

Historical analysis of the teaching of Cuban History: current significance

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ABSTRACT

The article is based on a scientific result of historical-pedagogical cut. It aims at explaining through a historical panorama the teaching of Cuban History from the colony to the present time, given its importance in the Cuban context. Theoretical methods: historical-logical, inductive-deductive, analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization of the historical and historical-chronological; empirical: analysis of documents and discourse. The main result lies in the need to strengthen the teaching of the subject in order to achieve political-ideological work, forge an emancipating culture against prejudice and discrimination, favor national unity and confront subversion.

Keywords: Teaching; History; Values; Actuality

Introduction

In the curricular conception of different educational models in various regions and countries, the teaching of history and especially national history is included. Hence, the subject History of Cuba, characterized by the study of the aspiration to the Cuban national being, has a strong presence in the curricula from primary to university education, where the contents referring to national and local history are selected with a didactic sense to allow the historical education of children, adolescents and young people.

This has been the result of an arduous task that reaches our days, since the teaching-learning process of the subject History of Cuba appeared in the 19th century, but it was not always taught in the way it is taught today, far from what is assumed today. A thorough analysis of the subject will allow us to understand its evolution and development.

The above mentioned and the relevance given to Cuban history at present are the reasons that encouraged the authors to carry out a historical-pedagogical research on the teaching of this subject from colonial times to the present. It is considered, therefore, a topic of study of significant importance from the historical-pedagogical perspective.

The research results are synthetically presented in this article, which is made available to those interested in the teaching-learning process of Cuban History, both in the academic field of universities as a material for consultation and deepening of the subject Methodology of History teaching, and in postgraduate education related to History of Education. Likewise, it can contribute to the methodological preparation of teachers of the subject at all levels of education.

For these reasons, it is stated as an objective: to explain through a historical panorama the teaching of Cuban History and its transcendence at present. For its realization, it was resorted to the theoretical methods: historical-logical, inductive-deductive, analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization of the historical and historical-chronological, fundamental in the researches of this typology. Likewise, empirical methods were used: document analysis for written sources and discourse analysis for oral sources.

Development

The process of conquest and colonization of Cuba produced a historical change in the evolution of the peaceful indigenous population that inhabited the island. Transformations were imposed through brutal force, the aboriginal culture was practically extinguished, some of their customs and myths, as well as certain stories of the chronicles of the conquerors were scarcely reflected in the first school texts of elementary education in the colonial stage. More than four centuries had to pass before the history of the island was made known through its teaching in schools.

The subject History was introduced in the school curriculum at the end of the 18th century, although in reality it was established as a curricular discipline with the study plan of 1842 and the secularization of the university, when the teaching of the History of Spain was implemented as a subject for the whole educational system of the colony with the purpose of liquidating the bases of the Cuban enlightened intellectual movement and the independence expressions of the beginning of the century.

In its teaching and learning, a memorized study of biographies of outstanding personalities was carried out, the feelings towards the metropolis were exalted, the Spanish royalty and the great conquerors were exalted. However, the brutal passages of the conquest and colonization were excluded.

This study plan was ratified in the educational reforms of 1863 and 1880, so that the teaching of History with the concept of Hispanity was incorporated to the teaching of Cuba and Puerto Rico to be taught in elementary and upper elementary school. Universal History and the History of Spain were left for high school and university.

The curricular conception applied showed that the subject History of Cuba was a regional history preceding the History of Spain and Universal History. They considered Cuba as a region of Spain, whose future and progress were based on understanding, cordiality and alliance between Creoles and peninsulars in order to avoid any independence concerns. Its teaching responded to the colonialist policy, to the Hispanic cultural thought, to the historical criteria of the unpatriotic representatives of the Creole oligarchy linked to the economic power and to a methodology based on the educational conception of the Spanish scholasticism, so it was repetitive, unreflective and memoristic.

In spite of colonial impositions, Cuban educators understood early on the potential of history to transmit values, feelings and attitudes, especially for the formation of patriotism and the defense of Cuban nationality. José Agustín Caballero, Félix Varela Morales, José de la Luz y Caballero were the main thinkers, the initiators of the Cuban ideals of the new generations; they contributed to prepare the consciences for the changes, they understood the importance of history in the formation of values and they used education to undertake it.

Undoubtedly, the Hispanic scholastic ideal imposed for the teaching of History through its texts and methodology was strongly opposed in the course of the 19th century by many Cuban educators, whose educational ideas had evolved from the Enlightenment and critical positivism

to the advanced pedagogical thinking of Martí, who gave special importance to the teaching of History and left evidence of this in several articles.

The American intervention in the war of independence in 1895 frustrated its imminent victory; Cuba ceased to be a Spanish colony, but it was not yet free or independent. Thus began the first U.S. military occupation, which prepared the conditions to turn Cuba into a neo-colony by consolidating U.S. economic predominance and curtailing its sovereignty with the Platt Amendment.

The terrible existing educational situation favored the public school system, the interveners tried to impose the conceptions and educational projects aimed at Americanizing Cubans from an early age. They introduced the mandatory teaching of U.S. History in public schools as one of the measures of the occupation government. Likewise, some primary school teachers received preparation courses at Harvard and Cambridge Universities in the United States that would serve to influence Cuban elementary education.

This stage was identified as "one of the most dramatic and conflictive chapters of education in that period" (Guzmán, 2001, p. 26). A manipulated version of the history of Cuba was offered in which relevance was given to the saving role of the United States in the attainment of independence.

Military Order No. 226, of December 6, 1899, and the Teacher's Manual, in 1900, were the guiding documents for the teaching of history in schools. They contained the didactic orientations for its learning, although they did not have an adequate dosage or graduation of its contents. The History of Cuba was taught with texts written by Spaniards or North Americans based on their criteria and versions; they reduced the study of the stages of the Cuban people's independence struggles, and the subject was taught linked and illustrated with the facts, processes and personalities of the United States.

The Manual did not include specific methodological guidelines for the teaching of Cuban history. However, it clearly expressed the need to teach local and national history in all grades, since our country should be of more interest than others.

In 1902, when the Neocolonial Republic was established, a new study plan was applied, ruled by Circular No. 5 of 1901 for elementary public elementary schools. The subject History of Cuba was excluded from the school curriculum and, in its place, History of America was included, which favored knowledge of American society and limited the teaching of national history. In fact, it constituted a step backward in relation to the 1900 Manual.

In the following curricula approved in the first republican years for the different levels of education, local history was hardly addressed in the methodological orientations, nor adequately considered in the curricular instrumentation of the programs designed. In elementary school it was completely ignored.

With the application of the courses of studies of History regulated by Circular No. 76 of 1914, it was oriented, in a very simple way and without the required importance, to approach in the first grades some aspects of local history as additions to the History of Cuba. This situation worsened with the new courses of studies for primary education, instituted after Circular No. 105 of 1922, where this subject was downplayed.

In spite of this, as explained by García (1980), since 1899 a vanguard of the Cuban teaching profession and especially in the public schools, the teacher taught the best traditions of struggle of his people, extolled the legendary heroes of the nation and began to form the new generations that would later initiate the struggles against the oligarchic and pro-imperialist governments of the republic.

Circular No. 114 of 1926 modified the courses of study in rural and urban public elementary schools. The subject of Cuban History began in third grade with local history, and in fourth, fifth and sixth grades, national history. The History of Cuba course was completely redesigned, according to Guerra (1950), in his work *Elementary Education in the XX century*, and he emphasized the contribution of History classes to the formation of moral and patriotic feelings, since they should be full of life so that children would think and feel like the great men, be moved by the heroes' exploits, enjoy their victories and suffer their defeats. In abstract, to feel admiration for the history of their homeland.

This curricular project, with some variations, was in force until 1958. However, the inclusion of local history in the third grade presented two major drawbacks: the lack of preparation of teachers in this subject and the absence of texts. For this reason, the Board of Superintendents of the Republic directed teachers to turn to primary sources and to resort to oral history.

Document No. 133 of 1944 emphasized in its guidelines the importance of teaching Cuban History, since it referred to how the subject would awaken in the student the love for his people and the desire to contribute to its aggrandizement, as well as contribute to his civic and moral formation. However, this pedagogical statement was distorted with conservative historiographic approaches, the anti-annexionist and anti-imperialist ideals of the Cuban

independence heroes were excluded, as well as the outstanding men of the first republican years, such as Mella, Villena or Guiteras.

In these years, historians and pedagogues such as Pedro García, Emilio Roig, Fernando Ortiz, Raúl Ferrer, Gaspar J. García Galló, among others, stood out. Many of their contributions refer to the emotional factor in the teaching of history and the value of orality in the classroom, aspects that were recommended in the works written for the Teacher Training Colleges.

In upper primary school, the teaching of national history was late and irregular, precisely in 1931. It was indicated to propitiate knowledge to the students about the evolution of the governmental organization and the political life of the municipality, the province and the Cuban nation. The programs tried to integrate the subjects of History, Geography and Civics where the civic and political aspects predominated over the historical ones, although very limited to certain accounts about the evolution of municipal and provincial institutions in Cuba, so they did not constitute a logical unit of local history initiated in the third grade of elementary school.

In relation to the second education or baccalaureate, the subject History of Cuba was not contemplated in the study plan designed by Enrique José Varona in 1901, its incorporation was made in the school year 1939-1940 with the new study plan for this level. Regarding technical education, it can be stated that the subject was ignored in some branches. In higher education, its introduction took place in 1927, limited to certain studies or specialties of the University of Havana, the only one existing in the country at that time.

The teaching of History during the period of the Revolution in power has as its essential basis what Commander in Chief Fidel Castro stated when he said that:

...the study of our history, of our country will not only enlighten our consciences, will not only enlighten our thinking, but the study of the history of our country will also help to find an inexhaustible source of heroism, an inexhaustible source of spirit of sacrifice, of spirit of struggle and combat.... (Castro, 1980, p.1)

This is precisely the role of the subject of Cuban History in close relation to historical knowledge, allowing the acquisition and formation of a dialectical-materialist conception of history and the defense of the Cuban social project.

Since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, a transcendental change began in Cuban education. Work was carried out to investigate, recover, complete, update and teach

aspects of history that had been omitted or distorted, for which the Revolutionary Government implemented a series of measures to achieve its goal.

The teaching of Cuban history and historical personalities was resized, the historiographic sources were radically transformed, and a major role was given to the study of the best traditions of struggle of the Cuban people and its main leaders. In order to improve it, the emerging training and improvement of teachers of the specialty was carried out, the study plans and programs were updated based on the contributions to national history made by eminent Cuban scholars.

The subject History of Cuba was present in the curricular design of primary and secondary education; in pre-university, the Economic History of Cuba was taught for some time. The spatial, temporal and causal dimensions of history began to be systematically addressed for its study and interesting methodological experiences were developed, but there were also some drawbacks. For example, local history was neither conceived nor implemented in the study plans due to the lack of conditions to develop an optimal teaching-learning process, since there were still insufficient studies of regional and local histories; the academic limitations presented by the teachers, since the study plans for teacher training did not contemplate the teaching of local history nor its methodology for the teaching-learning process.

In the 1976-1977 school year, the Education System was improved and consequently, there were changes in the curricular design for the teaching of the subject; historical knowledge was taught from first to fourth grade through ephemeris and writings in reading books; and a collection of booklets with historical anecdotes, entitled *La historia de mi Patria* (The History of my Homeland). From fifth grade onwards, Ancient and Middle History was taught; from sixth to ninth grades, the rest of the stages of Universal History were taught, alternating in each grade with the different stages of Cuban History, which had a negative impact on the subject as such, since it lost its presence in primary education.

As can be seen, at this stage the study of national history was minimized in primary education, as well as in junior high school and in pre-university it had to be integrated to alternate its space with Universal History. On the other hand, its study was dominated by the relationship between causes and consequences; the study of great historical personalities of the Ancient, Middle, Modern and Contemporary Ages was introduced.

A few years later, with the historiographic richness bequeathed by prestigious historians of the first half of the 20th century and the intensification of national, but especially local historical studies in the last quarter of that century, historical science made available to the school a variety of sources to study it and an endless number of topics that contribute to the education of children, adolescents and young people from the educational point of view.

This contributed to the application of a new curricular design as of the 1988-1989 school year, in which Cuban history recovered its space and independence at all levels of the National Education System, and the objectives and themes of the curriculum included attention to local history, so that the design adopted for the teaching-learning of history, particularly national history, was coherent and orderly from elementary school to higher education, which enabled the elements of local history to be addressed from the formative objectives.

As of 1996, the teaching of Cuban History was declared as a priority and a main direction of methodological work for the National Education System with a view to strengthening the integral formation of children and young people, the national identity and preserving the historical roots of the Cuban people through a correct teaching-learning process of the subject, because "a good History class is the daughter of freedom and granddaughter of culture, because culture is the mother of freedom." (Díaz, 2002, p. 20)

The teaching of history must reveal in each class the historical morality of the people, of their heroes, value the figures and the events in which they participated. It must relate the greatness of the people and the patriots as human beings with their experiences and the needs of today, which is what makes them imitable, achievable and real. The history class should leave a lesson: to contribute to elevate the human condition and it can be achieved through an effective self-preparation of the teacher, with a historical culture necessary to make the most appropriate didactic decisions and a reflective, collaborative learning, of constant exchange with and among their students.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the teaching of the subject History of Cuba was established in higher education for all university careers, including those of technical and agricultural sciences, a consensus that was reached by taking into account the need for knowledge of society by any professional, technician, worker and farmer regardless of the work activity he/she performs in society.

The teaching-learning process of Cuban History in universities contemplates a broad and coherent program that covers from 1492 to the present. For its dosage, a correct use was assumed of the system of knowledge proposed in each of the five topics into which the program is divided and distributed in the different forms of organization of university teaching: lectures, seminars, practical classes, fundamentally.

The content begins with a general overview from the conquest and colonization of Cuba in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, passing through the national liberation struggles of the Cuban people against Spanish colonialism, the Neocolonial Republic until the Revolution in power since 1959 until the early twenty-first century. Each subject aims at the study of the Cuban reality through the understanding of its essential problems in a past-present relationship that will allow the future professional to participate creatively in the ideological, cultural and educational struggle of these times.

History is the great tradition, hence its richness; it is the memory of the peoples. Therefore, we aspire to an integral man of his time who defends his identity as a Cuban and Latin American against the internal and external dissolving forces that seek his cultural and human denaturalization, and this can be achieved with the teaching of history.

For these reasons, in the Working Objectives of the First National Conference of the PCC approved in January 2012, specifically 64 states: "To improve the teaching and dissemination of Cuban and local history in the interest of strengthening national unity and promoting understanding of the origin and development of the nation, the consolidation of our own thinking and the patriotic, cultural, solidarity and internationalist tradition of our people ..." (PCC, 2012, p. 5).

The History of Cuba is the most secure ideological support of the Cuban national project. It stands as a weapon and instrument of teachers, politicians and citizens, for the strengthening of national identity and its most genuine values. One of the essential principles of the Revolution is the unity of the people, based on the historical roots of the Cuban independence process up to the present day. That history is the one that the enemies of the homeland want to destroy. In this regard, the First Secretary of the Party and President of the Republic, stated that:

The Cuban Revolution, it can be said, is a complete proof, absolutely complete, of all the truth contained in the Marxist-Leninist conception of society and history. And it is the great truth that the more we study, the more we penetrate into the depths of the problems, the more we understand history and all that has been the history of abuses, injustices and exploitation; the more we know imperialism, not theoretically, but because we are constantly enduring its attacks, its aggressions, its felonies. The understanding of all those things, living all those things, must make us all, and each one of us, more revolutionary every day... (Díaz-Canel, 2020, p. 2).

Today more than ever, working with history is one of the most important pillars in

university work, since rescuing historical memory, contextualizing it and working for its continuity, is to feel responsible for the work of the Revolution. For this reason, the teaching-learning process of history in Cuba is vital in the face of the media siege to which the homeland is subjected, which includes the dismantling of national history.

As part of the pretended dismantling of history, efforts are made to: promote demobilizing, apolitical and de-ideologized attitudes; make the revolution be seen as a process of agonies and sufferings; exaltation of the 50's and the figure of Batista; rewriting of national history; overvaluation of Cuban artists, writers and sportsmen who went into exile; strategy of attacking the history and values of the nation to dismember its unity; reflecting and exalting the basest human feelings; questioning the values of alternative societies to capitalism; fostering nostalgia for the past.

Therefore, strengthening the teaching of Cuban History at all educational levels is essential, as it contributes to the achievement of political-ideological work at this time, in order to forge an emancipatory culture against all forms of prejudice and discrimination, in favor of national unity and systematically confront political-ideological subversion in all scenarios and forms as part of the permanent cultural war of imperialism.

The current context, in the midst of unfavorable external circumstances, the defense and continuity of the model of prosperous and sustainable socialism possible to achieve in the concrete conditions of the country, demands, as never before, the knowledge of the brilliant pages of heroism and patriotism written in the Cuban historical evolution in epic struggle, first, in the confrontation with Spanish colonialism and then against the most powerful of empires, U.S. imperialism.

Conclusions

The analysis of the teaching of the History of Cuba and of the personalities in the elementary school in the colonial stage reveals the role it has played in the formation of patriotism and nationality, especially as a carrier of values, feelings and attitudes to the new generations that were being formed.

In the republican stage, two positions on the teaching of History were differentiated: the defenders of nationality, followers of the Cuban pedagogical tradition with the implicit

character of axiological education, and the conscious or unconscious supporters of assimilating the North American or European didactics based on their criteria or distorted versions of the true history.

In the classrooms of the best Cuban teachers, the teaching of history served as an incentive for the defense of the interests of the Cuban nation. Although there were foreign influences of domination, the emphasis was on emotions and feelings, reflections, analysis and the search for autochthony.

The educational transformations that took place after the triumph of the Revolution modified the historiographic, pedagogical, philosophical and methodological approaches to the teaching of history and its personalities, framed in a gradual process of improvement and improvement of the quality of its teaching that continues to this day.

At present, it is necessary to strengthen the teaching of Cuban History at all educational levels, since it contributes to the achievement of political-ideological work in students, in order to forge an emancipating culture against all forms of prejudice and discrimination, in favor of national unity and to be able to systematically confront the subversion of the enemies of the Cuban Revolution.