

An Investigation into Students' Perceptions of Multicultural Classroom
Environments in Queensland Catholic Secondary Schools

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis for which I have qualified or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety committee.

Abstract

Australia continues to become culturally diverse. This diversity is being witnessed in Catholic schools. This thesis reports research which employed quantitative data collection methods in investigating students' perceptions of their multicultural classroom environment. By drawing on Catholic school literature, multicultural literature, previous learning environment research and the perceptions of stakeholders, an instrument, known as the Multicultural Classroom Environment Instrument (MCEI), was developed to assess psychosocial dimensions of classroom environments in Queensland Catholic secondary schools. These dimensions were: Collaboration, Competition, Teacher Authority, Teacher Support, Congruence, Deference, Teacher Directedness and Gender Equity. The use of the instrument with a sample of 1,460 students in 24 Catholic secondary schools in Queensland revealed some statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of their classroom environment. Differences were revealed according to the country of birth of the student and those of the parents. Investigations examining school type, subject, year level and gender were also undertaken. Single-sex schools were shown to be more concerned with Teacher Authority and Competition compared to coeducational schools. Religion and Study of Religion classes were perceived as very similar, irrespective of school type. There were differences in students' perception of the classroom environment across different year levels, with year 8 students' perceptions significantly different to that of years 10 and 12 students. Girls generally perceived their classroom environment more positively than boys, with greater Collaboration, Teacher Support and Gender Equity and less Competition and Teacher Authority. The results of this thesis suggest that differences in students' perceptions of multicultural classroom environments in Queensland Catholic secondary schools do exist. It also suggests that in order to continue to provide quality education, Catholic schools must acknowledge these differences. They must also ensure that curriculum initiatives, staff professional development and training, and other educational and pastoral initiatives are designed to incorporate the differences identified in this thesis. Further investigation into a variety of multicultural classroom environments is recommended.