A Comparative Study of Student Attitudes to Learning: Cuba and Australia

Master of Education (research) Thesis
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2006
Declaration of Authenticity

“I, Joanne Williams, declare that the Master by Research entitled A Comparative Study of Student Attitudes to Learning: Cuba and Australia is no more than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed within educational research that student attitudes to learning and schooling are of critical importance. However it continues to be rare for research to draw on the perspectives of students themselves as valid data. Moreover, students are almost entirely absent from educational policy-making and processes of educational reform.

This project employed a collaborative social research methodology. It sought the perspectives of twenty Year 10 students in Melbourne's west, and twenty students of similar age in Havana, Cuba, using written cases and group interviews. The students offered their views on learning and schooling and then collaborated with the researcher to develop interpretative case summaries. The project demonstrates the usefulness of involving students actively in educational research not only from the perspective of improving student attitudes to learning, but also as a critical element of a democratic education capable of fostering an engaged and critical student population.

Cuba was chosen as a contrasting context with extensive experience in involving students in educational decision-making. The comparison between the two countries revealed both shared experiences and a range of differences, and illuminated the importance of understanding broader contextual influences on student attitudes and their relationship to the possibilities for reform.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would never have reached completion if it were not for the relentless support, encouragement, patience and feedback of Brenda Cherednichenko to whom I am eternally grateful. Thank you to both Maureen Ryan and Pat Brewer who provided clarity at critical moments in the process.

In particular I would like to thank my co-researchers, the students of Vedado Secondary College and Western Melbourne College, who all, in different ways reminded me of why I always wanted to be a teacher.

Thank you also to Grace Schirripa, Rosa Maria Masson Cruz, Marita, Jorge and Cecilia Jorquera and Kerryn, Chris, Julia, Sue and Russ Williams for their support.

Thank you to Jorge Jorquera for assisting with translations, transcriptions, reading and discussing countless drafts and his inexorable belief in me.

And finally, to Jorge, Miguel Enriquez and Inti Pablo who give me daily glimpses of how the world could be, provided we continue (in the words of Che) to be realistic by demanding the impossible.
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GLOSSARY

ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER  Australian Council for Educational Research
ACOSS  Australian Council of Social Services
AEU  Australian Education Union
ASRC  Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
AVCC  Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee
CDRs  Committees for the Defence of the Revolution
CTC  Confederation of Labour of Cuba
FEEM  Federation of Middle High School Students (Cuba)
FEU  Federation of University Students (Cuba)
FMC  Federation of Cuban Women
FOE  Friends of the Earth
FSS  Full Service Schooling
LLENs  Local Learning and Employment Networks
MCEETYA  Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MINED  Ministry of Education (Cuba)
MST  Landless Workers Movement (Brazil)
MWC  Melbourne West College
NOOSR  National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition
OPJM  José Martí Movement of Pioneers (Pioneros)
PAR  Participatory Action Research
PCC  Communist Party of Cuba
SAR  Students as Researchers
SATs  Student Action Teams
SRCs  Student Representative Councils
UJC  Union of Young Communists (Cuba)
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
VCAA  Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCE  Victorian Certificate of Education
VC OSS  Victorian Council of Social Services
VELS  Victorian Essential Learning Standards
VET  Vocational Education and Training
VSC  Vedado Secondary College