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BELIEFS OF STUDENTS FROM AN EIGHTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASS
REGARDING THEIR MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation by

Rory Allen Price

Submitted to the Graduate School

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Reich College of Education

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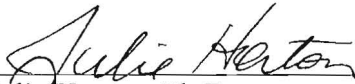
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August, 2006

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ABSTRACT

BELIEFS OF EIGHTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

(August, 2006)

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The beliefs of early adolescents regarding their education have not been given adequate attention by educators. A tradition of schooling influenced by factory models and behaviorism has effectively silenced student opportunities to share their beliefs relating to education. To give voice to students, this study examined the beliefs of students from an eighth grade language arts class regarding their meaningful learning experiences. The constant comparative method of qualitative research described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was employed for analysis of data. Riessman (2002) and Fairbanks (1992) were used to complement the analysis. Ten students were selected to participate in two individual and two focus group interviews. Ways in which their beliefs related to effective teacher characteristics are discussed.

Four themes emerged from student responses. The participants indicated a strong desire to have positive student-teacher relationships. Secondly, the participants believed a safe environment was critical to meaningful learning experiences. Expertise in subject matter, pedagogy, and student's personal lives was seen as important to the participants.

Lastly, obstacles to learning are discussed including poor relationships, a restrictive environment, and teachers with limited expertise.

Implications for further research include inquiry into other contexts such as student ability, culture, and school grade configurations. Additional possibilities consist of exploration into the level of brain development required to recognize these meaningful learning experiences, effect of teacher ego regarding students' beliefs, how students are motivated, and what the effect of National Board certification of teachers may have on students' beliefs regarding their meaningful learning experiences.