

REVOLUTION AND CONTINUITY IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN CUBA

Graciella Cruz-Taura

Marxist pedagogy came to dominate Cuba's educational system shortly after the Revolution of 1959. This paper examines the history of educational policy in Cuba, with emphasis on the Republic's policy during the first half the twentieth century. The objective is to identify cultural patterns that have survived the changes imposed by the communist order. The author recognizes that revolutionary ideology radically altered Cuban education yet the regime's ultimate goal to create a new socialist man has failed. While this is hardly a new assessment – it has been analyzed by the author elsewhere as well as by others – the author points to the historical record to support the argument that Cuban traditions and educational values contributed to the derailment of communist educational objectives and deserve consideration in the formulation of plans to rehabilitate the Cuban educational system for the twenty-first century.

COLONIAL ANTECEDENTS

Formal education in colonial Cuba had penurious beginnings. Parallel to the island's marginal place in a rapidly expanding Spanish overseas empire, the Crown lacked the resources to implement the recommendations made by the clergy and many royal officials to provide for grammar and Latin instructors in its isolated Caribbean communities during the age of pirates and corsairs.¹ Limited schooling was offered by the regular clergy and through the private initiative of local benefactors. During the eighteenth century, concurrently with the ascension of the French House of Bourbon to the Spanish throne, this dark period slowly began to fade in favor of the Enlightenment, an age characterized by new attitudes toward knowledge. Formal education would come to be associated with socioeconomic mobility and rulers chartered

¹For discussions of cultural life and education in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Cuba, see Leví Marrero y Artiles, 1976-1992, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, S.A.), vols. 3-4; José Manuel Pérez Cabrera, 1962, *Historiografía de Cuba* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia,) chapter 1; Teresa Fernández Soneira, 1997, *Cuba: historia de la educación católica, 1582-1961* (Miami: Ediciones Universal); and Sosa Rodríguez, Enrique y Alejandrina Penabad Félix, 2001 *Historia de la educación en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación).

institutions of learning, such as the University of Havana in 1728. Nevertheless, it would not be until the first decades of the nineteenth century that educated *criollos* would become an impacting cultural force in the emergent Cuban nationality.

That by 1492 a Catholic Castilian hegemonic culture emerged over other peoples, languages, and religions, first in Iberia, then in the New World, was done at the expense of fiercely clinging to religious orthodoxy and the values of a pre-Reformation world when theology had been the queen of the sciences, and scholasticism its highest expression.² During the sixteenth century, Counter-Reformation Spain cemented the foundational elements of the New World. Under the Hapsburg dynasty, Spain transmitted to its overseas enterprise a political culture that was particularly defined by Charles I, who became Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Charles's concept of imperialism was extrapolated from the concept of medieval leagues or federations by which each territory, with its laws and regional practices, was aggregated to the royal patrimony. In imitation of the Council of Castile, various councils were established, among which the Council of the Indies was entrusted with all administrative and judicial matters pertaining to the New World.³

The various philosophical currents of the Renaissance activated Spanish intellectual life in the sixteenth century; a secular spirit was predominant among them. The influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam on Spanish intellectual life is well documented. But unlike the generalized association of secularism with the Renaissance elsewhere in Europe, the Spanish school drew its philosophical strength from the scholastic thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century Christian theologian. Of the scholastic masters, it was Aquinas who did the most to raise the value to worldly knowledge and scientific speculation.⁴ Neo-Thomism, as this scholastic

²Américo Castro, 1954, *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). Talcott Parsons comments that the Spanish Hapsburgs successfully blocked any heterogeneity, unlike their Austrian counterparts, who allowed religious and ethnic diversity within their empire. I agree that the religious uniformity sought by the Spaniards was unfeasible in the Austrian holdings after the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) but Spain continued to sustain ethnic plurality at home and overseas. Although Roman Catholicism was a non-negotiable, the Spanish monarchy accommodated the incorporation of varied ethnic and linguistic groups, however different the social or legal status of these groups may have been, within the Spanish patrimony. See Talcott Parsons, 1977, *The Evolution of Societies* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 141-45, 161-62.

³J. H. Elliott, 1964, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 154-172. See also J.H. Parry, 1940, *The Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge) and Silvio Zavala, 1944 *Ensayos sobre la colonización española en América* (Buenos Aires).

⁴Steven Ozment, 1980, *The Age of Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 20.

revival came to be called, emphasized the importance of natural law to provide order to a society that transferred its sovereignty to a ruler who, although bound by his laws, was responsible to God. "Spanish scholasticism was an autonomous movement of ideas outside the frontiers of the Middle Ages."⁵ Rejecting rationalist philosophy, the new Thomists contributed to the formulation of Hapsburg imperial policy, as expressed by various Spanish thinkers of the sixteenth century, among whom Francisco Suárez stands out. This Jesuit theologian captured best the cultural milieu of Catholic Spain, what the historian Richard Morse (in emulation of Max Weber) has called "the sociological realities of the Spanish patrimonial state."⁶

While the viceroalties in the New World lived culturally in Europe's High Middle Ages,⁷ to the satisfaction of the mother country, a secular age was in the making. The legitimacy of Louis XIV's claim to the Spanish throne for his grandson Philip of Anjou united all Spanish subjects in support of that Bourbon prince, who became Philip V. While the right of the Bourbons to the throne was honored, the policies of the new dynasty, intent on remodeling the Spanish administration after the French, brought a disruption in the colonial order, especially in the aftermath of the Seven Years War – when the British had occupied Havana, the empire's best fortified possession – and the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1763, which included the return of Havana in exchange for Florida.

No other name in Spanish history is as closely associated with the ideas of the Enlightenment as King Charles III, Spain's Enlightened Despot.⁸ The reaction of those adversely affected by his administrative reforms was in line with the way grievances had been expressed in the past. *Viva el Rey y abajo el mal gobierno* reflected the ingrained belief that only a disconnected official would try to enforce an unreasonable law. The most notable – and violent –

⁵Maurice DeWulf, 1926, *A History of Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co.), II, 301. For a defense of the Spanish Renaissance, see Carlos G. Norena, 1975, *Studies in Spanish Renaissance Thought* (The Hague; Martinus Nijhoff).

⁶Richard M. Morse, 1989, "Claims of Political Tradition," in *New World Soundings: Culture and Ideology in the Americas* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 104. Morse also reminds the reader that feudalism was weaker in Spain than north of the Pyrenees, where rural life determined much of the feudal relationships while, in medieval Iberia, the town was an important center. One finds the coincidence of St. Thomas's Aristotelian synthesis, so influenced by the ancient Greek city-state, and its ideological affinity with the medieval worldview of the Spanish.

⁷Octavio Paz, 1950, *El laberinto de la soledad*, rev. ed. by Enrico Mario Santí (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, S.A., 1995), 228-58.

⁸A.P. Whitaker, ed., 1961, *Latin America and the Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

challenger was Tupac Amaru II who led a major revolt in the 1780s in Peru; much less known is the *vegueros* [tobacco growers]' revolts of 1717-1723 which made Cuba the earliest case of colonial protest at the changing policy.

Notwithstanding, Cuba welcomed the reforms of Charles III.⁹ On the cultural front, the chartering of the Real Sociedad Patriótica de La Habana in 1792 stands out; it became the major colonial institution to promote public education in Cuba. With the arrival in 1800 of Bishop Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa who counteracted the official anticlericalism of the day through his membership in the Sociedad Patriótica, the institution sponsored education through various venues. Espada's 32-year tenure included opening of schools, establishing literary prizes, scholarships for girls, and sending Juan Bernardo O'Gaban to Europe to learn the Pestalozzi teaching methodology. His appointment of 19-year-old Félix Varela (1788-1853) to a teaching position at the **Real Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio** proved to be prescient. The young priest, himself a student of educator José Agustín Caballero, revamped the scholastic curriculum to include science and modern philosophy, as well as lectured in the vernacular. Chosen to teach Constitutional Law in 1820, he became the mentor of the first generation to develop a sense of national identity. Among them was José de la Luz y Caballero (1800-1862) who called him "*el que nos enseñó a pensar*" (the one who taught us how to think).

With the independence of the continental colonies between 1810 and 1826, the Spanish empire was forced to reduce its focus to Cuba and Puerto Rico. The situation coincided with the promotion of education by Varela's cohort of students – Luz y Caballero, José Antonio Saco, and El Lugareño, to name the few most involved. Discrepancies over methodology of science caused a philosophical debate between José de la Luz y Caballero and González del Valle brothers. In 1855, Antonio Bachiller y Morales, in *Apuntes para la historia de las Letras y la Instrucción Pública en Cuba* [Notes for the history of texts and public education in Cuba], an annotated bibliography, described Luz y Caballero's treatise on eclecticism (1834) as "*el primer paso de la filosofía docente en Cuba*" [the first step towards a philosophy of education in Cuba]. Inspired by the ideas of the Spanish philosopher Luis Vives (1492-1540), Luz y Caballero

⁹For the most thorough research and analysis on eighteenth-century Cuba, see works by Allan Kuethe.

believed that every school should be experimental and a source for theories on education based on educational research.¹⁰

The writings on education by intellectuals of the stature of Varela and Luz y Caballero stand as important chapters in the history of education in Cuba; their importance lies in the ground they broke by opening Cuba to the methods of modernity yet remaining within the Hispanic tradition. While this colonial intelligentsia took pride in promoting education in Cuba, they were well aware that they were far from their goal, particularly because all their initiatives were private and lacked imperial support. In 1836, Domingo Delmonte lamented the consequences of an uneducated general population:

We cannot accomplish anything as long as education fails to reach the heart of the masses and we barely have some discreet lawyers, capable clerks, entertaining literati, as well as an outstanding abstract mathematician or an experienced naturalist here or there. All that is good, the country is honored by them, and can benefit from their knowledge. But all that cannot be compared to the immense advantage that the country will possess when the majority of those born [in Cuba] can read, write, count, know the usual principles of their beautiful language and have some notions of geography, knowledge which will be more useful when held along with convictions derived from the purest principles of religion and morality.¹¹

Delmonte despaired when lack of education impeded progress. No single term characterizes Latin America's nineteenth century with as much precision as *progress*. Conservatives and liberals embraced it long before the Social Darwinists made it their slogan in the latter part of that century. The political scripts recalled Adam Smith's 1776 vision of "the progress of society...[where] each individual becomes more expert in his own peculiar branch, more work is done upon the whole, and the quantity of science is considerably increased."¹² Far from creating a focused image, the term produces (or at best, reproduces) the different visions that competed to establish modern states, in continuation of the confrontations triggered by the Bourbon reforms in the late colonial period. The tensions continued both in Spain and in its colonies. Particularly in Cuba, where the sugar industry was technologically advancing, the quest for modernity found an outlet in cultural manifestations. Manuel Moreno Fraginals eloquently

¹⁰See Alfredo Miguel Aguayo, 1932, *Filosofía y nuevas orientaciones de la educación* (La Habana: Cultural, S. A.), 312-13; and Medardo Vitier, 1970, *Las Ideas y la Filosofía en Cuba* (la Habana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales), 210.

¹¹My translation of citation by Fernández Soneira, II, 363.

¹²Adam Smith, 1957, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Appleton), 3, 98.

characterized the technologically advancing culture of the nineteenth century as one experiencing an “intellectual adventure”.¹³ The study of chemistry and botany supported the assertion.

As the metropolis-colony relation deteriorated during the nineteenth century, Cuban intellectuals voiced concern over the accompanying decline of education in the island. Thus, the political manifestos of patriots – Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, José Martí – delineated the links between education and the state in a modern independent Cuba. Martí (1853-1895), in particular, was an educator and often expressed his views on the role of education in an open society. His exile in Spain coincided with the founding of the **Instituto Libre de Enseñanza**, in 1876 in Madrid, a private initiative led by Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1839-1915) to counteract the officially sanctioned lack of academic freedom in Spanish universities. The project soon expanded instruction to the elementary and secondary levels, a major intellectual challenge to Spanish education, then controlled by the Catholic Church through a rigid curriculum in line with the Thomistic tradition. Giner applied the theories of German idealist Karl C. F. Krause (1781-1832) who emphasized the moral education of the individual in pursuit of universal harmony. Martí embraced the pedagogy of the Instituto, a holistic education in line with the transcendentalist vision (à la Emerson) that was to influence him during his years (1881-1895) living in the United States.

Proscribed by the colonial authorities, Martí’s ideas on education would not impact the Cuban scene until the 1920’s, when the first generation born after independence studied the foundational literature of the Cuban nation. Before that happened, wars for independence (1868-1878, 1879-1880, 1895-1898) and accompanying devastation affected all aspects of life in Cuba before the Republic of Cuba was established in 1902.

EDUCATING THE NATION-STATE

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was the final phase of the Cuban wars of independence; it resulted in the United States military occupation of Cuba. As part of an impressive reconstruction package, a Board of Education was established in 1900 under the leadership of Enrique José Varona who, as Secretary of Public Instruction, enjoyed the support

¹³Manuel Moreno Fraginals, 1976, *The Sugarmill* (New York: Monthly Review Press), chapter 1.

of the US Commissioner of Education Alexis Frye. The Board arranged new school districts and had created nearly 3600 classrooms for 172,00 students (10.9% of the island's population) by 20 May 1902 when the Republic of Cuba was promulgated. Initiatives for teacher training led to the founding of the College of Education at the University of Havana, summer programs for Cuban teachers at Harvard University, and to opening of Normal Schools in each province by 1915.

The Cuban Constitution of 1901 (Title IV, article 31) guaranteed freedom to offer and receive instruction in any subject, legislation limited to requirements for degree-granting institutions. Data published by García Tudurí and others illustrate the significant development of the public school system in Cuba prior to the Revolution of 1959 as well as its shortcomings.¹⁴ To complement this important information, let us privilege three Cuban educators from the early republican period: Enrique José Varona, María Luisa Dolz, and Arturo Echemendía.¹⁵

Enrique José Varona (1849-1933) was the first Cuban to elaborate a congruent philosophy of education.¹⁶ A follower of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, he brought knowledge of psychology, moral philosophy, and sociology to his pedagogy. As Secretary of Public Instruction during the American occupation, he set the pace for the many reforms that took off at that time. His "Plan Varona" set a four-year program of studies for the secondary schools, the official curriculum until 1940, when a five-year program became the standard under the "Plan [Juan J.] Remos". Receptive to recommendations, Varona followed the advice of Cuba's leading educator of women, María Luisa Dolz, to establish a chair of Education at the university level.

María Luisa Dolz y Arango (1854-1928) began educating Cuban women in 1873 and, for the next fifty years, she dedicated her life to the development of Cuban pedagogy. Realizing the need to receive formal training herself, she completed a doctorate at the University of Havana and visited forty schools during a research trip to France and Germany in 1905. A strong believer

¹⁴The most thorough study of Cuban education in the first half of the twentieth century was prepared by Mercedes García Tudurí, 1952, *Historia de la nación cubana* (La Habana), X, book 2. A revised version which includes more important data appeared in García Tudurí, 1974, "La educación en Cuba," en *La enciclopedia de Cuba* (Madrid: Playor, S.A.), VI, 521-556. See also the sources cited in note 1.

¹⁵Choice made by Alfredo Miguel Aguayo (1866-1948), the leading Profesor of Education at the University of Havana. See Aguayo, 1937, *Tres grandes educadores cubanos: Varona, Echemendía, María Luisa Dolz* (La Habana: Cultural, S.A.).

¹⁶See Medardo Vitier, 1949, *Enrique José Varona: su pensamiento representativo* (La Habana); and Aguayo.

in the importance of methodology (more so than content), she proposed the establishment of a College of Education at the University of Havana. Her concerns for the educational system included the promotion of physical education programs. She attracted the best scholars and educators to her school, always emphasizing the freedom of the student:

The open political system we desire for our country cannot contradict the educational system. Free citizens cannot be educated employing the same means applied by those who perpetuate tyranny. One cannot prepare children to lead a life of freedom within a prison, nor is it possible to instill in them the value of civic engagement if all their initiatives meet rejection.

If educating free men of strong and unassailable character who are capable of making decisions for themselves is the goal, then it is essential that a modern, liberal, and discreet code of conduct replace that disciplinary code suited for prisons, barracks, or convents, places where the surveillance of all actions leads to the atrophy of the will.¹⁷

Identifying the education of women with their need for juridical rights, María Luisa Dolz became a leading feminist.¹⁸

Arturo Echemendía y Molino (1880-1934) taught for twenty years at the Matanzas Institute, the provincial public secondary school, where he formulated a methodology for teaching at this level. A contributor to educational journals, such as *Cuba Pedagoga*, *Revista de la Facultad de Letras y Ciencias*, and *Revista de Instrucción Pública*, he articulated his experiences in the classroom. While he believed that the secondary school years were crucial to train a “legion of prepared citizens”, a democracy’s best minds, he cautioned against creating a system that promoted the cultural divorce of the elite and the masses by limiting the education of the latter to a utilitarian and vocational curriculum.¹⁹

The cultural manifestations of Cuba during the early twentieth century attest to growing significance of Cuban education. Cuba’s student movement of the 1920’s and the Revolution of

¹⁷As cited by Aguayo, 63.

¹⁸See K. Lynn Stoner, 1991, *From the Houses to the Street* (Durham: Duke University Press).

¹⁹See Aguayo, 38, 41 and Arturo Echemendía, 1909, *Alrededor de la escuela*. Con la colaboración de Raúl Miranda. (Matanzas), and Echemendía, 1919, “Orientaciones de la segunda enseñanza,” *Revista de la Facultad de Letras y Ciencias*.

1933 cannot be discussed without due attention to the national conscience of Cuban youth.²⁰ Even when the real locus of protest was the University of Havana, secondary schools throughout the island staged public demonstrations of solidarity. When a new Constitution was promulgated in 1940, Title V, section II guaranteed private schools the right to teach religion and to instruct any subject through methods and contents of their choice. The new charter reflected the quest for a modern identity amidst the influence and the interference of both, the Spanish past and the United States. On educational policy, it sought the convergence of two conflicting traditions: on one hand, the pedagogical scholarship of educators like Varona, Dolz, and Echemendía, among others since the eighteenth century, whose thinking was rooted in the European Enlightenment; on the other hand, the realities of a nation-state embedded in the Hispanic neo-Thomist tradition.

By the 1950s, Cuba's educational history had developed along a modern path within the Enlightenment's secular tradition but checked by significant academic competition provided by the Roman Catholic Church and the increasing number of lay private schools. Where public education was lacking – blatantly so in rural areas and among a few sectors – the failure was deemed to be political by a growing nationalist, predominantly urban and educated, population. A matter for honest constitutional governments to solve, they blamed the political order (a dictatorship 1952-1958) for their inability to attain the social and economic fulfillment corresponding to their education – or for its lack (23% illiteracy) in the general population. The critics sought remedies in the context of a history of education tied to an enlightened vision that José Martí, Cuba's leading patriot, had directed to the education of children, a subject to which he devoted frequent attention. Many believed that the Revolution of 1959 would implement Martí's vision.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1959

Marxist dogma replaced Cuba's philosophy of education as a major component of the 1959 Revolution's efforts to create a new socialist man. The Revolution sought to mobilize the Cuban population by using education to promote its embrace of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The

²⁰I have discussed this subject in detail in Cruz-Taura, 1989, "Student Political Activism in Cuba," in *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*. Edited by Philip G. Altbach. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press).

Literacy Campaign of 1961 marked the first mass mobilization that would subsequently characterize the regime.²¹ Campaigns of volunteers went to the Cuban countryside to teach curricula modified at all levels to promote socialist objectives. The regime soon began opening **Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria** (Schools for Revolutionary Instruction) and sending students to Communist countries to study Marxism-Leninism and its corresponding pedagogy. The government claimed to have graduated 100,000 students from the Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria by the end of 1961.²² Finally, Che Guevara's article "Man and Socialism in Cuba" provided the guiding principle of educational policy's quest to create *el hombre nuevo* (the new man) after 1965.²³

The Cuban educational experiment soon exhibited features that would continue to characterize it for nearly five decades, although qualitative revisions would take place during the 1970s. Both apologists and critics attribute to the Cuban educational system:

(1) universal access; (2) the objective to engender the new socialist man based on Marxism-Leninism; (3) a work-study component; (4) promotion of economic development-scientific/technological studies; (5) centralized decision making; (6) school-community relations through official mass organizations; and (6) rewards and deprivations determined by political profiling of students.²⁴

By 1970, Cuban schooling had reached every child in the island nation, an accomplishment that would often overshadow the weaknesses of the system, which included

²¹For a detailed account of educational policy after 1959, see Nikolái Kolésnikov, 1983, *Cuba: Educación popular y preparación de los cuadros nacionales, 1959-1982* (Moscow: Editorial Progreso). The most thorough evaluation on the literacy campaign of 1961 published in Cuba is that by Felipe de J. Pérez Cruz, 2001, *La alfabetización en Cuba: Lectura histórica para pensar el presente* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales). For examples of the most analytical accounts available in the literature in English, see Richard Jolly, 1964, "The Literacy Campaign and Adult Education," in *Cuba: The Economic and Social Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press); Jonathan Kozol, 1978, "A New Look at the Literacy Campaign in Cuba" *Harvard Educational Review* 48, 3(August): 341-77; Martin Carnoy, 1990, "Socialist Development and Educational Reform in Cuba," in Hill Nasson and John Samuel, eds. *Education from Poverty to Liberty* (South Africa: Creda Press); and Karen Shaffer Vocke, 2001, "Literacy and Ideology in Cuba's Special Period" (Toledo, OH: University of Toledo, Ph. D. dissertation).

²²MINFAR, 1965, *Cuba: A Giant School* (Havana: Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

²³Ernesto Guevara, 1968, *Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 391.

²⁴This section was summarized from Cruz-Taura, 2003, *Rehabilitating Education in Cuba: Assessing of Conditions and Policy Recommendations* (Miami: University of Miami Institute for Cuban and Cuban Studies, Cuban Transition Project), 3-27.

grade repetition and a high dropout rate.²⁵ At issue was the acute need for teachers, which required continued reliance on *maestros emergentes*, young teachers trained after completing the ninth grade. These problems were highlighted at the 1971 First National Congress of Education and Culture in Havana. The main recommendation to remedy the series of failures in the system was to devote more resources to the proper training of Marxist teachers. Beginning the 1971-1972 school year, the Ministry of Education began operations through an intricate bureaucracy with multiple departments, each designated to handle every possible component of the educational system. These reforms must not have seemed enough to Castro, who added criticisms during a speech to the Communist Youth Congress in 1972. The signal from the top was clear: the Ministry of Education set out to revise its plans in time for approval at the First Cuban Communist Party Congress in 1975.

The **Plan de Perfeccionamiento del Sistema Nacional de Educación** [Improvement Plan for the National Education System] of 1975-76 provided the guidelines to improve the quality of education in closer association with the Communist Party in order to better satisfy economic and ideological goals. The party congress also promulgated a new constitution with specific references for education; the 1976 charter declared Marxism-Leninism the only acceptable ideology.²⁶

The ideological price was high. Thought control increased with additional mechanisms to monitor Marxist orthodoxy in the classroom. These mechanisms ranged from school records on student revolutionary activism and discipline to supervision of faculty by militant specialists. While Cuban publications, such as *Educación*, ran (and still run) articles recommending parental involvement in Cuban education, the government continued to control the relationship between parents, community, and school. All communication is channeled through mass organizations and directed by political personnel. British educational analyst Mark Richmond finds that:

...the full flavour of the Cuban educational model would be lost without mentioning the active participation of the whole community in performing a broad, diverse range of educational tasks and duties. This participation is channeled through a number of political and mass organizations, including the Cuban Communist Party, the Young Communists, the Pioneers, student

²⁵Lowry Nelson, 1971, "The School Dropout Problem in Cuba," *School and Society* 99(April): 234-35.

²⁶Most pertinent are Chapter V: Articles 39, 40; and Chapter VI: Article 43. See also Chapter I: Articles 5, 6; and Chapter IV: Articles 35, 38. In <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Constitutions/Cuba/cuba1992.html>.

federations, trade unions, the Federation of Cuban Women, the School Councils, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, and the Local Organs of People's Power. This widespread, popular involvement is an essential aspect of the Cuban educational model, being a vital expression of the attempt to break down the barriers between school and society.²⁷

While Richmond couldn't avoid enthusiasm about the Cuban model's access component, he recognized that it could be interpreted as "a recipe for totalitarian education" or as "national liberation."²⁸

During its third decade, the Cuban Revolution provided a picture to the world that all was well in its educational system. Sending teaching brigades to Angola and Nicaragua and physicians and engineers the world over, Cuba appeared to be an educational power. At home, by maintaining its initial strategy of reaching everyone, literacy was a reality throughout the island and schooling through the ninth grade was available to all. Nevertheless, before the end of the 1980s, admission to the university was reduced by 50 percent and rejected candidates had to settle for vocational or technical schools. To Castro, the problem was more political than economic. He saw failure in the product the schools delivered. Marxist pedagogy had not sufficed to create the new man seeking to fulfill revolutionary objectives and develop the national economy.

Ultimately, Castro's combined praise and chastisement of revolutionary education amounts to what analyst Jean-Pierre Beauvais has described as "the most striking of the many contradictions of the Cuban revolution – high political consciousness and low 'economic consciousness' of the masses."²⁹ Beauvais's critical eye allowed him to analyze the achievements and failures of the Cuban revolutionary experiment, but such broad analyst is rare among those who have visited the island over the decades. The Cuban Revolution often succeeds in presenting an image that dismisses the flaws in its educational system as matters that

²⁷Mark Richmond, 1990, "The Cuban Educational Model and Its Influence in the Caribbean Region," in *Education in Central America and the Caribbean*, eds. Colin Brock and Donald Clarkson (London: Routledge), 73-74.

²⁸Richmond, 1990, 74. Richmond was disappointed that by the mid-1980s, democratization of education was not manifesting itself in decision-making processes at the local levels. By then, rather than decentralizing policy, the leadership launched a Rectification Campaign and the coercive force of the Cuban state was once again repressing its educated population to counteract the Soviet *glasnost*.

²⁹Jean-Pierre Beauvais, 1983, "Achievements and Contradictions of the Cuban Workers' State," in *Crisis in the Caribbean*, eds. Fitzroy Ambursley and Robin Cohen (New York: Monthly Review Press), 49.

would be overcome with persistence in existing methods until a new generation internalized its ideology.

Conditions after 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, blatantly exposed the weaknesses of the Communist world and significantly thwarted the Cuban regime's ability to promote itself. Some of us would characterize the post-Soviet period as one of retrenchment but the government called it the "Special Period in a Time of Peace." Two features that the government maintained in its educational policy have been to continue (1) promoting Marxism-Leninism, in spite of the changing circumstances in the nation and in the world;³⁰ and (2) the allocation of about 10% of the Gross Domestic Product to the education sector. As the national budget decreased, so did that for education in absolute figures, however, after 1996, expenditures for education have risen.³¹

The loss of Soviet subsidies diminished investments in domestic services and forced the government to legalize possession of the US dollar. The Special Period's immediate manifestation in the classrooms was the reduction of school supplies and textbooks; support programs, such as school lunch and adult enrichment education, were indefinitely suspended or curtailed. The most damaging manifestation came from the *dollarization* of the economy and the promotion of foreign tourism. An average monthly teaching salary of 350 pesos has the market equivalent of twelve U.S. dollars, contributing to the exodus of teachers from the profession, as diversion to the tourist economy provides the needed supplement to a teacher's income.³² Ironically, the revolution's greatest accomplishment in education was its reach-out programs into the rural areas, but these are precisely the regions most affected by the decline in the number of teachers. The countryside, where access to the tourist economy is least likely, can only attract the most devoted teacher.³³ Just as the dollar economy lures teachers away from the profession,

³⁰*Educación*, 1991, "Requerimientos básicos para el Período Especial en los centros docentes," 21(June 1991): 23-26; and Oneida Álvarez Figueroa, 1997, "El sistema educativo cubano en los noventas," *Papers: Revista Sociológica* 52: 115-37.

³¹*Ibid.* and Uriarte, 34-37.

³²Magali Estrada, 2000, "Alarante éxodo de profesores de alto nivel," Buró de Prensa Independiente de Cuba (22 September). <http://www.bpicuba.org/otros/alarante.htm>. On college students volunteering to substitute in schools, see "Ninguno de los actuales problemas," *Granma*. <http://ww.granma.cubaweb.cu/temas11/articulo58.html>.

³³During a study tour, Gasperini was informed that "new professional activities, especially in tourism and in foreign firms [have caused] teacher attrition of 4 to 8 percent in the eastern oriental provinces, where tourism is more

students are also lured away from the academic tracks by the emoluments of the tourist economy.³⁴

Policies that helped the government control education and improve statistics in the early days of the Revolution have eventually become double-edged swords. While damages may have been minimized by the structured and controlled nature of the educational system, its rigidity has also backfired. First and foremost, the system purposely sought to remove the family from the educational enterprise, unless contact was made via official structures. From nursery to higher education, the revolutionary government promoted an educational system divorced from direct home influence, emphasizing the paternal role of the state in providing for its people. While the Constitution and the media claim that the family must be directly involved in children's education, this involvement must be channeled through official organizations. During the Special Period, at a time when educators have been frequently abandoning the profession, the lack of parental pressure on the system and on the children to attend school and study has often been absent. Any parent involvement in schools is channeled through local official organizations, stifling any community-based effort to complement child education or to demand better services from the authorities.

Also backfiring is the state's paternal role in assigning rewards, fields of study, and employment guarantees to graduates. Having absorbed the traditional individual decision-making process by planning and promising placement, the state finds itself unable to deliver positions to many graduates due to the changing global economy, its legalization of dollar transactions, and a growing younger population that it can no longer deploy in Third World liberation wars as it did during the 1980s.

Cuba continues to showcase its educational system through international fora, as well as through pedagogical publications as well as guided tours with "limited access to archives and academic settings"³⁵ to visiting scholars. The Lenin College Preparatory School in Havana is showcased for the quality of its education, and visitors are shown the competitive entrance exam

developed." In Lavinia Gasparini, 2000, "The Cuban Education System: Lessons and Dilemmas," In *The Education Report and Management Publication Series*, vol. 5 (Washington: The World Bank), 7.

³⁴Ronald A. Lindahl, 2000, "Evaluating the Cuban System: A Goal-Fulfillment Critique," *International Education* 29:2 (Spring): 5-20.

³⁵ Vocke. See also Christopher Worthman and Lourdes Kaplan, 2001, "Literacy Education and Dialogical Exchange: Impressions of Cuban Education in One Classroom," *Reading Teacher* 54:7 (April): 648-56.

required for admission.³⁶ Consequently, most analysts continue to consider Cuba's educational system one of the great success stories of the Cuban Revolution. To provide a recent example, a study published by the World Bank begins with the following summary:

The record of Cuban education is outstanding: universal school environment and attendance; nearly universal adult literacy; proportional female representation at all levels, including higher education; a strong scientific base, particularly in chemistry and medicine; consistent pedagogical quality across widely dispersed classrooms; equality of basic educational opportunity, even in impoverished areas, both rural and urban.³⁷

However, the situation in Cuba during the "Special Period" eroded many of the conditions that had facilitated those educational gains, while accentuating its weaknesses. Thus, while education continues to be promoted by the 50-year-old regime as a major revolutionary accomplishment, along with universal health care, these pillars of legitimization seem to be corroding at the base.³⁸

In 2002, *Granma*, the official Cuban Communist Party newspaper, quoted Fidel Castro stating that 86,000 youngsters in Havana who neither worked nor studied had been enrolled in **Escuelas de Superación Integral** [Schools for All-Encompassing Development].³⁹ What were these many young people doing that they were not in school, which is tuition-free, when the state acknowledges that they were not in the labor force? How many of these students can be expected to stay in school? Can inexperienced teachers, many with no more than nine years of basic schooling and earning about US\$15 a month, be expected to perform academic miracles?

³⁶The *Instituto Preuniversitario Vocacional de Ciencias Exactas Vladimir Ilich Lenin* is the secondary institution of choice for the Cuban political elite to send their children, limiting the number of places for students who can be admitted via the entrance exam. Parents pay for tutoring months in advance of the examination date; some teachers run Saturday sessions in their homes, a way of supplementing their salaries privately. Testimonies of several interviewees. See also Jacques-Yves Cousteau, prod., 1986, *Cuba: Waters of Destiny*, (Atlanta: Turner Program Services), a documentary film with scenes at the Lenin School; the absence of Afro-Cubans (I counted two) is a blatant statement of class and color discrimination in accessing the best college preparatory school in Cuba.

³⁷Vocke, 2001, 1. The study tour was undertaken by members of the Colombian government, the Cuban Ministry of Education and World Bank staff.

³⁸Eusebio Mujal-León and Joshua W. Bushby, 2001, "Much Ado About Something?: Regime Change in Cuba," *Problems of Post-Communism* 48(November/December): 12-13.

³⁹Reynold Rassi and Alberto Núñez, 2002, "Para este país no hay nada imposible: Presidió Fidel la Asamblea de Balance," *Granma* (8 July): 1.

While *Granma* has failed to deal with the issue of disaffected youth, an article in *Tribuna de La Habana* provided some pointers. A middle school teacher complained that 25 percent of the students who had to attend the required 45-day *escuela al campo*, the agricultural work component of the core curriculum, filed medical certificates excusing them from laboring in the countryside. How could it be possible that 25 percent of the 13- to 15-year-olds in Havana were not in good health, given Cuba's health statistics? In addition, parents continued to visit the camp and retrieve their children over the "family drama of a *muelita cariada* (tiny molar cavity) or the first sneezes that signaled an oncoming cold."⁴⁰ The author of an article in the Catholic magazine *Espacios* blames the proliferation of medical certificates to waive the *escuela al campo* requirement on the grueling and promiscuous conditions that adolescents find themselves in the countryside camps. Not only are food and living quarters inadequate and work demanding under the summer sun, but also, for teenagers without family support and controls, promiscuity is rampant. Most who have lived through the experience attest to the uncivilized conditions of this educational experiment.⁴¹

The young people the government enrolls in one-year teaching or nursing programs come from the population that literally dropped out of middle school to avoid attending the countryside camp, or that returned from the camp without a career alternative. The possibilities of entering the *preuniversitarios* (college preparatory schools) are limited; only a few of those who take the entrance exams make it into elite schools where the children of Communist Party members are well represented. In the absence of strong family values, those who are not particularly strong academically or related to the *nomenklatura* compose the population most likely to seek access to the tourist dollar.

⁴⁰Ángel Rodríguez, 2000, in *Tribuna de La Habana* (21 May), as quoted and analyzed by Julio Ramón Pita, 2000, "La contorsión familiar ante la escuela al campo," *Espacios* 4 (3): 40-41.

⁴¹Researcher Denise Blum claims to have recognized how polemical the *escuela al campo* (EAC) were when she overheard women in their fifties attribute the loss of morality and family values to the EAC policy. In Denise Blum, 2003, "Cuba's *Escuela al Campo* Program: Adapting to the 21st Century," Latin American Studies Association Congress. Manuscript, p. 29. The remarks Blum quotes are consistent with the response of all those I interviewed.

Among several voices inside Cuba who have dared criticize the Cuban educational model, Dagoberto Valdés, an activist with the Diocese of Pinar del Río, stands out. The following selections are from an editorial in *Vitral*⁴²:

...[In Cuba] great efforts have been made to assure that public instruction reaches everyone. The problem here is different: Cubans cannot choose the philosophical position, the pedagogical methods, the religious orientation, or the type of school that we want for our children.

In exchange for mass access, we have given up our personal responsibility to educate. In exchange for free access to instruction, we have not exercised the freedom to choose the type of education. Whenever we express that this is a problem, we are told that we should be thankful for the opportunity to study for free. In exchange for no expenses, we have disregarded quality.

Free services exact a price in Cuba: be grateful and faithful. [...]

The essential problem of education in Cuba is not access to instruction but its lack of pluralism as a result of its excluding monolithic ideological character. In other words: while it is true that everyone has access to instruction, parents cannot choose freely the type of education they consider best for their children.

[...] To choose between a paternalistic, manipulative education and a liberating pedagogy that respects the dignity and the rights of the person.

A paternalistic education guarantees that the “father-State” will provide all of its “children-pupils” with secure instruction whose objective is that they repeat and continue ideas and attitudes identical to those of the older “children-pupils;” this also happens in the midst of an authoritarian family, or in a paternalistic religious institution without member participation. It is a transmission cord that pushes and reiterates the same movement at the same pace. It does not educate persons but repeating machines. It assures itself of a blind or naive faithful following, but it turns citizens into burdens of the State, the Church, and the family -- an amorphous mass without willpower making inertia a style of daily life.

A paternalistic and manipulative education provides security today and uncertainty tomorrow because when the time comes to make a decision using one’s own head without tutelage from the top, the head rolls in indecision and corruption.

In contrast, a liberating and pluralist education is risky and insecure today but the guarantee for civic maturity and the autonomy of the individual and civil society tomorrow. Like the risk run by a child taking his first steps, we all know that no one would be able to walk with his own two feet without that previous risk. What are we surprised about when we see people and groups in moral and social stagnation?

⁴²An announcement in the March-April 2007 issue of *Vitral* indicated that the magazine lacked the resources to continue publication; the announcement coincided with the appointment of a new bishop to the diocese. On the public outcry over the closing of the publication, see, for example, <http://baracuteycubano.blogspot.com/> . While the good news is that *Vitral* has continued appearing regularly, Dagoberto Valdés is no longer a contributor to the publication he edited for fourteen years. See <http://vitral.organd>; and Ted Henken, 2007, “*Vitral* Magazine and the Center for Civic and Religious Formation: Building a new Cuba inside the shell of the old,” in *Cuba in Transition* 17 (ASCE): 195-198.

A liberating education is not an opening to libertinism but to personal and social responsibility. Only he who is free to choose can accept responsibility for his actions. A pluralist education is not an opening to moral relativism and to an “anything goes” attitude. It lets us discover the richness of diversity, and we respect it as a guarantee that we appreciate the rights of each individual.

Each Cuban mother and father has the right to choose between these two pedagogical styles... Let’s not fool ourselves: the character of our youth is weakened by the routine of only one educational option. Life cannot be enriched without debate. The national soul is dehumanized by the existential tediousness of one ideology. Without an educational system that would allow a real possibility to access some religious inspiration, the human spirit dries up “because [as José Martí said] there is nothing in it to nurture virtue.”⁴³

The platform of the **Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes de Cuba** openly challenges Cuba’s educational goal to form *un hombre nuevo*, a concept based on Marxist-Leninist ideology and articulated by Che Guevara.⁴⁴ Alternatively, the Colegio proposes a model to educate citizens for a Nueva República Martiana, a new republic based on the thought of José Martí, unquestionably the most revered Cuban national figure. The model adheres to the UNESCO guidelines on Human Development but incorporates Martí’s conception of a citizen in a free society. To support its proposal, the Colegio often quotes from Martí’s writings on education and refers to the ideas of other Cuban foundational figures, such as Varela, Luz y Caballero, and Enrique José Varona, among others. This is not an innovation in Cuban pedagogical thought: Cuba’s official publications make frequent references to nineteenth-century thinkers, even when euphemisms distort the intent of Cuban writers inspired by Western liberal thought.⁴⁵

The “new citizen” of República Martiana can freely choose any ideology and freely arrive at his own worldview. He can decide to identify with a political persuasion, change it, or abstain entirely. Educated for the total development of his individuality that he may contribute to the common good, he is taught the differences among concepts such as homeland, revolution, and party, according to their content and scope, as part of a liberating methodology. More important, he is taught values in line with universally recognized ethical and living norms, such

⁴³Vitral, 1998, “La educación: El derecho a elegir cómo ser,” 5: 24(March-April).

⁴⁴Guevara 1968, 391-94.

⁴⁵For example, see Justo A. Chávez Rodríguez, 1990, “La tradición pedagógica cubana. Primera parte,” *Educación* 20 (July-September): 25-36; and ____, 1996, *Bosquejo histórico de las ideas educativas en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación).

as tolerance, friendly foreign relations, and dialogue and mediation to solve conflicts and reconcile differences. As a parent, this citizen is expected to play a major and decisive role in his children's education.

Whether a communist or a liberal educational model, each system seeks to educate a person who can contribute to the perpetuation of a particular order, respectively, the *hombre nuevo* to the socialist state and the *ciudadano* (citizen) to a proposed (and therefore still idealized) new republic. The figures to be emulated are well established in each case. Cuban children today begin each school day with an oath of allegiance:

Pioneros por el comunismo, ¡seremos como el Che!

(Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che Guevara!)

In contrast, the unofficial Colegio model seeks to raise a follower of José Martí by promoting this thinker's ideas on education and his program for a socially just and independent Cuba. The use of Martí to satisfy a nation-building educational agenda predates the Castro revolution and has not escaped it without a Marxist twist.⁴⁶ His apostleship extends to the Cuban Constitution of 1976, further emphasized following revisions in 1992.⁴⁷ The Colegio's reliance on Martí's thought to articulate its goals reflects a recovery effort from what the dissident group perceives to be the national tradition and Martí's international standing as a follower of the Enlightenment tradition that manifested itself in Latin America's political emancipation from Spain.

CONCLUSION

It is significant after five decades of Marxist-Leninist ideology, those inside Cuba who chose to analyze schooling conditions independently and to propose educational reforms for the Cuba of tomorrow should be turning back to the thought of Cuba's founding fathers, and

⁴⁶See Lidia Turner Martí et al., 1996, *Martí y la educación*, (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación); and Justo Luis Pereda Rodríguez, Montano Cortina, and Gil Ramos Blanco, 1989, "José Martí presente en el plan de perfeccionamiento," *Educación* 19 (January-March): 78-87.

⁴⁷For an official application of Martí's thought to Cuban education, see Pareda et. al., particularly the comments on page 81 equating Martí's ideas to Marxism-Leninism. For analyses of the uses of Martí's thought, see Ottmar Ette, 1995, *José Martí Apóstol, Poeta, Revolucionario: Una historia de su recepción* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México); and Carlos Ripoll, 1984, *José Martí, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban History* (New Brunswick, CT: Transaction Books).

particularly to the writings of José Martí, Would not a new generation want to test new ideas and methods, even untested theories? Shouldn't the ideas of the past be held responsible for the conditions that brought about the Revolution in the first place and thus be unattractive to those who advocate change today? Why risk recreating even some of those preconditions? The schemes recommended by the Colegio laud the pre-1959 educational efforts, social values, and, as such, may even be described as reactionary. After so many years, can their program be attributed to nostalgia? Those I interviewed often spoke of the activities and type of education about which their parents and grandparents still reminisce from their school days in the 1950s. Juan Carlos Martínez Núñez, who organized an independent library in his Bayamo home, told me that he sponsored cultural activities with the purpose of teaching the children and their parents those elements of Cuban history deleted from the official curriculum.⁴⁸

It would be unfair to consider the dissidents' rejection of the revolutionary experience strictly subjective. Their discerning analysis of José Martí's thought is remarkable, given the selective and intense use of Martí's ideas by the regime.⁴⁹ Castro refers to Martí as the intellectual author of the revolution; the Cuban Constitution juxtaposes Marx and Martí as socialist models. Martí's ideas of social justice and self-sacrifice are useful, although in the Communist regime's practice, these concepts were equated with class struggle and repression, reduced to propaganda tools. The Colegio's quest to recover Martí's original intentions and establish the republic and pedagogy that he envisioned for Cuba suggest more than a reaction to the Revolution of 1959. It seeks to revive unfulfilled national dreams that date from Félix Varela's generation of the early nineteenth century and that the first generation to reach maturity after independence, beginning with the student protest of 1923, reaffirmed as Martí's vision of the Cuban nation.⁵⁰

⁴⁸To commemorate the centenary of the instauration of the Cuban Republic May 20, 2002, Martínez Núñez staged a play with the local children on the transfer of authority from the American occupation governor Leonard Wood to Cuba's first president, Tomás Estrada Palma. The reader interested in the history of education in colonial Cuba should note the aforementioned three-volume annotated bibliography published by Bachiller y Morales on this topic.

⁴⁹For essays by Julio Antonio Mella, Raúl Roa, Blas Roca, Che Guevara, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Armando Hart, and Juan Marinello, see Centro de Estudios Martianos, 1978, *Siete enfoques marxistas sobre José Martí* (Havana: Editora Política, Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba). For more information about the Centro de Estudios Martianos, see <http://www.filosofia.cu/cem/>.

⁵⁰Félix Lizaso and Ernesto Ardura, 1954, *Personalidad e ideas de José Martí* (Havana: Úcar, García, S.A.), 68-69.

Just as those who were dissatisfied with the state of Cuban affairs in the first half of the twentieth century looked to Martí's writings for inspiration, Cuban dissidents today continue to do so. The latter's rejection of the revolutionary ethos may be related to the realization that the communist regime has made a travesty of Martí's republic, a value historically embedded in their hearts.⁵¹ Political scientist Julie Bunck has argued that Castro's efforts to establish a revolutionary culture in Cuba have failed in spite of the suasion and coercion that have been alternatively and intensely applied.⁵² Except in the case of sports, where both the Cuban people and the government benefited from the adoption of a revolutionary sports ethic, Bunck analyzes the revolutionary strategies to change the culture of labor, women, and youth, only to find that traditional culture resisted any transformation.

Notwithstanding all the resources that the monopoly over education allowed the Cuban government to devote to teaching Marxist-Leninist ideology, the new socialist man has not emerged. Among Cuban dissidents, a desire persists to shed the Marxist pedagogy and to recover the pre-revolutionary tradition in education in order to move forward in a different direction. That tradition highlights the figure of José Martí to whom social justice was the panacea for all of the nation's ills; to him only an educated citizen was prepared to manifest freedom of thought and transcend the parochialism of his village.⁵³ The implicit contradictions among such admirable ideals explain why Martí's poetic prose offered solutions in the increasingly violent environment of the 1950s, and continues to inspire today. In spite of this thinker's rejection of church-based education, his formulations did not operate without casuistry, product of a world founded on neo-Thomistic pillars. How else can we explain that Martí's secular credo flourished predominantly in Catholic schools? Ultimately, when analyzing those factors that contributed to the derailment of communist educational objectives, we must consider Cuban traditions and educational values prior to the revolutionary era. By the same token, they deserve consideration

⁵¹The reference here is to what American sociologist Robert Bellah has called "habits of the heart". The concept helps explain the survival of Martí's ideas five decades after their distorted use by the Cuban government.

⁵²Julie M. Bunck, 1994, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Press, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press).

⁵³I am alluding to (1) Martí's article "Tres héroes" in *La edad de oro*, his short-lived publication for children, where he defines freedom as the right to be honest; and (2) his essay "Our America", which begins with a condemnation of the narrow-minded villager who thinks he commands the universe.

in the formulation of plans to rehabilitate the Cuban educational system for the twenty-first century.