed. In this paper we describe our attempts to integrate two iterations of a student-owned activism project into an upper-division sociology of popular culture class. We sought a way to increase students' sense of collective agency to challenge, for example, the neoliberal exploitation of sweatshop labor (Klein 2010) and the corporate colonization of youth culture (McChesney 2000) which students often find seriously problematic after taking the course. And we wanted to experiment with minimizing teacher authority and maximizing student control. As we discovered, this entailed challenges, particularly around issues of motivation and grading.

## Theoretical Perspectives

Anarchistic ideals were among the perspectives that inspired our desire to facilitate

a student-owned activism project. Anarchy can have many meanings and even prominent anarchists have difficulty defining it (Chomsky 1970). The mainstream media most frequently characterize anarchy as a violent, terroristic philosophy (Fernandez 2008; Owens & Palmer 2003), but anarchy is far more complex than simplistic media framing suggests (Graeber 2004). While mainstream media frame anarchists as violent, ignorant and out of control, scholarly research indicates that anarchism plays an important philosophical role in the anti-globalization (AG) movement, and, more recently the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement (Buttel 2003; Caren & Gaby 2011; Epstein 2001; Graeber 2004; Graeber 2011; Juris 2005; Owens & Palmer 2003). Core principles such as anti-authoritarianism, non-hierarchical organization, direct democracy and direct action are shared by pure anarchists in the Anti Globalization (AG) and Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movements, and by those that exhibit what Epstein (2001) calls an “anarchist sensibility.” Epstein claims that many AG activists are not rigidly anarchistic or members of explicitly anarchist groups, but do identify with anarchist ideals and utilize them in their activism.

In our attempt to facilitate a student-owned activism project, we drew loosely on an anarchist sensibility that emphasizes mutual aid and non-hierarchical organization while encouraging students to critique authority, the state, capitalism, and other forms of social domination (Graeber 2004; Kropotkin 1908). Anarchy as a pedagogical practice has received short shrift in sociology, yet we felt that attempting such an approach would be inherently sociological in that sociology, or at least much of it, is concerned with not only identifying various forms of domination but ameliorating them (Buechler 2008). Graeber describes the ideal anarchic order as “com[ing] up with a plan that eve-

rybody can live with and no one feels is a fundamental violation of their principles” (2004:8). This was our modest goal in experimenting with sharing classroom control.

While we were inspired by anarchist ideals for the first iteration of the activism project, for the second we also drew insights from critical pedagogy. In his groundbreaking work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), Paulo Freire rejects the idea that a class-based society is inevitable, arguing that education can (and should) be a powerful counter-hegemonic force. Traditional education transmits the ideas and values of the oppressors, says Freire. Power differentials between teachers and students should be dissolved, he argues, granting students ownership over their own education. Ultimately, Freire seeks to make students aware of their own oppression and to spur them to fight this oppression.

Though *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was originally aimed at poor, illiterate adults in developing nations, many US educators adopted Freire’s ideas (Macedo 2000). Perhaps the most prominent American educator implementing Freire’s ideas is Ira Shor. Shor’s book, *When Students Have Power* (1996), chronicles his efforts to incorporate critical pedagogy at the College of Staten Island in New York City. Shor documents how he and his students negotiated various elements of the classroom, ranging from syllabus to seating arrangements. Shor also discusses how this power-sharing arrangement led students to make demands that he didn’t anticipate. Students not only challenged the need for attendance but also Shor’s authority to determine grading standards. Because of these debates, Shor writes, the class almost transformed beyond his ability to manage it. Using student responses and comments to illustrate his ideas, Shor outlines both the successes and limitations of his experiment in critical pedagogy.

Recent scholarship chronicles efforts to incorporate critical pedagogy into the sociology curriculum. Braa and Callero (2006) describe how they implemented critical pedagogy when supporting a student-run and directed tenants' union. Fobes and Kaufman (2008) discuss obstacles to implementing critical pedagogy and pose solutions to such obstacles. We utilized these sociologists' insights when assessing our own student activism project's successes and limitations.

### **Campus Setting**

The setting for our student activism project was a medium-size, Southeastern United States public Master's university with approximately 13,000 students, of which roughly 12,000 are undergraduates. The student body is predominately white (86 percent), female (60 percent), in-state resident (82 percent), with 35 percent reporting family income in the \$75,000 to 150,000 dollar range. While the university administration encourages, and even mandates in some instances, student volunteerism - and there is a wide range of student organizations on campus across the social and political spectrum - many students describe the political and cultural climate on campus as "neutral" or "somewhat conservative" and there is little evidence of much lively, organized and/or public student activism.

### **Sociology of Popular Culture**

In our popular culture class we examined corporations and the commercialization of culture - and media representations of race, class, gender, and sexuality - from an explicitly critical perspective (King 2010). The first half of the course focused on Naomi Klein's book, *No Logo* (2010). Klein describes the problems of branding, advertising, changing manufacturing and labor practices and other facets of neoliberal globalization, and foregrounds the rise of anti-

corporate activism that has emerged in its wake.

We used Klein's work to encourage students to question the naturalness and/or inevitability of consumerism, corporate capitalism, neoliberalism, and our commercially-dominated and advertising-saturated culture. We encouraged students to recognize that such conditions are not inevitable (Freire 2000; Silvey 2004). Ultimately, we wanted to foster the belief - inherent in the global justice and other social reform movements - that a better world is possible (Scanlan 2009).

### **The Activism Project**

Donna King taught several iterations of Popular Culture as described above, with traditional reading, writing and oral presentation requirements, and anticipated once again the frustration and potential sense of powerlessness, cynicism and/or apathy students might experience as they learned to view their popular culture through a critical lens. When Nick Chagnon became her graduate teaching assistant in the class, he suggested an optional activism project. Nick appreciated the value in developing students' critical awareness, analytical ability and strong writing skills, but he also understood that many students prefer a more direct action approach. With that in mind, just before the semester began Nick suggested experimenting with a new kind of class project, which neither of us had attempted before. He suggested that along with being action-oriented, the project should be student-directed as much as possible. We amended the class syllabus to include a group activism project option in lieu of individual student oral presentations and attempted to make it a collective student decision.

Nick introduced the activism project option during the first day of class. Traditional oral presentations would entail each student independently researching on a topic relat-

ing to class themes and presenting their findings. The group activism project would be collectively conceived and executed by students, taking place in the wider campus community. Nick suggested, for example, that the class could organize some type of campus event or recruit a guest lecturer to come to campus. He also let students know it would be possible to split up the class so that each student could complete the assignment in which they felt most comfortable.

While introducing the project, Nick took special care to impress upon students that the activism project would be student owned. He made it clear that he felt mandating activism was unethical, and that it would be completely voluntary in this class. He also told students that he understood that they lived full lives outside the classroom and they might not be willing or able to do an activism project, for many reasons. Furthermore, he emphasized that, if they chose the option, an activism project must reflect students', not instructors', ideas. Along with this, he made sure that students understood that the possibility of a more rewarding experience through a student-owned project was accompanied by the likelihood of more work and responsibility. After the first class, he repeated these messages periodically while students decided whether they wanted to do the project, and while they selected a topic and techniques for the project.

Most of the initial class discussions involved brainstorming about the activism project so students would have some idea what they'd be getting into. Students floated many ideas, but hadn't settled on any when after four weeks Nick asked for a show of hands to determine which kind of final project they preferred. All but one student chose a group activism project. We validated this student's desire to do an independent project, and encouraged the student to stay flexible and keep an open mind about the

group project. After a few weeks, as the group project began to take shape, this student decided to switch and join in the group project. Thus, the entire class, a total of fifteen students, participated in the activism project.

Over the following six weeks, during class time allotted for the project, students engaged in more discussion and debate. As instructors, we tried to take an approach similar to Dallago et al. (2010), working more as facilitators than directors of the activism project. We approached the project with reflexivity, doing our best to avoid what Hart (1992) calls tokenism or manipulation – that is, using students as figureheads or puppets, or representing youth in projects to reflect the ideas and values of authorities in charge, rather than those of students themselves. We agree with Freire (2000) when he makes a similar point, arguing that education must reflect the ideas of students rather than teachers in order to be liberating.

In short, we wanted to ensure that this project reflected students' ideas and opinions, not our own. In pursuit of this goal, we attempted to maintain a non-authoritative, flexible, and non-directorial approach to helping students design and implement their project. However, we did decide to intervene and moderate the discussion on occasion, to keep it on track and time-sensitive. For example, to help students make sense of each other's ideas, we would ask students to elaborate on their suggestions, remind students of the amount of work likely entailed in each idea, or sometimes, comment on the feasibility of some ideas. We also provided guidance to assure the project didn't put students in any physical or legal danger, such as reminding them that using copyrighted corporate products in unauthorized ways might be illegal. Eventually we aided students in narrowing down their many options by writing them on the board and calling for a vote. Ultimately, students made all the ma-

major decisions for the project including coming up with the thematic focus, the concrete public actions, and the structure for an equitable division of labor.

For the first activism project, students decided to: (1) produce a short newsletter; (2) utilize “culture jamming” techniques, which Klein describes as subverting, spoofing, and/or radically altering corporate advertising to send a non-commercial, socially-responsible, satirical and/or ironic message; (3) organize a campus demonstration to raise awareness and distribute their newsletter; and (4) create a Facebook page to promote the event to a wider public.

Students broke into three groups to develop the project. Each group worked at one of three tasks-- promoting the demonstration, editing the newsletter, and organizing the culture jamming and demonstration. Additionally, students worked in pairs to produce written articles and artwork for the newsletter. Students from each group met independently inside and outside of class to work on their part of the project and then provided status updates and committee reports to the entire class during allotted class time. As facilitators, we were enlisted by the more active students in class to intervene in some of this group process, to ensure that all group members communicated effectively and executed their tasks appropriately. Much of this entailed sharing student concerns via the online discussion board, and (unfortunately for our anarchist ideals) raising the specter of the project grade as a negative reinforcement for group member cooperation and equity. We discuss the problem of grading a student-owned project in the next section of this paper.

The final newsletter was a two-sided sheet with six 250-word, student-written articles and graphics on subjects such as media concentration and ownership, effects of globalization on domestic and foreign labor, environmental impacts of consumerism, and

suggestions for individuals and organized groups to challenge and begin to change corporate practices. The culture jam involved blanketing the main campus pedestrian thoroughfare, ranging one half mile between the student dining hall and the library, with articles of clothing from companies such as Nike or Gap and accompanying posters describing the working conditions where these brand-name items were made. The demonstration occurred during the next-to-last class period. Students set up tables at each end of the culture-jammed campus walkway and for two hours handed out newsletters and engaged passing students in discussions about media conglomeration, corporate consumerism and neoliberal globalization, including a “Guess that Logo” game. Students successfully distributed roughly 200 newsletters on campus that day. The following week they met for the final class period to debrief about the experience and evaluate the activism project as a whole.

The second time we taught the course there were more students in the class (23), and roughly half decided to work collectively on a group activism project. This group focused on media representations of sexuality and reproductive health and worked independently outside of class to organize their project. For their activism event, they set up a large table with a colorful poster strategically-placed on the main campus walkway, and engaged passing students over a six hour period (in 2-hour shifts) by distributing a fact sheet they had created with public health information on STDs and safe-sex practices, playing a trivia game based on popular television shows that exposed the sexual exploitation and misinformation prevalent in the media, and distributing free candy and condoms.

### **Student Assessments of the Projects**

At the end of each project, we felt successful in that students had designed and

carried out an activism project, learned from it, and seemed fulfilled by the experience. To confirm these impressions, we asked students to complete a survey evaluating the project. The first assessment instrument was a 17-item survey containing both open- and close-ended questions. Close-ended items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). For the first survey, we included open-ended items to capture data that might be missed by close-ended questions. For the second survey, we eliminated open-ended written questions and conducted focus group interviews instead. We asked students about their sense of empowerment achieved through the project, the freedom and independence granted them throughout the project, the educative value of the project, and finally, whether or not they would participate in such a project again.

Student survey responses were resoundingly positive. The great majority of students from both activism projects reported that the project enhanced their perceptions of agency in relation to social problems. They also felt they were granted freedom and autonomy in planning and implementing each project. When asked about the educative value of the project, students again gave largely positive responses, and almost all said they would participate again. Though survey responses were not unanimous, for nearly all survey items, all but one or two students responded positively.

We were encouraged by these student responses and felt validated in our impressions of the projects' success. As teachers, however, we also learned lessons that we see as important to explore. Facilitating the first project was not easy, nor did it unfold as we anticipated. We spent a surprising amount of time and effort grappling with various issues and reflecting on the actual degree of our success in minimizing classroom authority. While we did experience

challenges, experimenting in this way also taught us a great deal.

### **Challenges Minimizing Teacher**

#### **Authority**

The paths of these projects were sometimes bumpy roads, though we consider the experience worthwhile for teacher and student alike. As Graeber reports, "creating a culture of democracy in a people who have little experience of such things is necessarily a painful and uneven business, full of all sorts of stumblings and false starts" (2002:8). In our case, there was satisfaction and frustration for both teachers and students. Like Fobes and Kaufman (2008), we encountered (especially in the first activism group) issues such as student unease with our non-directorial approach; difficulties keeping students on-task without invoking authority; free-riding students taking advantage of the project's group-work format; student anxiety about project grades, and the perception of coercion for some students. But we also discovered that many students appreciated both the freedom they were given to construct their own project and the student camaraderie that collaborating promoted.

#### *The Question of Coercion*

Despite our best efforts to avoid it, one student in each group reported feeling coerced to participate in the activism project. In an open-ended survey response, a student in the first group wrote, "I felt like there wasn't another option. No one wants to be the [one] person who doesn't want to do the group project. I would have preferred to do what I wanted, how I wanted." We attributed this student's discomfort to the open voting structure in the first group project and the possibility of perceived group conformity pressures, and we changed that format for the second group to anonymous voting. It is not clear to us, therefore, why one student in

the second activism group felt coerced to participate in a group activism project, since anonymous voting was conducted and half of the students in that class chose to do independent oral presentations. Thus, we are aware that when offering a group activism project opportunity to students as a group, some individuals may feel pressured to participate despite our best efforts to prevent that. We will continue to explore ways to minimize this possibility.

### *The Question of Grading a Student-owned Activism Project*

Our first activism project was somewhat spontaneous and thus there was uncertainty for teachers and students alike about how it would be assessed. Because of our open-ended approach, we didn't outline specific grading criteria during the initial phases of the first project. College students are understandably accustomed to structured assignments that clearly outline tasks and evaluation criteria up front. This led to some student concern in the first activism group over how the project would be graded. Braa and Callero (2006) had a similar experience, adding that students' preoccupation over grades can distract them from the learning experience. Eventually, for the first activism group we constructed a grading rubric which we distributed several weeks before the project date, collected peer evaluations from each subgroup at the conclusion of the project, and assigned grades ourselves based on these criteria and sources.

For the second activism project, we handed the evaluation over to students. Both Fobes and Kaufman (2008) and Braa and Callero (2006) suggest that teachers give students a role in constructing rubrics. One of the most integral elements of Shor's (1996) approach to power-sharing in the classroom was his negotiation of assignments and grading with students. Thus, we allowed the second activism group to con-

struct their own rubric and evaluate each other. We thought this was a fitting way to minimize teacher authority and maximize student autonomy. However, in focus group interviews, students raise an issue which we didn't anticipate regarding peer evaluations, the question of rigor. As one student states,

I even wrote on my little grading rubric, we were supposed to write a comment about each person and I ended up just writing [one] paragraph [for the whole group] because, you know like everybody did a good job, and worked really well together and there wasn't really a person who didn't do what they were supposed to do....

Another student seems to question the worth of peer evaluations, implying students might find it difficult to rigorously evaluate each other:

I think it's easier to do the field notes than responding about your own team, because you work together so you're not going to complain. I mean, if there was someone slacking, I'm sure that they would bring that up with the teacher but otherwise everyone's probably going to get the same grade.

It is important to note that this second activism group seems genuinely satisfied with each other's performance, thus explaining why they might be disinclined to criticize each other. Furthermore, students didn't say they *couldn't* evaluate each other; instead it appears they might not have evaluated each other *rigorously*. It makes sense that empathy and solidarity among students may lead to less than rigorous peer evaluation. Still, peer evaluation seems appropriate and desirable in pursuit of a non-authoritarian teaching approach.

*The Problem of Student Motivation and Free Riders*

The experience of group solidarity and satisfaction was different in the first group activism project, and at times we overestimated these students' independent motivation. While some student apathy is perhaps inevitable, for this first group we sometimes felt compelled to invoke our authority to overcome it. Thus we established deadlines and reminded students that, although this was their project, a lack of effort would cause their course grades to suffer.

This was less of a concern in the second activism group, perhaps because we put evaluation into their own hands, and instead of imposing deadlines, changed tack and requested weekly group progress reports. These students reported later that this approach helped keep them collectively on track yet independently directed. Appreciating the teacher's facilitative role, one student states, "I liked that when we came to class on Monday you would ask for progress and then give input. I think that helped us figure out what direction we needed to take it in."

Fobes and Kaufman (2008) note that in group projects such as these, there are inevitably some "free-riders" or students that allow other group members to do their work while they do little or nothing. In the open-ended portion of our first survey many students criticized the work done by others. Additionally, these student peer evaluations explicitly named some free-riders. Taking this into account, and observing students' in-class planning sessions, we were still able to conclude that most students did actively participate in this project.

On the other hand, the second group of students reported no free-riders. In focus groups, they repeatedly and explicitly stated each person did a fair amount of work. Talk-

ing about his satisfaction with the group process and final product, one student stated,

Yeah, I mean, I think kind of how like we were talking about how we graded people, but like, I don't know, it was kind [of] like no complaints. Like I think everybody did really well.

It is likely that either of these scenarios might occur in a class project; some free-riding students might take unfair advantage of group work, while at other times, students may team up in an effective and equitable way. In the end, we agree with Fobes and Kaufman when they conclude that the value of group projects and critical pedagogy outweighs the occasional reality of some free-riders.

*Facilitating versus Directing Students*

Advocating for student power in the classroom, Freire (2000) warns that students must own a transformative pedagogy. We strove to be sensitive to this issue throughout both activism projects. Although we did invoke authority to some degree in facilitating the first project, and thus violated strict anarchic principles, we remained mainly facilitators rather than directors. Dallago et al. echo our experience when they state, "we were mostly instruments in the hands of the students" (2010:44).

We respected the plurality of students' views and facilitated a democratic order in designing the projects. Students voted on nearly all matters, and all those who wanted to be heard were able to speak. Ours was similar to an anarchist consensus process; though we occasionally utilized voting, usually a class-wide consensus was reached rather than a majority-mandated decision (Graeber 2002). This probably caused the design process to be less streamlined than it might have been. Braa and Callero (2006) also incorporated a democratic process to

design their project. Unlike us, they question the relative value of such a strategy when it becomes a significant logistical obstacle. In our case, we believe the equity of this approach outweighed some of its inefficiency. It didn't create a major logistical obstacle for us and instead was invaluable both in facilitating high quality, student-created activism projects and in teaching students (and ourselves) about organizing in a loosely structured, non-authoritarian environment. However, our findings indicate that students didn't always find this approach as valuable as we do.

#### *Student Unease with an Unstructured Approach*

In the first activism project, some students reported they were often confused about their responsibilities and apprehensive about how the project would turn out. Though we were caught off guard by student anxieties, in retrospect such views are far from surprising. Fobes and Kaufman note that students are often unnerved by critical pedagogy because of its inherent "ambiguity and uncertainty" (2008:27). Shor noted a similar phenomenon when his students were at first resistant and suspicious of his ideas about power-sharing. Furthermore, he acknowledges some students were resentful of the extra student responsibility entailed in a power-sharing classroom (1996:210). Rossi (2009) reported similar findings in his case studies of youth participation, contending that youth do not necessarily prefer informal organizations. While we believe an ultimately open-ended approach to a project such as ours is integral to minimizing teacher authority, the facilitative role of instructors is still necessary. Striking a balance between laissez-faire and directorial teaching is the core challenge of effective facilitation.

#### *Student Autonomy and Collaboration*

While much of the first activism project was organized during class time, with some facilitation from Nick in his role as graduate teaching assistant, students in the second group organized themselves for the most part outside of class and collaborated in a non-hierarchical manner. They described their experience as an evolution from confusion to a relatively streamlined process. Students reported they managed to create an equitable division of labor which they felt led to a quality end product. Furthermore, they stated that no one student dominated the project, though key students took initiative in organizing elements of the project. As one student reported,

Yeah, there never really was a need for like one leader because everybody was participating, everyone was working; [one student] was like the organizer, [one] was more like the secretary. Yeah, like no one was like president or anything.

Another student described the division of labor this way,

Sure, I mean for me I'm a very independent person. So I don't always like to depend on others. But this group, they were great. It was easy. Everyone did what they needed to do and did it on time. The three components we had with the game, the flyer, and the poster...was very evenly divided and everyone did their part.

We can't claim that our efforts to cultivate a non-authoritarian classroom environment caused this group of students to develop a non-hierarchical order when organizing their out-of-class efforts. However, we feel encouraged that they were able to effectively organize themselves in this way. Overall,

taking into account survey responses, focus group data, and both activism projects' end products, we feel this project was successful in minimizing teacher authority and cultivating a somewhat non-authoritarian classroom environment. Further, we believe the activism project helped students to begin to think critically and to take direct action in their own community (Freire 2000).

### Implications

Ultimately, we feel these projects were successful. Students produced quality and unique end products, organized and publicized campus-wide demonstrations, and successfully distributed materials they researched and wrote themselves. They reported positive experiences relating to the activism projects, and most students said they would participate in a similar project again. However, we recognize there is always room for improvement in future versions of these activism projects.

We can provide students with more varied examples of student activism, such as the Kudong campaign (Featherstone 2004) or Braa and Callero's (2006) student-developed tenant's union, to inspire and inform them. Providing students with more concrete examples may address students' desire for more instruction and structure. As one of our students stated, "I think there should have been more instruction at the beginning, to [help us] understand more of what we were really [being] asked to do." Giving students more concrete examples of activism projects might help resolve such confusion in a suggestive rather than directorial way. Furthermore, our own students' group activism projects will act as concrete examples and possible frameworks for future students should they choose to adopt them. Braa and Callero's (2006) tenant's union project exemplifies this; developed by one cohort of students, it has been carried on by several subsequent cohorts. Our experi-

ence with our students' pioneering projects will allow us to provide vivid examples of local student-owned group activism.

Additionally, we have the benefit of our experience in facilitating such projects. Being more sure-footed in our facilitative duties will hopefully allow us to avoid some of the confusion that students experienced. For example, we might refine our consensus technique by using established methods, such as hand signals similar to those used to organize OWS assemblies. And, though the question of rigor is potentially problematic, we will remember it is important to put evaluation of student-owned projects into students' hands. We feel these lessons will allow us to facilitate future student activism projects in a more streamlined, yet flexible and non-authoritarian, manner.

Student requests for more teacher-directed structure in student-owned activism projects create a paradox. Providing more information, such as concrete examples and student-created evaluation criteria, might resolve these student concerns. On the other hand, they may not. Should we provide more structure in the future? We are concerned that too much input from us would violate student ownership of the project. Additionally, this raises ethical concerns about coercing students into activism. Some might argue that encouraging students to take full responsibility to construct their own activism project might also be considered coercive. But, however bumpy the experience, students did choose whether or not they wanted to participate in an activism project.

We believe classroom flexibility and minimized teacher authority give willing students a unique and valuable educational experience in group organizing that would be lost in a more structured environment. We also see the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty as a necessary skill students need to learn on the road to full ma-

turity, and thus consider it our responsibility as teachers to provide successful opportunities for students to master it. Of course, that also requires us as teachers to cultivate a similar tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty in ceding classroom control. Thus, we remain ever aware of walking a challenging line between laissez-faire and directorial approaches in our continuing effort to minimize teacher authority when facilitating student-owned activism projects.

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