

The philosophy of education in Fidel Castro as a tradition of thought

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of a scientific result of a qualitative research of a philosophical-educational nature. It exposes from the political-emancipatory perspective and as a tradition of thought some educational philosophical ideas of Fidel Castro; the ethical-moral component of his thought that guides and promotes the goals of educational policy is highlighted. Theoretical methods were used: historical-logical, ascent from the abstract to the concrete and systematization; empirical: document review, discourse analysis. It can be used as deepening material in the teaching-learning process in the pedagogical profile careers of universities and postgraduate teaching.

Keywords: Education; educational philosophy; Pedagogical thinking; Educational thinking.

Introduction

Today, in Cuban education, the Philosophy of Education is very relevant. Hence the importance of the subject under study, since it provides necessary reflections for the education of the new generations that society aspires to.

Fidel Castro's ideas represent, in synthesis, the development of the most progressive Latin American educational thought of the 19th and 20th centuries. As stated by researcher Padilla (2008), "...Fidel Castro was a politician sui generis, who in his actions linked to the

Cuban educational endeavor developed a theoretically argued Philosophy of Education" (p. 32).

The historic leader of the Revolution was fully aware of Cuban society, its problems, contradictions and potentialities, and was therefore able to achieve an enriching dialectical synthesis between the democratic and popular tradition of the Cuban school, the legacy of Martí, the best of Latin American thought and, in particular, universal thought.

Fidel Castro's pedagogical thought, forged in the theoretical-practical work, nourished by historical roots, makers of cultural and national identity, is only understandable when approached in the systematic structuring of its economic, political, ideo-cultural and axiological components. It is opportune to point out that, in the revolutionary practice, his educational thought transcends the traditional conception of education as a remedy to all evils. His wise conception of the educated and cultured man, as a historical subject capable of carrying out economic, political and social transformations, gives education the character of a valuable instrument to carry out the necessary change of unjust social structures

The objective of this article is to present Fidel Castro's educational philosophical ideas from a political-emancipatory point of view and as a tradition of thought. The study was developed from a combination of theoretical and empirical methods in order to know with greater richness the object of study. Theoretical methods: historical-logical, analysis and synthesis, inductive-deductive, ascent from the abstract to the concrete and systematization; empirical: analysis of documents and discourse analysis.

In the research process, the authors carried out an extensive search in documentary sources as essential materials for data collection. Among them, the following stand out: books and periodical press that mainly gather the speeches pronounced by the Commander in Chief related to education in his trajectory as the maximum leader of the Cuban Revolution. Likewise, they carried out an objective analysis that allowed grouping them in each of the two stages of the Revolution in power and classifying in each of those speeches, the different facets of his philosophical-educational and pedagogical thought.

Development

In Fidel Castro's educational philosophical thought, we can find a set of theses, many of them already anticipated by the preceding Cuban and Latin American thought, which the historical leader was systematically incorporating into his praxis as a politician. Essentially they are, as expressed by Padilla (2008), education as a human right; education as an instrument to equalize men; education as a way to achieve the spiritual richness of the human being; education as an indispensable way to achieve perfectibility in the human being; education as a means of human liberation.

The critical analysis made by Fidel Castro on the problems of Cuban man, the educational deficiencies that typified him, the understanding of the ways for its transformation; as well as his reflections on the bases and formative meanings of education as a way of life, the moral philosophy in the educational context and vehicle of disengagement, and the integral formation of human beings exposed early on in *History will absolve me*, would constitute the bases for the political program of the Revolution. Once victory was achieved on January 1, 1959, work began on a democratic and popular education for the Cuban people. His educational thinking, charged with a broad anthropological conception, has as its starting point the recognition of the educable character of man and the understanding of the educational potential of the people. Only on the basis of these ideas could he undertake the new social project that requires educated men and women with the capacity for action.

Aware of the need to raise the level of education of the population so that it could become an effective active subject, not only in economic life, but also in political-social life, the generalization of education began, with the legal support of Law 561, whose purpose was to broaden access to education.

Given the precarious situation of the education system in Cuba, at the National Congress of Rural Teachers, held in August 1959, the Commander in Chief asked the participants to support the creation of ten thousand classrooms, which would double the projected figure of five thousand proposed by the Ministry of Education, which they gladly accepted immediately.

Thus, it was necessary to undertake the massive construction of schools, especially in rural areas; the conversion of sixty-nine barracks of the tyranny into schools stands out. Fidel had already stated in Camagüey: "So we will turn this military city into a school attended by hundreds of children, because our barracks are among the people, our Revolution is defended by the people!" (Castro, 1959: p.1) New schools were inaugurated: the Columbia Camp turned into Libertad School City in Havana, the Moncada Barracks turned into July 26th School City in Santiago de Cuba, the Leoncio Vidal Regiment turned into Abel Santamaría School City in Santa Clara, just to cite a few examples.

Later, on August 29, 1960, at the graduation ceremony of the first volunteer teachers, he clearly defined the primary task of the Revolution: "The fundamental thing that a revolution has to do is to teach and educate. The most important task of a revolution, and without which there is no revolution, is to make the people study" (Castro, 1960: p.1).

This idea imposed a new rationality to the life of the Cuban people, who, under the revolutionary fervor, assumed the new challenges of transformation of the society that for centuries had been subjected to ignorance. In this sense, at the closing of the First National Congress of the Municipal Education Councils in 1960, he placed the importance of education for the spiritual development of man on the principle that "there will always be difficulties when a citizen does not know how to read and write" (Castro, 1960: p.1).

For the distinguished thinker, the foundation of the dignity of man is in the first place to know how to read and write. This affirmation is supported by the following statement: "... the least a human being should know... is to know how to read and write. When a person does not know how to read and write, he is really on the lowest scale in which a human being can be placed" (Castro, 1961: p.1).

The relationship between the Revolution and education, expression of its political-educational ideal, is based on the practical humanism that is based on the teaching-learning process for the constant improvement of the human being. By virtue of this, only two years after the triumph of the Revolution, the literacy campaign was carried out throughout the island. This epic allowed, in less than a year, the declaration of Cuba as a territory free of illiteracy, on December 22, 1961.

For Fidel, as a Martiano and Marxist, the formation of man is not detached from revolutionary praxis; that is why he considered decisive the struggle to expand education as the basis of human dignity and even national dignity, an aspect expressed in the conception that dialectically combines the revolution-education relationship, since he considered that there cannot be a revolution without a revolution in the field of education.

In assessing reality, when he spoke of education, he did not speak of an isolated fact, disconnected from the rest of the social and historical reality, he saw it as the basis of every renovating process, as an instrument through which the new generations receive the skills, the knowledge to train them and then, to perform as social, productive and political entities.

In his educational conception, the significance of the teacher for the new economic, political and cultural context can be appreciated; for this reason, and throughout his life, he emphasized on raising the social recognition of his work: "...the Revolution has given an

extraordinary and special importance to the training of teachers and professors..." (Castro, 1961, p. 19).

He considered teaching as the most sublime work that could be performed by any person in the new society. "That is why the Revolution elevates the role of the teacher, highlights the function of the teacher" (Castro, 1961, p. 19). In this sense, his valuation became more fruitful, not only in his human nature, but also in his practical revolutionary becoming: to strengthen the subjective conditions of the teaching profession and to foster the revolutionary consciousness of the teacher.

In the same speech, when he declared Cuba an illiteracy-free territory, he summoned 1,500 brigadista girls to attend a Special School for Teachers at the "Heroes de Girón" center in the capital. There they would receive general instruction in the morning and political theory in the afternoon. In the evenings they would teach in the schools for domestic workers. That same day, he announced the massive scholarship plan that made it possible for forty thousand children of workers and peasants, brigadists, to integrate the first contingent of scholarship holders.

In the same way, the Cuban leader requested two thousand young brigadists, of both sexes, with sixth grade expired, to join a primary teacher training course in the Sierra Maestra.

The first stage of teacher training with a new conception began to operate on January 20, 1962. The essence of that new conception, fidelist, was based on a teacher trained in the values of unconditionality with the Revolution and linked to the professional practice from the first moments, especially linked to the life of the people. He was emphatic in forming a new generation of teachers, revolutionary teachers, capable of being ready to teach anywhere in the world where a brotherly people needed them.

Distinctive elements of Fidel's educational thinking are what knowledge to bring and how to bring it to the people in order to enhance man's physical and mental capacities. From very early on he valued the need to develop a scientific pedagogy, to banish everything dogmatic and scholastic inherited from the past. To the teachers who would take teaching to the mountains, coinciding this idea with Martí's idea of spreading teachers in valleys and mountains, he stimulated them to "teach in a different way, to teach to think, to banish everything that is mechanical in intelligence to give place to everything that is development of intelligence" (Castro, 1960: p. 2). (Castro, 1960: p. 2)

In order to bring knowledge to the people, different ways were put into practice to generalize education. One of them was the opening of new educational centers. In April 1959, eight hundred and seventeen adult education centers began to operate on the island.

In this way and by Fidel's initiative, "in each of the people's farms, created as a result of the application of the First Agrarian Reform Law, a school was established as part of the plan to open ten thousand new classrooms and the urgent literacy plan". (Azel, 2019: p.105)

Another of the ways to educate and bring knowledge to the masses was the instruction of the female sector. As part of the education and improvement plans for women, in January 1961 the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), under the express guidance of Fidel Castro, organized the Conrado Benítez School of Revolutionary Instructors. This school was one of the avenues for the subsequent development of the plans for the advancement of women. Later, as part of the extension of culture throughout the country, the Schools of Art Instructors were created with a national character. The children of peasants and workers were taken to the capital to become instructors of music, dance, plastic arts and theater. He always emphasized the need to "...bring opportunity to all those intelligences, we are going to create the conditions that allow all artistic or literary or scientific talent or of any order to develop" (Castro, 1974: p. 34).

As a substantive aspect of Fidel Castro's conception of bringing knowledge to all the people, he referred to the expansion of knowledge through different modalities of study, to which he pointed out: "We think that the right thing is that workers, middle-level technicians, everyone, should also have the opportunity to pursue higher education, but not through the regular system of university education, but through directed courses" (Castro, 1976: p. 2). (Castro, 1976: p. 2).

His resolute position of placing wisdom at the service of man, and at the service of the people in a general sense, was not only an idea born of the prevailing reality, it was also a superlative expression of his practical humanism; in this direction he considered that "...technical knowledge should be the heritage of all mankind... that what has been created by man's intelligence should be the heritage of all mankind" (Castro, 1969: p. 2).

Since the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, the Theses on Educational Policy, which establish the nature, purpose and basic principles of Cuban education, were established as the starting point for educational action. From that moment on, education was developed on the basis of socialist, Marxist and Leninist pedagogy.

Of singular importance in Fidel's educational thought, which constitutes a guiding platform for the new generations, is that which refers to the formation of values. This conception is based, in the first place, on the most advanced and progressive thinking of Latin America throughout the centuries, and, secondly, on Marxist-Leninist ideology. On the basis of these elements, the critical analysis of the neocolonial system in Cuba contributed to the

conformation of an axiological system that has as essential pillars, social justice, human dignity, anti-imperialism, patriotism, solidarity, collectivism, internationalism, among others.

From the first years of the 1990s, characterized by the onslaught of the special period and the crisis of values, the pedagogical conception of the leader of the Cuban Revolution was once again highlighted. Based on his Martí and Marxist-Leninist essence, Fidel Castro emphasized the importance of creating values and feelings of solidarity in human beings and the role of the educator in Cuban society:

In his political and pedagogical speeches we find a broad axiological conception that represents not only the historical continuity in terms of the values to be formed and transmitted to the concrete man, but above all the pretension regarding the historical becoming of the American peoples. Hence, the educational policy developed since the triumph of the Revolution is based on the conceptions and principles of Martí's pedagogical ideology and on the deep feeling of social justice and respect for human dignity that characterized the Cuban Revolution from its origins.

In Fidel Castro's axiological conception, it is remarkable the place given to human subjectivity, to the revolutionary conscience as a factor of conduct in the construction of the socialist society. His broad spectrum in the formation of values such as: justice, freedom, patriotism, independence, anti-imperialism, as well as universal human values: respect, dignity, responsibility, honesty, simplicity, unconditionality, solidarity and others, constitutes the foundation in the formation process of the new generations. He considered the creation of ethics, conscience, sense of duty, discipline, responsibility as characteristic features of the subject of the new society.

In many of his speeches he made clear the purpose of education. For that reason, the Cuban educational policy, outlined in the First Congress of the PCC in 1975, embodied the concepts, principles, objectives and general guidelines on the integral formation of the new generations, which would imply, from the educational theory, to address all the dimensions of the human being.

In line with this essence and great practical-formative sense, he stated: "The future development of our education will have an enormous political, social and human connotation...education is the instrument par excellence in the search for equality, welfare and social justice" (Castro, 2003a: pp. 19-30).

These educational ideas are rooted in the Latin American philosophical-educational tradition of all times, expressed by thinkers such as José Agustín Caballero, Simón

Rodríguez, Andrés Bello, Simón Bolívar, Félix Varela, José de la Luz, Eugenio María de Hostos, Enrique José Varona, José Martí, José Medardo Vitier, Carlos Mariátegui, Paulo Freire, and are synthesized in the following expression:

To educate is everything, it is to sow values, to develop an ethic, an attitude towards life. To educate is to sow feelings. To educate is to seek all the good that can be in the soul of a human being, whose development is a struggle of opposites, instinctive tendencies of selfishness and other attitudes that must be counteracted and can only be counteracted by conscience (Castro, 2003b, p. 35).

The fundamental objective of education embodied in the Law of the Integral Reform of Education of 1959, would be pointed out by Fidel years later when referring to the full development of the human being. Therefore, it was an emancipating, liberating education, builder of a new man.

Conclusions

Fidel Castro's educational philosophical thought is characterized by the following elements: he recognizes man in his condition of educable being; he recognizes education as a formative element; he highlights the role of the teacher and emphasizes what his qualities should be; he recognizes man's potential to know and the importance of knowledge; he is the exponent of an axiological conception based on values born of the transforming praxis; he also advocated integral formation with the capacity to act and build the new society, transform the environment and himself.

The universality and rationality of its theoretical content contain elements of judgment that stand as a theoretical platform guiding pedagogy, as well as educational policies of the Cuban reality; in addition, they respond to questions that the complexity of current times demands against neoliberal positions. The pedagogical orientation underlies its political project aimed at forming men of science and conscience, men useful to the homeland and able to respond to the demands of the new times.

His ideas have been shaped as a reflective and self-conscious process of the socio-historical reality that encompasses the different aspects of man as an individual and as a social entity; they mark the guiding thread in the continuity of Latin American educational philosophical thought, with a manifest character of authenticity and

originality. In addition, they constitute reflections on man and his education, based on the political, social and cultural reality of his time. Therefore, he attributed great value to the school conceived as a means of socialization and space for the spiritual formation of the human being.