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Seeking Autonomy In Student Organizing: A Case Study of External Influence on Clark Climate Justice

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SEEKING AUTONOMY IN STUDENT ORGANIZING: A Case Study of External Influence on Clark Climate Justice

Senior Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Social & Environmental Justice Major at Clark University

Ari Nicholson

Abstract: In this thesis, I characterize the influence that the national youth climate movement and coalition partners have had on a small college climate organization, Clark Climate Justice (CCJ). Drawing from both Participatory Action Methods as well as Autoethnography, I used interviews, self-reflection, and observation to investigate CCJ's work. I utilize Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* to understand the ways that CCJ has implemented Freire's idea of praxis. Through narrative storytelling I detail the history of CCJ since its inception, cataloging the organization's changes and challenges. I analyze the ways that CCJ's praxis has been shaped by outside actors, if coalitions have been collaborative, and why CCJ has chosen to join or split from coalition. In my conclusion I complicate Freire's idea of praxis by describing how praxis can apply at a national scale, as well as what sort of commitments this wider scale requires. I describe the ways that the national movement has fallen short in supporting local climate justice groups to develop decision-making skills. Then, I differentiate the experience of praxis between individuals and a collective as well as introduce CCJ's cultural approach to critical pedagogy. Additionally, I complicate Freire's ideas of solidarity by detailing short fallings in both his analysis and the analysis of intersectionality. I share CCJ's commitment to deliberative action with a deep understanding of our axes of privilege and oppression. Finally, I offer concrete considerations for both the national youth climate movement and student justice organizations.

To access the entire thesis, please contact Ari Nicholson at arianamnicholson@gmail.com.

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