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The textbook is not the only resource on hand for the teaching of history. Autor: Roberto Suárez Publicado: 20/11/2017 | 03:51 pm

History of Cuba for the Defense of Our Roots

Under the premise that studying history is essential to shape up our identity, the teachers of this subject assume the challenge of increasing the quality of lessons to motivate the students

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My bedroom is full of pictures of Che, Fidel, Martí, Maceo and Mella, all for loving Cuba for the deep-rooted Cuban nature I took without realizing from my History teachers. I still remember the day when I tasted cassava for the first time or when I had to dramatize for a school play.

Many Cubans had great history teachers, so it is painful to hear opinions like that of Daniela Vázquez Soria, a secondary-level student: "history is always the same, there's nothing which prompt me to study it, neither the teachers, nor the textbooks."

Where does the problem lie?

Head of the Marxism-Leninism and History department from the Ministry of Education (MINED) Miriam Egea Álvarez said that the specialists from the department are not fully satisfied with the way in which the subject History of Cuba is taught at different educational levels.

She went on to say that one of the main problems to teach this subject is the incomplete teaching staffs, and to solve it different alternatives have been sought like the insertion in educational centers of university students, the hiring of retired teachers and the use of graduates of other subjects like Spanish-Literature, Political Culture

and Civic Education.

Egea Álvarez also stated that spaces for the teachers' preparation are very important, so they can have the necessary knowledge in class.

"Aiming at the Cuban culture and history teacher's upgrade we presented for the second consecutive time the audiovisual Cuba, el sueño de lo posible (Cuba, dream of what is possible) authored by Doctor of Science Eduardo Torres Cuevas, President of the Academy of History of Cuba. That audiovisual production was distributed in all provinces of the country and led to four national workshops with the aim of enhancing the preparation of coordinators of the course", Egea Álvarez said.

For his part, President of the Association of History of Havana and provincial methodologist of History and Political Culture, stressed: "We are very happy with the methodological preparation of different high schools of Havana, although not completely. We boast very competent teachers, who can achieve that the students feel more Cubans through History and that they can have an exact idea of their idiosyncrasy."

For the high-school teacher Reynier Aljovín Méndez, the insufficient use of new technologies is one of the elements affecting the interest of students towards History. "It is necessary that the teachers provide tools for us to make lessons more interesting", he stated.

However, Miriam Egea Álvarez said that the media to teach those lessons fluently are already created and mentioned CubaEduca, website created by MINED and coordinated by the National Direction of Educational Computing.

Proclaiming itself as an interactive, systemic, dynamic communication channel committed to the curriculum of the Cuban school www.cubaeduca.cu allows virtual visits to important historical sites, in addition to access to teachers online, for each of the subjects taught up to the high school level.

"Although we should not be blind, many educational centers don't have the needed conditions to use technological resources", Egea Álvarez said.

The twelfth grade student, Carlos Ernesto Vázquez Sánchez highlighted that beyond the lack of motivation, the essence of the problem lies in the fact that the Cuban History lessons are schematic, and they are strictly tied to that appearing in the textbook.

In this regard, Egea Alvarez said that MINED undergoes a syllabus refining process, which entails the improvement of the text of History of Cuba currently used by high-school students. She also emphasized the importance of its detailed study for the tests of this educational level and especially for the higher education entrance exams.

Nonetheless, there is no reason why the textbook is the only resource used in the teaching of History. Since 2014, MINED has applied Resolution No. 186 in all educational centers, which provides greater flexibility to the teaching program. Teachers are free to convene pupils to hold meetings with researchers, visits to historical sites or places of cultural interest, all in pursuit of an improvement of the Cuban educational system.

Coloring the past

"I always looked forward to the History lessons. I was excited with every anecdote the teacher told us. I looked at the blackboard and found it flooded with graphics that illustrated the heroic battles waged by courageous people and that, unfortunately, sometimes are not known enough. I will never forget my high-school teacher, so cheerful and eloquent, so in love with our country," said first-year student Celia Verdecia Sáenz, majoring in Criminal Expertise in the Higher Institute of the Ministry of the Interior (ISMI).

The student referred to Eduardo Jesús Carbonel Couse Social Sciences Methodologist of the vocational MININT high-school, one of the many educators who tried to achieve the family-school-community relationship in his History classes, and with whom we had the opportunity to talk.

-Professor, what tools do you use to bring students around the study of History?

-I've been teaching this subject for years and when I started teaching there were not the technologies that young people use so much today, so I had to use other methods, because otherwise the student would not be able to grasp the content.

"The best technique to achieve a close relation between students and the History of Cuba is through research and direct contact with the facts and, of course, with the actors."

-Can you comment on some experience that shows how you apply this method?

-The Vocational High-School Institute of Exact Sciences in Las Tunas, began in 2003 the event In defense of our historical roots, for which the students who entered the center had to investigate, for a whole year, the life of a fighter from the locality or from a forgotten site, to show the findings in a meeting to be held in April the following year, which brought together journalists, the veteran fighters and students from all teaching levels.

"I remember once a student came to me in tears. She looked at me and said: "Prof, the combatant died, what do I do with my work?" The investigation became the least important, we had to support the relatives of the revolutionary, and we did that. It did not turn out to be the best research project, but it was the most human."

- What can teachers do to motivate students to study this subject?

- The History of Cuba must be heartfelt in order to be understood, that is why the professional has to color the past.

Educate to be Cuban?

The text The Teaching of the History of Cuba, by Amauris Laurencio Leyva and Adelín García Hernández, published in the Cuban Journal of Higher Education, in 2012, states that "education must be impregnated with national affairs, as the main objective of this it is to awaken the national feeling and love for Cuba."

The school, like the family, should have influence on the education of the youngest and seed strong Cuban roots in the children. The history teachers contribute to the birth, in the students, of the loyalty to our symbols, the loyalty to the leaders of the Revolution, the sense of justice and solidarity, the emotion when we sing the National Anthem and the joy of seeing the Cuban flag. That has to help the Cuban spirit to grow.

Translated by ESTI

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