

## **The Intersection of Values and Social Reproduction: Lessons from Cuba**

Jessica Bridges  
*Oklahoma State University, USA*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*This article will examine how various socialist values are promoted through the Cuban educational system. The voices represented vary generationally, racially, and in gender. This research is not meant to generalize about all educational experiences in Cuba; rather, it represents a variety of experiences in the educational system. The research represented in this article was gathered in June 2015 in Havana, Cuba. This article begins with a brief historical background on education in Cuba after the triumph of the revolution in 1959, followed by data collection methods, representation of the data through vignettes and poetry, and finally an analysis of the diverse experiences through the framework of intersectionality. The primary finding was that Cuban society taught socialist values overtly within the educational system through school-based activities, such as the Junior Pioneers from the primary level, and through its emphasis on values formation as part of teacher training. The inculcation of these revolutionary values through the education system kept the revolutionary ideology alive across generations.*

**Keywords:** *Cuba, education, social reproduction, intersectionality*

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The revolution today confronts the offensive of imperialism and [its] reactionary forces... The battle against the Cuban revolution is today directed by imperialism itself; the battle against [us] is directed by the Yankee State Department... the Yankee C.I.A., and the Yankee warmongers*

*in the Pentagon* – Fidel Castro in a speech on October 11, 1960 to First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils (paragraph 14, 22).

Cuba, a country who has not received a penny from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund since the revolution began in 1959, is ranked close to number 1 in education in Latin America. According to the 2014 World Bank report, *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*:

No Latin American school system today, except possibly Cuba's, is very close to high standards, high academic talent, high or at least adequate compensation, and high professional autonomy that characterize the world's most effective education systems, such as those found in Finland, Singapore, Shanghai, China, Korea, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Canada. (p. 11)

This World Bank report is a quantitative measurement of academic success in Latin America. It references research published by Carnoy et al. (2007), *Cuba's Academic Advantage*. In his findings, Carnoy (2007) compares Cuban education to other high achieving countries and attributes Cuba's high-ranking education system to state investment in education, family expectations and education (social capital), emphasis on math and literacy, and teacher quality. While Carnoy et al. (2007), note that teacher quality is a key component in Cuba's successes, there has not been extensive research about what "formation of the teacher" means in Cuba.

For emerging socialist countries, Samoff (1991) addresses the objective of education as one that must not only prepare a knowledgeable workforce but a workforce diverse enough to meet the needs of the system. Samoff's (1991) emphasis is on labor and education that places value on labor production. One of the gaps in this thinking is that the workforce is not enough to continue social reproduction. Socialist nations need a citizenry that believes in and places value in the ideology of socialism. This citizenry must have these values so ingrained that they actively work to reproduce a labor force and cultural values that allow their system to continue (Samoff, 199; Bowles 1971).

Employing the theoretical framework of intersectionality, this study investigates how the Cuban education system promoted socialist values among the citizenry and how teaching these values sustained the revolutionary ideology of the country even through the most difficult times. After providing a literature review on the history of education in socialist Cuba, the study will present the theoretical framework and data collection methods. This will be followed by the findings and analysis on based on the

author's interactions with diverse respondents ranging from university professors to citizens she encountered on the streets of Havana.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the US Central Intelligence Agency website, Cuba is known to have a 99.8% literacy rate higher than most developed countries (cite). The central focus on education has led scholars to study Cuba's education system and the values it chooses to reproduce. Scholars have focused their research primarily on the metropolitan area and capital city of Havana. Denise Blum's (2011) research focused on the values inculcated in Cuban schools in order to create "the new socialist man." Rosi Smith (2016) builds on Blum's (2011) research in the 1990s by examining how the values inculcated are understood and practiced by youth in the early 2000s. Smith (2016) states, "What is notable about the Cuban case is the way in which education has been framed simultaneously as a tool for disseminating revolutionary ideology, a central component of the content of that ideology and a significant arena of knowledge production for its formation." (p. 12). Both Smith and Blum acknowledge the difficulty in researching in Cuba, where the Ministry of Education is known to be tight-lipped and closed off to foreigners.

Cuba's government constructed its modern education system after the revolution in 1959 in which communist forces overthrew Fulgencio Batista. The first thing Fidel Castro did for education after taking power was the Literacy Campaign – a nationwide literacy movement where schools were shut down and young volunteer teachers went to all communities throughout the country to ensure everyone could read and write. In the eyes of the Revolutionary government, the campaign was "a fundamental act of social justice" (Blum, 2011, p. 41). This movement represented a break with pre-revolutionary education where United States' imperialism imposed a class structure, the social relations of production, and a stalling of the Cuban economy which was reproduced by the school system (Bowles, 1971). Breidlid (2007) describes the literacy campaign as having "transcended mere educational objectives" (p. 621) and indeed Cuba was deemed a country "free of illiteracy" by UNESCO in 1964 (as cited in Breidlid, 2007, p. 621). The literacy campaign freed Cuba from a colonial, imperialist ideology that had been imposed decades earlier (Blum, 2011; Breidlid, 2007; Carnoy, 2007).

Castro called upon the Federation of Cuban Women to help in the nation-wide literacy campaign where the rhetoric was that literacy was as important to the Revolution as the insurrection that preceded it (Herman, 2012). In a speech on April 9, 1961, titled, "Education and Revolution," Castro further paints a picture of the importance of education to the revolution, "There can be no revolution without education because a

revolution means profound changes in the life of a country” (paragraph 1). The way Castro spoke about education put it as the highest priority of the revolution and in order to do so he gathered volunteer teachers and youth brigades.

In his “Literacy Campaign” speech on August 17, 1961 in Havana, Castro talked about how many people in the country were still illiterate and outlined his plan to educate the entire population through the university level. Literacy was the top priority for accomplishing the means of production necessary to provide for the people and sustain production for future generations. Immediately following the Revolution, Castro began his educational reform movement. In a speech to teachers, Castro gives a call to arms on October 11, 1960 to the First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils:

[We] are defending... the humble peasant, the little child who does not have a school to go to, the worker, the person who has been discriminated against, the poor... I only want to know whether you think that we can win the great battle of culture in 1961... [for] you [the teachers] are the great army of education in our country (paragraph 50).

In this speech, Castro denotes the importance of the ideology that should be taken toward education and the Revolution. His words illustrate his dedication to Marxism in order to create a socialist society. He defends the poor and the peasants who will become his proletariat. Emphasizing that Cuba will defend those workers through education explains the morality behind the need for Castro to start a cultural revolution—educating the poor was a defense against imperialist and exploitative Yankees. There is an undertone that relies on education as an important savior for the future of Cuba.

The Cuban revolution, among other things, led to a new educational system. Leading the revolution, Castro intended to sever ties with the United States, which had been like an economic hand to Cuba (Britton, 2015). His first order of business after successfully overthrowing the previous government was to lead a cultural revolution centered on literacy for all on the premise of socialism. Samoff (1991) describes the view from a socialist’s perspective in this way, “Socialists have regarded education—both the learning generated by participation in struggle and the more organized instructional efforts inside and outside schools—as a critical, and perhaps the principal, dynamic in reconstructing society” (p. 2).

As early as 1960, Castro wanted to cut ties with the United States. This has to do more with the United States’ imperialistic tendencies than the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Because of his adherence to Marxist ideals, Castro rejected capitalism as the basis of production relations in the economy and therefore Cuba’s relationship to the US—the US being the embodiment

of capitalism. In his own words, Castro was very clear about the purpose of the Revolution and why Cuba was separating from the United States.

From the beginning days of the Revolution, Cuba was supported by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). This relationship allowed Cuba to stay afloat economically after cutting ties with the US. Its relationship with the USSR also allowed Cuba a “constant sugar market at prices above the world market norm, which had provided some capital for the development of industry and of very advanced social services” (Carnoy & Samoff, 1990, p. 102). This deal with the USSR would last twenty years and the revenue from the sugar export allowed a more equal distribution of goods among the citizenry, but there was still the issue of how to establish a new socialist ideology.

For this new ideology to take hold, Castro needed a newly educated populace. By establishing a system of education completely controlled by the government, the Revolutionary government could decide what and how students should learn. Starting with the literacy campaign, Revolutionary values were ingrained in the populace. These values included: honesty, solidarity, and patriotism, and as Blum (2011) puts it, “The Cuban educational system has been one of the main institutions held responsible for ‘rescuing’ revolutionary values” (p. 14). The inculcation of such values has allowed Cuba to maintain its identity even through the worst circumstances. The fall of the Soviet Union was a blow to Cuba’s economy. All of a sudden, Cuba had no one to trade with. The relationship with the USSR was sustaining the Cuban economy through the US imposed embargo, which Cubans call “the blockade.”

### **Theoretical Framework**

The choice to use intersectionality as a frame for analysis of this research stem from the diverse articulations participants had with educational experiences in Cuba. The issue of narrative comes into question in Cuba, a country where *el teque* or the official story has the potential to blend with reality. Anders Breidlid (2007), during his organized, government sanctioned research in Cuba, discussed having encountered difficulty assessing whether the interviewees’ responses were government rhetoric or the person’s actual experience. Denise Blum (2011) describes *el teque* a rhetoric of the Revolution. Instead of deciding what is true for an individual or whether they are just regurgitating what the government has sanctioned for them to say, this research only attempts to examine people’s stories as a means of examining their truth.

Intersectionality provides a framework for what Maxwell (2012) refers to as “epistemological constructivism,” a means of making sense of reality as shaped by the construction of “assumptions and prior experiences as well as by the reality that they interact with” (p. 43). By viewing the lived

experience of the subject with this framework, as a researcher, I am able to understand my data as “a simplified and incomplete attempt to grasp something about a complex reality” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 43).

Reality is complex. Intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 “to capture the intricate interplay of social forces that produce particular men and women as members of particular races, classes, sexualities, ethnicities, and nationalities” (Hawkesworth, 2006, p. 209). Instead of trying to understand how each explanation of Cuban education leads to a singular social truth or experience, I am examining the individual statements as separate parts or realities. Then, “analyzing them concerning cultural and linguistic practices, historical traditions, and philosophical frameworks in order to provide an enhanced explanation consistent with the meaning of the experience to the agent” (Hawkesworth, 2006, p. 217). By examining the experiences of the individuals in this study according to their meaning and within the social, cultural, historical context, I can see how each person is experiencing a singular phenomenon – education in Cuba – as something different.

Patricia Hill Collins (2002) describes ideology as “the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people” (p. 5). These ideas, however, do not exist in isolation or without influence from other aspects of society. “Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely seen as natural, normal and inevitable” (Collins, 2002, p. 5). Bell hooks (2000) addresses the history of feminism as primarily a White one, that ignores class and racial difference by ignoring the colonial and imperialist roots of racism in the United States. If this is true for the United States, then the same or other hegemonic ideologies must exist in other cultures that construct reality. For example, the Cuban Revolution and its ideologies construct a reality where communism and socialism are seen as the best way to construct an ideal society.

Hawkesworth (2006) explains how “feminist scholars of color have demonstrated the grave intellectual and moral deficiencies that result from failure to comprehend and address the mutual constitution of identities and the social practices that produce and sustain hierarchies of difference (p. 209). Two of the participants in this study are Cubans of color (I will refer to them as Afro-Cuban), and their experiences/attitudes contrasted with the other participants – two White Cubans. The white Cuban women also held positions of power, whereas the Afro-Cubans did not. Differences in skin color may correlate to positions of power in Cuban society.

The purpose of choosing intersectionality is to understand that there are various identities and social practices that could lead to the contrast in how participants understood revolutionary values in Cuban education based on the experiences they shared with me. Looking through the lens of

intersectionality, I can make sense of how the race and social structures would lead to different experiences and how these structures, including race, articulate to create meaning from the diverse experiences.

Intersectionality encompasses a nexus of complex “relationships among biological classification, the social construction of race and gender as categories of analysis, the material conditions accompanying these changing social constructions, and Black women’s consciousness about these themes” (Collins, 2000, p. 405). This framework can be applied when trying to understand someone and their reality who is different from one self. Applying Black Feminist Thought to my understanding and interpretation of findings means discarding my own dominant ideology as much as possible and trying to view others from what Collins (2002) describes as a “matrix of domination” (p. 227).

### **Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

While in Cuba, I interviewed teacher educators from the Enrique José Varona University of the Pedagogical Sciences, a high school principal, a government educational researcher, and the director of the Center for the Studies of José Martí. In addition to these formal interviews, I draw extensively on my field notes for further explanation about how these revolutionary values appeared in spontaneous encounters and interviews.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data over a three-week period in June 2015 in Havana, Cuba. With permission from The Center for the Studies of José Martí, I conducted semi-structured, formal interviews with three professors of teacher education, two which were center directors – one for The Center for the Studies of José Martí, and the other the director of an educational research center - and one high school principal. I used an informed consent form translated to Spanish for every recorded interview. The formal interviews I conducted in Cuba were ones that the director of the center, acting as a gate-keeper, set up for me.

Although I also conducted informal interviews through spontaneous encounters on the street, subjects were not willing to be recorded for fear of their government. In contrast, at the center all the interviews were arranged ahead of time. All were white Cuban women professors and one school principal, all were around the same age (mid to late fifties). For the informal interviews, I relied on my field notes for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Patricia Hill Collins (2002) said, “Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship” (p. 251). In order to avoid imposing my own Whiteness or my own Western thought

onto the subject or interpretation, I have tried to allow for the stories to speak for themselves. Hill Collins (2002) examined truth as an intersectionality of race, gender, power, and power structures. This intersectionality allows for multiple truths and at the same time addresses the nature of truth as something in between the political power structures and people's lived reality – where they connect and where they differ. Instead of examining the power structures determining the truth, I have taken the stories from my interviews as truth existing within the power structure and unique to the individual.

Ivor F. Goodson (1998) said, "...stories do social and political work as they are told. A story is never just a story – it is a statement of belief, of morality, it speaks about values. Stories carry loud messages both in what they say and what they don't say" (p. 12). My research views the story as a manifestation of the power structure as it intersects with the lived reality of the teller. Stories are the narrative of my research, and it is my view that as much as possible, the listener should try not to impose their own cultural structures of power into the meaning beyond the words.

### **Poetry as Analysis**

The author used poetry to record notes from some of her interactions with people in Havana. Saldaña (2016) describes choosing his line of inquiry as pragmatic, it is "choosing the right tool for the job. Sometimes a poem says it best" (p. 3). This analytic exercise will apply poetic analysis to field notes taken on 21 June 2015 and 25 June 2015 in Havana, Cuba. Although poems typically come from interview transcripts (Miller, Humble, & Radina, 2019), Faulkner (2018) uses poetry as inquiry, and she represented her autoethnographic accounts of running with short poems and haikus. "Compared to normal prose, poetry is a special language. There is a refreshing authenticity and often confronting *vulnerable vibrancy* to it that uniquely reaches and resonates" (Miller, Humble, & Radina, 2019, p. 21).

Inspired by Sandra L. Faulkner's (2018) *Real women run: Running as feminist embodiment*, I decided to attempt poetic inquiry to breathe life into a chance encounter on Father's Day in Havana in 2015. Faulkner's (2018) use of poetic inquiry gives vitality to women's embodied experiences as runners. Through her poems, one understands the embodied and gendered experience of what it is to be a woman runner. "Research poetry is an experimental text form that challenges listeners, readers, and researchers" (Miller, Humble, & Radina, 2019, p. 22). Research poetry or poetic inquiry is a challenging process. It is a personal process. The challenge lies in creating an artistic expression of an encounter with someone else. Miller (2019), describes step one of poetic inquiry as "immersion" in the data – reading over and over again (p. 23). Faulkner (2018) describes her process of immersion, explaining how she listened to her interviews while going on



runs. Whether reading or listening, I found that looking back at my field notes and reading them over again, I was immediately transported back to Father's Day, June 2015.

## FINDINGS

I found that Cuban education is comprised of three main values that promote a deep appreciation for education and future leadership. Interviews with professors from the Institute of the Science of Pedagogy, who teach teachers, revealed that in Cuban education, honesty, solidarity, and patriotism are the values cultivated in every child in order to raise a future generation of dedicated citizens and educated leaders. These three values cannot be quantified in an assessment that tests literacy, math, or science. Rather, they can be assessed through formal and informal interviews and in observing teacher-student relationships. In the case of my own research, although I was unable to observe classroom practices, these qualities were highlighted in formal interviews as well as observed in common people, through casual conversations on the street, in the store, or at a restaurant.

The Director of the Center for the Studies of José Martí said that imperial education, supported by the United States was directed towards the primary grades “because that’s where values are introduced.” She further described the efforts of the US, “Imperialism tried to erase the Cuban identity because the US already had control of the economy, now they need control of the ideology. They created a lot of schools that taught loyalty to the American flag” (Interviewed by author on June 14, 2015). The strong anti-imperialist sentiment is not without merit.

After the United States inserted itself into the Spanish American War fighting for Cuba, it inserted itself into Cuban education in a “paternalistic” way that tried to impose its own set of values (Blum, 2011, p. 42). In addition, the Platt Amendment allowed for extended occupation of Cuba including the lease of what is now the Guantánamo Naval base. This US occupation of Cuba’s education system was resisted by teachers. According to the same director, “The teachers taught loyalty to the [Cuban] fatherland too and because of these Cuban identity was saved” (Interviewed by author on June 14, 2015). Within this story the importance of a national identity is expressed. This identity is meant to be a counter to the US imperialist and capitalist values. The fact that it was the teachers that “saved” the identity also illustrates the importance of education as a means to form and develop a certain identity in young people. This was the idea behind Castro developing a new educational system after the revolution, one that could further construct a new “socialist” citizen (Bowles, 1971; Blum, 2011; Samoff, 1991).

During my time in Cuba, I traveled outside the city where I witnessed a great deal of government propaganda. The sign that burns in my

memory read, “El bloqueo” (the blockade) with the O written as noose. Below that read, “the longest genocide in history.” I relate this story for the purpose of examining the Cuban government point of view. During the 1990s, people died because of lack of resources due to the blockade. Castro dubbed this time the “Special Period in Time of Peace” (Blum, 2011, p. 103). The director for the Center of the Studies of José Martí shared through tears the story of her mother, with a heart condition, dying due to the inability for Cuba to acquire pacemakers. There was no one willing to betray the United States to help out Cubans in their time of need and yet, the Cubans endured. The same director recounted her story about the gathering at Revolutionary Square when the USSR fell:

We were all there. And Castro was there and he was telling us that the Soviet Union has fallen. We have lost our support. What should we do? Should we continue with socialism? We are going to have some difficult times. We are going to be hungry. We are going to have to do without. What should we do? And we all stood there in Revolutionary Square shouting ‘socialism, socialism, socialism!’ (Interviewed by author, June 17, 2015)

It seems to have been a decision of the people of Cuba to continue on the path of socialism. I had to ask myself why would people choose to suffer? My finding is that it has more to do with the formation of values, than anything else. My own background led me to think that people were forced to adopt socialism, so I was unaware that people felt it was a choice they made in unity. The education system provided Cubans with such a strong sense of identity that they were willing to go through what was the most difficult period in their history knowing that they could survive together. The director also shared her story of needing an operation. The problem was that there was no surgical thread. She counted on a friend to travel from Mexico with surgical supplies in her luggage, carrying them to Havana so she could have surgery. She told me about her time as Dean of the University’s Department of Education when they didn’t have paper for exams, how the government distributed bicycles for lack of gasoline and she road 18 miles to work every day. There are countless stories like hers. I met a young man who told me how he and his friends survived by taking the tags of their shirts to patch the cloth on their shoes and how they searched for cardboard when the soles came apart. The 1990s were an exceptionally difficult period for the Cubans and yet, they endured. If the formation of values was a way to form the new Revolutionary citizen, then a person with these values would not abandon the Revolution no matter the circumstance. The blockade was just another piece of the Revolution that was able to deepen a sense of national identity based on these Revolutionary values.

“The boundaries between school and society are never distinct: in revolutionary Cuba they are blurred beyond recognition” (Bowles, 1971, p. 473). This quote speaks not only to the relationship between school and society, but, also how in Cuba the values overtly taught in the educational system manifest in Cuban society. My research in 2015 echoed this finding by Samuel Bowles in 1969. Major events have occurred in Cuba between his research and my own, and yet, as best as I could see, the idea of education being used as a means of socially reproducing values hasn’t changed. Bowles (1971) addressed the need for Cuba to establish values that would allow for a new economy. My own research led me to encounter honesty, solidarity, and patriotism as the focal values to be formed. Denise Blum (2011), also cites laboriousness, self-sacrifice, and loyalty to the revolution in her research. Based on my interviews and field notes where the values of honesty, solidarity, and patriotism were most often referenced as the values being formed in students, I will examine how these values appeared overtly and in the daily life of Cubans.

## ANALYSIS

Starting with the professors of teacher education, the formation of honesty, solidarity, and patriotism were the values heard most often while interviewing the teacher educators in reference to the values they attempted to impart to students as well as the kind of people they hoped their students would be in the future. Patriotism was the value that dominated the discourse in every formal interview. It makes sense when English and Bolton (2016) explain Bourdieu, “The importance of schooling is that it transmits patterns of the dominant culture that are mirrored in school curricula and other routines...In this way, schools themselves play a focal role in imbuing their students with the prevailing culture and ‘rules’ of society” (p. 59). In terms of Cuban education, the inculcation of the aforementioned values plays an important role in helping young people learn about how they fit into society. By teaching students these values, teachers are teaching the dominant “habitus.” These aren’t just important values for Cuban youth to learn in becoming part of society, they also function for youth to carry on the revolutionary spirit.

### **Marta**

Marta, a professor of educational psychology, elaborated on the Pioneer organization as an example of how students learn the Revolutionary values. Blum (2011) describes the organization as one that is, “overtly used by the Cuban government to socialize schoolchildren to be responsible citizens” (p. 151). The Pioneer organization starts in first grade. A contact in Havana described the Pioneer organization of José Martí as the first in a series of student organizations in Cuba. The Pioneers of José Martí is

preceded by the Moncadista Pioneers (the Moncadistas were heroes of the war of liberation in the 1950s against Batista) in the first and second grades and followed by the Federation of Middle-level Students. The university organization is called the Federation of University Students. According to a source in Havana and confirmed by Blum's (2011) research, all students are part of the organizations. A leader for every classroom is elected by his or her peers. As my contact described the activities, they could be compared to students saying the Pledge of Allegiance every day in school in the United States. The difference exists in the words and what they convey. In Cuba students say, "Pioneers for communism, we will be like Ché." Marta became emotional describing the first nation-wide meeting of the Pioneers:

I remember the first congress of the Pioneers in Cuba that was in the 80s where the Pioneers decided things and demanded things. They discussed the uniform that high school students would wear. Another example is that the children asked how, because they always talk about Ché... and in the salute they say "We will be like Ché," and it was the reality, the Ché that they knew, the Ché who was in his 20s, the guerrilla. A ten year-old can't be like that Ché. So, they asked to learn about Ché as a boy and from there the decision was made to share Ché's personal history as a boy. There was a book written by Ché's father and others who collaborated. It's called *Ernestico* and has photos of him, for example, having an asthma attack playing soccer, and climbing mountains. (Interviewed by author, June 15, 2015)

The value of patriotism is not only relevant to the pledge made by the students to be "pioneers for communism," it is also an illustration of how students take pride in their founding leaders, such as Martí, and to not only know about the leaders but how they as young people can emulate the actions their leaders took at a young age. For example, wanting to not just be like Ché, but to be like Ché as he was as a child. To be encouraged to emulate a leader at such an early age is a way for them to take pride in their leaders and their country – to be patriotic.

## **Hanier**

Hanier is one example of this patriotic spirit. Hanier grew up in Holguin, a province located on the eastern end of the island, far from Havana. Hanier and I met standing outside a small store outside a gas station. I was standing outside waiting for the store to open when he asked me why we were waiting. I described what was going on inside and he reminded me of the word, "inventory." I replied, "Yeah, that's it. That's why we are waiting." When he asked, I told him about my research and he invited me to have a beer. We got our groceries and went to a small outdoor drink place and had

a beer. He complained about how Cuba was poor and the government was collecting an 85-dollar visa fee for every person entering the country. He said they had millions of visitors that year and although it was a socialist country, he had yet to see any of that revenue. People were just barely getting by. In the next sentence he said, “But, Fidel, has a special place in my heart. That man had courage.” We continued our discussion.

He was in town getting ready to go to Finland. He had never left Cuba before. I told him traveling would expand his thinking, and his reply was that he would never permanently move to another country. His heart resided in Cuba. After talking for some time, he stopped and asked about my analysis of him. I explained that I was only taking notes about what he was saying, but that he had indeed exhibited the same values I was learning about from my interviews. At first he looked shocked, but I reminded him that despite his criticisms, it seemed that Cuba and Castro were in his blood. He concurred, agreeing that Cubans are patriotic. Hanier, a thirty-four-year-old single father of two, had grown up in Holguin and owned his own jewelry business. Although he didn’t spout *el teque* or the motto of the Pioneer organization, his sense of patriotism shone through his criticism. He was genuine and sincere and loved his country regardless of the difficult time he had endured as a Cuban.

## **Marilyn**

In my desire to express a feeling for daily life of a teacher in Havana, I have decided to attempt an original poem as representation of my field notes from 21 June 2015 and a found poem from my final encounter with the teacher at her house on 25 June 2015. I wrote these field notes after spending a day with Marilyn, an elementary school physical education teacher in Havana on Father’s Day, 21 June 2015. The second poem is taken from field notes after an afternoon with her on 25 June 2015.

We shared a profound sense of death on that day – neither of our fathers was living. It was Marilyn’s uncle that grabbed my arm on the side of the street and immediately asked where I was from. When I said the United States, he wanted to know if President Obama would come to Havana. I admitted that I did not have direct communication or insight into that scenario, but I could imagine he would – they asked me to tell him to come to the island. I wrote this poem as I engaged with my field notes and remembered back to that sunny afternoon. Marilyn so touched me in sharing the loss of our fathers – that loss bonded us.

I crafted the first poem as a representation of how our relationship developed, however short, however instantaneous, over our shared sense of loss. Miller (2019) calls this type of poetry an “emotive poem” (p. 25). I chose to represent our initial encounter with an emotive poem because that experience was typical of the warmth, generosity, and cultural

understandings of Cubans and being a foreigner in Cuba. I felt embraced by the initial and continuous hospitality shown by Marilyn and her uncle as they invited me to hang with them after our adventure at the Rumba in Callejón Hamel.

The second poem is a found poem from my field notes after I visited Marilyn on my last day in Havana. I found that I wrote my notes in what Saldaña (2016) calls “organic poetry” (p. 109). My notes were staccato – short sentences punctuated by periods. I took the exact phrases (In Vivo) and re-arranged them to create a representation of the last few hours I spent with Marilyn. Through this exercise, I have found that representing my experience with Marilyn, as a participant, through poetry gave my field notes more vigor in their representation. My goal was for these poems to tell the story of my time with Marilyn in her reality.

**Rumba with Marilyn and her tío** (21 June 2015)

“Have you been to the Rumba?”

“That’s where I am trying to go, but I am not sure of the way.”

“We’ll take you there” – Marilyn and her tío

It’s Father’s Day

We feel the loss

My father February 2015

Her father passed in California, his death unresolved from afar,

We walk side by side.

*Callejón Hamel: Rumba*

Rap-pa-pa, rap, rap-rap pa....

“Have you tried *bilongo*?”

I buy three drinks

Orishas in all their representations are dancing around us

The congas are singing

rap, pa, pa, pa

“Move your hips like this”

The Conga’s Afro-Caribbean beats move our bodies

*Cayo Hueso*

At Marilyn’s house we continue the celebration with her tío and daughters,

he brings rum, we mourn the loss of our fathers, and we dance.

**Rocking Chairs** (25 June 2015)

We watched some music videos in her rocking chairs.

She seemed stoned.

Then we watched some contraband cable show from Miami.

Marilyn explained that it wasn’t her cable. The guy upstairs gets it legal - he pays for it and she connects to the cable for free.

She asked me if some of the infomercials were for real.  
I told her it's a scam.  
I asked her about Cuba getting Internet by 2020, she said yeah, but who will be able to afford it?  
Internet is good but who will use it?  
When it was time to leave she asked if I wanted to buy a video recorder.  
I couldn't.  
I had no use for it.  
She said she needed the money, and she only bought because she thought she could sell it.  
We said goodbye.

## **Orlando**

Not all my findings were as Pro-Revolution as those I found with the professors of teacher education, in fact I managed to find one person who talked openly about his disdain for Cuba. We met on the Malecón, the long costal street in Havana. On one side, people walk along the coast and on the other side of the four-lane street there are various bars and restaurants and business as well as housing. I met this young man while enjoying the sunset on the Malecón.

The Cuban government forced Orlando to attend a behavior school in his elementary years, and he described his experience as different from those at the other schools. He began to notice in school when he and his classmates went to do their voluntary (required) work outdoors; he described having to do the more challenging jobs. For example, instead of painting a fence, he and his classmates would have to dig the post holes. He said it was not apparent right away, but soon everyone at the school realized they had something in common – they had one or more relatives who resisted the Revolution. Later, he recalled when he tried to cross the sea to Florida with his friends, and they got caught in a storm, stranded at sea and picked up by the Cuban government. He shared that he was no longer eligible for the free education promised to other Cubans and that many of his rights had been taken away because of this experience. He was critical of the government, of the Castro family, and especially of patriotism – calling it “fanaticism” instead.

On a subsequent visit a few nights later, Orlando told me more about his life. Eventually he opened up about his most painful experience with Revolutionary values explaining to me, with hurt in his voice and anger in his eyes, that patriotism had killed his unborn child. He told me about the May Day celebration, required by the government (by threat of a fine) when his partner lost their child. He described how although she was having complications with the pregnancy and in spite of the doctor's request for rest,

her mother encouraged her to march as a source of pride for the family – to demonstrate her patriotism. He begged her to stay home, but she felt compelled to march with the others and suffered a miscarriage, as a result. I was left speechless as he told me patriotism had ruined his only chance of being a father.

The May Day parade in Revolutionary Square is an annual celebration in Cuba, one where citizens gather to celebrate the working class. Ten days earlier, Marta had described the May Day Parade with tears of pride in her eyes describing how emotional she had been watching her daughter carrying the Cuban flag in a display of patriotism. It was as if everything she had dreamed for her daughter had been realized, that the values of the Revolution were alive in that moment. The difference in educational experiences can be interpreted as a difference in cultural capital. The young man didn't have the same cultural capital because of his family background and his refusal to adhere and honor the Revolutionary values. His educational experience reinforced his difference in society. When I left this young man the last time, I wished him luck. He was still dreaming of the day he would get to the United States.

Although his experience was distinct, it still represents the reproductive function of education. He was unable to break free from his family background through the educational system. This young man went to a school where other students had parents who were political dissidents. Admittedly, he was the first person I met who was so blatantly opposed to the Revolution, so I was taken aback by his initial response to my research. He was an outlier within my findings, and I examined his story with the same intersectional framework that I took in all others – this was this man's lived experience – his experience within the power structure of domination of his own culture. As his family history didn't fit the dominant structure, I had to reconcile that his educational experience would probably not fit within that same structure. I accepted his story as truth.

## CONCLUSION

It wasn't just that people exhibited the revolutionary values of honesty, solidarity and patriotism, it was also that they wanted these values to be transmitted to others. During my time at the Center for the Studies of José Martí, two groups “graduated” from different programs given for foreigners. These two programs happened to be attended by people from the US – one was a group of students from a university in the US and another a group of professors from a community college in New York. At both ceremonies, I observed the Director asking for both parties to take back with them similar requests. The requests included sharing with their communities about the reality of their time in Cuba – that they spread the word in their country, that through this new and developing relationship, the US end the



blockade, give back Guantánamo, and respect the Cuban culture by not attempting to change it. My interpretation of this request goes back to my original research question about how schools are reproducing these values. I believe that the Director of the center was looking at this as another opportunity to inculcate what it means to be Cuban.

To acquire cultural capital in Cuba, means to adhere to Revolutionary values. Based on the interviews I conducted, one purpose of education in Cuba is to reproduce these values through the pioneer organization, the education of teachers and other methods that have not been described in this paper. The reproduction of these values is seen through the eyes of the interviewees as the means to sustain socialism and Cuban identity. English and Bolton (2016) describe the acquisition of cultural values as something desired and accepted by the dominant class – in this case those who uphold the Revolution. This explains why it was uncomfortable to talk about the normalization of relations with the United States and its imperialist agenda and there was also a strong determination to resist capitalism. There was a fear that something stronger than education could influence young people’s belief about the Revolution. On the other hand, when I mentioned to Marilyn that I learned Cuba had a goal of the internet reaching all citizens by 2020. She didn’t seem impressed, wondering how, if she only makes \$17 a month, will she be able to afford internet too? It was only through the generosity of her neighbor that she had TV channels from Miami.

What does the reproduction of values mean for a society? In the case of Cuba, it means that through the most difficult times imaginable, a national identity was created and strengthened, which enabled them to endure some of the worst times imaginable. The idea of embedding values in the curriculum – with a purpose, stood in sharp contrast to the hidden curriculum of values I had become accustomed to in my own experience as a teacher the United States. By teaching values overtly within the educational system through activities, such as the Junior Pioneers, and with an emphasis on values formation as part of teacher education in the tertiary level, Cuba sustained communism and socialism through the Special Period after the fall of the Soviet Union. The inculcation of these Revolutionary values has kept the Revolutionary ideology alive.

## REFERENCES

- Breidlid, A. (2007). Education in Cuba - an alternative educational discourse: Lessons to be learned? *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 37(5), 617–634. doi:10.1080/03057920701582491
- Britton, J. A. (2015). Cuban Revolution. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.
- Blum, D. F. (2011). *Cuban youth and revolutionary values: educating the new socialist citizen*. University of Texas Press.

- Bowles, S. (1971). Cuban education and the revolutionary ideology. *Harvard Educational Review*, 41(4), 472– 500.
- Carnoy, M., Gove, A. K., & Marshall, J. H. (2007). *Cuba's academic advantage: Why students in Cuba do better in school*. Stanford University Press.
- Carnoy, M., & Samoff, J. (2014). *Education and social transition in the Third World* (Vol. 1044). Princeton University Press.
- Castro, F. (1960, October 11). *First national Congress of Municipal Education Councils* [Transcript]. Latin American Network Information Center. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.
- Castro, F. (1961, April 9). *Education and Revolution*. [Transcript]. Latin American Network Information Center. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.
- Castro, F. (1961, 17 August). *Literacy Campaign*. [Transcript]. Latin American Network Information Center. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.
- Collins, P. H. (2000) Black feminist thought. In Back, L., & Solomos, J. (Eds.) *Theories of Race & Racism* (pp. 404-420). Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- English, F. W., & Bolton, C. L. (2016). *Bourdieu for educators: Policy and practice*. SAGE.
- Epstein, E. H. (1987). The peril of paternalism: The imposition of education on Cuba by the United States. *American Journal of Education*, 1-23.
- Faulkner, S. L. (2018). *Real women run: Running as feminist embodiment*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Goodson, I. F. (1998). Storying the self: Life politics and the study of the teacher's life and work. In Pinar, W.F. (Ed.), *Curriculum: Toward new identities*, 3-20. Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Herman, R. (2012). An army of educators: Gender, revolution and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961. *Gender & History*, 24(1), 93–111. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2011.01670
- Hooks, B. (2000). Racism and feminism. In Back, L., & Solomos, J. (Eds.) *Theories of Race & Racism* (pp. 373-388). Routledge.
- Miller, E. (2019). Creating Research Poetry. In A. M. Humble & M. E. Radina (Eds.), *How Qualitative Data Analysis Happens* (pp. 18–33). Routledge.
- Saldaña Johnny. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- Samoff, J. (1991). Socialist Education? *Comparative Education Review*, 35(1), 1–22.

---

**Jessica Bridges** is a Ph.D. Candidate at Oklahoma State University. The Soka University of America funded her research for this article for her M.A. in Educational Leadership and Societal Change. Email: [jesbrid@okstate.edu](mailto:jesbrid@okstate.edu).

---

*Manuscript submitted: January 20, 2020*

*Manuscript revised: May 11, 2020*

*Accepted for publication: July 12, 2020*