

The basic secondary school
in the country:
an educational
innovation in Cuba

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The basic secondary school in the country: an educational innovation in Cuba

by Max Figueroa
Abel Prieto
Raúl Gutiérrez

Educational Development
Centre, Havana

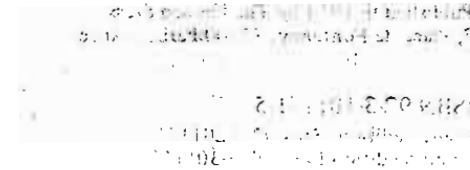
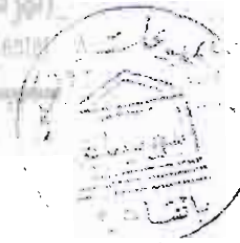
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The study on 'the basic secondary school in the country' for which we are indebted to Mr. Max Figueroa, Director of the Educational Development Centre, Mr. Raul Gutiérrez, Director of Research at the same Centre, and Mr. Abel Prieto, Director-General of the Technical Education Department, immediately confronts us with one of those extreme cases where everything in the education system constitutes a break, not only with the past, but also with what exists elsewhere. To integrate productive work with school work, the school community with the rural community, educational development with the country's economic, social and cultural development, the formation of intellectual faculties with that of moral, social, physical and aesthetic faculties, the adolescent age group with the

adult one, all this is a comprehensive vision of a society confident of a future, this situates the Cuban experiment not in any ordinary category of educational innovations but in what might be called a truly innovative reform. The reader, according to his particular point of view, will certainly have the most varied and diverging attitudes towards the way in which the authors approach their analysis and especially with regard to the ideology which forms the background to the whole experiment. Whether it be a political ideology or a real philosophy of education, it gives the new educational experiment all the greater consistency and coherence. For beyond the slogans, abstract concepts or nebulous figments of the imagination, there remains something which imposes itself on the observation and stands up to the most critical evaluation, namely, man's achievement in his own environment, which he actualizes within himself. It is to this that we invite the readers' attention, leaving the authors the entire responsibility for their ideological or political perspectives.

Since the aim of the IBE, through these studies and beyond individual cases, is to uncover the mechanism of change in education, so provoking thought and, in a climate of healthy emulation, giving impulse to the imagination of those responsible for education, may we venture to predict, as a tribute to Mr. Max Figueroa, Mr. Raul Gutiérrez and Mr. Abel Prieto, as well as to the whole team at the Havana Educational Development Centre to which they belong, that this study will offer ample food for thought for all who are interested in educational innovations.

Although they do not necessarily represent the views of Unesco, the ideas contained in this study will not fail to provoke and give substance to a fruitful dialogue between those who today find themselves faced with the dilemma engendered, on the one hand, by the demands of the quantitative and qualitative development of education and, on the other, by the constraint of human and financial resources which economic realities impose in a greater number of countries, particularly in developing countries.

The most striking aspect of the Cuban experiment lies, perhaps, in the veritable feat not only of instituting a system of self-financing and self-management of education, but also of making the school a lever for the process of the economic, social and cultural development of the region. There is certainly something here for the planners, but also psychologists, sociologists and educators cannot fail to judge the extent to which well-thought-out goals can inspire deep and lasting motivations in the young and the less

young, so that not only are the immediate objectives fully achieved but also a radical change in young people's attitudes offers a glimpse of the beginning of a cumulative process of which the outcome can scarcely be surmised.

Preface

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Introduction

Cuba is a poor country which, following the triumph of its revolution, has put in hand infrangible plans of economic and social development directed to meeting the imperious material and spiritual aspirations of its people after a hundred years of struggle for the achievement of national independence.

Interwoven with the history of the century required for full national liberation and closely linked to the moulding of Cuban nationality in its hundred years' gestation is the development of a conceptual line of positive pedagogic thinking by great Cuban educators of the epoch.

These men tenaciously combated the scholastic and metaphysical approach dominant in education, characteristic of a situation which faithfully represented the great negative pedagogic tradition established by the Spanish home country in its Cuban colony.

These great Cuban educators of the 19th century, notably José Agustín Caballero, Félix Varela, José de la Luz y Caballero, Rafael María-Mendive and Enrique José Varona in their general arguments advocated a more rational education of a scientific and experimental character. This progressive developing line culminated in the most universal and revolutionary of our great thinkers and patriots, the master and apostle of our independence, José Martí (1853-95).

Martí not only upholds scientific education like his predecessors but proclaims the necessity for 'our America' - Latin America - of a scientific education which takes as its starting point the realities of our economic problem situation as underdeveloped countries whose wealth or resources are pre-eminently agricultural. But Martí's pedagogical thinking goes deeper conceptually in postulating the need to end the existing divorce in education between theory and practice, study and work, intellectual work and manual work and for this he argues for the fusion of these activities in schools' educational work. In this connexion it is appropriate to quote passages culled from Martí's extensive though dispersed writings in which his lively pedagogic thinking is represented: