

Cuba and the US: Comparing Early Education Policy

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If a tiny island nation can provide health and education services to its youngest citizens, then perhaps the US could imagine ways to solve some of its persistent problems in this regard.

Visits to Cuba over the last 6 years have impressed me by the highly developed system of early care and education for children, and smooth integration of health access. I have been particularly impressed by the achievement of nearly 100% access to health and education services. It seems useful to share evidence, even anecdotal of the success of the Cuban early childhood project. The two countries are vastly different in national organization, so that direct comparisons are almost impossible.

Cuba has participated in the UNICEF sponsored Early Childhood Benchmarks of Child Well-Being. The US has not. I have used commonly available internet sources to provide plausible information about the US for each of the UNICEF benchmarks.

US local programs are often assessed with the well known ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale). Cuba has its own methods of assessment. Neither of these assessments is validated for the other country. My impressions are plentiful and consistent with each other. I have organized them based on my general knowledge of early childhood best practices in the US, using the ECERS-R subscales as a rough guide.

Informal comparison on these two contrasting levels leads me to conclude that there are many ways in which the US might seek to emulate Cuban practices—not by simply copying, but by allowing those practices to inform action at the national, state and local levels.

Annotated References

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US is #26 out of 29 countries included. Child Poverty rate, 15%
Children 4 yrs. through compulsory school age < 75%.
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