

INFORMAL AND POPULAR EDUCATION IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY WORK

**Seeking insights for Australian
theory and practice from theories and
practices in Germany and Singapore**

Doctoral thesis
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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study of youth and community work in three countries. Using field work in Australia and Singapore, and a study of German literature I examine the way youth and community workers in these three countries theorise about their educational practice.

The following questions guide the research:

- Do youth and community workers practice informal education?
- What is successful informal education practice in youth and community work?
- Does the educational practice of youth and community workers serve to control its learners?
- Can the educational practice of youth and community workers emancipate learners?

The starting point for the research is an examination of informal and popular education in Australian youth and community work. I have practised, researched and taught youth and community work in Australia for almost twenty years. Drawing upon this experience and a series of interviews I describe and discuss the contradictions, ambiguities and different consciousnesses that characterise the way many Australian youth and community workers theorise about their practice.

I then seek insights for Australian theory and practice in German literature about youth and community work. German scholars have engaged in educational theorising about youth and community work dating back into the nineteenth century. I give an account of the history of this theorising and then analyse more recent debates between advocates of the critical-emancipatory, instrumental and historical-materialist perspectives.

In Singapore, youth and community work, if judged solely in terms of participation, is very successful, and I look for explanations for this success. Youth and community workers in Singapore are open about serving the interests of the state. Yet they use language and espouse goals similar to that of their Australian and German counterparts who, for the most part, claim to serve the interests of their communities. The study of this seeming paradox enables me to interrogate the claims of Australian youth and community workers that their practice is shaped by the needs of the people and that they seek to strengthen social wellbeing and cohesion.

I conclude my thesis by using the Centre for Popular Education at UTS as a case study and examine how the lessons learnt in the course of my study of Australian and Singaporean practice and German theory can be used to analyse and explain the Centre's development. I close the thesis by answering the four guiding research questions.