

Education in Cuba: Foundations and challenges

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Introduction

TO ANY country education is a topic of great interest and priority, as it is impossible to think about the development of the citizens a nation needs, or the economic and social development it requires, without taking education into consideration, regardless of the model proposed as a paradigm. Therefore, education has always been present in the ideals of independence of all peoples, as masterfully expressed by their heroes, in whose political thought it has also held a special place. This is corroborated, for example, by personalities like the Liberator Simón Bolívar, when he stated that “there can be no freedom where there is ignorance [...] Slavery is the daughter of darkness [...] Ignorant people are a blind instrument of their own destruction ...”¹; or the thought of the apostle of Cuban independence, José Martí, also warning about the role of education in his maxim “To be educated is the only way to be free”.² And those words were no accident, because the importance of education lies essentially in that it is an ideological weapon that allows men to understand the problems that society must face in each historical moment, in addition to being a fundamental path to solving many of these problems. Another important element can be added: it is through education that every nation develops in its citizens the values and ideals that identify it as such.

In the case of Cuba, education is one of its key pillars, as well as a vital commitment of the State to its society. And this precept is fulfilled because there is close coordination between the policies and strategies implemented by the country to ensure the educational development and economic and social progress it requires. This is favored by a strong engagement of society at large and the awareness that education is a task in which everyone participates in one way or another, and therefore should also be the responsibility of all, although it falls on the Ministry of Education the state duty of managing, guiding and controlling education at all levels.

This declaration of principles on the importance of education would not be enough without the endorsement of legal support. Thus, the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba in force since 1976 establishes in several articles the fundamental principles and objectives of education, according to which the “Socialist State, as the power of the people [...] shall ensure [...] that no child be left

without schooling, food and clothing; that no young person be left without the opportunity to study; that no one be left without access to the studies, culture and sports...”, while “guiding, fostering and promoting education, culture and science in all their manifestations”.³

Therefore, besides an elementary duty of humanity and social justice, education for Cuba is also an imperative of the present time and the safety of its future in the preparation of new generations, so as to ensure the continuity of the revolutionary work undertaken more than half a century ago. Hence the main goal of the Cuban effort to pursue the continuous improvement of education, with a view to fully meeting its objectives, which today leads to the implementation of major transformations.

It would be impossible to objectively recognize the value of the present state of Cuban education, its major achievements and transformations without a comparative analysis of the current situation with that which existed before the Revolution. Table 1 shows some of the most representative indicators of this behavior:

Table 1

Comparative state of Cuban education in selected Indicators (Data taken from official statistics of the Ministry of Education)	
Before 1959	Today (2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 22,000 active teachers, and 10,000 unemployed for lack of budget and schools; population 6 million. - Education budget: 79.4 million pesos, which were the object of embezzlement by politicians of the time. - Illiteracy was 23.6% among 15 year-olds, with similar percentages of semi-literates. - Average schooling was three years. - Only 55.1% of children between 6 and 11 years old were schooled. - Three state universities with limited access. - Low number of university graduates. - Six teacher-training schools, with limited access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 258,126 teachers and 15,741 teachers in training attending the last years of education; population 11.2 million. - Education budget: 96 billion pesos (2010). - Illiteracy rate is 0.2% in age group over 10 years and up. - Average schooling is 10 years. - 99.7% of children 6-11 years of age are attending or have completed primary education. - 65 universities enable bringing higher education to all municipalities on the Island. - One million university graduates in the period 1960-2010. - 16 universities of Pedagogical Sciences and 18 pedagogical schools to train the teachers the country needs.

The quantitative advances shown in Table 1 are linked to significant qualitative advances, due to the adoption of the basic principles underpinning the Cuban educational policy.

Principles of education

Coverage of education. If education is a right guaranteed by State guarantees to its people as a just aspiration of society, the government has to guarantee massive education to enable the access of all children, youth and adults to the System, which means that it should be comprehensive in all types and at all levels of education, without regard to age, gender, ethnic or religious differences.

Study-work combination. It is a guiding principle of Cuban pedagogy that merges two essential goals. On the one hand, to develop in students the love for work as a fundamental value of a society of workers such as ours, to create in them the awareness of producers of social and material wealth; and on the other, to integrate the student in the productive process and socially useful work in a participatory and balanced way, so to promote in them, from early on, values as essential as responsibility and industriousness. Both goals are focused on the school, on the vocational training process that takes place inside and outside the classroom, by which students share, through work, the rules of conduct and values related to the development of their consciousness as producers that will enable them to internalize the culture of work as education of the individual in its broadest sense. The application of this principle is present in all the Educational System adjusted to the characteristics of each educational subsystem and to the social needs of development itself. Its roots lie in Martí's conceptions and in the most advanced contemporary pedagogical ideas.

Co-education. If Cuban education is comprehensive, it has to ensure equal rights to all citizens, regardless of gender, thus guaranteeing the access of girls, adolescents and young women to any kind of education and school level, with equal development opportunities.

Free of charge. Cuban education is free of charge in the entire System, and the State has the responsibility of ensuring teachers the educational facilities and means necessary for their full development, including graduate studies.

Democratic character. Family, community and society as a whole are encouraged to take an active part in all aspects related to education as individuals, but also through social, professional and scientific organizations to which they belong, in which the opinions and recommendations arising from the debate are a starting point for the improvement of school curricula and programs, as well as for the training of teachers.

Particularly meaningful is the work developed by the School Councils and Childhood Circles, which are an important factor of educational influence and a decisive force to support institutional management by contributing to the advances and results of education. Student organizations, in their daily activities and in congresses analyze and discuss the issues that affect their development and propose solutions to be submitted to the educational authorities.

Therefore, the full, universal and comprehensive realization of the right to education ensures that every Cuban citizen is fully aware of all their rights and the legal and institutional mechanisms it entails.

It is easy then to understand that to ensure compliance with these principles, the path followed in these 53 years has been very complex, with many obstacles to be overcome. First we have the eradication of the inherited illiteracy coupled with the need to establish schools across the country and to train teachers to work in all corners of the Island, to fully transform and consolidate the Educational System in both its objectives and contents and to diversify education and multiply the number of universities. Achieving all that required using new, bold methods suitable for each historical moment, in order to overcome the objective and subjective difficulties amid attacks of all sorts and an iron-clad blockade imposed since the beginning of the Revolution, which translated into a high economic and social cost for our people, with a big impact on education.

Therefore, we value modestly, but also with great pride, the educational work carried out, the results of which, although still in need of improvements reflect the collective effort of the people and the political will of its leadership to achieve it. This endeavor is seen in every corner of the country, in each educational institution and in the work selflessly carried out, day after day, by our educators.

Today we are struggling to perfect that work, with the aim of achieving an Educational System increasingly based on equality and social justice and capable of meeting the moral and social needs of citizens, so that we can achieve the model of educated society we have set out to create, as a reality of Martí's maxim that *there is no possible equality without equality of culture*.⁴

So today we are focused on a very important moment of new transformations that will enable continually improving the outcomes of education in relation to previous moments that became important landmarks in the history of Cuban education. The first of such moments occurred when, with the active participation of young people, illiteracy was eradicated in just one year (1961). That was not only a human imperative of social justice but, above all, the foundation of the subsequent educational and social development achieved by the country.

The second occurred in the 1970s, when the National System of Education was consolidated, the school became the most important cultural center in the community, and universal access to secondary education was attained, in view of the possibility of ensuring continuous education for all those who, after the triumph of the Revolution, had achieved literacy, and children attending school who completed primary education. This led to the creation of new secondary and pre-university schools in rural areas, to which thousands of secondary school students were incorporated as teachers, integrating the Manuel Ascunce Domenech Teaching Detachment⁵ that marked a new paradigm in the

development of Cuban teachers by combining teacher training programs and work.

The third began in 2000, when the main goal in the continuous process of raising the educational outcomes achieved was to ensure the maximum human development of all people, especially children, adolescents and young people, expressed in a comprehensive general culture that provided solid and deep knowledge in preparation for life, sustained in the values of the Cuban educational model.

The fourth is the moment we are living today, since the last school period when new changes were introduced throughout the System with the main objective of ensuring that our students develop their capabilities to the fullest, so that the great opportunities afforded by the Revolution can become real possibilities for them to achieve the comprehensive general culture to which our society aspires and in which the truly revolutionary feelings and commitment to the nation will prevail.

National Education System in Cuba

How was it possible to orchestrate this entire educational system? The State is in charge of structuring and securing the operation of the National Education System, with the participation and support of society at large, focused on the development of new generations under the leadership of the ministries of Education and Higher Education. This a mission will be accomplished through a comprehensive, systematic and participatory educational teaching process in permanent development, whose main goal is to “allow all Cuban children and youth to have exactly the same possibilities and opportunities to learn from the capabilities that the school develops in them”.⁶

To achieve that, the National Education System is structured in a set of organically coordinated subsystems covering all levels and types of education and ages, with students attending the 10,954 educational institutions of different kinds, ranging from the children’s circle (kindergarten) to universities, with a total enrollment of more than 2.5 million students.

A brief tour of the System will enable a characterization of each of the subsystems it comprises:

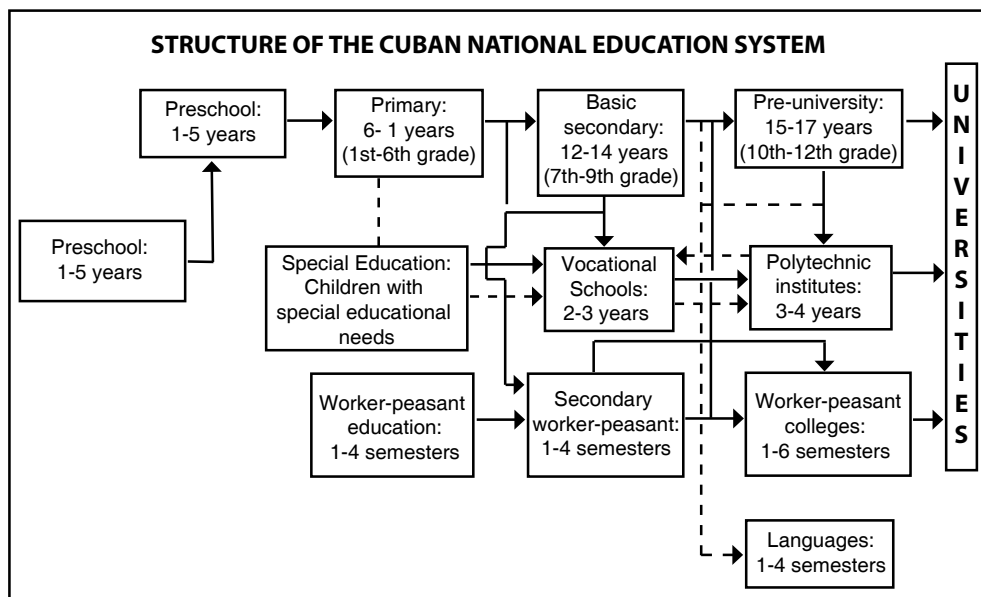


Figure 1 – Structure of the Cuban National Education System

Preschool Education. It is the first link of the System, which brings together children in age group 0-5 years. It has two main objectives: to guarantee the full physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic development of children, besides providing adequate preparation for future academic education.

Of the children in this age group, 99.5% are served by this subsystem, in which 68.5% of children between 0 and 5 years old participate through the “Educate Your Child Program” sponsored by informal channels, with the involvement of the family and the community; 17% attend the *children’s circles*, which are specialized institutions that cater to more than 116,106 children, and *pre-school*, in which all children from the age of 5 are enrolled, representing 14% of the country’s population.

The “Educate Your Child Program” aims to prepare the family to cope with the education of their children. To that end, multidisciplinary working groups have been established on the Island, consisting of health and education professionals from different organizations and agencies, who work within the area of action of the family.

General Education. It caters to most of the population in age group 6-17 years and comprises two levels: *Primary Education* and *Secondary Education*. Its goal is to contribute to the full development of the personality of children, adolescents and youth, based on the close relationship that should exist between teaching and learning, as a fundamental law of education.

Primary Education includes children 6-11 years old, who represent 99.7% of the country’s child population. These children attend 7,258 schools, which cater to 786,855 students, of which 179,929 correspond to the rural sector.

Primary education covers six grades (years) structured in two cycles: the first from 1st to 4th grade, and the second from 5th to 6th grade. The primary goal is to develop a learned student, with patriotic feelings and civic education, capable of identifying with the values and principles of our society, exalting the value of work as a source of wealth and acting as the protagonist in the learning process. This should be achieved through the educational pedagogical process and all school and social activities conducted by the school, the family and the community.

An efficiency rate of 99.3% has been achieved in this educational level, meaning that virtually all students attending primary school in Cuba complete their courses, which allows them to move on to the next level.

General Secondary Education comprises two levels: *Basic Secondary Education*, from 7th to 9th grade (basic secondary level) and *Pre-University Education*, from 10th to 12th grade (higher secondary level).

Basic Secondary Education is comprised of students in age group 12-15 years and is an integral part of the compulsory basic education along with Primary Education. The country has 1,069 such centers attended by 396,453 students assisted by 43,639 teachers in different disciplines. Its goal is to lay the foundation for the full development of the student's personality by fostering the acquisition of basic knowledge and the development of skills in Native Language, Literature, Mathematics, Natural and Social Sciences and a foreign language, besides contributing to the aesthetic education of students, the development of a physical culture, the practice of sports and the elementary knowledge of the principles of the technique, closely linked to production activities and the work of vocational training and professional guidance.

Upon successfully completing 9th grade, students have the possibility to continue their education. From then on, they have a wide range of options, all of interest to the economic and social development of the country, in accordance with the workforce demand required for the coming years, including: teacher training for primary and pre-school education, skilled technical workers and university graduates to continue their graduate studies in areas of economic and social interest.

Pre-University Education. General Secondary Education also includes Pre-University Education, which, in addition to preparing young people for Higher Education with a solid foundation of general culture, aims to instill in the students the conviction that the university studies to which they aspire will meet the requirements for the development of the country.

Pre-University Education brings together students 15-18 years old, who complete their studies in three years. In the country there are 464 pre-university institutes, with 173,448 students assisted by 22,163 teachers in different subjects.

These centers diversify their profile to better assist the students in voca-

tional training and professional guidance in courses of high national priority. Thus, we have the *Pre-University Vocational Institutes of Pedagogical Sciences*, whose purpose is to strengthen the vocational training started in previous levels in order to ensure efficient vocational guidance to students, encourage them and commit them to continue their education in pedagogical courses, from which they will graduate in education. Currently, 17,084 students are enrolled in 41 of such centers in operation in the country.

There are also the *Pre-University Vocational Institutes of Exact Sciences*, whose goal is to ensure that its graduates opt for careers in science, which are necessary for the scientific development of the country. With similar objectives there are the *Pre-University Military Vocational Institutes* for students pursuing military careers.

All students who complete higher secondary education are able to opt for any of the different university careers, according to the country's development needs within five years. To enter the university, students must have satisfactorily completed their studies at this level, in addition to taking and passing entrance examinations in Spanish, Mathematics and Cuban History.

Special Education. It is the subsystem that caters to younger children with special educational needs. Its goal is to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the proper mental development of students and prepare them for their future life from the point of view of both education and work.

There are different types of centers catering to population that requires specialized education: schools for the blind; for visually impairment, cross-eyed and amblyopic students; for deaf and hearing impaired students; for mentally impaired students; for students with behavioral and speech disorders; and for students with physical and sensory disabilities. Today there are 396 special schools in the country, catering to more than 40,176 students. The goal is to do the humanly possible for students to receive the assistance they need, even in hospitals, where 300 children are assisted in 33 classrooms, and also at home, when the student is incapable to commute to the educational institution.

Students are admitted in these schools after a thorough survey conducted at the 200 Centers of Diagnosis and Guidance existing in the country, where they are seen by a multidisciplinary team of specialists who determine the student's condition, recommending the assistance institution and the specific treatment to be provided. Also in operation in the municipalities are the Councils of Assistance to Minors, integrated by all strata of society, which participate directly with the school in preventive activities and direct assistance to the population at greatest risk.

Technical and Vocational Education. The main role of this subsystem is to prepare the skilled workforce of technicians and workers that the country requires. Students enter the subsystem after completing 9 or 12 years of schooling in some specialties. The courses last 3 or 4 years, according to the entry level

and complexity of the specialty, whose structure corresponds to the current demand, especially in the areas of agriculture, civil construction, accounting and railroads. These areas are linked to production organizations and services of the State, and the courses are taught by 2,942 specialists from the work centers of these organizations. 2,957 adjoining rooms have also been set up in the production and services centers, in which students undertake practical activities to develop professional skills, thus facilitating the use of the specialized material study base existing in such facilities.

The subsystem also caters to the *Professional Schools* to train qualified workers in areas of greater labor demand in each field.

Higher Secondary Education also includes the training of primary school and preschool teachers in the *Pedagogical Schools*, with duration of four years, and continued undergraduate on-the-job studies in Education in these specialties. There are 18 such schools, whose students are of strategic importance, as the primary school teacher is the very foundation of the entire educational system.

Adult Education. The goal is to provide workers and adults in general with the required basic education foundation, so that they can achieve the desired educational level and further technical training. It is structured in three levels: *Worker-Peasant Education*, *Secondary Worker-Peasant Education* and *Worker-Peasant College*, with courses equivalent to Primary, Secondary and Pre-University education respectively. It also includes the *Language Schools*, so as to meet the workers' needs for the knowledge of foreign languages.

Currently the workers' colleges also offer courses in Spanish, Mathematics and Cuban History, with a view to preparing the workers who wish to enter university and must take the required entrance examinations.

Higher Education. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for directing this educational level through its network of subordinate universities and those under other organizations. University-level specialists graduate from these institutions to work in different spheres of the country's economic and social life, in *day courses* for students who have completed their courses in Pre-University Education; *courses through meetings* for workers in those modalities. Candidates must take and pass the three aforementioned entrance exams.

This subsystem includes the Higher Pedagogical Education, linked to the Ministry of Education. Its role is to train the teachers required by the System, and the courses are offered by the *Universities of Pedagogical Sciences*, from which students graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Education.

These centers also cater to the improvement of teachers in activity, covering the different types of graduate education established in Cuba, in two areas: *professional enhancement* and *graduate academic programs*. The first aims to ensure an enhancement that meets the characteristics and needs of teachers as a result of their professional performance, so as to enable them to improve their

knowledge, master the contents of the disciplines and the necessary methods and, in addition, prepare them to assimilate the changes imposed by development, with the ability to enhance their own practice, its results and the ways to change it. Among the enhancement activities, personal growth is essential for other organizational forms such as courses, seminars and “graduates”.

Graduate academic education, as a second area, enables teachers to achieve high professional competence and high research and innovation capacity in the workplace, which is recognized with an academic or scientific degree. In this sense, the development of the broadly accessible Master’s in Education had a major impact. A total of 41,000 teachers have obtained the degree, making up a scientific potential prepared to produce the desired changes in the various areas of knowledge. In turn, the development of the scientific activity has provided the country with more than 1,000 doctors of Sciences linked directly to the training of the teaching staff and to other educational levels, whose research results, when put into practice, will contribute to accelerate the changes made to the system.

The key to success lies in the unity achieved between scientific activity, enhancement and methodological work, as an essential condition to the work that the school should develop to improve the quality of education.

Since the period 2010-2011, new curricula and programs have been introduced in Undergraduate Education, which meet the current demands in the training of these professionals, from the design of a model whose primary purpose is to better prepare the students before they face the work at school, the expansion of the profiles of careers that produce teachers for Secondary Education, and the improved role of the school in training, as a materialization of the study-work principle.



On the streets of Havana, one can see children going to schools wearing the school uniform.

The new pedagogical model was developed for the purpose of training educators who:

- Are prepared to scientifically conduct the educational process at the school, ensure the full personal development of the student expressed in the knowledge of contents, the supporting methods and the ethical standards shown in their professional performance.
- Vocationally orient the student to the specialties the country needs the most.
- Interact with the family so as to play a major role in the full development of their students.
- Use scientific methods to provide solutions to problems encountered in their work.
- Demonstrate to be politically, legally and culturally prepared and are capable to communicate effectively, so as to serve as a linguistic model to students.
- Can identify their own enhancement needs and act to meet them.

These new plans preserve and consolidate principles contained in previous plans, which prioritize: the political-ideological work and full general cultural development, the educational work in tune with the training and development of a broad profile professional, who can lead the educational process in more than one discipline or grade, the link between theory and practice, with a professional focus throughout the training process.

These are five-year courses that train teachers in 21 careers for all levels of the Education System, which are developed in different modalities. The new model involves an intensive training stage in the classroom during the first two or three years of the career at the Universities of Pedagogical Sciences, which since the first year improves the general culture of the future teacher, while starting his preparation to work at the school. Upon completing this stage, the student enters a school near his home, which is considered a micro-university because that is where he will continue his professional development under the direct guidance of a mentor who will accompany him throughout his career, which is complemented by the university courses he will attend to achieve his higher level education. These courses are completed with a state examination or a certificate activity; the latter for students with high academic achievement.

From the current pedagogical conceptions established for Higher Education in Cuba, each career defines the *type of professional* to be developed and sets the *general objectives* to be achieved, from which the respective curricula will be developed. These plans take into account three levels in determining the content: the *basic curriculum*, of state character, the *specific curriculum*, which is completed by each university based on the previous one, and the *optional/elective curriculum* offered by the educational system, with options for the student to choose from.

Current challenges and transformation to meet them

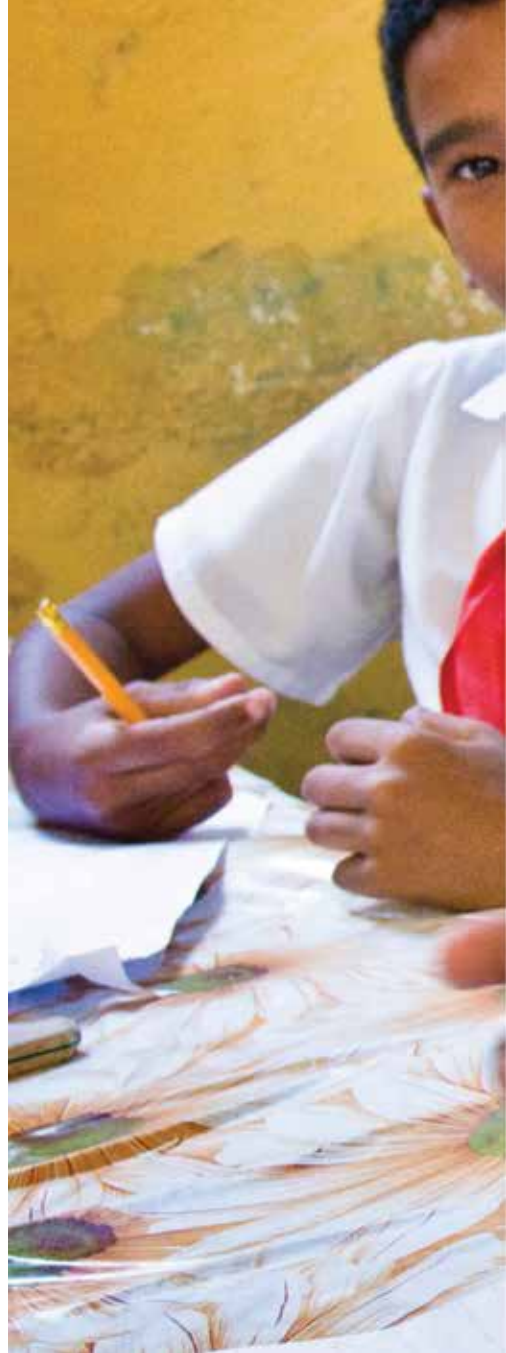
In the school period 2009-2010, the Ministry of Education implemented a comprehensive and deep transformation plan involving all institutions, their directors, faculty and students, as well as families and other sectors of society, with the goal to continue improving the quality of education so that current and future generations are increasingly prepared to face and solve the problems generated by development, and to do so with strong patriotic and revolutionary convictions. This requires joining the effort and will of all, combining all strategies and, where necessary, “revolutionizing, down to their foundation, the concepts of education,”⁷ reaffirming the idea expressed by the Commander in Chief, Fidel Castro, many years ago.

This entails:

- Prioritizing the political-ideological work and education in values throughout the Educational System, especially in the strengthening of patriotic and civic education, underpinned by a greater knowledge of the History of Cuba, Martí’s thought, the thought of our heroes and main leaders, so as to instill in the present and future generations, ideas that contribute raise awareness through the education they receive in learning institutions. Hence the emphasis on the “need to inform, discuss and achieve a higher level of development of the population, particularly young people”.⁸
- Improving preventive and community work as an important component of the educational work, so as to prevent misbehavior, vices and misconduct.
- Focusing on the professional development of students, as a guiding principle of education contained in the Master Program for strengthening the core values of the current Cuban society.
- Improving the “Educate Your Child Program”, which ensures the high levels of participation that have helped to achieve greater inclusion and retention of children 0-6 years of age.
- Consolidating the achievements of Primary Education, which have enabled attaining an almost absolute efficiency in the cycle.
- Improving the Assessment in School System, in which its psycho-educational conception is reinforced, to stimulating study, effort and learning.
- Introducing pedagogical training at the higher secondary level in pedagogical schools to train primary and preschool teachers.
- Improving the development and enhancement of teachers, with the implementation of new curricula and careers with dual specialty, increasing research activity and its application in teaching activity and in the design of an enhancement system that meets the real needs of

educators.

- Improving the methodological work as a means of scientific and pedagogical preparation to improve the skills of teachers in the classroom, taking as the starting point their self-preparation, as well as their continuous improvement understood as a priority to safeguard the quality of teaching, the education work and the scientific activity.
- Strengthening the development of skills in the Mother Tongue in all the subsystems and in particular in the training of teachers, as an essential element in their development.
- Focusing the organization of special school on improving assistance to children with special needs requiring these services.
- Strengthening in all subsystems the implementation of the curricula existing in all educational levels with adjustments to their content, with the aim to achieve greater efficiency in each cycle.
- In Basic Secondary Education, prioritizing the specialized methodological assistance of mentor teachers to new teachers, so as to improve the educational process from the work developed in the classroom.
- Working in the different centers comprising Pre-university education in preparing young people for their access to education in careers prioritized in the country.
- In the polytechnic institutes, creating adjacent classrooms in production and services centers, thus facilitating the direct incorporation of production specialists into the formative process of their students, coupled with a more rational use of available resources.
- Working on strengthening the school organization and reorganizing the school network, with the rational use and control of the human and material resources provided by the State to the schools, for them to carry out their work.
- Improving the “Yo, sí puedo” (“Yes, I can”) and “Yo, sí puedo seguir” (“Yes, I can continue”) programs for international collaboration, as Cuba’s contribution to eradicating of the scourge of illiteracy in other





countries.

In the classroom, students from public schools in Cuba develop educational activities

Conclusions

The economic and social landscape that characterizes today's world, with its major conflicts and inequalities, of both natural origin and political and social character, has a direct impact on the mission and roles to be fulfilled by education anywhere in the world, where only the strength of the peoples and the political will of their leaders will enable its realization.

Cuba, which has met the goals of Education for All, as well as the overall

objectives of the United Nations Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean,⁹ has shown that it is possible to develop education with high levels of equity, justice and quality, while facing adverse economic conditions. This is due to the fact that education has always been among the priorities of both the State and society at large.

In the course of 53 years educational policies have been implemented for the purpose of guaranteeing the people's education and the full development of new generations. In this regard, the key element that has allowed Cubans to move forward is their endless trust in the justice of the educational work we are building and in the unity that has always existed among the people to take this endeavor forward.

Today we are all immersed in a world of extraordinary development rates, and, paradoxically, also of incredible poverty rates. Technical-scientific development is part of this reality, and it cannot be denied that those who generate it, in their urge for domination attempt to erase from our nations the purest patriotic feelings and their identities as independent and sovereign nations. In this fierce battle, education is necessarily called upon to occupy a privileged and strategic place. So for us, education is decisive: "the creation and development of values in the consciousness of children and young people from an early age, and today it is more necessary than ever [...] to save our independence, to save our Nation, to save our Revolution".¹⁰

Notes

- 1 Bolívar, S. *Breviario educativo*. Caracas: s. n., 1825.
- 2 Martí, J. Maestros ambulantes. *La América*, New York, May 1884.
- 3 National People's Power Assembly: Constitución de la República de Cuba. Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 2003. p.10-11.
- 4 Martí, J. El Plato de Lentejas. *Patria*, New York, 6 Jan. 1894.
- 5 Movement that brought together young people who have taken a step forward to graduate as teachers, named after a young literacy teacher murdered by mercenary armies organized and equipped by the United States government.
- 6 *Informe de Cuba sobre la evaluación de la primera etapa del "Programa mundial para la educación en derechos humanos. (2005-2009)"*. Geneva: United Nations, 7 Apr. 2010.
- 7 Castro Ruz, F. *Discurso na clausura do II Congresso da União de Jovens Comunistas*, held in Havana on 4 April 1972.
- 8 Velázquez Cobiella, E. E. (Minister of Education of Cuba). Inaugural Conference at the Pedagogy Congress 2011. Convention Palace, 24 January 2001.

9 The *main education project*, which preceded the *World Conference on Education for All* in Jomtien, guided educational policies in Latin America and the Caribbean for twenty years. This *project* was approved in 1980, at the 21st Meeting of the General Conference of UNESCO, with the agreement of the countries of the region, given the need for a collective effort to achieve, before 2000, the following objectives: ensure basic education to school age children; eradicate illiteracy; improve the quality and efficiency of educational systems and of education in general.

10 Castro Ruz, F. *Speech delivered at the official opening of the school period 1997-98*. 1st September 1997, in *Cidade Escolar Libertad*.

Abstract – This article discusses the importance of education for any nation and for Cuba in particular, examining its political, pedagogical and sociological foundations, and portraying its accomplishments over the last 50 years. The principles underlying the educational policy of the Cuban government are explained, as they underpin the mission of the National Education System (NES) to carry forward educational work in the country. The essay also depicts each of the subsystems that comprise the NES and ensure the fulfillment of the key educational goals: to educate the new generations and the people as a whole in a scientific conception of the world; to develop fully their intellectual, physical and spiritual skills; to promote high aesthetic tastes and feelings; and to convert communist ideological, political and moral principles into personal convictions and daily habits of conduct, with the participation of school, family and society as a whole. The essay also presents the changes that are currently being made in the Ministry of Education with the participation of administrators, principals, teachers, students and other social agents, to continuously raise the quality of its results.

Keywords: Education, Development, Comprehensive education, Values.

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