

**REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION:
CUBAN AMERICANS PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY EDUCATION**

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Revolutionary Education:

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This dissertation investigated the effectiveness of literacy education in the post-revolution Cuban Education System, and in particular, how Cuba has maintained exceptional literacy rates since 1961. These results are surprising because for many years Cuba had maintained literacy rates despite the obstacle of abject poverty. Previous research has shown that low levels of literacy are correlated with low socioeconomic status (Berliner, 2013; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; Green, 1997; Lareau, 2003; and Ripley, 2013). Cuba's literacy rates from 1961 to present have surpassed those of the world's most powerful countries, including the United States. This dissertation was motivated by three goals: (1) to understand the role of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy; (2) to understand the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education; and (3) to understand what (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system. This results of this study

showed that although Cuba did maintain a successful program for many years after the Cuban Revolution, the participants of this study detailed an education system that was crumbling as they were students and have since worsened.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mentor and chair, Alan Sadovnik, PhD. Alan is not only one of the most intelligent individuals that I have had the pleasure in working with and taking classes from, but he is also the most kind and encouraging person. Alan believed in me since the day he read my application for this program. I have him to thank for admissions to Rutgers, my scholarship that allowed me to attend this program (which he advocated for me after only one Skype call and a few email correspondences), and for finishing this program and dissertation. Alan has continually championed me, as he has done with many students before me. I have had the pleasure of working closely with him during my time at Rutgers and will forever treasure his guidance and friendship. He truly made this program worth all the sweat and tears.

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To Cubans and Cuban Americans; regardless where you now call home, your spirit and resilience is carried with me. Thank you for letting me in.

Finally, to young women everywhere, there is no ceiling. You can have it all.

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Chapter1: Introduction

Research Problem

The literacy outcomes of American students are remarkably low for a country that spends 4.94% of its national GDP (or \$17.9 trillion dollars) each year to educate 61.5 million students between the ages of 3-17 (UNESCO, 2013). In 2003, The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) reported that 88% of the United States of America (United States or USA) population was defined as below the proficient literacy level (NAAL, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 32 million adults cannot read (14% of population), 21% of adults in US read below a 5th grade level, and 19% of high school graduates cannot read at a basic level (NAAL, 2003). The NAAL defines a basic level of literacy as someone who can perform simple and everyday literacy activities (NAAL, 2003). In the United States, poverty is a confounding factor; those who are poor are more likely to have literacy problems.

In contrast, Cuba has vastly improved its educational outcomes since 1960 through the educational overhaul brought about by the Revolution of 1959. Poverty is not an academic indicator in Cuba as it is in the United States. As of 2012, Cuba's literacy rate was 99.75% (UNESCO, 2014). Although Cuba spends less per student than most countries, its education budget comprises 12.84% of its national GDP, allocating \$80.66 billion dollars to educate 1.9 million students between the ages of 3-17 each year (UNESCO, 2014).

Educational reform in Cuba became public when Fidel Castro announced to the General Assembly of the United Nations his plan to fight illiteracy in 1960 (Fagen, 1969). The Literacy Campaign begun in 1961 and initiated the complete revamping of

Cuba's education system. From 1961 onward, Cuba has maintained a strong education system based on high literacy standards and has done so with a small national education budget. While the success of the Cuban education system has been widely reported, the means by which Cuban leaders pulled off this remarkable achievement is unknown. This dissertation did not conduct a historical analysis, rather, it addressed the question of how Cuba has maintained its extremely high levels of literacy since the Literacy Campaign of 1961. This study set out to research the details of how the education system operates multi-levelly. It was initially planned to conduct interviews with the Ministry of Education, school administrators, teachers, and other adults associated with Cuban schools, in addition to conducting ethnographic classroom observations to better understand how these individuals and the education system work together in the pursuit of high educational outcomes in literacy. Due to unforeseen obstacles, that are better detailed in the methods chapter, this study ultimately interviewed six Cuban Americans living in the United States of America, all of whom were raised and attended school in Cuba.

Background and Justification

Many reforms have attempted to address the problem of low literacy. Being literate is essential to grasping other subjects, and many countries struggle with low literacy rates. In the United States of America, most of the reforms failed. It is estimated that 30 million adults cannot read beyond a fifth-grade level, and native-born Americans comprise the majority population with low literacy (NAAL, 2003). By the time students arrive at the high school level, literacy deficits are difficult to correct. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in Fall 2015, approximately 4.1 million students were

enrolled in the 9th grade (NCES, 2015). Of those 4.1 million 9th graders, it is estimated that over 280,000 of them will drop out of high school before graduating (7% dropout rate) (NCES, 2015). The group that comprises the majority of dropouts are students in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) (NCES, 2015).

Poverty is already established as an important predictor for poor academic progress; it is generally a strong indicator of literacy levels, tied directly to maternal education level. Parents who are more educated will have the social and personal capital to seek better educational options for their child. Students who come from families with low SES are more likely to live in neighborhoods where food, stable housing, and safety from violence and drugs take precedent over education. In addition, parents who have literacy problems have more barriers navigating the job market as education plays a critical role in skill sets for acquiring jobs (Lareau, 2003). Middle class parents are active in their children's education and development by structuring their children's organized activities, a style of parenting which Lareau labeled 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003). Lareau found that families with lower SES are less likely to partake in concerted cultivation and are more likely to give orders rather than interact with their children (Lareau, 2003).

Children born to families with low SES have been found to have weaker language skills compared to children of middle SES families (A. Fernald et al., 2013). These language skills are furthered by the disparities created by low SES for literacy and overall educational attainment. By the time the lower SES children enter school, they score at levels two years behind their peers in standardized language development tests (at 5 years old) (A. Fernald et al., 2013). In Fernald's study, cross-cultural research was conducted in

West Africa where cultural norms kept parents from speaking with their children regularly (L. C. H. Fernald, Weber, Galasso, & Ratsifandrihamanana, 2011) (A. Fernald, 2014). As Cuba does not have the same standardized testing issues with their five-year old's, it may indicate that parents take an active role in their children's education.

These educational problems associated with poverty in the United States become cyclical when the new generations repeat the trajectory of their parents. To begin to repair deficits in American schools, this cycle needs to be broken. To do so, properly educating children, regardless of their family SES, will provide them with the opportunity to do so. Having American children reach high levels of literacy is the first step to accomplishing this.

In contrast, Cuba does not have literacy rate inequality between children born with low versus high family incomes. Cuba is a socialist/communist state where some food rations are provided, such as rice and beans, and overall salaries are fairly comparable to each other. In comparison to any other country, Cuba is a poor nation. Salaries range between \$20-\$36 USD a month (See, 2016). It is difficult to report statistics of poverty, as Cuba does not release detailed economic indicators. However, low family income does not seem to be negatively correlated with educational attainment and high literacy rates in Cuba. This dissertation provides initial insight into maintaining high academic levels when poverty is not a significant factor, as in Cuba's case.

Purpose Statement

This research examined the literacy educational reform in Cuba and how Cuba was able to reform and maintain high levels of literacy since the Literacy Campaign of 1961. Although previous literature is limited, standardized test results (provided by

UNESCO) show that Cuba has maintained its high level of literacy since the campaign of 1961. We also know that Cuban schools are highly centralized with a group of master teachers, a *colectivo pedagógico* (collective pedagogy), who pick the curriculum and books used in the classroom (Gasperini, 2000). Cuban schools use the selections made by the *Instituto Superior Pedagógico* (Superior Pedagogical Institute), and individual schools are not afforded any autonomy at all (Gasperini, 2000).

There have been a number of books and articles written about the early stages of the Revolution as they pertain to the Literacy Campaign, and that is why the year-long Literacy Campaign, and the years directly preceding and succeeding it, have been well documented. However, continued scholarship on Cuban education has not regularly occurred; other than Kozol's 1978 book, there is not a substantial number of publications about Cuban schools or literacy education from the late 1960s to the early 2000s. In the early 2000s Cuba's popularity began to rise with the changing of power from Fidel Castro to his brother Raul Castro. From 1959 to 2008, Fidel Castro was the leader of Cuba and had his hand in every branch of government.

Research since 2000 has shown us that Cuba's students are successful because they attend schools that focus on instruction rather than being student centered, the schools are staffed by highly trained teachers, and the culture of Cuba is dedicated to high academic achievement (Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007). Cuba allocates a large percentage of their national GDP towards education (Gasperini, 2000). Cuba has also dedicated an action research group to facilitate positive relations with the local communities (Gasperini, 2000).

Cuban schools are highly centralized and tightly controlled, unlike the other two countries researched by Carnoy et al (2007); Brazil and Chile. Brazil has a decentralized education system where each state and municipality controls their schools (Carnoy et al., 2007). In Brazil students also have autonomy, and teachers have very little oversight from the state or the school administration (Carnoy et al., 2007). In many regards, the Brazilian education system is comparable to the education system in the United States of America. Carnoy et al. revealed that the education system in Chile is decentralized to an even greater extent than in Brazil (or the United States). Approximately half of all Chilean students attend private school and, like some districts in the United States, there is a voucher system to assist with private school costs (Carnoy et al., 2007). The results of the research from Chile showed that no school can overcome low standards of education, poor teacher training programs, and a culture that does not place value on academic success (Carnoy et al., 2007).

Cuba, like Chile, has maintained high academic success, however, there is insufficient research on how Cuban literacy education is carried out daily and through the years. Other countries with high successes of literacy achievement, such as Finland, have been well-researched and have identified some best practices. In understanding Cuba's best practices, that data will have the potential to triangulate best practices that may be more universal where all countries could utilize them.

As literacy is a fundamental building block to academic achievement, this research serves as an initial guideline to begin to fill gaps of knowledge regarding this topic. It is the hopes of this researcher that Cuban literacy research continues in order to inform, policymakers and educational reformers, who can use this research to help advise

curriculum or policy changes to advance literacy education and overall educational attainment. In better understanding how successful literacy programming has been established and maintained within the limits of the small Cuban budget, the results of continued research will provide other nations with best practices when attempting to undertake their own reforms in literacy.

Research Questions

This research was motivated by the overarching question of; what are the perceptions of Cuban literacy education from Cubans? This is followed by three sub-questions;

(1) What are the roles of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy?

(2) What are the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education?

(3) What (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system?

These questions will be addressed through qualitative interviews with Cuban born individuals that now reside in the United States of America.

Methodology Overview

This research was a small exploratory study using qualitative interviews that were analyzed through a phenomenological analysis of one-on-one interviews. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for the ebb and flow of conversation and for the researcher to follow up on any new information as it came up during the time spent with each

individual. All six interviews were conducted with adults who meet the inclusion criteria that are outlined in Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework or Theoretical Orientation Overview

When speaking about the 1959 Revolution in Cuba, Karl Marx's Conflict Theory is applicable as the purpose of the revolution was to fix the class inequities. Prior to the Revolution in 1959, Cuba had a distinct capitalist elite who deliberately kept resources from the general public. Fidel Castro and his Guerilla Army began to fight the corruption in the early 1950's. The Revolution of 1959 began in conflict, with Castro and the Guerillas overthrowing the Batista dictatorship, a class struggled easily understood and explained from a Marxist perspective. Conflict theorists stress that inequalities are legitimized, and the dominant group imposes their culture on subordinates through force or manipulation (Sadovnik, 2011). Conflict theory focuses on the power differences among social classes and believes that resentment and hostility are constant elements in society.

While the beginning of the revolution was unquestionably defined by Marxist goals and ideology, since the 1960s the results of the education system in Cuba have stabilized at a high level. Functionalism, a theoretical framework invented by Emile Durkheim, focuses on individual parts of society and how they function in society as a whole (Sadovnik, 2011). Functionalist view society as a machine, with all fields depending on each other, and is extremely interested in homeostasis and predicting behavior. Durkheim believed schools reflect society, school is where students learn behaviors, and that schools create good citizens. In preparing students for life in Cuba and maintaining the status quo, this dissertation proposes that Cuban schools currently

follow what Sadovnik (2007, 2011, 2016) has termed the radical functionalism of Bowles and Gintis. Radical Functionalism is a functionalist application of Marxist theories. Cuba exemplifies this when Castro established a school system that appeared to follow the tenants of Marxism in furthering social equality when in reality, he created an education system that produced good Cuban citizens who loved and followed Castro and the mission of the revolution. Thus the Cuban education system applied radical functionalism where the school acts as an engine that yields 'good Cubans'.

Once the new system was in place, all Cuban schools were reported to have equitable educational outcomes regardless of location (Carnoy et al., 2007). Prior to the revolution, Cuban schools were not widely attended and were not well kept (Cuba, 1953; See, 2016). Worldwide attendance rates in the first half of the nineteenth century were low, even for the countries with compulsory attendance laws (UNESCO, 2005). The new education system mimicked the societal changes that Castro set into motion during the revolution. Cuban students learn to read from books that are steeped in political jargon, where "F is always for Fidel" (Carnoy et al., 2007).

Cuban Education Overview

Prior to the 1959 Revolution in Cuba, education and schooling chiefly benefitted the elite and urban students. Among other social woes, rates of school attendance were extremely low, with only half of eligible students attending school in 1953. In the years after Fidel Castro and his guerilla fighters overtook the Cuban government, Castro introduced many progressive social reforms. One of the major reforms was to the education system. Castro nationalized all educational institutions, making all schools public, and government run. The year-long Literacy Campaign was subsequently

established to eradicate illiteracy from Cuba. Teacher training programs were restructured at the collegiate level, and the Ministry of Education was reorganized to centralize the education system.

In the past fifty-eight years, Cuba has maintained the highest literacy rate in the world. The Cuban Education System has also kept up a high national ranking in other subjects. Cuban immigrants have performed academically well in other educational systems, and their performance has been attributed to the base knowledge they received during primary school. In Union City, New Jersey, Kirp, revealed that their district performs better on standardized tests than the state average, which may stem in part from the fact that the majority of the students in this district are of Cuban descent (2013). For all countries that are looking for educational reforms to help their most disparate populations, Cuba provides an unexplored case study of an educational reform that has been successful.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research is limited by not interviewing all Cuban Americans who grew up in Cuba during the post-revolution period through present day. This study looks at the experiences of six individuals who currently live in New Jersey and who grew up in the Greater-Havana region of Cuba at approximately the same time. For this study, the individuals who were interviewed are millennials; other generations did not participate in this study. The researcher was unable to travel to other regions with large Cuban populations to conduct interviews.

It is a delimitation of this study that only millennials participated. The data could have potentially been drastically different if older generations chose to participate. Since

the mid-1950s, Cubans have migrated to the United States under a number of different circumstances. Older generations experienced to favorable immigration policies. In 1961, the United States set forth a number of policies for Cubans who were fleeing Castro and the Revolution. This is one of the reasons that a large number of Cubans fled the country by small boats and make-shift rafts. It is estimated that 6,700 Cubans arrived in Florida via this method (Duany, 2017). Additionally, the United States accepted around 55,900 Cubans who travelled through other countries first (Duany, 2017).

For just over a month in late 1965, the Cuban government opened a port in Matanzas allowing Cubans to leave. This would be the first of three instances where the Cuban government allowed people to leave without any authorization from the United States: 1965, 1980, and 1994 (Duany, 2017). After the opening of the port in Matanzas, the United States and Cuba reached a diplomatic agreement. An air bridge between Varadero, Cuba and Miami, Florida opened which allowed Cubans to leave permanently (Pedraza, 2012). This program that was funded by the United States, also known as Freedom Flights, had two flights leaving Cuba daily between December 1, 1965 to April 6, 1973 (Pedraza, 2012). The Freedom Flights “became the largest and longest refugee resettlement initiative in U.S. history...transporting between 3,000 and 4,000 refugees per month, for a total of about 260,600 persons” (Duany, 2017).

For the older generations who left Cuba during this time, they immediately gained access to permanent residency as political refugees, however they were subjected to US-led government surveillance in the Greater-Miami area. Cubans who have experienced governmental intrusions in Cuba, and then again in their new country, The United States, may be likely to have different thoughts regarding Cuba, including the education system.

In 1994, the Clinton administration enacted new policies, such as “wet foot, dry foot”, which changed the course of Cuban immigration. Cubans needed to reach land to benefit from the immigration policies of the United States, but if they were intercepted during travel (via water), they were sent back to Cuba or detained in US military bases in Guantánamo and Panama (Duany, 2017). Cuba’s government was met with resistance over the inability to leave the country. In 1995, the US and Cuba agreed to allow “20,000 Cubans per year, including a special lottery of 5,000 new visa applications,

Under the Obama administration Cuban-American relations began to thaw, where travel restrictions were lifted for both parties. The millennial participants of this study immigrated to the United States between 2014-2016. This was a time when they were able to leave Cuba (by paying the proper fees and filing paperwork) and arrive in the United States with little struggle. This is significant because, from a policy perspective, they did not have the struggle that generations before them, or generations after them may have when deciding to leave Cuba.

In January 2017 President Obama ended the longstanding “wet foot, dry foot” policy from the Clinton administration (Baltova & Zong, 2017). For Cubans this means that they no longer are able to arrive at a US port or border without prior authorization. Immigration to the United States now requires a formal process for Cubans, including visas. In 2017 the Trump administration began revoking Obama administration policies with Cuba. Under the Trump administration the US Embassy in Havana, Cuba was scaled back to a skeleton staff in 2017.

Due to the radically different policies that have affected Cubans coming to America over the past 60 years, it is highly likely that Cubans from generations other than

millennials, would have different perceptions of Cuban education. Policies have changed in the United States regarding immigration status, and also the Cuban education system has changed over those 60 years as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. Therefore, a single generation that had one of the easiest periods of immigration is a delimitation to understanding Cuban perceptions of literacy education as a whole.

Further, this study was amended multiple times (fully detailed in Chapter 3). The initial study planned for the researcher to spend a period of six months in Cuba to interview education officials, administrators, teachers, parents, and to observe students. When the presidential administration of the United States of America transitioned in 2016, the researcher was unable to get necessary approval from the State Department to conduct this research as she was told that these types of reviews would not be occurring. After readjusting the study to account for the inability to go to Cuba, it was planned to interview forty Cuban Americans that spanned multiple generations. After substantial difficulty in recruitment of participants, this study concluded with six interviews, who coincidentally were from the same generation (Millennials or Generation Y, 1981-1996). Cuban Americans were very hesitant to agree to be recorded or to participate in this study. It has been noted in previous studies the same difficulty in getting immigrants and ethnic minorities to participate in research (Bonevski et al., 2014; Corbie-Smith, MoodyAyers, & Thrasher, 2004; Ellard-Gray, et. al., 2015; Hynes, 2003; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008; Jenkins et al., 1998; Scharff, et. al, 2010; Shedlin, et. al., 2011). The study reached saturation because these six interviews largely said the same things regarding their experience in Cuban schools.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the entire project. Chapter 2 reviews literature about Cuban education chronologically, focusing mainly on the post-revolution period (after 1959) as a new education system was established at that time.

Chapter 3 details two methodologies; an initial project design, and the research methodology actually utilized. Also discussed in Chapter 3 is working with hard to reach populations and the adaptations that were necessary. This research serves as a small exploratory study using qualitative interviews, further explained in Chapter 3. The phenomenological analysis process is explained, beginning from the recruitment of participants to the analysis of data. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted, with five of the six being audio recorded. The interviews were completed between January and March 2019. Each participant received a \$20 gift card to either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts as an incentive to participate.

Chapter 4 delineates the analyzed data. This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section details the individual experiences of each participant (textural); the second section discusses themes that resonated through each of the interviews (structural). Four themes were identified: 1) the Special Period, 2) Infrastructure, 3) Language, and 4) Teaching as a Profession. The identified themes are critical to understanding the overall experience of millennial Cubans during their primary school years.

Chapter 5 discusses each research questions and detailed what was learned from this research, including addressing the limitations. Chapter 5 also highlights what questions remain regarding Cuban literacy education. Implications for policy and next steps for research were presented as well.

Chapter 6 concludes this research by providing a summary of the study, discussing the difficulties of this project and the adaptations that were made.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter discusses theoretical perspectives related to education, reviews literatures related to Cuban literacy education, and literature regarding researching with populations that are contrary to participating in research. The theoretical discussion will outline the main theoretical argument that this study takes regarding Cuban education. The literature about the Cuban education system will provide a historical lens to the landscape of Cuban education pre-revolution and will also discuss the literature published after the education rehaul of the 1960s. The final literature section will discuss working with populations, such as Cubans, who do not typically self-select to be a part of research for a variety of reasons. This literature will provide insight as to the adaptations that this study made during its course. Literature for this study was found through an exhaustive search of American and Cuban libraries and databases. The only reference point that the researcher did not gain access to is archival works such as microfilm.

The Conflict Theory Perspective of Education

Conflict theory argues that society is held together by various economic, political, cultural, and military powers that legitimize inequality and create a constant struggle (Sadovnik, 2011). Conflict theorists see the purpose of education as maintaining social inequality and preserving the power of a dominant group. Education systems that are defined by conflict theory perpetuate the status quo by reducing the lower classes to make them obedient workers; this is accomplished by sorting schools based on class and race (Sadovnik, 2011). When sorted by class, schools replicate the same class level in society that the students were born into. While Castro's primary goal for education was to enable

it to make all Cubans equal; in practice the Cuban education system did make all Cubans appear to be equal on the surface, however this also prepared students to accept life in the socioeconomic class in which they were born.

Marxism

While Karl Marx's ideas generated conflict theory, Marxism and conflict theory are easily confused when discussing education. Traditional Marxists see education systems working in the interest of the ruling class. According to this perspective, education has three functions-reproducing class inequality, legitimizing class inequality, and working in the interest of capitalist employers. This dissertation uses the Marxist iteration of Conflict theory in its discussions.

The Functionalist Theory Perspective of Education

Emile Durkheim first introduced the theory of functionalism, which asserts that schools' function by maintaining social order. Functionalist perspectives of education attempt to examine society in terms of how it is maintained for the common good. This theory argues that education provides equality of opportunity for all students based on the idea that education that is democratic, meritocratic, and technocratic (Sadovnik, 2011).

A functionalist perspective emphasizes positive aspects of schools, such as socialization. Functionalists see education in its manifest role; conveying basic knowledge to the next generation. Durkheim calls this socialization to the mainstream a "moral education" (Durkheim, 1973). In the example of the United States, schools helped to form a cohesive social structure by bringing together early immigrants to be 'Americanized'. In other countries, schools teach the norms and customs of the majority

to their students, such as in Japan where they place an emphasis on preserving the environment (Gasperini, 2000).

Like Conflict Theory, Functionalism sees a benefit in sorting students, however Functionalists base sorting on merit, which is done through testing; IQ testing, placement testing, or various educational tracks. Functionalism assumes that all children are equitably served through one way of educating. This theory sees education as a great equalizer and does not accept that different outcomes may be rooted in differences such as race, socio-economic status, or factors from outside of the school. Castro claimed that the new Cuban education system would liberate Cubans by providing equitable education to all citizens. Castro did adjust for factors outside of school such as food, housing, and healthcare, however his stand was that education would uplift and equalize the Cuban people regardless of race, family status, or gender.

Radical Functionalism

Radical Functionalism is a term coined by Sadovnik, et. al. (2007, 2011, 2017) where Marxist principals are applied functionally. This means that education systems work in the interest of the ruling class and that education: 1) reproduces class inequality, 2) legitimizes class inequality, and 3) works in the interest of capitalism (Marxism). This is achieved by schools maintaining social order under the guise of it being for the common good (functionalism).

Cuban Education Pre-Revolution

The Cuban educational system prior to the revolution catered to the elite. Cubans have always performed well in literacy, in 1900 the literacy rate was 42%, the highest rate of developing nations (UNESCO, 2005). Other developing nations had far lower

rates of literacy; India 6%, Mexico 21%, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) 27%, Burma 28%, and Brazil 35% (UNESCO, 2005). The United States and Canada had some of the highest literacy rates at the turn of the century, in 1870 approximately 80% of the United States adults were literate, and in Canada in 1901 83% of adults were literate (UNESCO, 2005). Many countries in Europe had poor literacy rates due to World War I, but the rates of literacy continued to grow over the mid-nineteenth century (UNESCO, 2005).

Although the public schools were always free, the schools were not kept up in prior to the revolution (See, 2016). In 1945, approximately 75% of Cubans were literate (UNESCO, 2005). However, the burden of illiteracy fell on the rural population. Almost half of the rural population was illiterate (45%) and never attended school (44%) (Cuba, 1953). Approximately a quarter (27%) of urban children, and over half (61%) of rural children were not attending school as of 1953 (Cuba, 1953). A quarter of the labor force was unemployed and went hungry most days (Cuba, 1953).

In his reform of Cuban Education, Fidel Castro eliminated private schools and universities making all schooling public and free. Castro closed most of the teacher preparation programs and moved them to the best universities, making them an elite teacher training program (Gasperini, 2000; Carnoy et al., 2007). At this time Castro also began the Literacy Campaign, which was praised by UNESCO because literacy rates rose from 76% to 96% in 1961 (UNESCO, 2005). There is a discrepancy with the rate of literacy by the end of 1961. Castro and the revolution claim the rate was 100%, and the rate has been reported to be between 96%-99% elsewhere.

The Cuban Revolution

In the years since the revolution of 1959, Cuba has improved its educational outcomes to such an extent that UNESCO recognizes it as a regional leader in educating its populace. Cuban outcomes for literacy are particularly striking; data collected in 2009 reported that 7% of the Cuban population has a university level education and the average level of education is ninth grade (Sabina, 2009). In data updated in 2012 by UNESCO, Cuba's literacy rate is reported to be 99.75%. To address the question of how Cuba maintained its high level of literacy post-1961, I must first provide a background of Cuban educational history.

Prior to the revolution in 1959 Cuba's population was in dire straits. Victims of political and social corruption, the poor in Cuba were in extreme poverty, many without any access to education. Fidel Castro succeeded in eradicating illiteracy and maintained the highest literacy rate in the world for over fifty-eight years (UNESCO, 2014). There are many publications reporting the success of the Cuban Education System, however, the means by which the current successful system is maintained is unknown.

Despite having overall high rates of literacy, Cuba's educational outcomes were terrible in the 1950s; 25% of citizens 10 years or older had never been to school (Fagen, 1969). For those who had attended school, more than half of them dropped out before the sixth grade. By the time Castro took power, about half of the students from ages 5-15 attended school (Fagen, 1969). Adult education was almost non-existent, and the Ministry of Education was corrupt under Batista's regime. Castro's interest in education was apparent as early as 1953. He remarked that *campesinos* (peasant farmers) did not know how to sign their own name and that Cubans did not know their own history.

On September 26, 1960 Castro spoke to the General Assembly of the United Nations and it was there he first announced his plan to fight illiteracy in one year (Fagen, 1969). The speech served a political purpose, it was announced that Castro's fight against illiteracy was a direct attack against Batista, the Cuban dictator backed by the United States from 1952-1959 (and against The United States by extension). The goal of the campaign was simple: Castro wanted every Cuban to be able to read and write. Cubans felt the reforms to education were both necessary and just, and they overwhelmingly supported Castro in this mission (Fagen, 1969). The Literacy Campaign began when Castro created the Commission on Illiteracy in 1959 to assist the Ministry of Education. The Commission set up Literacy Centers to recruit teachers and educators from urban areas, they immediately went to work in rural areas (Fagen, 1969). The official year of literacy is recorded as January 1 to December 22, 1961.

During a visit to Cuba in July 2015, the researcher was able to visit the official Literacy Museum in Havana, Cuba to learn about what happened on the ground during the campaign. In 1953, there were 1,032,849 Cubans illiterate out of a population of four million adults (Kozol, 1978). The goal of the Literacy Campaign was to eradicate illiteracy. A slogan for the campaign quoted Martí "*Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre*" (to be educated is the only way to be free) (Martí, 2015, p. 90). However, one of Cuba's Marxist educators Dr. Mire Fables said "the goal of the campaign was always greater than to teach poor people how to read. The dream was to enable those two portions of the population who had been most instrumental in the process of the revolution from the first to find a common bond, a common spirit, and the common goal.

The peasants discovered the word. The students discovered the poor. Together, they all discovered their own *patria* (patriotism)” (Kozol, 1978, p. 22) .

The Literacy Campaign started out with a call for young people to become a part of the brigades to help rid Cuba of illiteracy. Cuba was successful in eliminating illiteracy thanks to the large number of young volunteers. A lot of the young people who signed up for the campaign saw this as a way to share in an adventure and help their country. The campaign was also considered a moment of political and moral transformation for young people who had never been outside the circles of their home and middle-class neighborhoods. Young women happily described their part of the campaign because they thought this was the first time they were given equal role as men in Cuba. The youngest teacher named Elan Mendez was 8 years old the oldest students was a 106-year-old woman who was born and grew up as a slave (Kozol, 1978).

The brigades trained in Varadero Beach for anywhere from three to ten days (Levinson & Brightman, 1971). The number of those enrolled in the brigades at the first wave was 95,777 people (Kozol, 1978). The first wave of brigades was named after a Cuban youth, Conrado Benitez, who was killed earlier that year by anti-Revolutionaries. Castro would stop by Varadero Beach to talk to the young brigadistas and talk to those in charge of the campaign.

In Cuba, most of the population backed Castro’s mission because they believed in the importance of education and they did not want their beloved leader to be “embarrassed in the eyes of the whole world” (Kozol, 1978, p. 8). The Education Prime Minister tasked with the leadership of the Literacy Campaign was Armando Hart. Before

the campaign began, Castro sent Hart on a six-week tour of Europe. During Hart's absence, Castro made himself Acting Minister of Education and participated in the composition of the teacher's manual.

The well-known Cuban scholar Dr. Raul Gutierrez was the principal author of the primer. There were 150,000 copies distributed. The primer used 'active words' that bore associations of love, longing, ecstasy, or rage for the *campesinos* to recognize (Kozol, 1978). There were 15 lessons in the primer in total. The teacher's manual is named *Alfabetismo* (Literacy) and the learner's primer was named *Venceremos* (We shall overcome) (Pictured Below).

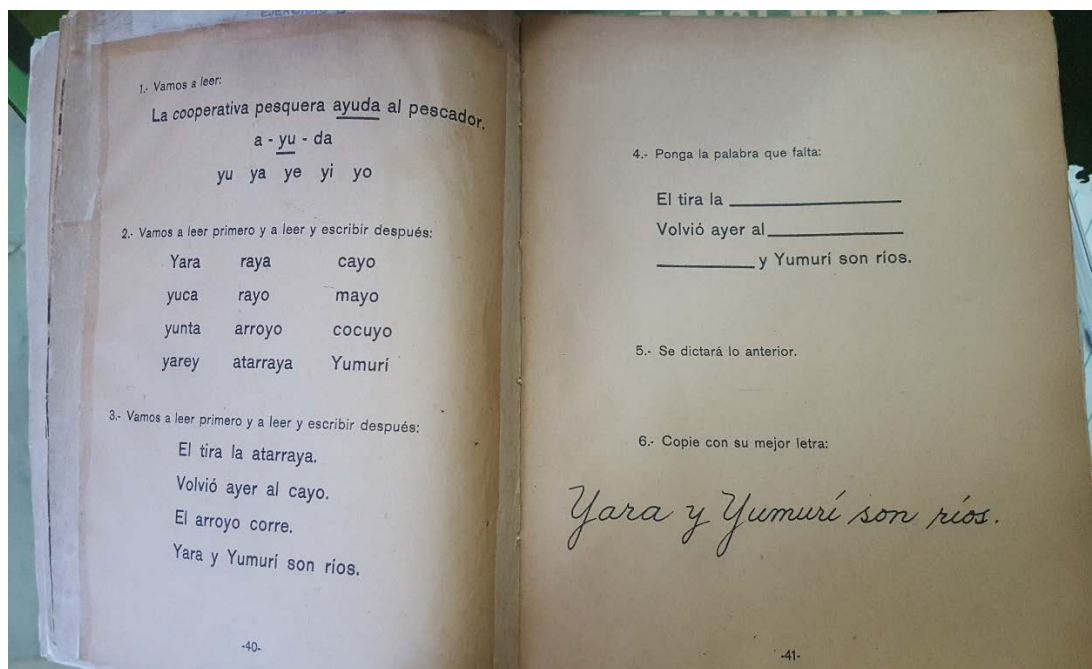
Photos from Literacy Museum

1.



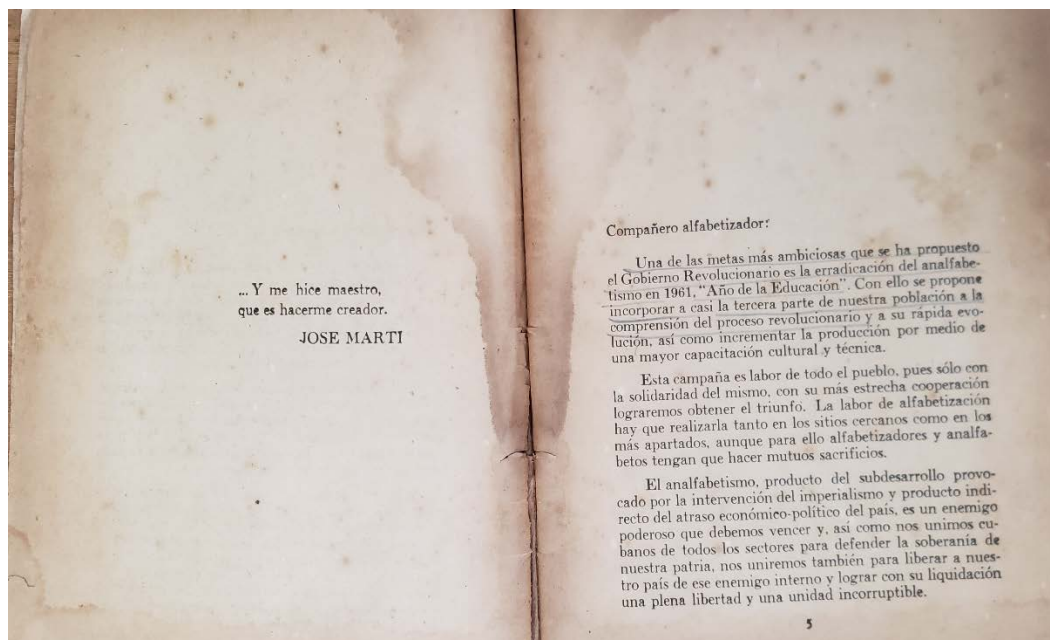
See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Primer and Teacher's Manual [photograph]. Havana, Cuba

4.



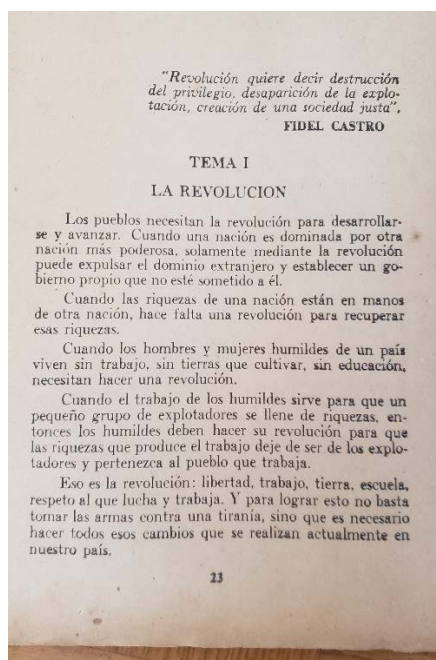
See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Primer pgs. 40 and 41 [photograph]. Havana, Cuba

5.



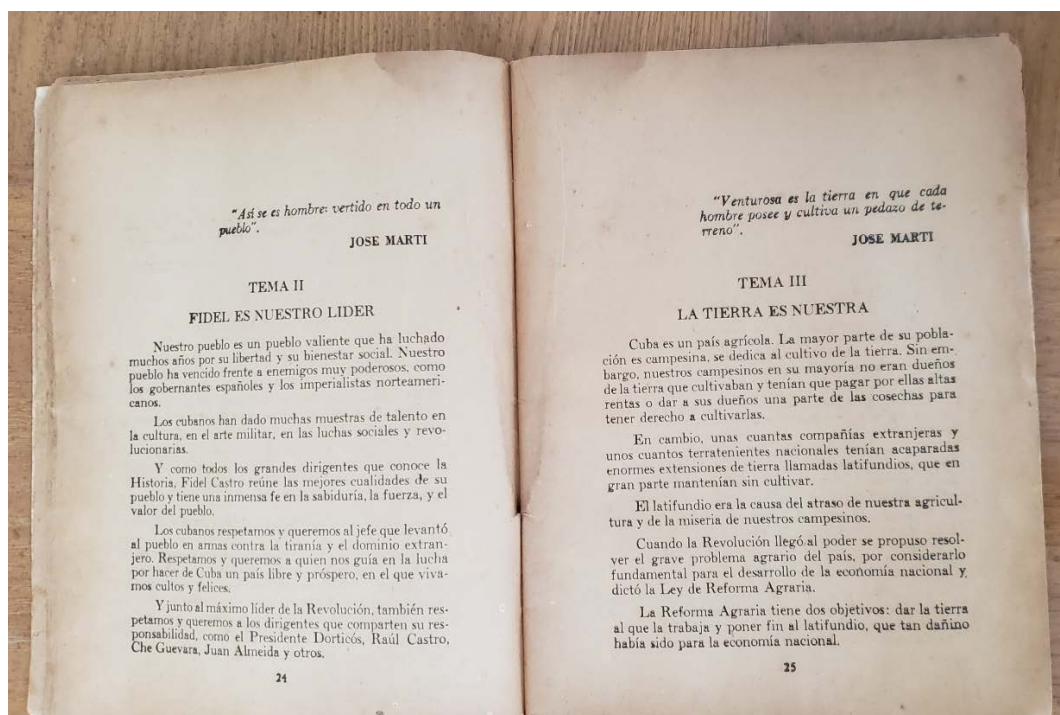
See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Teacher's Manual Introduction [photograph]. Havana, Cuba

6.



See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Teacher's Manual Theme 1[*photograph*]. Havana, Cuba

7.



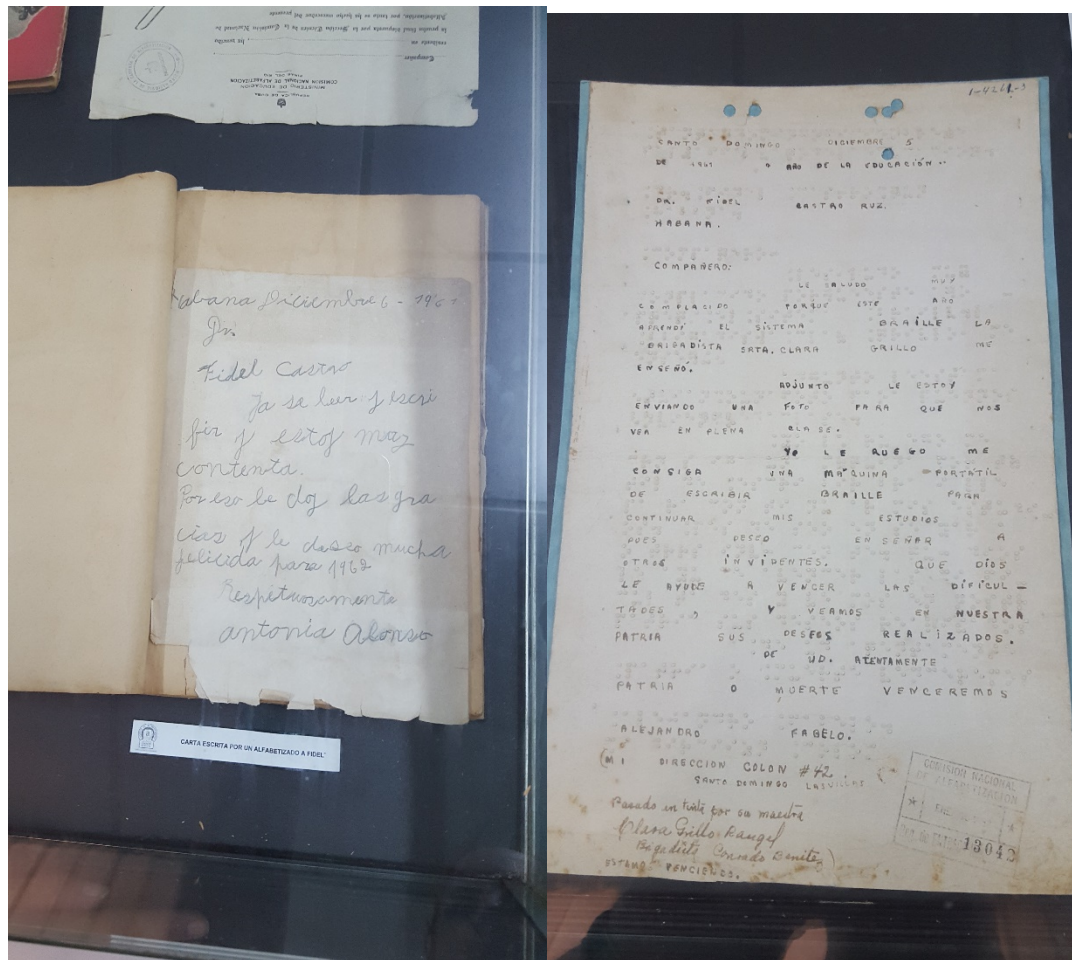
See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Teacher's Manual Themes II and III [*photograph*]. Havana, Cuba

As demonstrated in the photos above, both the primer and the teacher's manual are heavily political. Photos 2-4 depict the Primer's Exercise A and a later exercise. In Exercise A (Photos 2 and 3), the students learned how to read and write by using the words *Organización de Estados Americanos* (Organization of American States or OAE) and *La Reforma Agraria* (The Agrarian Reform). The OAE was started in the late 1940's with the goal of unifying the Americas (think of the modern European Union), and The Agrarian Reform is not an actual part of the Revolution. This phrase was placed in the primer to garner support for Castro, but under the guise of the rural farmers only knowing so many words, and therefore using the words they know to leverage further literacy.

Photos 5-7 depict the Teacher's Manual Introduction and first 3 themes. The introduction speaks about how 1961 is the year of education, as per Castro and the Revolution. The first three themes are (in order) *La Revolución* (The Revolution), *Fidel Es Nuestro Líder* (Fidel is our Leader), and *La Tierra Es Nuestra* (The Land is Ours); these are clearly highly politically skewed to promote Castro and the Revolution. In promoting Castro and the Revolution, the Communist/Marxist political ideologies are evident. Further, each page of the Teacher's Manual has a quote from José Martí, Cuba's National Hero and Poet, or from Fidel Castro himself.

Lastly, Photo 8 (below) depicts two letters sent to Castro at the culmination of the Literacy Campaign. After the literacy students and teachers finished their lessons, the students sent Castro a letter signifying that they completed their lessons and are now literate. In return, the students were sent a package containing books and further lessons to continue their studies.

8.



See, H. (Photographer). (2016, July). Literacy Campaign Letters to Fidel [photograph]. Havana, Cuba

The *brigadistas* were sent out with primer books, a uniform that resembled a military uniform, a Coleman lantern, a backpack, and a hammock. The lantern was essential and served many purposes for the campaign. The lantern provided light to work under after farming all day; it was also a symbol of the people becoming enlightened by being able to read and write. Often, it was bestowed as a gift by the *brigadistas* to their assigned *campesino* families upon their departure (See, 2016). The hammocks were

important as well, because the *brigadistas* had to set up their beds wherever they could; it also lifted the burden of providing a bed for the *brigadistas* from the *campesinos*.

Something extremely important to note is that medical services were set up to assist the Literacy Campaign from the beginning of the campaign. Education and Medical care were considered twin pillars of the Revolution. To this day, in Cuba, both the Education and Healthcare systems are highly regarded. Physicians, Nurses, and Medical Assistants were sent out with the brigades in order to care for them as they encountered the ills of poverty, such as lack of plumbing, poor water quality, or harsh natural conditions. Additionally, doctors went out to conduct screenings and operations for the *campesinos*. Many *campesinos* had not been to a doctor once in the course of their entire lives. A crucial part of this effort centers on the fitting and distribution of over 177,000 pairs of glasses without cost. Without access to glasses, the campaign could not have been as successful as it was. The doctors and other health professionals additionally served as chaperones for the young teachers (Kozol, 1978).

Not everything in the campaign went smoothly. A school near Havana was attacked by Cuban exile forces launched against Castro in early 1961. Armed opposition attacked the school, but the Cuban people continued the campaign. As a sign of pride, the blackboard from that school containing bullet holes is now on display at the Literacy Museum. Always the shrewd politician, Castro gave a speech on Mother's Day in 1961 saying that he was grateful for the efforts and sacrifices that parents made by allowing their children to go out and teach literacy.

Aside from a few setbacks of violence against Castro and the campaign, things were going well but progressing slowly. In June of 1961 there were 500,000 Cuban adults

reported to be studying, but only 119,000 were reported to be successful in completing the primer (Kozol, 1978). This was more than halfway through the year, so a call went out to factories with the hope of mobilizing 30,000 additional people to volunteer as teachers for the brigades. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reported that 21,000 people joined the pre-existing cadre of teachers to create a new brigade called '*Patria o Muerte*' (Homeland or Death) (Kozol, 1978). Arrangements were made for co-workers to help with the workload while volunteers were away, so the job force did not suffer while the volunteers were still paid wages in order to support their families.

In late summer 1961, the Cuban government called a National Congress in Havana to assess the measures of the literacy campaign. It was reported that there was 86,0000 people still illiterate with 3/4 of the year gone (Kozol, 1978). On September 18th, all teacher participation ceased to be voluntary. The government decided to push back the start date for primary and secondary schools until January 1962. As the government decided to end school early the year prior, therefore primary and secondary school students missed six months of instruction for the benefit of the campaign. By the end of the campaign there were 707,212 Cuban people no longer illiterate (Kozol, 1978). That meant that less than 5% of Cuba's population was still considered illiterate by December 1961.

Once the *campesinos* finished the course work, they sent a letter to Castro and in return they received a workbook to follow up with their literacy education. Flags were hung outside homes and in towns to celebrate eradicating illiteracy (See, 2016). In December 1961 a large parade took place in Havana signaling that the campaign had

been successful. Not long after the campaign ended, materials were collected to begin an exhibit on the project.

Harvard scholar, David Hartman, has said about the Literacy Campaign that its definition of basic literacy skill was far too low to prove significant as a pedagogic victory in itself' (Kozol, 1978). The campaign's definition of literacy was reading and writing at approximately a first-grade level, not at the ninth-grade level as literacy is universally defined by UNESCO (Fagen, 1969).

The second phase of Castro's educational reform effort was the lesser-known *Battle for Sixth Grade*. It was considered extremely important to provide the total population with a minimum of a sixth-grade educational level to follow up on the Literacy Campaign (Kozol, 1978). By the late 1960s the *Battle for Sixth Grade* and *Farmer-Worker Education* programs were set up in Cuba. Additionally, Castro closed a number of teacher training programs and moved them to the top universities in Cuba where only the top ten percent of students are selected into highly competitive programs. Cuban teachers gain a depth of pedagogical theory and child development knowledge during their training (Carnoy et al., 2007).

A similar teacher program overhaul occurred in Finland in the late 1960's (Ripley, 2013). Finland has been long considered an effective model of education that many other countries admire. Finland has been extremely successful in having the best educated people becoming teachers by preferring quality over quantity in their teachers (Ripley, 2013). There has been several research studies conducted on Finland's education system and teacher training programs, however, there has not been the same extent of

research conducted on the Cuban system which has been reported as successful in educating their population as Finland.

Gaps in Literature

There is a gap in knowledge about the *Battle for Sixth Grade* and contemporary teacher training programs. The *Battle for Sixth Grade* launched by Castro as the follow-up program to the Literacy Campaign. Very little is known about the *Battle for Sixth Grade*, including the details of the program, if it ever launched, and if it was successful. Also, not well-known is the status of the current teacher training programs. All information that has been published reiterates Castro's original plan of having and being elite teacher training programs. This research sought and understanding of how both programs worked and in what ways they were successful. Specifically, there is not a lot of previous research on the logistics of the *Battle for Sixth Grade* or how those teacher training programs at top universities achieved such high standards in their teacher training programs and have maintained them to the present day.

Furthermore, there is a large gap in the literature between the 1960s and early 2000s. The primary source of information regarding Cuba's educational system comes from journalist Jonathan Kozal's 1978 book, *Children of the Revolution: a Yankee Teacher in the Cuban Schools*. After Kozal, very little has been written about Cuba's education system, in either Spanish or English, until the year 2000. Due to this lack of publications from the Cuban state, a lot of detailed information is still not known. It is important to understand not only the way in which Cuba's literacy education programming maintained high levels of achievement over the past fifty-eight years, but also how Cuba currently maintains high academic success.

21st Century

Interest in Cuban educational success has gained traction in the 21st century as the formerly icy relations between the United States and Cuba have been thawed. Cuban classrooms employ pedagogical methods that derived from the Ministry of Education (Carnoy et al., 2007). Even with their smaller than average education budget, the main goal is the continuity of education reform. Cuba cuts costs by reusing materials, because they believe that understanding labor should be a part of education. This Marxist idea of labor being necessary in Cuban education was first articulated by José Martí (Martí, 2015). The Cuban education system believes that competition is beneficial, and competition is encouraged between schools and classes. School performance, however, is based on a holistic measure (Gasperini, 2000).

Teachers are assessed by the *Instituto Pedagógico* (Pedagogical Institute through the Ministry of Education) superiors once a month; this assessment is completed by the master teachers sitting in on class. Classrooms maintain a small student/teacher ratio of 12:1 (Sabina, 2009). Compulsory education is from ages 6-14 (Sabina, 2009). After compulsory education ends in ninth grade, approximately half of Cuban students go onto technical and vocational education (TVE) (Gasperini, 2000). The rest go onto college in one of the forty-seven universities with 112,000 enrolled students (United Nations Educational, 2014).

Martin Carnoy conducted a similar study through UNESCO's 1997 data on Mathematics and Sciences (2007). His book, "*Cuba's Academic Advantage*" compared Cuba's Mathematics and Sciences academic achievement against other Latin American countries (Carnoy et al., 2007). Carnoy proved that Cuban education has outperformed

Chile and Brazil across all measures (2007). Literacy rates and scores were not accounted for in his study, and therefore should be researched further. The hypothesis of this research is that Cuban students attended a strictly controlled education system, and that specific system, rooted in the need for literacy, is what drove the academic success rates of Cubans over the past sixty years.

Emergent Teachers Program

During the Special Period in Cuba, or *el período especial en tiempos de paz* (The Special Period in Time of Peace), (an economic crisis due to the fall of the Soviet Union, 1991-2000), many teachers moved from the education sector to tourism for better financial opportunities, or they emigrated from Cuba. “The quality of education offered in Cuba has undeniable deteriorated since the economic crisis of the 1990s” (Raysberg, 2013). To alleviate the exodus of teachers, the Cuban government tried a number of different things; hired teachers by the hour, reincorporated retirees of teaching, used university students as teachers at lower levels, and began a *Maestros Emergentes* (Emergent Teachers) Program.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Fidel Castro created schools for Emerging and Integral Teachers (Pentón, 2017). Emergent teachers are high school or college students who train for eight months in the didactic method and help cover the demand of teachers (Juárez Bolaños, 2012). The didactic method is highly theoretical with a strong emphasis on reading and writing.

Being a teacher in Cuba was once a distinguished profession and highly sought after. González González, & Velázquez, (2011) said:

It should be noted that one motivation to become a teacher is that it is one of the few professions (in addition to doctors) with which there are possibilities to work abroad for periods ranging from one to three years. The Cuban government develops educational and literacy projects in several Latin American nations, among which are Mexico, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Venezuela. Even one of the teachers interviewed was on a mission for a year in Western Sahara at the end of the 1980s.

Many teachers have been leaving education “because teachers have not received the proper attention” claims Cuban academic Armando Chaguaceda (Pentón, 2017). The problems brought by the emergent teacher program was further exacerbated in the transition of power from Fidel Castro to his brother, Raúl Castro, beginning in 2006.

After Raúl Castro took power, he cut the Ministry of Educations’ budget drastically (Pentón, 2017). It is estimated that “education spending dropped from 14.1 percent of the island’s GDP in 2008 to 10.2 percent in 2015” (Pentón, 2017). During that time, as many as 1,800 schools were closed. The National Statistics and Information Office (NSIO) reported that Cuba has lost more than 40,000 teachers in the last decade (Pentón, 2017). As of 2017, Cuba was short 16,000 teachers. In a recent interview, Education Minister, Ena Elsa Velázquez, acknowledged that there were anywhere from 10,000 to 13,000 teachers on Cuba’s payroll but are not in classrooms because of personal problems or maternity leave (Pentón, 2017).

The teaching shortage in Cuba and the emergent teachers’ program that followed has not been well documented and therefore there is not a lot of literature on this topic. The little literature that is available displays cracks in the Cuban education system that were verbalized to the researcher during her summer in Cuba (See, 2016).

Summary

Cuba, not unlike most other countries, have experienced education reforms. The complete overhaul of Cuba's education system that was conducted by Fidel Castro poised the country to be a leader in education for the next half century, especially as a model for developing countries, where Cuba took a heavy hand in replicating their literacy programs. Cuba's policies have been shrouded in secrecy for many years, mostly due to the icy political relations with the majority of outside countries, most specifically the United States of America. With limited resources and support Cuba found a way to be a world leader in literacy.

There has been limited research approved by the regulatory Cuban government since the early 1960s, when the international political relations became unfriendly. The chief data collection since the 1960s came from the United Nations UNESCO studies, where Cuba continually trumped most, if not all other countries in regard to literacy (Finland has been the main contender for literacy). The specifics concerning the manner in which Cuba executed a superior literacy education for over fifty years have yet to be detailed in a formalized research capacity. Most of what is known regarding the programs that followed the Literacy Campaign are from Cuban produced (or overly Cuban controlled) reports. The Cuban produced documents are contradicted when speaking with Cubans that live there today (See, 2016).

As international relations have thawed in the most recent two decades, more formalized research has been sought in Cuba and about Cubans' experiences. Since research is presently being conducted, it leaves some room for recall bias as all the current research will rely on memory of individuals and whatever limited information was printed at the time. The younger generations, who mostly have emigrated from Cuba,

are more open to expressing their feelings, both good and bad, about their home country, without the fear of prosecution. This thawing of state relations and the openness of the younger generations have provided researchers with the opportunity to study things that would have been impossible to in the past. The next chapter will fully explain the methodology used for this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this project was investigating Cuban literacy pedagogy through former Cuban students and teachers. This project was initially conceptualized as a research study taking place in Cuba over a period of six months. The initial plan was accepted by the Internal Review Board for the institution; however, a number of issues arose when gaining the other approvals that were necessary. While the current political climate and lack of funding has prohibited this research from occurring in Cuba during the time of this dissertation, the hope is that this research will support further research inside Cuba. This project is a small exploratory study of Cubans who immigrated to the United States of America after the revolution of 1959, using qualitative interviews. that deepens our understanding of literacy education in Cuba, a country that has been excelling in this since 1961. To fully illustrate the process of this project, I will outline the original intent of research, and then detail how this project ended up being an exploratory qualitative interview study consisting of six Cuban American millennials.

Initial Project Intent

As stated in Chapter 1, it has been proven that Cuban immigrants outperform American born students in the United States Education system (Sabina, 2009; Kirp, 2013). This study was motivated in further understanding the dynamics of the Cuban classroom in regard to literacy education. This study initially aimed to investigate the literacy policies and programming post-1959 revolution and how those policies and programs are currently implemented in schools. Derived from the current literature, the working assumption is that the Ministry of Education dictates all aspects of Education Policy including textbook

choice, pedagogy, and professional development. This top down model supports the premise that the education system, which was conceptualized as Marxist, in practice became radical functionalism.

Fidel Castro succeeded in eradicating illiteracy and maintained the highest literacy rate in the world in Cuba for over fifty-eight years (UNESCO, 2014). The Cuban education system's success has been widely publicized, however there are gaps in knowledge as to how Cuban leaders accomplished this feat. This research proposed to explore how the education system in Cuba operates in the classrooms, by examining first-person experience of individuals who attended or taught in Cuban schools post-1959. Research in this area offers the promise of insight into how successful literacy reform can be carried out. The results of this research could provide information for best practices in literacy programs and policies that may be adapted by other countries.

The initial design of this study was a cross-sectional, ethnographic study to be conducted in La Habana Province in Cuba over the course of six-months. The initial plan was to interview forty individuals from the Ministry of Education, school administration, teachers, and other adults associated with Cuban schools with the goal to better understand how Cuban Literacy Education is overseen and administered from a policy level. In addition to those interviews, it was planned to conduct classroom observations to determine if the aforementioned education policies were adequately implemented in schools. The initial study design also included a request for complete Cuban National Exam scores and a copy of the exam. This study intended to determine if the literacy rates published by Cuba are comparable to the standard accepted through the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

The original research plan selected qualitative methods, interviewing and ethnographic observations, as the intent was to serve as an exploratory study to understand the complexities of the multi-level Cuban Literacy Education in the most appropriate manner. Cuba is currently and has always been resistant to outside researchers testing their students, therefore quantitative methods would not be appropriate for any study involving Cubans.

Study Site. The initial study sites were planned to be public elementary schools in the La Habana Province, Cuba. It was the aim to have access to one urban school as the researcher's primary study site. It was also planned to visit a rural school, for comparison, as a secondary site. In the primary, urban elementary school, two classrooms (preferably a first and a fourth-grade classroom) would be identified to conduct observations. At the secondary rural school, a visit of two weeks' maximum would allow ample time to rotate through as many classrooms levels that are given permission.

It was planned for all interviews to take place in an empty classroom in the school except for the ministry interviews. The ministry interviews would have taken place in each individual's office in downtown Havana, Cuba. Observations would have taken place in classrooms of the schools that were given access to. Personal observations of teachers would include observing their classroom preparation and participating in workshops and instruction imparted in the classrooms by master teachers.

Access to complete a study such as this would have needed approval from Cuban schools and the Ministry of Education. Gaining approval was conceptualized as an initial trip to Cuba to get the written permissions, and a return trip of six months to complete the

research. All materials such as information, consent/assent forms, and approvals would be written and distributed in Spanish, as appropriate.

Inclusion/Exclusion Eligibility Criteria. For the initial research plan, inclusion would not have been able to be dictated by the researcher. Inclusion would have been based on the schools and students that the Ministry of Education approved. The researcher would not have complete control over which schools would have been made available, so it was planned to adjust for this in the research methods. Those included would be; Ministry Officials, administration, teachers, tutors, and parents who have worked in the Cuban education system for a minimum of 1 year, the only exception would be first year teachers who completed their teacher training at a university in Cuba. Excluded would be those who have not worked in Cuba for at least a year as they may not have complete information regarding the way Cuba teaches literacy as they have not completed a full year in their role.

The inclusion criteria of students would have been those who have attended Cuban schools since *prescolar* (pre-school). Students who transferred into Cuban schools would be excluded to insure there are no outside factors, such as a different education program, skewing the data.

Measurement/instrumentation. It was planned to use qualitative analysis on all of the interviews. Discourse analysis would have been used to measure the educational policies effectiveness. It was undetermined if access would be given to national exam data, therefore the plan was to use the best quantitative measurement available determined by if the scored were disaggregated or not. Any data that would have been

collected from the national exam would have been used to compare the publicly available information to the raw scores.

Data Analysis and Interpretation. It was planned to hire a native Cuban to assist in transcription and translation to help ensure that all colloquialisms will not be missed. Analysis would have taken place in the original Spanish and after analysis be translated to English for the purposes of this study. A secure laptop and back-up drive would have been used to store data. Much like any qualitative study, pseudonyms would have been employed. Field notes would have been taken in both English and Spanish as appropriate. These notes would be written by hand in a notebook. Those notes would be regularly transcribed for documentation purposes.

If access to test scores were given, they would have been used as a point of comparison to determine if classrooms are being taught in the manner in which the ministry says it should be taught. Score data would have been used to triangulate against the ethnographic observations and interview data that would have been collected over six months in La Habana Province, Cuba.

Discussion of Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability. The threat to internal validity is that the researcher would have been unable to choose what schools were approved. The schools that the Ministry of Education and the University of Havana might have approved could of had the potential of not be representative of Cuba. The researcher would have no power to change school selection, however the plan was to try and compensate by collecting data from more than one school through teachers and administration at those other schools.

Initial Research Questions. The initial project was a much larger scope than the actual project and therefor included a number of research questions. Only some of the research questions were used for the actual study. The initial questions include;

How has Cuban Literacy Education been reported post-1961?

- In what way(s) has Cuban success been measured?
- Is Cuban literacy education comparable to that of other Spanish-speaking nations?

What is the goal and function of Cuban literacy education?

- How did Castro centralize the Cuban Education System?
- What type of teaching methods are employed in literacy education?
- How are the reforms of Cuban literacy education best understood?
 - Is it through Marxism, Functionalism, or another educational theory?

How is Cuban literacy education organized?

- What role does the Ministry of Education play in setting literacy education policy?
- Who decides on the best practices for teaching literacy and how is that information distributed across schools/districts?
- Is there specific training and/or professional development for teachers in Cuba?
- Are there master teachers for instructing literacy?
- What role do they play in setting policies and instructing teachers?

What methods are used to teach a child to read?

- What are school conditions that may aid or hinder learning outcomes?
- What adults (other than schoolteachers) assisted you in learning to read?

- Are the skills learned through Cuban Literacy applicable to learning other languages?

Finalized Research Project

The complications above led to a study design that sought to understand the Cuban education system through the experiences of adults who attended primary school in Cuba and had later immigrated to the United States of America. After two revisions, a second project was given the necessary approvals to research Cuban Americans in the two largest population concentrations in the United States of America; Northern New Jersey/ New York City, and Greater Miami, Florida.

Six interviews were conducted in New Jersey between January and March 2019. These interviews served as a platform to gain insight on how Cuban literacy education was employed post-revolution from the view adults exposed to the American education system as well. The interviews were audio recorded were conducted in the language preferred by the participant; English or Spanish.

Research Questions

This research was motivated by the overarching question of; what are the perceptions of Cuban literacy education from Cubans? This is followed by three sub-questions;

(1) What are the roles of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy?

(2) What are the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education?

(3) What (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system?

Research Design

This study used qualitative methodology through semi-structured qualitative interviewing to seek an understanding of the lived experiences of Cuban American Millennials. The research design was influenced by phenomenology but did not acquire the in-depth understanding required by that methodology. As there is limited research in the years after the Literacy Campaign, qualitative methods were most appropriate for this investigatory study (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative research accounts for the understanding of individuals' interpretations of their own experience and allows participants to "reconstruct his or her experience" (Seidman, 2013). Further, qualitative interviewing was employed as it allowed the researcher a wide range of interviewing options in order to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. Seidman (2013) states that there is "no single approach to interviewing research that could be called phenomenological", therefore it allows the researcher to employ a "range of approaches to inquiry".

Rationale for Design

It is appropriate to use for this project because it will serve as an exploratory study to understand Cuban Literacy Education in the classroom. This research focused on understanding the lived experiences of students attending primary school in Cuba between the late 1980s and early 2000s.

Qualitative interviewing allowed for open-ended questions that "build upon and explore" participant responses, allowing for the participant to "reconstruct his or her

experience” (Seidman, 2013). The structure of these open-ended interviews will provide the researcher ability to further question topics that arise that are of interest to the study. “

The participants consisted of adults who had previous experience with Cuban schools, including former teachers and students due to the fact that they were able to articulate their thoughts on Cuban Literacy Programming based on their lived experiences. Lastly, qualitative methods are appropriate as the research is based on experiences from the past that cannot be measured quantitatively. As qualitative interviewing has a loose methodological structure, the researcher employed phenomenological analysis to analyze the responses of the participants.

The Researcher's Role

For this study, this researcher was the sole interviewer. The researcher acknowledged her own personal, cultural, and historical background in order to set them aside for the purposes of producing unbiased research. The researcher’s insights to the Cuban education system stem from a month-long summer project investigating the Literacy Campaign during the summer of 2016, during which the initial research was conceptualized, and subsequent study was planned thereafter. None of the researcher’s personal beliefs affected this research as the researcher continually bracketed her own thoughts and feelings during the research process.

The researcher did not have a prior relationship with interviewees that would have skewed the outcomes of this study. The researcher gained access to interviewees through contacts in the Cuban community who themselves do not meet the inclusion criteria. Initial IRB approval was given on 4/5/2018, and a continuum was approved on 3/8/2019.

Sample and Recruitment

The researcher used snowballing sampling technique for this study. Recruitment began in May 2018 with emails to contacts of Cuban descent that did not fit the criteria themselves (Appendix A). Also, recruitment posters (Appendix B) were emailed to Cuban restaurants, civic centers, and organizations in the Greater Miami area. The recruitment posters were hand delivered to Northern New Jersey locations where the researcher engaged with potential participants. No participants were found via this in-person method.

Participants were found via a work connection where a Cuban immigrant, who themselves did not qualify, identified two other people who happened to not know each other. Those identified via the work connection were the first two interviews completed. The remaining four participants were snowball sampled from contacts the first two participants provided the researcher. There were a number of instances where a potential participant's information was given, only to find out that they do not qualify, but they know another individual that would. In total, six interviews were completed. The six interviews that were completed nearly all said the same thing, and therefore saturation was reached for this population.

Study Site

Northern New Jersey and Miami have been two primary places of immigration for Cubans. These ethnic enclaves provided rich research sites. Though much recruitment effort, there were no participants from the greater Miami area. The researcher selected to focus research in Northern New Jersey for two reasons; 1. access to this population, and

2. this population was previously studied (Sabina, 2009; Kirp, 2013), therefore this research can be added to the previous literature on Cuban Americans in this region.

Inclusion/Exclusion Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria were comprised of adults who either attended or taught in Cuban schools. The researcher was seeking former students who attended all years of primary school in Cuba post-1959. Individuals would only be excluded if they attended Cuban school prior to 1959, as the research was interested in post-revolution education reforms. Also excluded were those who did not complete all years of primary education in Cuba to insure there are no additional variables, such as a different education program, skewing the data. Additionally, these interviews were based on memory and there can be a memory bias when there is a shorter length of time that an individual is asked to remember.

Also included were former teachers who taught in Cuba for two academic years or more post-1959. Former teachers who only taught prior to the revolution were excluded, as the researcher is investigating the current education system and that system was initiated at the start of the revolution. Also excluded were those who taught for less than two academic years, as they may not have representative experiences regarding the way Cuba teaches literacy as they have not completed a full academic year in their role. It just so happens that all six participants are from the same age bracket and three of them also taught in Cuban schools prior to immigrating.

Figure 1. Participant Criteria Model

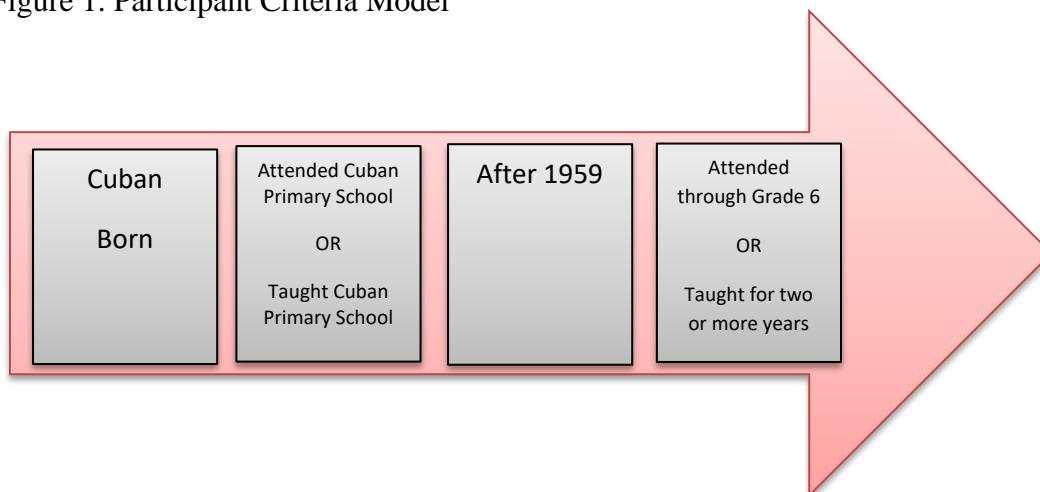


Figure 1 represents how participation in the study is determined following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Measurement/Instrumentation

The researcher used interviews to obtain the most comprehensive representation of Cuban Americans experience in Cuban primary schools. The interview questions were developed directly from the gaps in literature with the objective of gaining a better understanding of how Cuban schools' taught literacy, post-literacy campaign.

The interviews were approximately 33 minutes in length, ranging from 23 to 42 minutes. The questions were semi-structured, and open-ended to all for the natural emergence of themes through natural conversation. The interviews were conducted in person or by phone and recorded on one or two audio recording devices, as appropriate.

Analysis was conducted by hand in the original language. Post-analysis, the researcher hired a transcriber who spoke both Spanish and English to accurately transcribe the interviews. The Spanish transcriptions were translated into English for the purposes of quoting the participant, post-analysis. Translations were conducted by a

native Caribbean Spanish speaker familiar with the Cuban dialect. The researcher reviewed each translated quote again prior to using it.

Hard to Reach Population

Sydor (2013) argues that the terms that describe populations who are difficult in agreeing to participation are varied and not well defined. Researchers use 'hidden population', 'hard to reach population', 'elusive' and 'low visibility' populations interchangeably and often regarding the same group (Biemacki and Waldorf, 1981; Fielding, 2004; Long-Sutehall, et. al., 2011; Sydor, 2013). This study uses the terms as defined by Sydor (2013):

Hard to reach: a population that is difficult for researchers to access
Sensitive subject: a subject that some people prefer not to discuss publicly,
usually because they perceive a risk associated with self-disclosure

Sydor (2013) goes on to say that with some population's researchers know prior to the study that the participants will be hard to reach, whereas other populations are 'more ambiguous'. Having a sensitive subject matter can be a factor as to why participants are hesitant to participate in the study. The challenging part is determining what topics would be considered sensitive. Renzetü and Lee (1993) believe that any topic has the potential to be sensitive. This means that even topics that researchers believe not to be sensitive should be handled carefully on the part of the researcher. The more sensitive the topic, the more difficulty there will be in recruitment.

This study researched the experiences of Cuban Americans regarding their experience while growing up in Cuba. The researcher acknowledged that people may be cautious to participate given that in Cuba free speech is and was discouraged if the speech went against the decree of the revolution. However, the researcher could have

never prepared for the extreme degree of eligible participants that did not want to go on record. This was surprising as the original study wanted to sample 40 individuals and given the large Cuban population in the United States, this was believed to be very achievable, even accounting for those who would potentially not wish to participate.

The Hispanic/Latino population in the United States of America is 59.9 million people as of 2018 (Pew, 2019). As of the 2010 U.S. Census, 1,785,547 2017 of those were Cuban, and it is estimated that as of 2017 there were 2, 315,863 Cubans in the United States (Pew, 2019; Census, 2018). Popularity for research with Caribbean Latinos and those living in the northeast have become increasingly popular, but as of Gómez's 2002 study, most studies involving Latinos have concentrated in the US. Southwest, or have utilized people of Mexican descent, with some exceptions (Chavez, 1993; Juniu, 2000). Gómez points out that Latinos tend to concentrate in urban centers, and Cubans are no exception. According to the 2010 Census, the top four locations of people of Cuban descent are Miami, FL, Northern New Jersey, Tampa, FL, and Los Angeles, CA, therefore research in these areas are essential (Census, 2010). Gómez (2002) studied Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts, and even though he was Latino and Spanish-speaking, he still found it difficult to recruit participants for his study. Gómez states:

A difficulty often encountered in researching ethnic groups is accessibility to the population one wants to study. In an article on researching diverse populations, Henderson (1998) noted that "[methods] are important, but the strategies used to get information are essential. Researchers may need to stray from research protocol to obtain data and create an environment of social support" (p. 164).

Another reason that some populations, especially vulnerable populations, do not choose to participate in research is a mistrust of the research process (Bonevski et al.,

2014; Ellard-Gray, et. al., 2015; Hynes, 2003; Jenkins et al., 1998) Ellard-Gray, et. al.

(2015) continue by saying:

In many cases, this mistrust stems from historical violations by researchers and can affect willingness to participate and/or to disclose identities to researchers... Ethnic minority groups share the concern that research findings may not benefit their community (Corbie-Smith, MoodyAyers, & Thrasher, 2004; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008).

Ethnic minorities and immigrants whose native language is different from the researcher are less likely to trust the researcher (Ellard-Gray, et. al., 2015; Shedlin, et. al., 2011).

The researcher speaks Spanish fluently; however, she is a white woman from the United States and could have been seen as an outsider for those who chose not to participate. Speaking the language of the participants is not a clear indicator that participants will choose to participate. There is a great possibility that if the researcher was seen as an outsider in this way, that it would garner suspicion within the Cuban population as they were unlawfully recorded and tracked upon immigrating in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2017 when President Trump took office there were informal rumblings of mistrust of being recorded within the community, despite many Cubans being registered and voting as Republicans. This spoken mistrust came directly from the early comments regarding Latino populations and Cuba/ Fidel Castro.

Any population that has a history of being mistreated in research are less likely to participate in research, even if it has been a long time since the transgression in question (Bonevski et al., 2014; Scharff, et. al, 2010). Cubans feel that they have been mistreated by their own government, and, depending on the age of the person, by the United States as well. This adds to their unlikeliness to participate in research. Cubans today still speak carefully when they disagree with Cuban policies. The participants of this study were

careful to not use exact names or places when discussing the things they did not agree with. For Cubans who spoke to the researcher but declined to participate, they regularly said they still have family in Cuba and did not want to make any trouble. This may indicate that there is still a fear of retaliation from Castro's regime.

As with any population, researching Cubans posed its own unique challenges. A number of hypothesis could explain the lack of willingness to participate for this population. These reasons could include, but are not limited to; being immigrants, speaking Spanish as a primary language (although the research speaks it fluently, she is not of Latino descent), being political refugees, fear of speaking out for themselves or for loved ones who still live in Cuba (history has proven that in decades past, families were punished by Fidel Castro when foreign Cubans spoke out against the Revolution), the US government taping Cuban refugees during the 1960s and the mistrust it created, or another reason that is not yet understood. Regardless of the reason that Cuban Americans were hesitant to participate in this research, this study, like many before it that worked with difficult hard to reach populations, had to modify their research a number of times and also build trust with the participants to complete the study. Fortunately, for the purposes of this study, participation reached saturation after six interviews when no new information was given.

Data Collection

Upon being identified as a participant that fit the inclusion criteria, the participants scheduled a date and location to conduct the interview. They were also given a copy of the interview protocol, in both languages, and were asked which language they

prefer for the interview. The participants were also emailed a copy of the consent form, in both languages, and were asked to review it before the interview.

Before the interviews began, the researcher reviewed the consent form, answered any questions and received signed consent forms from each participant. The interviewer also let each participant know that they can skip any question, ask for the recording to be stopped, or decline participation at any time.

The participants partook in a semi-structured interview where mutual inquiries were welcomed. Four of the six interviews were held in person; the first two interviews were held on the Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey-Newark's (Rutgers-Newark) campus, the last two interviews were held in the participants' private residences. The third and fourth interviews were conducted via cellphone. The in-person interviews were recorded on two devices, a cellphone and a separate recorder. The phone interviews were recorded solely on the separate recorder. During interview three the recorder died and turned off during the first minute and the researcher will rely on their notes for the purposes of analysis. Seidman (2013) states "it is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not to conduct one at all".

None of the interviews were video recorded because of the numerous issues in recruitment. The researcher wanted the participants to feel safe and that their identity was well-protected and therefore decided to not video record as initially participation was difficult to obtain. The interviews lasted between 23 and 43 minutes.

All names and identifying information about the participants were removed from written transcripts prior to data analysis. Every participant was given a pseudonym. There is only one key that is saved in a password protected file on the researchers'

personal laptop, no one other than the researcher and her dissertation committee had access to this information. In total, there were six interviews completed. Sample size was determined based on best practices for qualitative research that utilize semi-structured interviews to achieve saturation of themes and develop theories for future testing (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Graph 1. Interview Data

Participant	Interview Duration	Word Count	Transcription Pages	Interview Language
1	42:50	6,903	22	English
2	27:46	7,513	14	English/Spanish
3	37:30	Unrecorded	Unrecorded	Spanish
4	23:13	4,992	10	Spanish
5	35:07	8,445	16	Spanish
6	35:53	3,010	7	English

Graph 1 depicts each of the six interviews duration, word count, transcription length and the language the interview was conducted in.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of each interview, a native English or Caribbean Spanish-speaking transcriber was hired to transcribe each interview in the language used by the participant. For three of the six interviews, this required a translation as well. Analysis was conducted by hand with the original language. The original Spanish quotes and information that were provided by participants, and were used for the purposes of this

paper, were translated to English, and double checked by the researcher, per the requirements of this dissertation.

The researcher employed a line by line hand analysis as there was a small participant population and this was feasible given the length of time it takes for such hand analysis. Hand analysis was utilized question by question across all six participants, this allowed for natural themes to emerge. Additionally, the researcher was able to identify quotes as they pertained to the participants' experience. Repeated themes, words, and phrases were thus considered significant and placed aside to later be pieced together in order to understand the complete picture of these experiences.

Phenomenological analysis requires the information to be reduced to "what is most significant and (of) interest" (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Seidman, 2013; Wolcott, 1990). The researcher first applied hand coding during the interview process to establish the first codes (Creswell, 2008). The researcher collected these initial codes during the interviews when repeated sentiments were expressed naturally during the interview. Next, the researcher employed horizontalization. Horizontalization is when all significant statements from each participant are reviewed until repletion was eliminated from the statements (Creswell, 2008). Reduction occurred through clustering, where related statements across all the participants were clustered into major themes (Creswell, 2008).

The researcher followed the modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994). The data was analyzed manually with pen and paper and then transcribed into Microsoft Word.

Bracketing. Bracketing requires the researcher to suspend any preconceived notions or perceptions to effectively conduct phenomenological analysis. Reflexivity, such as

bracketing, helps researchers identify any areas of potential bias, thus ensuring validity of the study. The researcher used the methods outlined in the article by Chan, Fung, & Chien regarding Bracketing in Phenomenology (2013).

Keep a reflexive diary, helping to awaken the researchers' own pre-conceptions;

Engage participants in bracketing during the data collection process when indicated;

Thorough research planning before data collection;

Interview the participants using open-ended questions;

Adopt a Not-knowing stand to maintain the curiosity in the participants;

Generate knowledge from participants via semi-structured interviews.

aim to ensure that the findings are as close to what the participants mean as possible and in a more realistic and practical sense.

Phenomenological analysis requires specific steps to be taken to ensure quality of analysis. The steps to the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) were followed. The steps in this process are horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and theming, validation, textural description, and structural description;

1. **Horizontalization.** The researcher read each transcript in full, then returned to each transcript to begin highlighting question by question. This produced lists of quotes and notes in multiple preliminary groupings.
2. **Reduction and Elimination.** Next the preliminary groups were reduced by testing each expression with two questions:

Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it?

Is it possible to abstract and label it? (Moustakas, p.121, 1994).

Guided by these questions, the researcher, organized the data into numerous codes

3. **Clustering and Theming.** Next the preliminary groups were grouped into larger sections (themes) that were relevant to the data extracted. These themes were labeled to reflect the experience of the participants.
4. **Validation.** Validation was achieved by questioning:
 - Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
 - Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
 - If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher's experience and should be deleted (Moustakas, p.121, 1994).
5. **Textural Description.** Textural descriptions were created for the group as a whole, and for each individual participant using verbatim excerpts and quotes from the participant to give voice to the participant as a co-researcher (Moustakas, 1994).
6. **Structural Description.** Structural descriptions were created for each theme that reflected the lived experiences of the participants. This was achieved by exploring the meanings of each participant and how each participant added meaning for the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

There is no threat to internal validity as participant recruitment is through the snowball method. Additionally, validity was achieved through the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) phenomenological analysis which accounted for validity through reflection, detailed above. This research is generalizable only to millennials growing up in Greater Havana during the Special Period. Therefore, this study is not generalizable to Cuba as a whole, through other generations, or locations. More research is required to understand those other experiences.

Recall bias is a consideration in any research that uses memory as a tool for understanding the past. Recall bias may occur when using oral history or interviews as a method of instrumentation. Human subjects do not always recall event accurately, the longer the time of recall, or if there was trauma involved, memories can be skewed. It is imperative for researchers to account for any potential issues regarding participants memory by triangulating the interviews with each other and other available data.

Recall bias is adjusted for by reaching saturation in your population sample, and by triangulating the data with previous research (Moustakas, 1994). The results of this study reinforced statements that were given to the researcher by Cubans, while in Cuba in July 2016. In addition to corroborating with the sentiments expressed previous literature (Carnoy, et. al., 2007; Gasperini, 2000; Kirp, 2013; Kozol, 1978; Ripley, 2013). In Kirp (2013) Cuban students outperformed American-born students in Northern New Jersey. The results of that study concluded that it was due to the Cuban culture surrounding the importance of education is what made the difference for these students. In Kozol (1978) and Gasperini (2000), Cuban students expressed to the researchers the importance education is for them. When speaking with Kozol, students reiterated that they are free because they are educated (1978). Carnoy, et. al. (2007) and Ripley (2013) compared Cuban students against students from all over the world, where Cuban students continually outperformed other students. In all these studies, Cubans expressed a high value on free education, the same sentiments expressed through this study explored further in Chapter 4. Thus, completing one part of triangulation.

The second part of triangulation, saturation, was reached through the six participants as no new information was provided to the researcher. Without knowing

what other participants discussed, all of the participants expressed similar experiences and thoughts regarding their education. During the interviews, no new information was provided that was dissimilar to what the other participants said. Reaching saturation and corroborating previous research triangulates the data from this study and proves validity. Oral history or interviewing remains a valid and reliable tool when data is triangulated and the study reaches participation (Moustakas, 1994).

Human Subject Research

This research did not pose a risk to study participants. There is no risk of psychological or physical harm. A number of steps were taken to guarantee the protection of participants in the study, before any data collection began. Upon being identified to participate, appropriate consent forms were collected and securely protected in a locked file for the duration of this study. Any email correspondences were copied and filed in the same locked file as other identifying information and then deleted from the researchers' email. The researcher's personal computer is secured through a password and fingerprint scanner that all other data, including transcription were stored on. All data will continue to be securely stored in this manner for the time period required by the IRB (Internal Board Review).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provided a detailed overview of the initial project methodology, and this research projects methodology. This included the initial projects' planned design, research questions, sample and recruitment, study sites, inclusion and exclusion criteria and planned data analysis. This chapter also overviewed interviewing difficult populations, which lead to the finalized project. The second half of this chapter detailed

the research design, research questions, qualitative approach, the researcher's role, sample and recruitment, the study site, inclusion and exclusion eligibility criteria, data analysis, a discussion of reliability, validity, and generalizability, and the protection of human subjects in this study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This study focused on the experiences of six Cuban Americans literacy education in Cuba. All of the participants are in the millennial generation, and therefore attended primary school in the 1990's. The youngest of the participants graduated high school in the early 2000's. The educational experiences of these six individuals begin to paint a picture of what schooling thirty years after the revolution was like.

Phenomenological analysis was used as the methodology to understand the participant's experiences. Four of the interviews were women and two were male. All six of the interviews grew up in the greater Havana area of Cuba and went to school in approximately the same years. The participants were given the option to choose to interview in English or Spanish. The researcher gave agency to each of the participants where they are able to switch back and forth if needed when describing anything. It was offered to review transcripts, all declined but asked for final paper, which will be provided upon approval.

All of the interviews were completed between January and March 2019. Four of the six interviews were held in person; the first two interviews were held on the Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey-Newark's (Rutgers-Newark) campus, the last two interviews were held in the participant's private residences. The third and fourth interviews were conducted via cellphone. The in-person interviews were recorded on two devices, a cellphone and a separate recorder. The phone interviews were recorded solely on the separate recorder. During interview three the recorder died and turned off during

the first minute and the researcher will rely on their notes for the purposes of analysis.

This chapter details their group and individual lived experiences; thus, the chapter is divided into two sections with the first part detailing the overall and the individual, and the second part discussing the themes that emerged as a group.

Section One: Participant Descriptions (Textural)

The six participants are detailed in the table below. The table displays the participants' pseudonym, gender, the highest level of educational attainment in Cuba if they attended any level of school outside of Cuba, the municipality they attended school in, the year they immigrated to the United States of America, if they have children and their children's ages, and indicates what experience they have with schools in the United States of America;

As a whole, all of the participants had an education that placed an emphasis on books, believed that Cuba provided them with an strong education, believed that the United States provides more job opportunities, and agreed that education in Cuba has declined since the time they were in school.

Each of the participants, individually, expressed that Cuba's education has since declined and that they felt some of the effects of this during their time in school. Two of the participants relayed information from their family that still lives in Cuba, one of the participants conveyed the experiences of her friend's child in regards to Cuba's educational decline, and the other three participants spoke to this via their experiences working in Cuban schools. It should be noted that all of the participants have graduate level degrees. Advanced degrees are common for Cubans in this age bracket.

Graph 2. Participant Profiles

Name	Gender	In Cuban schools through	Languages Spoken	Municipality	School outside of Cuba	Year Immigrated to USA	Children	Experience in USA Schools
Maria	Female	Some Master's	Spanish, English, French	Maríel & Bauta	Yes- currently in graduate school in USA	2014	No	Yes- Masters Student
Yahaira	Female	Undergrad	Spanish & English	Habana del Este, Alamar	No	2016	No	No
Manuel	Male	Undergrad	Spanish, English, Portuguese, Russian, & French	Habana Vieja	Yes- Master's degree in Mexico	2016	Yes- young child, no age provided	Yes- as professor
Emilia	Female	Undergrad	Spanish, English, French, & Latin	San Nicolás de Bari	Yes- Master's degree in Mexico	2015	Yes- toddler	Yes- Doctoral Student
Jorge	Male	Undergrad	Spanish & English	10 de Octubre	Yes- PhD in Mexico	2016	Yes- toddler	Yes- as professor
Nancy	Female	Undergrad	Spanish & English	Habna del Este, Alamar	Yes- Master's in Mexico	2016	Yes- toddler	Yes- as a paraprofessiona l in grade school

Graph 2 depicts each of the six participants pseudonym, gender, language(s) spoken, the municipality they attended school in, if they attended school outside of Cuba, the year they immigrated to the USA, if they have children, and if they have experience in US schools.

Maria. Maria was the first interview completed. The interview was held on the campus of Rutgers-Newark. She immediately appeared open and informative. She grew up outside of Havana as an only child to a single mother. The primary schools she attended were in the Mariel and Bauta municipalities. She attended primary school (grades 1-6) in the 1990's, as did the other five participants in this study.

Maria immigrated to the United States of America in 2014 after finishing only part of the requirements for a graduate degree in Cuba. Maria believes that compared to the United States of America, that Cuban education is stronger because "having free education is a major thing" because children grow up knowing they will be educated and can study whatever they want. She goes on to say, "right now, I am going to school for graduate (program in the USA) and its super expensive. And I am going to a very expensive university also so the debt that I have is a lot." Maria goes on to explain that she came to the USA to study for her graduate degree because after attending her undergraduate institution she was well-prepared for the workforce. Undergraduate degrees in Cuba typically are over five years as opposed to four, as in the case of the USA. After being in classes in New Jersey, she believed that her "education was pretty good compared to people that have studied the same thing here (USA)".

Maria is literate in three languages; Spanish, English, and French. She stated "I speak Spanish of course, that is my native (language). English now. During Cuba, I went to the French Alliance for four years... I've lost some French, but I was able to communicate French too." Spanish, her native language, was always present in her home while growing up. She also attended *Circo Infantil* (state-funded day care in Cuba) beginning at six months old (the age of enrollment has since been moved up to a year). At

Ciclo Infantil, students are cared provided food, read to, and play games. After *Ciclo Infantil*, she attended *prescholar* (state-funded preschool in Cuba) where there is a curriculum to prepare the students for primary school.

For Maria, she attended three drastically different primary schools, the first she described as being:

bad because a lot of professors weren't going to that school, so I barely had any class. I went to that school up to second grade so at that point my mom changed me to another school that was like... a better school

However, the second school she appreciated more, despite disagreeing with the teaching methods:

The second one, he didn't have the best methods. I would say he was a little violent sometimes... (he would) get angry with students and at that time you have like 40 like... anything between 30 students to 40 students per professors.... I mean at that time; a professor would have a class full of students for like one professor. That one specifically he used to be like sometimes he'd get angry and yeah it wasn't good. But he was a good professor I have to say... he was a good professor.

Her experience, regardless of the angry teacher was a positive experience for Maria. She has fond memories of learning languages. She excitedly said:

actually, while I was in primary school, I took French classes. That was my first encounter with French, and I think that's maybe why I decided to continue elsewhere because it was wasn't for everyone because usually you get placed into English. But in that classroom where I was did French instead of English. So, I had for like a semester I think that I had French and I still remember some from when I learned back then.

Cuban schools provided Maria the opportunity to learn other languages, outside of the standard Spanish and English curriculum. She stated that for most students they receive English instruction; forty-five minutes daily in primary school, and ninety minutes in secondary school. She explained:

English is what you get in school the most. I remember mainly taking English when I was in... I went to boarding school from eleven, from tenth to twelfth grade because at my time that was the only option that you had. Soo... there I remember taking English. Learning the regular verbs, learning to like the conjugation and all of that. Yeah... That's the only English I really took.

Although she had only two years of English instruction, because her primary years were filled with French lessons, she said that she was able to communicate in English after twelfth grade.

Maria fondly recalls books being a large part of her youth. There were three books that deeply resonated with her;

It was *Mama, Papa, y Yo*, and that explains how the reproductive system. Because my mom was psychology so for it was like a thing... so how the reproductive system in a woman works and that was the story of the books. So, I remember that story and that was even before knew how to read but then I knew how to read and that would be part of my reading. I remember another one *bohona ceta*. It was about... a mushroom. So, it was like growing and growing and they were like trying to get people away from the rain so to keep them... dry. So, they would go under the ceta, and as the rain came through it would get bigger and bigger so they could like come have more people underneath it... the thing. I remember those three things. Those two books and then José Martí too. That's very important in every Cuban children's life. *Lalalora*.

When questioned regarding the difficulty of Martí's writings, she went on to say;

I didn't read it but... that was something that I grew up with because I used to have the books so that was something that... I mean, you know how your parents will read you stories and that becomes part of your repertoire.

The third important book in her life was her primary textbook. It had "like very simple sentences" where you began to try "to conjugate". She further described that the primary textbook had:

these main characters that will go along the book. So, they will have like images for example for showing tallness, like likes tomatoes or something like that. They would put a picture of a tomato. It was like very... It was

full of white space which was good... It would have the image and the sentence which was very concise which is also good... so that's what I remember from that book. So, you have like... I remember for example "Nail" they would put a picture of the nail and put the word how it was written so you have the visual reference and the writing reference.

Schooling in Cuba is standardized and regulated. Maria recalls *Maestros* (Master Teachers) coming into her primary school to evaluate her teachers and the students. She believes that students are no longer evaluated in this manner, but during the 1990s and early 2000s when she attended school, they were.

Upon completing primary and secondary school (compulsory grades 7- 9) Maria used tutors to help her gain admissions to boarding school for eleventh and twelfth grade as she wished to pursue a college career. Her tutors were also her professors that tutored after school for extra income.

Maria believes that the Cuban education system has declined saying:

I think right now that education is a little worse than it was before and that I got like all the professors that were more committed with teaching, then they like started doing this program where they were trying to graduate a lot of professors because they run out of professor and it was like the professor emeritus. They were just forming in like 6 months, one year and usually people who didn't do really well in school. So, you're making people who don't do well at school like professors. So, I think that that like screwed things up a little bit but in my time I did no, I didn't have that experience. On the contrary, in my opinion I had like very good professors

She goes on to discuss how Cuba does not have many amenities or infrastructure that, in her opinion, is essential for learning. She attributes it to a number of things that occurred in Cuba after the Special Period (1991-2000), an economic decline due to the fall of the Soviet Union; poor teacher training, tourism taking skilled professionals out of the teaching workforce, and the introduction of classroom TV's. Maria said that the TV courses were the worst part of her education where everything was pre-recorded.

Students began to not pay attention in class because of the TV classes. She clearly remembers recorded English classes:

They started doing these tele-classes that was on the TV. And most of the English classes now that I think about it. In secondary school they were in TV. So, you would sit on the TV, and you would listen to these people, and learn English that way.

Some of the other interviewees talk about it in depth, during the Special Period the government created a *Profesores Emergentes* (emergent teacher's) program that trained people to be teachers and recruited high achieving high school and college students to teach the primary grades:

You have this fast rout routes that they created, and teachers is unfortunately one of them because for them you have to be better prepared. It was almost like a joke. I remember when I was in boarding school they came trying to recruit people being teacher and for me it was, I had to take a very hard test to get into this school and there's no way that now you're going to take me to teaching. You know because that's like a bad thing, being a teacher is a bad thing in Cuba.

Maria expands on this notion of teaching becoming less respectable of a profession by explaining that anyone who was in school during the Special Period realized that they needed a job that pays well so they can leave the country, this means do not become a teacher, or choose a career in healthcare (including being a doctor). "If I become doctor and then you want to leave you need to almost release you. It's like I'm almost like a property to them so it's very complicated." The Cuban government requires all citizens to give back to the system that helped them with education, healthcare, and food. Most individuals are required to do a set number of years, based on their profession, with one additional military year if they are male. This military year for males is called *service de social* (service of society). Maria describes it as:

Service de social is a time where you repay whatever you use when you go to school. So basically, you will get like a lower salary because you are like a trainee or something like that. And that lasts, that used to last two years I think it was one or two then they... added a new year so I had to take two, three years. For men they do two because like they do military service and that counts as one.

She continues;

...if would have (been) in the hospital and I become a part of that system it would have been like more complicated. You need a release; you need like a... I don't know how many steps, cause for them it's like coming from their perspective it's like I don't have many people in this field and this is very important for the social group and all of that and I'm giving you this (education) for free so I really need to keep the people that I have."

Maria believes that people in her generation move mainly due to financial reasons, salaries have not risen much, if any while subsidies quantity and quality has declined steadily.

Maria was the interviewee that stressed that there were many differences in education based on the municipality the school was located in. Each school allowed a specific number of students from each municipality to enter, the bad municipalities had lower entrance score standard than the better municipalities. She also stressed that the Special Period, when she and all of the other participants were in school, is when things began to change. Maria believes that by the time she was in university that the K-12 education system had almost fully deteriorated.

Yahaira. Yahaira was the second interview completed. At the beginning of the interview she seemed apprehensive and spoke quite hurriedly. As the interview progressed, she seemed to visually relax even though she kept up the fast pace of conversation. The interview took place in a quiet corner of a coffee shop on the campus of Rutgers-Newark. Before immigrating to the USA in 2016, she grew up in the Alamar

section of Havana, with one older brother. In Cuba she completed all of her schooling through an undergraduate degree. She believes that Cuba does a lot well in terms of education, but there is a lot that she thinks can be improved on.

Yahaira speaks Spanish and English, not receiving English instruction until her time the university she attended. She recalls that she was consistently taught Spanish in school beginning in first grade. She continued to explain that “they (teachers) teach you the letters, the sounds of the letters. And then they ask you to say the sounds quickly. For example, the word “mamá”, they teach you “m”, “a”, “m”, “a”. Now quickly “mamá”, like that”. Yahaira was clear that she was taught to read phonetically, progressing from easier letters “m” and gradually getting more difficulty “p”.

When asked who she practiced Spanish with, she responded;

most of the time teachers. And then when I – I mean, when I go back home I have to practice with my mom. I did it with my mom, with my brother. Because I used to live with them, so yeah. Those are the people who most – who practiced Spanish with me.

Unlike Maria, Yahaira did not receive English instruction prior to university. When asked about her English classes, she responded there was:

nothing... in school in Cuba, there is supposed to be an English teacher starting in elementary school. But in my case, there wasn't one in my school. There never was. So, I was supposed to take English, but I didn't take it because there was no English teacher until I got to university.

She recalls that the majority of her homework during her early primary years consisted of reading a story and coming back to school knowing that story fully. She said that her older brother or mother would help her by listening to her read. Yahaira believes that her mother was crucial to her positive education experience because she always supported what was being taught in school:

If the teacher had told us to read *El Soldadito de Plomo*, then my mom would of course keep cooking. She cooked while I read at the same time. I mean, I would be reading and she in the kitchen listening to me. And I would read the text that the teacher had told us to read. If I finished it very quickly, then she would make me read it again.

Like Maria, books played a large role in her childhood. However, Yahaira did not have the fondest memories of all the books she was given. Describing one that was assigned to her in early primary she states that;

there was one that I hated because it was huge. It was long. It was called *El Soldadito de Plomo (The Steadfast Tin Soldier)*. There were others that were like songs. So, you could – you read it as if it were a reading and then you practiced singing the song. There was one about a frog, but I can't remember it.

She expanded on her literacy education saying that they;

did several things. We did dictations. They dictated things. They dictated paragraphs out of those books, those long texts, and we had to write it down. Or they would also read – they would read a sentence and make another student continue the reading. So another person continued the reading. They would make someone else stand up – so they would say to another child, “You continue.” That forced you to not only practice reading, but also practice concentrating because you had to be – since you didn't know who they would call on next, you had to be following along with the reading at all times almost being scolded by the teacher.

Yahaira thinks that these methods are possibly why Cuban schools are regarded as being good, but she insisted that the school infrastructure is the thing that Cuba is lacking behind. She things her primary school was “very ugly” and it wasn't painted, it was surrounded by “by a lot of buildings – houses, dwellings. The street was very bad. It was difficult for cars to drive on the street because it was full of potholes”. This deteriorated infrastructure is something that anyone who lives further from the city center must contend with. Yahaira spoke to this, saying:

I mean, I studied in Havana, but inside Havana it was a municipality kind of far away – more to the east of Havana. The closer to the center of the city you study, the better the schools are. Here it's like they're a little uglier, I think.

Despite these issues, Yahaira said that she “was in school during the good times” specifically because of the quality of teachers. She recalled that all of her teachers were older, and in her opinion, they were professionals in contrast to “nowadays I know that teachers are like 20 years old and they teach children that are like, I don't know, 13 years old” due to the program, *Profesores Emergentes*. She explicated:

I remember perfectly my first teacher. First grade to fourth grade. She was a very patient teacher. I don't know if it's relevant, but I really value – when it comes to teaching, don't yell at me, don't – and that teacher was incredibly patient. Sometimes when she was absent, we got another teacher who was the opposite of her. I remember that I hated her. So, I appreciated my teacher more. I would say, “I'm glad Daisy is my teacher” – that was her name. So yes, she was very patient. She did a lot of activities with us, like games. I think that with her we learned by playing as well. Which for me is important because I think that for any child – I mean, when you are a child, that is the age for playing games. And that's why when she did it, it was more appealing. I also remember that when it came time to punish us, it was – they made us do what we used to call *copias*, which was I had to repeat a sentence like ten hundred or one hundred or two hundred times. And that was exhausting. That was tremendously bad. But that was the way – for example, when we made spelling mistakes, they would make us write the sentence with certain words written correctly a hundred times, and then you would never forget how to write it.

Yahaira also makes it a point to say that when she was in school, they did not need or use tutors unless they were studying for admission to the university. She points out that that is a norm for Cubans in school presently.

She believes that the best things about Cuban education are that it is compulsory, the teachers were good (in her years), and it is free to all Cubans:

If you don't go to school, there are real consequences. No parent can say, "If my child doesn't want to go to school, he doesn't have to go." You can't do that because you can go to jail for that. They are quite strict about that, and I think that is a strength. Because they'll go and look for you at home. You have to say why your child is not going to school, justifying it very well. They monitor it closely. It's incredible.

She believes the teachers were well prepared during her time in school because they "were in it for altruism, because it was their calling". Yahaira says that, for the most part, her teachers taught her how to critically think, and that is the skill that is transferable. She also places emphasis on high quality schooling being really free, to everyone. This point stands out to her as she has attended conferences with people from many other countries and their free education was sub-par.

The biggest issue for Yahaira was school being politically influenced, but she likes that religion present in schools, as it is in the USA. "Starting in first grade there is a slogan that says "Pioneros por el comunismo, seremos como el Che" ("Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che [Guevara])", and she said that none of her classmates nor she knew what it meant, but it was repeated every day. The songs she was taught were very political and the history that was taught was "in agreement with the system that exists in Cuba". As most things are highly regulated, if they noticed that a child was not in complete support with the political landscape, the government would visit homes to discuss your "parents' ideologies". Both her and her parents believe that "they (government) get involved in such personal things that they have no business being involved in".

Yahaira was the most vocal regarding her disdain for the highly politicized system, saying:

When you're a child you don't realize it. You repeat. When you are a child, you say, "Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che." And they start telling you all those beautiful things. And you start to believe them because you can't really understand them. There's no Internet access... So, you just have what the teachers tell you. It is not possible to search for other things. And that's why it also restricts your view a little, because you don't have anything to compare it to. You don't have anyone telling you, "this isn't like this. This isn't really like this." You don't have that point of view. In other things that don't have to do with politics, yes, they're more open to critical thinking... You grow up with that. And later on, it is very hard to realize that – when you start to believe something else it's like, "My God, I was in a bubble because they were doing this to me."

She concludes by saying:

Yes, education and healthcare are free, but you don't spend your whole life in hospitals or schools. Because there comes a time when you leave school. What then? You're very well educated. You have a vision. And then what? How do you survive? How do you support yourself? So, when you face that reality after thinking your whole life that the system is the best in the world – but then when you have to support yourself – because while you're thinking that, your parents support you. When you leave school and your parents don't support you anymore because you have to spread your wings and fly by yourself, it's very frustrating to realize that everything you have experienced is practically a lie. It's very, very, very frustrating. And of course, that's when you start thinking about leaving the country. Because it's like you see there's no path to change. There's no path. And that does affect the schools as well. I think that the schools are one of the main institutions responsible for – or one of the main agents, let's say, that make you – that start to (believe) communist things, political things – school basically. Not even family.

Manuel. Manuel was the third interview. The recording device died during Manuel's interview; therefore the researcher is left with just the field notes from this interview. Manuel grew up in Habana Vieja and attended school from primary school through his university degree. He then went to Mexico to pursue a graduate degree. In Mexico he also studied English, which was taught phonetically. Currently he is a professor and speaks five languages; Spanish, English, Portuguese, Russian, and French.

He recalled his primary years were good, but the buildings were falling apart and dirty. His parents and grandmother were important to his education and encouraged reading beyond what the teachers assigned. He said that the majority of his teachers were “great, strong women” who were much older. He had teachers that were white and Afro-Cubana and both teachers were well respected.

During his time in school, 1990s-2000s, there was a lot of change in schools. Specifically, in 1994 he realized that there were no textbooks and that he was forced to start recycling all of the materials. That recycling continued through the duration of his schooling in Cuba. His school also focused more on being bilingual in English, which was not the case for his first few years of schooling. English courses began for him in grade 5 and continued for only a few years. He made it a point to say that even though the focus switched to English, they were taught via videos on a TV and that is why he had to learn English properly in Mexico. He blames the international conflicts for these rapid changes.

He has a young son that he has taught the alphabet in Spanish. He plans on using the same methods he was taught to teach his son. As a professor, Manuel has taught in many countries, including the USA and Cuba and he believes that combining the good things from all of the systems is the best way. Overall, he has a positive view of education in the United States. Similarly, to Maria and Yahaira he agreed that Cuban education was really good for a long time but has since declined. He said that he, like many people his age, had to leave the country for better opportunities.

Emilia. Emilia was the fourth interview overall and the second interview by phone. She immigrated to the United States in 2015 to pursue a doctorate. She is the

participant that grew up the furthest away from Havana, in San Nicolás de Bari, where she attended school until she went to the city for her undergraduate degree. Before coming to the United States, she earned her master's in Mexico. She can "speak Spanish, English, French", and "can read and translate from Latin". She also taught school in Cuba for a period of time before leaving.

She was exposed to Spanish and French in Cuba the most, and only received instruction in English for two semesters. She studied French for six years at the Alianza Francesa de Cuba (French Alliance specialty program). She took classical languages in undergrad and that is where she picked up Latin. As Spanish is her mother tongue, learning began at home. She goes on to say:

But if I had to name a strong influence on my education in Spanish, I would say my grandmother on my father's side, because she was an elementary school teacher. And every afternoon we would talk a lot and she would help me go over – she would read to me and teach me beyond what I would learn at school.

Following her grandmother, her mother was a great influence in her early language learning. Her mother placed her in school as soon as she was eligible, first she attended *circle infantil*, then *prescolar*. Her mother then placed her in a school that was a little further from her house because it had a pool.

She says of her elementary school, "The school was normal by Cuba's standards. But if you compare it to a school in the United States, you could say it was a poor school. But by Cuba's standards, it was fine". Her school also provided food for all of the students, but she cautioned that she went to elementary school during the Special Period so there was a consistent shortage of supplies. She said her family was not affected as harshly by the Special Period because they had family living in the USA and sending

over money regularly. The school, and neighborhood often suffered under the Special Period. She said:

The school – sometimes – I do remember that sometimes – in the beginning when I started there to learn how to swim, the school almost always had water. But later, around fourth grade, it almost never had water. The pool was always empty because when they would fill it up, it would leave the entire neighborhood around the school without water.

Despite the issues with infrastructure, Emilia enjoyed her schooling. She spoke highly of her teachers:

first grade, I remember my teacher Rafaela very well because she was very maternal, and she helped us learn a lot by playing. She had – now that I think about it as an adult, she had very effective teaching strategies for that age group. And then in second grade until sixth grade – at the other school– I would say that the school – the teachers were good...because I had a teacher starting in fourth grade – so from about seven years old until I left that school – until 10 years old – named Pedro (redacted). And he was passionate about history and literature. His personality shaped me even to this day. I mean, that’s where my passion for history and literature started.

Her elementary years were before *Profesores Emergentes* began and thus Emilia said all of her teachers were excellent “with great training who had chosen to study education from the beginning. They were old teachers and very, very good”. She did not have to use a tutor until she began studying for entrance exams, much like the other participants.

Emilia has a young son that she has intentionally taught the sounds of letters, starting with vowels. She has “worked with children for many years”, therefore she uses the same “the strategy of teaching the alphabet and letters through music”. She seeks songs with specific words for him to begin to learn those words. Her son, who is not yet 3 years old, “already knows the letters of the alphabet. And he knows the numbers. But – and he also recognizes his name, for example”. He recently started preschool where he is

being taught English, Emilia and her husband deliberately are giving him time to work through learning two languages, including mixing them up at time. She continues that her and her husband want her son to speak more than one language so he can be tied to his culture:

As a strategy so that he doesn't lose his Spanish, what we're doing at home is only speak to him in Spanish, so that way he will become bilingual. At home he will only receive input in Spanish. And then outside of the home, at school, he will learn in English.

Beyond Spanish, Emilia believes it is important to know other languages to be exposed to world cultures. Her son has already taken "a few French classes" and he "already knows some songs in French". She thinks her high regard for culture and language come from growing up in Cuba.

Emilia believes that in Cuba;

one of the best things is the dialogue that exists between students and teachers. Because students in Cuba always see teachers as colleagues. And that lets them be much more open and express what they think at all times. I mean, not thinking so much about what the teachers expect them to say to make them happy, but rather what they truly believe about a certain phenomenon or reality.

As she has worked in both school systems, she compared the open dialogue that she prized from Cuba, saying it "is missing a little bit from other education systems, for example here in the United States". She goes on to say that:

in elementary school, it was very helpful for them to teach me grammar from a very early age. I mean, they taught Spanish language not only for communicative purposes, but also for us to understand the grammar of the language, the way of thinking about the language. And here, grammar is not taught. As a teacher, I have realized that the kids don't have a grasp of what the parts of a sentence are or how the language is structured. And that is taught in Cuba.

Similarly, to the other participants, Emilia thinks that Cuba's education system has decayed directly due to the watered-down teaching programs. She thinks Cuba should "go back to the time of when there were dedicated teachers... teachers for whom teaching was a lifelong profession. Because the *emergentes* do not have a true profession. That was a mistake". Also, Emilia thinks it is important for Cuba to:

get rid of the televised classes completely. Those were a big, big mistake...first because there was no longer any interaction between students and teachers. Second, because the televised classes couldn't – and this is related to the first point – they couldn't truly measure students' level of knowledge using something that was of course pre-recorded.

In comparison she thinks:

that higher education in the United States is excellent...it is very good. But elementary school, the education that children receive, is not so good. Those early moments are what lay the groundwork for how children will interact with teaching and learning processes going forward. And for example, I have worked with children who at six years old don't know how to identify numbers and letters. And that is concerning, because later they are going to... school. And they will end up in a bad position because they will not be able to continue studying. So, I think that I would say they should rethink elementary school basically. That would be my contribution. I mean, that's what I think would be fundamental.

Jorge. Jorge was the fifth interview overall, and the third interview in person.

This interview took place in his apartment in the late afternoon before he went to work. Jorge moved to the United States with his wife in 2016. He grew up in the 10 de Octubre section of Havana. He attended school in Havana through undergrad, earned his master's in Spain, then returned to Cuba to earn a second master's degree before pursuing a doctorate from Mexico.

Jorge speaks Spanish and English; however, he says that he does not actually speak English well if he is comparing it to Spanish. He also studied French at the French

Alliance in Cuba, but he does not consider himself knowing French. When discussing learning language, he thinks that the school is not only the space to learn. You need the family too". In his home, his grandmother on his fathers' side was an important influence for him because she was a former teacher and she spend a significant amount of time teaching her grandchildren things in addition to what they learned in the classroom.

Jorge says everything was different in the 1980s in Cuba, he was really young and only attended two years of school in the late 80's, but he still remembers a significant difference in the neighborhood dynamics. Prior to the revolution his family had more money and a bigger house, but that was lost during the revolution. His family lived moved into "the poorest house of the family" located in "a middle-class neighborhood – low-middle-class neighborhood", pointing out that "social stratification in Cuba, (is) not the same one that we have in the USA". Jorge says his family spent "a lot of time and a lot of resources trying to do something better with me in the neighborhood".

He grew up reading a lot and currently purchases books written in Spanish from other countries for his young daughter. He and his wife consciously only speak to their daughter in Spanish because they believe that they "will ruin her accent" continuing by saying:

neither I nor my wife is able to pronounce the sounds in English the way a native speaker would. So, I think that will wait until she starts school. I don't know if you've thought about it – you must have thought about it, right? But in the United States there is a lot of segregation based on how you speak English. Sometimes I'd like to think that people forgive my Sofia Vergara-sounding accent – you know who Sofia Vergara is, right?...So, if you don't like my accent, I say goodbye to another job. But people's accents on a cultural level – I don't know anything, but I see people as having a higher cultural level. And here people evaluate you based on how you speak. So, a big problem that occurs with children here

is that they need teachers who know how to speak upper-class English. It's disturbing, but that's the way it is. It's disturbing, elitist, classist, but that's the way it works.

Growing up, he says that his family:

is a family that reads a lot. They read all the time. So, there isn't – like a (line) clearly separating what was required because it was homework and what you would do because you were imitating a behavior in your home where everyone would read, so you read. It's something quite natural.

Continuing by saying that children in Cuba begin reading before children here in the USA. In Cuba, “when you are three, four years old, you start reading, reading, reading”, and by Kindergarten “they start learning how to read and write (by) five years (old)”.

Jorge's elementary school was “small school, very small. The school was a house that had belonged to someone with a lot of money in Cuba. The house is a house – if I remember correctly, from 1907 – a big house, a kind of palace” that was converted to a school after the revolution. At the time that he attended this school, there were less than 200 students from preschool through sixth grade. He recalls that the school was “a typical school where there are two preschool classes, two first-grade classes, and like that up to sixth grade. The environment (was) quite relaxed, quite calm”.

For Jorge, he could clearly see when things began to change as far as his education was concerned. By the time he reached grade 9, Cuba was in the “middle of the economic crisis where there were many teachers – they had had to leave the education sector to go work in other areas”, during the Special Period. This left teachers in the system that “either very young and they were studying, and they had to fill those jobs – they were either very young or very old and so they couldn't make that career change”. In hindsight, this is when the middle class disappeared because those who could left the

country or the teaching professions, and that was the start of the generational education loss. He also noticed an uptick of violence in schools at this time;

they had corporal punishment at that school. If you didn't behave well, they would put you – they would stand you behind a door or hit you with a ruler. Not like a Victorian school, but pretty close to it. In other words, there was discipline.

Jorge said that during his years in school tutors were not used regularly, except for entrance exams, much alike the other participants in this study. The competitive school that he attended had extremely difficult entrance exams. He explained that not many students actually gain acceptance to these schools:

Suppose that out of 250 or 300 students in the ninth grade, which is the last grade – 10 of us went to (school name redacted). Of those 10, I imagine that eight had hired tutors. It was very difficult to make that jump without hiring tutors. Because the education that you received in school was not at the same level that the exams required. So, you had to fill that gap by studying in private classes.

He said that he knows about tutors being a pervasive problem in Cuba currently:

It is my understanding that nowadays people use tutors because there are problems with the teachers. So, families who have more money, who are more well off, pay for a tutor so that the tutor can in some ways improve the education that students receive at school.

Jorge attributes the current need for tutors to the issues in the teaching profession.

He exemplified this by saying when he was younger:

an elementary school teacher would earn, let's say, 200 Cuban pesos. Two hundred Cuban pesos at that time – it would be a hundred and something dollars per month. And at that time, it was not a large salary. A doctor would earn 400 or 500 at that time. It was not a large salary, but it was large enough that teachers could pay for their basic needs. I'm talking about the 80s. In the 80s, the Cuban subsidy system – the food rations that they gave you – worked very well. And they sold clothes, shoes, books at subsidized prices. That means that with 200 pesos, a teacher lived pretty well. Not super well, but pretty well. So, the people who were teachers did it because they liked it, generally speaking.

Despite the large shifts he has witnessed, Jorge believes that he was given a strong education in Cuba. Emphatically stating:

I think that poor people in Cuba have access to an education that is one of the most admirable, one of the best of any third-world country. I even think it could compete with that of first-world countries. The level of access that lower-class people have to education – that is amazing. You find people living below minimum wage and they have access to free education where the school gives them food, gives them a uniform, and the students have basic knowledge. That is great. That is very good.

He goes on saying however, “an essential part of Cuban textbooks is support for the Revolution and socialism and proletarian internationalism”. Jorge believes that all countries socialize children, but some countries do it “in a more intelligent way, sometimes in a less intelligent way, but they all do it”.

Jorge summed up his thoughts by explaining:

Cuba is going through a cultural shift. Cultural shifts are difficult for those of us that live through them. They are difficult, and the proof that they are difficult is that you are talking to an immigrant now. I don't want to be here. I would prefer to be in my house, in my country, speaking my language and doing something that I've always done but probably more easily and with less stress. Cultural shifts are difficult. And the educational model, just like society as a whole, not just education, is undergoing a cultural shift. Things are changing at this point in time. Education today is much worse than it was 20 or 30 years ago. There is less money. There is less interest. Budgets have been cut. And you can see that. You can notice it. I think Cuba has to create an educational model that is feasible, that is economically viable, where there is a more or less a balance between costs and benefits without falling into liberalism. I mean, without turning poor people into just numbers. I think that education – to me it is important that it be free and universal. And that needs to be promoted. But only saying that education should be free does not mean the costs should be equally distributed. The poor should not pay for it. The rich should pay for it. Things shouldn't be given away to poor people, but they should be given the tools to escape poverty. I mean, I'm telling you things that everybody knows – that are not easy to solve, that do not get solved. You are American, you have an incredible education budget. Now college is free if

you are a full-time student in New York. But people cannot escape poverty in one, two, three generations. There are other things that exist in society that cannot be changed with money, that cannot be changed by a government. It's more complicated than that. And that takes much, much longer to take hold. The topic of ideology in Cuba bothers me, the crude way in which it is presented. I would like for them to teach children how to think. It is very difficult to teach someone to think – very difficult. In Cuba students repeat, repeat, repeat. That is a big problem in Cuban education almost everywhere. Teachers' salaries should be increased. They have to invest in education. And that is not done. Very little is spent on teachers' salaries and nobody wants to be a teacher. So those who are teachers do not want to be. They don't like it. They hate it.

When asked about the education system in the USA, he said that he could not “give an opinion about the education system – I wouldn't dare to describe the education system in the United States” because it is so vast. From his experience in the tri-state area, the biggest problem he sees is social segregation. He states that “, the United States has the best education system in the world for those who can afford it, and the worst education system in the world for those who cannot afford it”. The repeated this point;

Let me repeat that. The best education system in the world for those who can afford it. They teach children four languages, they teach them singing, piano, music, dance, and they learn about the best historical figures and do the most beautiful things in the world. They speak Chinese. But the country has the worst system in the first world for poor people. Why? Because the poor – nobody locks them in the ghetto. Nobody tells the poor that they have to stay in the ghetto. But the system is designed so that the poor never leave the ghetto.

Nancy. Nancy was the sixth and final interview, and the fourth in person interview. She grew up in Habana del Este-Alamar with her sister, parents, and grandparents. Nancy immigrated to the United States in 2016. She attended schooling through her undergraduate degree in Cuba and earned her master's degree in Mexico, like a number of the other participants. She speaks Spanish and English, stating that she only received two years of English instruction and gained the majority of her skills since living

in the USA.

In addition to her teachers, Nancy's language acquisition was supported by her parents, sister, and uncle. She said that she recalls the teachers placing prominence on learning the letters and pronouncing them correctly, in regard to her Spanish instruction. "Then you put sounds together in simple words like "mamá", "papá"". She recounts that there were always numerous books during her elementary years. Her primary teachers would also use songs to teach words. Nancy also clearly remembers using a *componedor* (composing stick, direct translation) to make different words; "you have letters and then you change the letters and you make words and you learn like this". Upon learning to write, she remembers having to write in a notebook daily for homework.

Nancy has a young daughter that she teaches Spanish to as her first language. She says of her daughter:

It's different now because they learn like this. You don't teach with a curriculum. It's only the life. So, I – for me it's very incredible that they learn for the repetition. "Párate. Párate. Párate." She doesn't know, but the repetition she knows that it's "párate." Then when she's grown, I think you teach singular and plural, the different genders – female or masculine.

She also teaches her daughter vocabulary by always talking to her and asking "What is that? Tell me a word about feelings. Tell me – use your words." I teach everything – the nouns, everything". Nancy likes to use songs to teach her daughter, but she does not translate the songs, or seek the Spanish version, that her daughter may hear on a cartoon or by just living in the United States. Recently she was amazed by her toddler because she has not deliberately instructed her daughter in English:

Everything is in Spanish since three days old. Three days ago, I was very surprised because I never teach her letters because I think, "She's too

young.” And I was open one book and it was about letters and alphabet. It was to touch, to teach letters. And she start, “Y, B, D.” I say, “What? You know the letters and in English? What?” Only from the TV. And it was crazy because I never teach her the letters, and menos en inglés (less in English).

Her mother, who lives with her family is “worried because (her daughter) says “yellow” even if – “amarillo” because it’s too long”. While Nancy is not concerned that her young daughter is learning both languages at the same time, she is concerned about learning proper pronunciation in both languages:

We want that she speak very good Spanish and English. And if you want to speak Spanish correctly you need to speak very hard. In English it’s not like this. So – and she say like – let me see. “Ferrocarril” [with English “r” sound]. You need to say “ferrocarril” [with trilled Spanish “r” sound]. So you teach sounds, pronounce – how to pronounce well. (Ferrocarril means railway)

Discussing how Nancy herself learned English, she exclaimed that Cuba taught her English in a new way, not building off of her Spanish language knowledge. In retrospection she wondered” “Why they don’t teach me English like a child? You need to learn like this the letters and then how to put together to sounds, and then high-frequency words, and then blending””. She asserted that acquiring English in Cuba was learning a bunch of units that did not build off of one and another, she had to memorize English for the exam. Nancy felt that when she arrived in the United States that she “didn’t understand anything” English was like Chinese to her. She believes that she acquired the most English by working in schools here with children, because in her classes in Cuba there were many movies and television shows played in English with Spanish subtitles as the only form of instruction.

Her elementary school was further away from her house because her parents wanted her to go to a school that had better teacher/family relations. Nancy remembers her “principal was very nice. Was a kindly woman that was very caring about children. I remember some teachers are good, some teachers are bad. I remember a lot of violence in the classroom”. Nancy says the main perpetrators of violence were the assistant teachers. The assistant teachers slapped the kids when they were out of line, in the smallest way. The classrooms were full of children, so it was easy to get distracted. Nancy believes that the violence only got worse as Cuban education declined. She has a “friend that has a child, and the child was very upset, and he doesn’t want to go to school because the assistant teacher is so violent and say bad words and hit everybody. And it’s horrible”.

Nancy continues by saying that the majority of her teachers were qualified and good teachers, but things started to change while she was still in school. Her teachers were older, but Cuba hired a lot of young teacher to fill gaps and the young teachers were not as qualified. She fondly recalls social activities at her school:

Every morning you meet with the whole school and say the – cantan el himno (sing the hymn). There are some performance from other kids. It was nice because every – the whole school needs to meet every morning. Here I was surprised. When I was an assistant teacher, I was surprised that there isn’t any moment that everybody is joined together.

She said some of the best things her primary days offered were the ability for every child to learn how to swim at school, even though she still does not like to swim herself. The school also provided “vaccines for the children and they also go to the dentist”.

Like the other participants in this study, Nancy did not use a tutor during her education until she needed to study for entrance exams. She said that the situation is different now from what people who still live in Cuba tell her:

But my cousins for example said that the teachers don't explain the whole subject in the classroom because they let one part to the private class to receive money from the same children that they are students the whole day. So, this is too, too, too sad. And not every person have money to pay private class then after school. Of course, it's too bad. It is incredible. But the people said that that happens. Or for example, they sell the tests. They say, "Okay, you give me \$10 and I give you the test. Now you can memorize all the questions and respond very well".

Although unsure of the exact timing, Nancy believes that these things began while she was at university in the early 2000s and have since worsened further.

Despite the current issues and the persistent violence with assistant teachers, Nancy thinks highly of her time in schools. She also likes that in Cuba, children spend a lot of time on education. "In Cuba it's like 5:00 PM in elementary school" when students are released, and there are "more social spaces, more social moments" in Cuban schools. She does, still, have a number of recommendations on what could improve about Cuba's education system:

They can improve this violence in the classroom. They need to (allow) teachers have gained more salary. Because it's an important profession for the society, and they do not believe that you need to put economic support to this - to education. Because it's everything in the society and they do not put enough support for that. And it's terrible. The teachers are not prepared. They are too young. They do not have the pedagogy skills. It's too bad.

Nancy said that although her experience with the education system in the United States is limited, she does not like that there is no sense of community:

In Cuba there is more relationship between parents and teachers. And here you never go to the classroom. You really don't know what happens all day. And in Cuba the parents go to the classroom and talk with the teacher every day and ask what's going on. Here, no. It's like more space between both sides.

On a positive note, Nancy like that the USA had “a lot of materials” and “technology”. She thinks it is a positive that teachers in the United States have the full knowledge of the internet at their disposal.

Section Two: Themes (Structural)

Four major themes arose from the analysis of the data. For the Cuban American, millennial immigrants that grew up in Cuba their educational experiences were shaped by 1) The Special Period, 2) Infrastructure, 3) Language, and 4) Teaching as a Profession. Each theme will be discussed through the experiences of the participants and historically what was occurring in Cuba during the Special Period, as acceptable. The participants in this study all attended primary school between the years of 1987-2012, as they are all from the millennial generation. The current age ranges 23-38 years as of 2019. All six participants enjoyed their own education overall, but each said that the quality of education in Cuba has been steadily declining. The reason of this decline, according to the participants, is the Special Period where changes on a global scale affected the day to day of students in Cuba.

Special Period. The first, and overarching theme, is the Special Period. The Special Period in Cuba, or *el período especial en tiempos de paz* (The Special Period in Time of Peace), began in 1991 and continued through 2000 (Henken, 2009). As the name indicates, Cuba was a in a peaceful time, but the fall of the Soviet Union severely affected Cuba’s main source of imports and exports and therefore money. The early part of the Special Period was the most severe before Hugo Chávez’s, Venezuela became the primary trading partner and economic support for Cuba after he was elected in 1998 (Garth, 2017).

Prior to Venezuela stepping in and a major trade partner, Cuba was radically changed. Public transportation was now heavily relied on, and very unpredictable. During the Special Period, waiting for a bus could take up to three hours, power outages could last up to sixteen hours, food consumption was cut back to one-fifth of its previous level and the average Cuban lost about twenty pounds (Donovan, Rao, & Sandmann, 2008). Starvation was avoided, persistent hunger and malnutrition became a problem due to the deep reductions of food rations (Garth, 2017; Henken, 2009). Compounding the issues in Cuba, in 1996, the United States imposed the Helms-Burton Act in 1996 that placed penalties on businesses doing business with Cuba, and therefore cut a lot of humanitarian aid that was coming from the USA (Hillyard & Miller, 1998). Due the issues outlined above, the Cuban government was forced to contract tourism deals with European and South American countries, which began the tourism boom in Cuba. For historical context, in 2000, Vladimir Putin orchestrated an improvement in relations between Cuba and Russia which helped stabilize the Cuban government in addition to the influx of tourism, specifically from Germany.

Students in Cuba felt these national changes in a variety of ways; through their daily lives, and through the other themes that will be discussed in this study. Jorge, a professor, spoke of the historical context of the Special Period on his life:

When I was six years old, I started school in 1987, 1988. The crisis really began in 1991. If you remember, the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Two years later the Soviet Union fell apart and the crisis really began in Cuba. So that world protected by money, by the subsidies of the Soviet Union, that apparently stable, calm world in which things worked, fell apart. And that was the world in which I was living. If I compare my first-grade teacher, a black woman who studied during the Revolution, which is who teaches you how to read and write – an authoritarian black woman – remember that “black” is not an insult in Spanish, okay? She was an authoritarian

person but an excellent teacher. And my third-grade teacher, I remember her studying English during class because her dream for her life was to marry a foreigner so she could leave the country. So, you see how the values were backwards, right? It was as if the idea of being a teacher, of teaching, of contributing to society, ends up being at sometimes a punishment, because that same woman started earning – she continued to earn 200 pesos, and in the most difficult times of the crisis, 200 pesos was equivalent to two dollars without subsidies. Look at the difference. The model began to fall apart. It was not evident, and it did not happen overnight. But I studied for the first years of my life using old and new books, and I finished my studies using books that had been recycled from three, four, five years ago because we had nothing. They taught us how to write in the same notebook using as little space as possible to save paper.

Jorge continued by saying that by the time he finished sixth grade he lived in a country “country that was in the middle of an economic crisis”. Poignantly, Jorge recognized that the economic crisis was not the only thing occurring in Cuba:

The moral crisis took a little longer to arrive. Seeing the relationship between the economic model – between the economy and production of ideas, cultural production. One thing is closely linked to the other. Time has to pass for that. It was a school – looking back at it from the present – it was a school in a neighborhood where equality truly existed. What do I mean? There were middle-class professionals, perhaps my own parents who were doctors in Cuba, to very, very, very poor people – single mothers – and everyone lived in relative harmony and relative stability. And that is very good, and it worked quite well.

Jorge went on to discuss that when communism was no longer funded, it was not sustainable, and that is when schools really started to feel the effects of the politics. These effects will be further discussed in the themes below.

Jorge also highlighted a cultural point that is central to this discussion of education and Cuba. Jorge noted that Cuba, like all other third-world Latin American countries are:

characterized by having a very well-prepared elite class that is very connected with the world, with a very clear idea of what they want and

what they know, they have a clear sense of direction, and they have extensive travel experience.

This highly educated elite class has always been of interest to the United States, and neither of those points; the highly educated elite class, or the United States interest had anything to do with Fidel Castro or the Revolution. A lover of history, Jorge expands on this notion by telling the researcher that:

There is an important educational tradition among the Cuban elite that dates back to colonial times. Our first university was founded in 1728 – the University of Havana, in 1728. There is this whole tradition of thought, tradition of pedagogy, that cannot be ignored. And it is interesting that the United States has always clearly seen the importance of education and educational models in its relationship with Cuba. One of the first measures taken by the interventionist government in Cuba in 1901, if I remember correctly – it was either 1901 or 1899 – was to look for a group of Cuban teachers... and send them to Harvard. When the United States occupied the island after the war, they looked for teachers – elementary school teachers – and sent them to Harvard to take a course at Harvard, in order to try to change the educational model from that of the colonial Spanish era to the new era. And that is important because the seed of many things that would happen later can be found there.

During the Special Period all of these economic and social changes were occurring at a rapid rate. The society that was once a steady pulse, crafted by Fidel Castro and his Revolutionaries, was now scrambling to stay afloat. During the Special Period, Fidel Castro created the Emergent Teachers program, he opened Cuba up to more tourism and was aggressively seeking countries to partner in exports and imports in order to stabilize the economy. All of these decisions did ultimately alleviate the fallout stemming from the fall of the Soviet Union, but they temporarily. Each of them had long-lasting consequences that the Cuban government could not have fully anticipated.

Infrastructure. The second significant theme is infrastructure. A long-lasting consequence of the Revolution and the Special Period is physical infrastructure. Cuba is

known for their old cars that double as taxis, and while it makes for a charming postcard, living with outdated machines is one of the biggest issues Cubans face. Not just those old, beautiful cars, where spare parts are no longer produced, but with halting major trade for over fifty years, Cubans have been left lacking basic items. This was apparent during the researchers visit in 2016, that summer it was difficult to find men's pants of any size, or rotating fans. Cuba is not only deficient in consumer items; it is a problem that extends to all areas of the island. Lacking basic national infrastructure such as, transportation, communication, sewage, water, and electric systems affect every citizen, down to the smallest children.

As it relates to education, all six of the participants spoke to the various resources they believed were lacking. Everything from roads with potholes, lacking water to fill the school swimming pool, deteriorating buildings, to not enough paper to write with are all problems that Cuban students face.

Yahaira and Manuel spoke about their school building falling apart and looking ugly. Emilia and Jorge added to that saying that the schools were left unpainted and undecorated. Yahaira said:

The parents of the students were the ones who had to decorate the classrooms any way they can – bring whatever they can to decorate it and more or less make it look pretty. But the furniture, the chairs, the tables were very, very, very old. And sometimes we even had to do volunteer work to fix those tables and chairs so that we could sit comfortably.

Manuel made it a point to state that the school building that he attended for elementary school was nice, but as each year passed, things in his school would not be fixed. By the time he was nearing secondary school, the buildings felt like they were falling apart. He distinctly remembers that when things began breaking, the schools were dirtier than ever

before. He thinks that the citizens stopped caring about appearances because things were getting so bad in other areas of life. When asked about what could have been improved during her time in school, Yahaira said:

I think the conditions in which people are educated. When you arrive at the school it can be depressing because it's very ugly. It's not a place that welcomes you and makes you feel that it is a place to learn, that it is the place [inaudible]. It's the place where – that whole idea that says that the place where you learn is your first home or your second home, the place where you spend the most time, the place that prepares you for life. When you physically come into contact with that place, it's as if – as if what they tell you and what you see don't match up. Sometimes it can be an ugly, disorganized, depressing place. I don't know. They should make the schools a little more dignified than they are now. An important place. Probably one of the most important – the most important buildings that exist in Cuba. But no, the most important buildings are the hotels.

Emilia's primary school tried to combat the issues of disrepair by getting parents and students involved in the upkeep of the school. Emilia continues:

I remember they would paint the school every so often. Because they would take us to do – they called it volunteer work. And we would help the teachers paint the classroom, decorate it. And they instilled in us doing, crafted by Fidel Castro and his Revolutionaries arts and crafts, which really it was the parents who did them. We also made murals and crafts to decorate the classroom.

Jorge, Nancy, and Yahaira had the same experience cleaning and painting the schools they attended. Jorge did not like it, but Nancy did not seem to mind. She liked that families were involved in the school. Yahaira explained:

My school –it was an ugly school. It wasn't painted. It was surrounded by a lot of buildings – houses, dwellings. The street was very bad. It was difficult for cars to drive on the street because it was full of potholes. I didn't study in a city. I mean, I studied in Havana, but inside Havana it was a municipality kind of far away – more to the east of Havana. The closer to the center of the city you study, the better the schools are. Here it's like they're a little uglier, I think. Anyway, the parents of the students were the ones who had to decorate the classrooms any way they can – bring whatever they can to decorate it and more or less make it look

pretty. But the furniture, the chairs, the tables were very, very, very old. And sometimes we even had to do volunteer work to fix those tables and chairs so that we could sit comfortably.

All of the participants believe that the United States has much better infrastructure in their education system. They all believed that having drivable roads to school, buildings that were upkept, and furniture that was available and was not broken can assist students in learning better.

Beyond the external infrastructure and furniture, textbooks and paper were also in short supply. Jorge recounts his experience saying:

I studied for the first years of my life using old and new books, and I finished my studies using books that had been recycled from three, four, five years ago because we had nothing. They taught us how to write in the same notebook using as little space as possible to save paper.

All six participants were certain to describe how little they had, and how those resources became scarcer as they progressed through their education. The interesting piece of this is that despite the extreme lack of resources, which all of the participants deemed as a negative regarding the Cuban system, Cuban students in their generation still were very academically successful. It appears that although this theme of infrastructure being poor, and a negative part of the Cuban education system, it did not affect this group of participants negatively overall. Maria said:

I don't think we have a good infrastructure, but I don't think that that's essential for learning to be honest.

As each of them noted that things progressively got worse, and almost all of them were in university by the time "things got really bad", they might have been a generation that escaped the negative effects of this decline. It is quite possible that the generation after the millennials, Generation Z (born 1995-2010), will be the first generation to be

noticeably affected by all the changes in Cuban education.

Language. The third prominent theme is language. The participants had a lot to say about language as it pertains to how they acquired it, how it is important for cultural awareness, and what they want for their own children. All six participants are bilingual in Spanish and English, and three of them are multilingual. As UNESCO, and previous researchers have proven, Cuba's literacy education is excellent (Kirp, 2013; Sabina, 2009; UNESCO). It is this strong foundation in their native language, Spanish, that allows Cubans to excel in other languages. Further, Cuba views languages as an important piece of education and offers public language courses a decade before the United States offers it to their public school students. Cuba's language education begins in *Circo Infantil*, whereas it is common for American students to not encounter a foreign language until middle school (6th or 7th grade, or 11-12 years old).

Manuel, Emilia, Maria, and Jorge learned French in Cuba. Jorge does not consider himself to be a French speaker, as he is not fluent. However, he noted that he was taught through phonetics, much like how Cuba teaches Spanish. He believes that his education in Cuba instilled in him a respect for languages and that is why he strategically teaches his young daughter both Spanish and English. He thinks she should learn one or two more languages than that, but he wants her to be a native in both Spanish and English, so he will not introduce a third or fourth language until she speaks more. His daughter is two and speaks in short phrases in Spanish and English.

Emilia speaks to her young son in Spanish, he learns English in school, and she has placed him into French classes as well. She excitedly said:

Yes. In fact, he took a few French classes. And he already knows some songs in French. So yes, the goal is that he not only becomes bilingual, but rather trilingual at least and that he is exposed to other cultures and languages.

She, like Jorge, highly values languages and concertedly select opportunities for her child to be exposed to language and culture. Emilia thinks Cuba does teach language better than in the United States, she said:

they taught Spanish language not only for communicative purposes, but also for us to understand the grammar of the language, the way of thinking about the language. And here (in the US) grammar is not taught. As a teacher, I have realized that the kids don't have a grasp of what the parts of a sentence are or how the language is structured. And that is taught in Cuba.

Manuel, also a teacher, who speaks the most languages of the participants; Spanish, English, Portuguese, Russian, & French, also values proper language instruction. He said it was his language skills that allowed him to leave Cuba. His wife also speaks a few languages, which made it easier when they decided to leave Cuba. They have an infant son who they began to teach the alphabet in Spanish and will also add English. He wants his children to have the ability to leave and live in different countries. Manuel said that his friends with no language skills are the ones who are stuck in Cuba.

Nancy, one of the younger participants of the group, says that although Cuba exposed her to many languages, they were not taught well. She says:

First of all, when you learn English in Cuba, it's like today's one unit and tomorrow another unit and tomorrow another. And then in the end you can't learn anything because you don't remember, because today you say "marries a girl" and tomorrow it's like "she is 12 years old." You need to – like in the school, when you are in the first grade, you repeat and repeat and repeat the same sounds, the same letters and the same words. Then the biggest disadvantage at least - I think most – is that it's grammar, it's only writing. And you write and write and write, and you have few times to speak and to explain ideas and to listen and to understand. So, when I came here I

didn't understand anything – like Chinese. I said, “Why I spend the whole life in Cuba studying English and I didn't understand nothing. I don't understand.” It's like grammar, verb “to be”, and irregular verbs, and present continuous, present perfect continuous, present past.

Unfortunately for Nancy, she lived further away from the city center, and it seems that her school was negatively affected in the foreign language classes. For Nancy, the Spanish classes were excellent, she said that she was taught all of the parts of speech and given many books and writing assignments. Her school taught English in units, and not in the same manner that Spanish was taught. She remembers her teachers telling her class that they would need to learn English for the future

Maria, who also learned French in Cuba said that French was offered in primary school, but it was not offered to everyone. Most Cuban students are placed into English, and those selected get to take a foreign language. She took English “from 10th to 12th grade because at my time that was the only option that you had. Soo... there I remember taking English. Learning the regular verbs, learning to like the conjugation and all of that.” English was taught for 90 minutes a day in secondary school, where Maria felt that she really learned the language. Maria believes that “learning is universal. It doesn't matter the language you use”, that good teaching can be applied in any language. She thinks that what happens in Cuba could happen in the United States, there are just many different issues in the United States than in Cuba, but she said Cuba has different issues.

Teaching as a Profession. The fourth and final theme is Teaching as a Profession. All of the participants suggested that teachers currently in Cuba are not reflective of their experience in school. When the participants were attending primary school, they believed that teachers were valued, and their parents all supported what the teachers were teaching. All of the participants also said this value on educators stopped

during the Special Period.

An important positive point for all six participants is that education was completely free, and it was available to all Cubans. It was that birthright that they felt was violated by the Emergent Teachers program, where the devaluing of education began.

Yahaira compared her education to other professionals in her field:

Education was free. Yes, it is free. And I personally think it's good. I think it is good quality, generally speaking. And I've had the chance to participate in conferences with other people from outside Cuba. And I realize that the level of instruction in Cuba – I'm not talking about the level of education, because level of education is something else. But the level of instruction in Cuba is good, it's high quality. I realize that when I interact with other specialists, from what they talk about, what they say, the education they have.

Nancy recalls nice teachers and principals that held meetings with the students of the schools and the parents were welcome to visit and participate. Schools also supported society, children received free meals and children were kept in school until when jobs closed, so parents did not have to find babysitters. Nancy was “surprised... at 3:30 they are done (in the USA). And in Cuba it's like 5:00 PM”. The participants

Teaching as a profession changed radically for the participants when they were in school. Their schooling that was once strong and distinguished by well trained teachers, transitioned into a schooling system that was just trying to survive. Emilia recalled:

At that time in elementary school, they had not yet started something called *Profesores Emergentes*. So, the teachers were old specialized teachers. They were excellent teachers with great training who had chosen to study education from the beginning. They were old teachers and very, very good.

“We say that if you shake a tree, 100 teachers fall out”, proclaimed Yahaira regarding the program. She continued:

Of course that means that they are not well trained, so when they get to the classroom, they don't know how to deal with the daily conflicts of a classroom of 30 students or even 15 or 20. So I think that right now that is a huge problem that exists. Sometimes they are too young. You have, I don't know, a 19-year-old teacher teaching a student who is 15 or 13. That creates other kinds of conflicts because they are practically – both of them are practically teenagers. So how can that be dealt with? It's more of a problem than a solution.

Maria thinks that “education is a little worse than it was before and that I got like all the professors that were more committed with teaching”. Maria said of the Emergent

Teachers program that:

they started doing these tele-classes that was on the TV. And most of the English classes now that I think about it... In secondary school they were in TV. They were made on TV. So, you would sit on the TV, and you would listen to these people, and learn English that way... It's honestly very hard to give (an opinion)... of what they could do better because I know right now it's not the education that I had in my time. So for sure I would say that based on what I know from now, try not graduate the worst on the how you say “*escalaphon*” (scale). The worst students don't make them teachers because that's the only thing that people in Cuba have. You grow up with because it's free and because it's accessible you almost grow up with the idea that anyone can go to university. And if you're really like and if you really want too you can do it for sure. But then you have this fast rout routes that they created, and teachers is unfortunately one of them because for them you have to be better prepared. It was almost like a joke. I remember when I was in boarding school they came trying to recruit people being teacher and for me it was, I had to take a very hard test to get into this school and there's no way that now you're going to take me to teaching. You know because that's like a bad thing, being a teacher is a bad thing in Cuba.

There was a lot of discussion on if the education system is corrupt, and each of the participants blamed the Emergent Teacher's program because they all believed that the system worked fine before that program. Nancy was particularly disgusted with the program because of her family's experiences:

But my cousins, for example, said that the teachers don't explain the whole subject in the classroom because they let one part to the private class to receive money from the same children that they are students the

whole day. So, this is too, too, too sad. And no todas las personas (not all the people) have money to pay private class then after school. Of course, it's too bad. It is incredible. But the people said that that happens. Or for example, they sell the tests. They say, "Okay, you give me \$10 and I give you the test. Now you can memorize all the questions and respond very well." Like this. So, it's very, very bad. In my time ... When I was young, no was like this.

None of the participants blame their teachers for leaving the profession, they blame the Cuban government. As things across Cuba began to worsen, classrooms became overcrowded, and underfunded as resources were threatened. The participants all agree that teachers were underpaid and that during the Special Period where there were other opportunities for educated people in tourism, they took it. Jorge agreed that even though teachers were not paid well during his time in school, they were professionals. Emilia said that Cuba needs to "go back to the time of when there were dedicated teachers".

Chapter Summary

Cuba's education system for the first twenty years after the revolution seemed quite stable (Carnoy, et. al., 2007; Fagen, 1969; Kozol, 1978; Gasperini, 2000; Ripley, 2013; Sabina, 2009) having the benefit of funding from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR) government. After the major world event, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent crash of the USSR in the early 1990s, financial support for Cuba quickly became scarce and therefore major changes were felt, even by young Cubans at the time, as in the case of the six participants of this study. Fortunately for the participants of this study, that the effects of the changes were noticed and felt, to some degree, however, this group did not feel that they were strongly negatively affected in their educational outcomes. All of the participants say that as they liked their education

and that Cuba did a good job in educating them. The participants generally agreed on all points regarding their upbringing. Cuban schools were good, the Special Period ruined society, language skills are highly valued, the infrastructure of the country is bad, and the depths of how bad it is was only realized when moving to other countries, and teaching as a profession is not what it used to be, because of the Emergent Teacher's program.

The only noticeable discrepancy is that only one participant spoke of violence in the schools. Nancy said:

I remember a lot of violence in the classroom. I think everybody remembers that until this day. The assistant teachers mainly – violence – I remember, yes. When I was in elementary school it was like 30, 35 or 40 students in one classroom. Now no is like this. Then they reduce it to 15 or 20 students. But in my time when I was child, it was – I remember sixth grade or fifth grade 40 students. Was too much. A lot of students doesn't want there. It was difficult. But was so violent because *te daban* (they gave you). They hit you or *daban bofetadas* (slapped you) and nothing happened. It's like this. You are in a classroom and you can't touch anybody because you maybe are in trouble.... It was very sad. And I remember these days – for example, I have a friend that has a child, and the child was very upset and he doesn't want to go to school because the assistant teacher is so violent and say bad words and hit everybody. And it's horrible.

Nancy is the only one who relayed a story such as this. The closest thing that was said was by Jorge; "I mean, they had corporal punishment at that school. If you didn't behave well, they would put you – they would stand you behind a door or hit you with a ruler". It is undetermined if Nancy's experience was unique to her school and would need to be researched further with a larger sample size. It is extremely plausible that Cuba approved of corporal punishment, in the same vein as Catholic schools in the United States, but Nancy's school, or principal took a liberal interpretation of said rule. Nancy lived further out than many of the other participants (still in La Habana, just in the outskirts), so there could be a correlation to how suburban or rural the school is and the level of punishment

that is allowed at it.

This chapter addressed the results of the participant interviews. Highlighted first was the textural experience of each of the participants. Next the structural experience was discussed, describing major themes that emerged from the research. The themes include; the Special Period, Infrastructure, Language, and Teaching as a Profession. Chapter 5 will discuss how this research answers the research questions and what questions remain.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

The results in Chapter 4 were consistent with what Cubans told the researcher during her visit in Cuba, off of the record and also consistent with what Cubans who spoke to the researcher in the United States but did not wish to participate in the study formally. The overarching question of; “what the perceptions of Cuban literacy education from Cubans?” are was fully addresses in the results section of Chapter 4. The six participants largely agreed with each other on every point of this study, and therefore the study reached saturation with six participants. While the experiences of each individual participant were consistent with the experiences of Cubans, and with the other participants, the results did not fully answer all of the research questions. This chapter will discuss each of the research questions, what was learned from the study, how this research fills gaps, questions that remain, implications for policy, and the next steps for this research.

Question One

What are the roles of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy?

This first research question remains unanswered. The initial research plan included provisions to speak with enough diverse individuals to begin to understand the flowchart of the Cuban Ministry of Education and the system beneath it. Due to the complications that occurred over the duration of this study, this question was unable to be answered largely due to the number of adaptations that had to be made in order to complete the study.

The first complication was due to a change in presidency of the United States of America. It was the timing of this research that coincided with the transition of power from one president to another. The researcher was unable to gain the necessary state department permissions to conduct international research of this kind. The politics of doing research ultimately drives what type of research is able to be conducted. If the research was able to take place in Cuba, there was a high likelihood of this question being answered as access to the Ministry of Education would have been aided by a host institution in Cuba. In order to research in Cuba, it is mandated that one of their local universities' co-sponsor the researcher. Due to this reason, Cuba has been able to control the research that has occurred on the island. The initial research plan never made it through the primary approvals via the United States of America's Department of State, and therefore sponsorship of this research in Cuba did not occur.

The second complication came from recruitment for the actual study. Cuban Americans were a hard to reach population (as detailed in Chapter 3) and therefore participation was limited to six individuals who happened to be from the same generation. If there was an opportunity to interview with more Cuban Americans, especially those who held Ministry of Education jobs, then the research could have begun to tackle this question.

Question Two

What are the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education?

The second question has been partially addressed. The goal of Cuban literacy education is for all Cubans, regardless of race or wealth, to be literate in Spanish. This ideal of education was adapted from Martí's quote: "*Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre*" (to

be educated is the only way to be free), that was widely publicized by Fidel Castro (Martí, 2015, p. 90). Spanish Literacy was accomplished in a number of steps, beginning with the Literacy Campaign of 1961. The Literacy Campaign was the beginning of Fidel Castro's overhaul of the education system. From January 1 to December 22, 1961, Castro deployed hundreds of thousands of Cubans to teach illiterate adults to read and write. Literacy was seen as every Cuban's civic duty. By the end of 1961, Castro claimed that illiteracy had been eradicated. Since then, Cuba has maintained exceptional literacy rates, despite issues external to education. Castro also moved teacher training programs to become elite programs within the top colleges. The teacher training programs focused on pedagogy, which the participants all believed was special about Cuban education and seems to be lacking in other countries education systems.

Also, with the high emphasis on literacy; reading, writing, and speaking are taught earlier than in other countries. In Cuban daycares, the fundamentals of literacy are being practiced in the classroom. This spills over to private homes where reading and education is highly valued. The participants in this study said they read a lot during their youth both at school and at home. It is important to note that the internet or other important information sources and technologies were not readily available during the participants youths. Currently, in 2019, internet, fast information sources, and other technologies are still not easily available and are quite costly.

Generations of Cubans are well educated and well-read, and therefore good linguistic skills are passed onto new generations. This fact may be the key to understanding why the abject poverty is not a factor in Cuba, as being poor does not limit access to quality education, and therefore there is not generational education gaps in families, or in society

as a whole. The function of Cuban literacy education is to have a literate population. Cuba prides itself on being educated and therefore being free. Cuba has proven itself in being educated, however, freedom is a matter of perspective. Freedom in the context of the United States of America means the autonomy to make one's own decisions, and freely think and speak. In Cuba, freedom of speech is not advised. There were many instances of violence and people being exiled for freely speaking, when it contradicted the revolution. This distress over freedom of speech could be the most responsible factor of Cuban Americans not wishing to participate in this study.

Further, the results of this research indicate that Cuba functions through radical functionalism. Schools reflect the society they are in and the values of the society are woven throughout the curriculum. Cuba produces citizens who follow the rules of the revolution and accept their role in society. Although Cubans are quite educated, they have not had the practice of truly free speech nor had the opportunity of social mobility. Cubans are born into a society that is of relatively equal income (outside of the revolutionary party members), and regardless of their education level or their profession, they live and ultimately die in the same economic situation they were born into. There are many Cubans who do not like the system that was established by the revolution and they either fled, left on their own will, were exiled, or accepted society as it was, and stayed in the system that was established.

Question Three

What (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system?

This question was addressed. The best practice that can be applied to the United States is moving teacher training programs to be elite programs in elite universities where

the focus is pedagogy. The teachers from the era prior to the emergent teacher's program were considered qualified and professional by the participants. The UNESCO literacy test scores were higher than every other nation tested. In Kozol's (1978) book, he stated that teachers were well prepared and followed a tight curriculum. Having very well-educated teachers helped Cuba produce an educated population. Also, for a number of years, prior to the Special Period, there was very little attrition in the teaching field.

Cuba made a number of mistakes; the low pay (that was not uncommon for every other field as well) and the Emergent Teacher's Program, that other countries would not want to replicate, but any country, regardless of their political stance could better train their teachers in pedagogy. In the case of the United States where there is large attrition in the teaching field, better teaching programs could be established. With better prepared teachers, there is the possibility for less burnout, and thus attrition. Also, if the teaching population is more highly educated, than it would be more difficult for someone to become a teacher. This difficulty in becoming a teacher could work as a gatekeeper, ensuring qualified people are in classrooms.

What Was Learned

There were three major take-aways from this research; strong teacher training is critical, millennials that grew up in the Havana area were not significantly negatively affected by the lack of resources, and education reforms need to be sustainable. Strong teacher training is critical for schools to function well. As seen in Cuba, when there were strong teachers, the system worked well; teachers were fulfilled, students learned well, and it was done peacefully. Only after teacher training programs were watered down did the system begin to crumble.

Luckily for the millennials of this study, they did not feel that their education outcomes were severely negatively affected by the problems that began in the mid-1990s. The participants of this study seemed to have a majority of good teachers that were able to work within their means. Each participant had a story of at least one teacher they came across, either personally, or in a school they attended, where that teacher was a graduate of the Emergent Teacher's program. The participants of this study were still in school when the pendulum swung from highly qualified teacher being the majority to Emergent Teachers being the majority, and therefore were witnesses to the major changes that occurred. They all know that the system is now irrevocably broken, and it would take a revolutionary change to fix the now deeply rooted issues.

Lastly, education reforms need to be sustainable. The reason the Cuban system cracked is because Cuba could not sustain its own education system without financial support from the Soviet Union. Once the Soviet Union fell, Cuba did as well. Any country that is looking to Cuba as a model of education should heed the lessons learned about sustainability.

Filling the Gap

The results of this study add to the extremely limited printed information regarding schooling for Cuban students between the years of 1987- 2012 (the range of years that millennial students would have been in school assuming a normal progression thorough the years). This study, although exploratory, provides insight to millennials experiences in schools surrounding Havana, Cuba. This study provided information about what the schooling experience was in the 1990s and early 2000s but is also raises interesting questions for future research.

Questions That Remain

The question from the study that remains is; What are the roles of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy?

In addition to that question, a number of other questions became apparent throughout this research;

- What was the battle for sixth grade and what were its results?
- Are the experiences presented in this study representative of Cubans in all locations during this time period?
 - Specifically, what, if any, are the differences in rural education in Cuba?
- Was the proceeding generation, Generation X (born 1965-1980), less affected by the changing education system?
- Will the next generation, Generation Z (born 1995-2010), be affected differently?

Implications for Policy

Two important implications for policy come from the lessons learned in this study; strong teacher training programs are essential to strong education systems, and education reforms must be sustainable. When implementing a new education system, having well trained teachers is essential for its success. Teachers are the bridges from the education system to the families and when they are well trained, they will keep a system steady.

As seen in most education reforms, they need to be sustainable. It is imperative for education reforms to completely replace and fix all the issues of the system it is replacing. If it does not, as in Cuba's case, the new reform will eventually show signs of cracking and inevitably break. Once broken, a newer reform will be needed in a cyclical

manner. If the education reform in Cuba was sustainable at the high level during the economic recession of the Special Period, Cuba would still have one of the best education systems today.

Next Steps

This study just begins to scratch the surface of the rich data that could be acquired in Cuba. It is highly recommended for the researcher to complete the initial study design, in Cuba, at the first available opportunity. That research would include people in multilevel of the education system; student, parents, teachers, administrators, and Ministry of Education Officials.

In addition to that research, it is recommended that studies follow-up on the research conducted in this study but expand it to other populations within Cuba; people who went to school in rural areas, in other cities, in varying generations. It would make for an interesting comparison and would paint a broader picture of Cuba's educational landscape over the years. These future studies, in combination with this study, could provide generalizable results.

Lastly, the topic of violence and corporal punishment in schools should be addressed through research. If it is possible, any official records at schools or at the Ministry of Education should try to be obtained to fully understand the scope of violence in schools, as it pertains to teachers/administrators behaving violently to students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed summary of themes, answers to research questions, addressed questions that remain, provided recommendations for policy, and discussed next steps for research. The next and final chapter will conclude the study.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study, discusses the difficulties of this research, and the adaptations that were made in order to complete the project. The purpose of this study was to understand how Cuba established and then maintained a successful literacy program within the limits of a small national education budget. The results of this study showed that although Cuba did maintain a successful program for many years after the Cuban Revolution, the participants of this study detailed an education system that was crumbling as they were students and have since gotten worse.

Summary of the Study

This study sought to understand literacy education in the post-revolution Cuban Education System, and in particular, how Cuba has maintained exceptional literacy rates since 1961. Cuba's education was widely regarded as stellar, and they maintained literacy rates despite continual abject poverty. Previous research has shown that low levels of literacy are correlated with low socioeconomic status (Berliner, 2013; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; Green, 1997; Lareau, 2003; and Ripley, 2013). For over 50 years, Cuba's literacy rates have surpassed those of the world's most powerful countries, including the United States.

This research investigated the literacy educational reform in Cuba and how it was maintained at a high level. A new educational reform in Cuba became public when Fidel Castro announced to the General Assembly of the United Nations his plan to fight illiteracy in 1960 (Fagen, 1969). The Literacy Campaign initiated the complete revamping of Cuba's education system. Although previous literature is limited,

standardized test results (provided by UNESCO) show that Cuba has maintained its high level of literacy since the campaign of 1961.

This study begins to fill the gaps in literature regarding Cuba's literacy education for the years between 1987- 2012. In the 1960s and early 1970s. Cuba's educational successes were widely published and praised. An example of this is the widely popular book by Kozol (1978), *Children of the revolution*. There was very little written about Cuba's education system in the 1980s-1990s.

In early 2000s, when it was announced that Fidel Castro would be relinquishing some of his leadership duties to his brother Raul Castro, interest in Cuba began to peak again. Research since 2000 has shown us that Cuba's students are successful because they attend schools that focus on instruction rather than being student centered, the schools are staffed by highly trained teachers, and the culture of Cuba is dedicated to high academic achievement (Gasperini, 2000; Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007). Despite having a small national budget, Cuba allocates a large percentage of their budget towards education and has also dedicated an action research group to facilitate positive relations with the local communities (Gasperini, 2000).

Conceptual Framework. This study argues that Cuba follows what Sadovnik (2007, 2011, 2016) has termed radical functionalism of Bowles and Gintis. Radical Functionalism is a functionalist application of Marxist theories. Cuba exemplified this when Castro established a school system that appeared to follow the tenants of Marxism in furthering social equality when in reality, he created an education system that produced good Cuban citizens who loved and followed Castro and the mission of the revolution.

Thus, the Cuban education system applied radical functionalism where the school acts as an engine that yields ‘good Cubans’.

Methods. This study was conceptualized based on previous research that found that Cuban immigrants outperform American born students in the United States Education system (Sabina, 2009; Kirp, 2013). This research was propelled by three questions; 1) How does each player in the multi-level Cuban education system ensure successful literacy? 2) What are the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education? 3) What (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system?

This exploratory qualitative study investigated Cuban literacy pedagogy through former Cuban students and teachers who immigrated to the United States of America after the revolution of 1959. Qualitative interviewing was employed as it allowed the researcher a wide range of interviewing options in order to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. Seidman (2013) states that there is “no single approach to interviewing research that could be called phenomenological”, therefore it allows the researcher to employ a “range of approaches to inquiry”. Qualitative methods were the most appropriate for this investigatory study as the goals of this study were to fill gaps in literature about Cuban literacy education post- literacy campaign (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

This was achieved through individual interviews with six participants. The participants were snowball recruited for this study via email and word of mouth. Recruitment stopped when saturation was reached. All six of the participants were from the millennial generation and grew up in and around Havana, Cuba. Sample size was determined based on best practices for qualitative research that utilize semi-structured

interviews to achieve saturation of themes and develop theories for future testing (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Eligibility for the study was determined through a brief interaction with the researcher, either in person or via email. The researcher listed the eligibility criteria, outlined the scope of the study, and explained the consent process. Prior to meeting for the interview, all participants signed consent forms. Consent forms and interview questions were sent out in both Spanish and English before interviews were scheduled. Upon meeting the eligibility criteria and signing the consent form, interviews took place. The interviews lasted approximately 33 minutes and were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions. The researcher had the autonomy to ask additional and/or follow-up questions as necessary for further clarification regarding what a participant shared, or to follow-up on any new information as it came up in the field. All six interviews were conducted with consenting adults who met the inclusion criteria. The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder. The researcher decided not to video record as getting people to consent to the interview was difficult and the researcher wanted the participants to trust that their confidentiality was protected.

Analysis. Interview data was analyzed through phenomenological analysis, following the modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were first transcribed in the language used in the interview. Data was analyzed in the original language. After analysis, the Spanish transcriptions were translated into English for the purposed of quotes and data for this paper. Both transcription and translation were conducted by a native English or Caribbean Spanish speaker, as appropriate. The researcher read through each transcription and translation with audio playing to ensure correct transcription and

translation. Before beginning analysis, the researcher bracketed her personal beliefs though methods outlined in the article by Chan, Fung, & Chien regarding Bracketing in Phenomenology (2013).

Line by line hand analysis was used to identify natural emerging themes across all six participants. Phenomenology analysis requires the information to be reduced to “what is most significant and (of) interest” (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Seidman, 2013; Wolcott, 1990). The researcher achieved this through the modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher first employed horizontalization. Horizontalization is when all significant statements from each participant are reviewed until repletion was eliminated from the statements (Creswell, 2008). Then the data was reduced through clustering, where related statements across all the participants were clustered into major themes (Creswell, 2008). Then the researcher validated the results through the modified Van Kaam Method, by asking;

Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher’s experience and should be deleted (Moustakas, p.121, 1994).

The analysis led to textural and structural descriptions of the subject being studied. The textural descriptions described the group as a whole, and then each individual personal experience in Cuban schools. The structural descriptions described the themes that emerged through analysis, and how each participant added meaning for the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Limitations and Delimitations. There were a few limitations and delimitations of this study, first, the researcher was unable to interview all Cuban Americans who grew up in Cuba post-revolution. Additionally, generations other than millennials did not

participate in this research, and therefore the results of this study can only be applied to one generation. Having participants from one generation does not fully represent what occurred in Cuban education over the duration of 60 years, but it does begin to explain what was happening in the late 1980s-1990s. The data could have potentially been different if older generations choose to participate. Since the mid-1950s, Cubans have migrated to the United States under a number of different circumstances. Education policies have changed in Cuba over the duration of Castro's reign, and immigration policies have changed in the United States as it pertains to Cubans during the same period. Therefore, a single generation that had one of the easiest periods of immigration is a delimitation to understanding Cuban perceptions of literacy education as a whole.

Additionally, the researcher conducted all the interviews in northern New Jersey, there is a possibility that Cuban Americans in other parts of the United States of America might have other things to add to this body of work.

Lastly, the study was amended multiple times, as detailed in Chapter 3. Through the various revisions of this study, the research concluded with six interviews, who coincidentally were all Millennials (Generation Y, 1981-1996). The study ultimately reached saturation in the six interviews because they said the same things regarding their experience in Cuban schools.

Difficulty in Execution

Due to many of the reasons outlined in (Research with Hard to Reach Populations) section of Chapter 3, it was difficult to find participants in the study initially. Beginning in May 2018 and continuing for over a month, the researcher spent a

few hours a week going to local business that are Cuban owned, or where Cubans frequent. There were over ten individuals who met the inclusion criteria that would speak with the researcher but would not consent to an interview nor would agree to be audiotaped. Beyond the ten that qualified for the study, there were a few more individuals who were Cuban and attended Cuban schools but did not meet the criteria of number of years. Those individuals did share their experiences in short, but also would not consent using any information that was shared in this research. In total, twenty-four people were screened or spoke to regarding this research, and six participants ultimately participated.

In the instance of this study, it appears that age was a significant variable in participation. The researcher did not specifically recruit individuals that were millennials, but, all of the participants who consented to being recorded and participating were from that generation. It appears that the older the potential participant was, the less likely they were to consent to being recorded or interviewed.

Adaptions Made

Similar to any research, this research hit roadblocks, as discussed in Chapter 3. The two major adaptions were in reaction to not being able to research in Cuba as initially planned, and then due to difficult informants. The first substantial adaptation was made during the IRB process. Upon gaining approval from the home institutions IRB, it was necessary to gain approval from a university in Cuba, University of Havana was selected by the researcher, and also approval from the State Department of The United States of America, as it would have been an international project. The researcher was unable to complete their approval process with the Cuban university because after a meeting with the State Department the researcher was told that due to a change in

administration (Donald Trump was recently elected at this time) that approvals for research like this were halted until the new president's plans were outlined. After asking for a timeline for such a decision, the researcher was told that it could take anywhere from six months to a year before the process would resume. After consulting the lead faculty member at the time, the researcher and the faculty member decided that it would be most efficient for the research project to be national by using Cuban immigrants. A new IRB was submitted reflecting the changes in design, inclusion criteria, recruitment materials, and research questions. This IRB was approved within a month's time and research then began.

The second adaption was in recruitment strategies of Cuban American's. As stated in the section above, the researcher visited local places where Cubans gathered and spoke to a number of people, both in English and Spanish. The researcher found it hard to get consent to participate even though many of those same individuals shared a great deal of information with the researcher. The recruitment strategy shifted to distributing the flyer and recruitment letter on social media and via email. This process began in September 2018 and ultimately produced the six participants that participated in the study between January and March 2019. The study reached saturation after six participants

Results

Textural. The textural data was consistent between each of the six participants. The participants received an education in Cuba that placed an emphasis on books and gaining knowledge. Their parents all supported the work of the teachers and encouraged learning. All of the participants felt some effects of the Cuban education system declining. Regardless of this decline, all the participants believed that Cuba provided

them with a good education.

Structural. The data produced four themes; The Special Period, Infrastructure, Language, and Teaching as a Profession. The Special Period was an extended economic crisis that lasted from 1991-2000 as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union. During this time Cuba experienced major changes that included a reduction of rations, and consistently not having enough resources.

Those resources extended to the infrastructure. The city-wide infrastructure such as the school buildings, roads, and public swimming pools went largely unkept, and slowly deteriorated. Inside of the classrooms there were a shortage of books, paper, and desks. Students and families were tasked with coming into the school to fix the broken items. Students were taught to conserve paper and how to write lightly to be able to re-use the textbooks and workbooks again.

Language was a positive theme that emerged. The participants placed a high value on language and culture by extension. All of the participants are bilingual and three of them are multilingual. Those that have children are passing along the benefits of language learning to their children.

The last theme is Teaching as a Profession. The participants said that as a result of the Special Period, Teaching as a Profession declined severely. New policies such as the Emergent Teacher's program devalued the profession and a number of teachers left. In conjunction, the addition of tourism in Cuba provided lucrative opportunities for educated individuals, and more teachers left the profession. Those two factors combined with the already low pay was a toxic combination that changed the education landscape in Cuba for good.

Question 1. The question of; “What are the roles of each player in the multi-level Cuban education system which oversees successful literacy?” remains unanswered, largely due to complication in research and recruitment.

Question 2. The question of; “What are the goals and functions of Cuban literacy education?” was partially answered. The goal of Cuban literacy education is for all Cubans regardless of race or income level to be fully literate in Spanish. The function of Cuban literacy education is for Cubans to be highly educated and therefor have a free mind. This is not entirely the case as freedom of speech is still convictable in Cuba.

Question 3. The question of; “What (if any) best practices can be applied to the United States educational system?” was answered. The best practice that can be applied to the United States educational system is having well-prepared teachers from strong teacher training programs. In Cuba, their education system was steady for such a long time due directly to their teachers. The profession was devalued as soon as the teacher training programs became less rigorous. The level of teaching then declined and the system began to break.

Contribution to the Literature

There is such a sparsity of un-biased literature (not Cuban produced) on the subject of Cuban Education and this research provides an important original contribution to literature available. As discussed in Gaps in Literature section of Chapter 2, the early successes of the Revolution and Literacy Campaign were well documented, but in the last 1970s through the early 2000s, almost no literature was produced regarding Cuban Education. In the early 2000s, when research began again, the researchers were escorted by Cuban Officials and the schools they visited were hand selected by the Ministry of

Education in Cuba. It is this researcher's argument that the problems that Cuban education was experiencing after the collapse of the Soviet Union were hidden by the Cuban Officials that accompanied the researchers during this period. If the initial project design of this research was conducted, it is extremely plausible that the results of that initial study would have been heavily influenced by the Ministry of Education as they would have had to approve of all visits that the researcher would have made and any research that the researcher would have conducted.

For the reasons listed above, the results of this study are an important contribution to the limited literature on the subject. The results of this study indicate that in the late 1980s and through the 1990s that the education system in Cuba was deteriorating due to a number of political and financial factors. Anecdotal data provided by the participants assert that education conditions in Cuba today are far worse than what they personally experienced. The participants of this study reported those details after speaking to their friends and family who remain in Cuba. The results of this study indicate that further research is needed to fully understand the current education landscape in Cuba.

What I Should Have Asked

This study should have further inquired regarding the roles of each individual in the education system. This question was not followed-up on as much as the other integral questions for the study. There is a potential for a missed opportunity of knowledge by not following up with secondary questions regarding this topic.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the study, addressed the limitations, discussed researching with hard to reach populations, discussed the adaptations made for the study, summarized the results, and discussed questions that should have been asked.

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



Are you Cuban?

Did you attend elementary school in Cuba? Or did you teach for two or more years in Cuba?

Would you like to share your experiences in Cuban schools?

I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University who is interested in interviewing Cuban immigrants about their experiences in Cuban schools after 1959. Interviews will remain anonymous. For further information please contact me below.



¿Es usted cubano?

¿Asistió a la escuela primaria en Cuba? ¿O enseñó como maestra/o en Cuba durante dos o más años?

¿Le gustaría compartir sus experiencias con las escuelas cubanas?

Soy estudiante de doctorado en Rutgers University en Nueva Jersey, y me interesa entrevistar a inmigrantes cubanos sobre sus experiencias en las escuelas cubanas después del año 1959. Las entrevistas se mantendrán confidenciales. Para más información, por favor póngase en contacto conmigo.

Contact information that was included at the bottom of the flyer has been redacted for privacy of the researcher.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate Email (English/Spanish)

Hello,

My name is Heather See and I am a Doctoral Student at Rutgers University-Newark. I am conducting a study about Literacy Education in Cuba. I would like to interview anyone who has attended elementary school in Cuba, or taught elementary school for two or more years in Cuba after 1959. I am interested in learning about your experiences as a student or teacher after the revolution. If you or anyone you know would be interested in participating in an interview, please email Heather at (hls84@rutgers.edu).

Thank you for your time,

Heather See

Doctoral Candidate, Urban Systems

Rutgers University- Newark

A quien corresponda,

Mi nombre es Heather See y soy estudiante de doctorado en Rutgers University-Newark. Estoy investigando la alfabetización en Cuba. Me gustaría entrevistar a cualquier persona que haya asistido a la escuela primaria en Cuba, o haya enseñado en la escuela primaria por dos o más años en Cuba después del año 1959. Estoy interesado en conocer sus experiencias como estudiante o maestro después de la revolución. Si usted o alguien que conoce estaría interesado en participar en una entrevista, envíe un correo electrónico a Heather a (hls84@rutgers.edu).

Espero su repuesta pronto,

Heather See

Doctoral Candidate, Urban Systems

Rutgers University- Newark

Appendix C: Consent Forms English and Spanish



Global Urban Studies
Joint Ph.D. in Urban Systems

Cuba's Revolutionary Literacy Education

INTERVIEW CONSENT

New Jersey Residents

WITH AUDIO RECORDING

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the department of Urban Systems at Rutgers University, and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation. I am studying educational experiences of former students and former teachers from Cuba; all the participants now live in the United States. We are interested in understanding Cuban educational similarities and differences to the United States because Cuba leads in literacy education and there is potential for best practices to be discovered.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your educational experiences while you lived in Cuba. This interview was designed to be between one to three hours in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your personal information, the location of the schools you attended in Cuba, or any identifying information about your life in Cuba]. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location that is fingerprint protected. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity unless you specify otherwise.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. No immigration status information will ever be divulged. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for five years maximum as required by publishing agencies.

You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be the ability to assist language policies in the United States. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study. You will receive snacks for completing the entire study.

The interviews will be audio recorded. The recordings will be used for analysis by the research team. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts. To participate in this study, you must agree to be audio recorded.

For IRB Use Only. This Section Must Be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.

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The recordings will be stored in a locked file and a linked code to subjects' identity will be stored separately on a fingerprint protected computer. The recordings will be kept for five years maximum as required by publishing agencies. The recordings will be destroyed upon publication of study results.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at Heather See, 624 Hill Hall, Rutgers-Newark, Newark, NJ 07102, by cell at 978-404-3182, or at hls84@scarletmail.rutgers.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Jennifer Austin, 413 Conklin Hall, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ 07102, by phone at 973-353-1858, or via email jbaustin@newark.rutgers.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants).

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-2866
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. By participating in the above stated procedures, then you agree to participation in this study.

For IRB Use Only. This Section Must Be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.

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IRB ID: Pro2018000400
Approval Date: 5/7/2018
Expiration Date: 4/4/2019

Study Title Revolutionary Education; Cuba's Literacy Training, Teaching, Impact, and Performance

PI Heather See

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO A PARTICIPAR EN UN ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM - SPANISH

Se le está pidiendo que participe en un estudio de investigación.

Antes de que usted acceda a participar, el investigador tienen que informarle de:

- i) el propósito, los procedimientos y la duración del estudio;
- ii) cualquier procedimiento que sea experimental;
- iii) cualquier riesgo, molestia o ventaja de la investigación que razonablemente pudiera anticiparse;
- iv) cualquier procedimiento o tratamiento alternativo que sea potencialmente beneficioso;
- v) qué medidas se tomarán para proteger el carácter confidencial de la información.

Si aplica, el investigador también tiene que informarle sobre:

- i) cualquier tipo de recompensa o de tratamiento médico que esté disponible en caso de lesión;
- ii) cualquier posibilidad de riesgos que no se puedan anticipar;
- iii) circunstancias bajo las cuales el investigador podría discontinuar su participación en el estudio;
- iv) cualquier gasto adicional que usted pueda tener;
- v) qué ocurre si decide discontinuar su participación;
- vi) cuándo se le informará sobre nuevos hallazgos que pudieran afectar su voluntad de participar;
- vii) cuántas personas estarán participando en el estudio.

Si usted acuerda participar, el investigador tiene que entregarle una copia firmada de este documento y, por escrito, un resumen de la investigación.

Puede comunicarse con Heather See en el teléfono 978-404-3182
(Name/questions) (Telephone)

en cualquier momento si tiene preguntas sobre el estudio.

Puede comunicarse con Farah Anwar en el teléfono 732-235-6041
(Name/rights or injury) (Telephone)

en cualquier momento si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos al participar en un estudio o sobre qué hacer si sufre alguna lesión.

Su participación en el estudio es voluntaria y no se le sancionará ni perderá prestaciones si rehúsa participar o si decide discontinuar su participación.

Al firmar este documento da por entendido y reconoce que el estudio de investigación, incluyendo la información enumerada en este documento, se le ha descrito verbalmente y que usted voluntariamente accede a participar.

Firma del participante
Participant's signature

Fecha
Date

Firma del testigo
Witness signature

Fecha
Date

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Appendix D: Interview Protocol

English Questions

Have you gone to school in any country other than Cuba or the USA?

What grades did you attend school in Cuba?

What year did you come to the United States?

How many languages do you speak? For how long?

How did you start learning Spanish?

What adults taught you Spanish? (Teachers, family, community)

Describe your elementary school? How did you learn to read?

What municipality was your school located?

Describe your elementary school teachers.

Did you ever use a tutor to supplement school?

Was reading practiced in your home?

If you have children; did you teach your children to read the same way you did? What did you do?

If you learned a language outside of school, were you able to employ your language learning skills to that other language?

What do you think Cuba does particularly well in educating youth?

What do you think Cuba could improve in education?

What are your views on American education?

Preguntas en Español

¿Cuál es la estructura del Ministerio de Educación de Cuba?

¿Puede hablarme sobre las diferencias entre las escuelas cubanas?

¿Cuál es su opinión acerca de la educación cubana?

¿Cómo funciona la escuela donde enseñó? ¿Quién está a cargo de qué cosas?

¿Qué tipos de desarrollo profesional estaba disponible para los maestros?

¿Quién decide los planes de lecciones? ¿Cómo se distribuyen? ¿Qué método de enseñanza se usó?

¿Ha trabajado en otra escuela cubana? Si es así, ¿cuál fue su experiencia?

¿Cómo cree que su escuela se compara con las otras escuelas cubanas que conoce?

¿Cómo se involucran los padres y miembros de la comunidad en la escuela?

¿Cuál es un área de mejora que le gustaría ver en esta escuela?

¿Cuál es su opinión acerca de la educación estadounidense?

Describe su escuela primaria?

¿Cómo aprendió a leer?

¿Les enseñó a sus hijos a leer de la misma manera que usted? ¿Qué hizo?

Si aprendió un idioma fuera de la escuela, ¿pudo emplear sus habilidades de aprendizaje de idiomas en ese otro idioma?

Describa a sus maestros de la escuela primaria.

¿Alguna vez usó un tutor para suplementar la educación de la escuela?

¿Se practicaba lectura en su casa?

¿Qué cree que Cuba hace particularmente bien en la educación de la juventud?

¿Qué cree que Cuba podría mejorar en educación?

¿Qué opina acerca de la educación estadounidense?

Appendix E: Initial Interview Protocols (not used)

Questionnaire English

Questionnaire on schooling in Cuba (English version)

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. In what year did you immigrate to the United States? _____
4. Indicate if you have lived in other countries and in what years:
(example: Russia, 1985-1988)

5. Where did you live in Cuba?

6. Where did you attend the following grades of the elementary school (name and location)

Preschool: _____

Kindergarten: _____

First grade: _____

Second grade: _____

Third degree: _____

Fourth grade: _____

Fifth grade: _____

7. Did you attend school in Cuba for longer than the fifth grade (for how long)?

8. List other languages you speak and how long you know them:
(example: English, 10 years)

9. Please describe how you started learning Spanish:

10. What adults were involved when you learned to read?

____ Teachers

____ Mother

____ Father

____ Grandparents

____ Aunts

____ uncles

____ Cousins

____ Brothers

____ Neighbors
____ Church members
____ Other

11. Do your children speak Spanish? IF NOT

12. Do your children speak English? IF NOT

13. How did you get involved in your children learning to read?

14. Did you use any teaching method you learned in Cuba to help your children learn to read?

15. Comments or questions:

(If you have any questions or information that you want to add to the questionnaire, you can do so here).

Cuestionario sobre la escolarización en Cuba (Versión en español)

1. Nombre: _____

2. Edad: _____

3. ¿En qué año inmigró a los Estados Unidos? _____

4. Indique si ha vivido en otros países y en qué años:

(ejemplo: Rusia, 1985-1988)

5. ¿Dónde vives en Cuba?

6. ¿Dónde asistió a los siguientes grados de la escuela primaria (nombre y ubicación)

Preescolar: _____

Jardín de infancia: _____

Primer grado: _____

Segundo grado: _____

Tercer grado: _____

Cuarto grado: _____

Quinto grado: _____

7. ¿Asistió a la escuela en Cuba por más tiempo que el quinto grado (por cuánto tiempo)?

8. Enumere otros idiomas que habla y cuánto tiempo los conoce:
(ejemplo: inglés, 10 años)

9. Por favor describe cómo comenzó a aprender español:

10. ¿Qué adultos le ayudaron a aprender a leer a leer?

_____ Maestros

_____ Madre

_____ Padre

_____ Abuelos

_____ Tías

_____ tíos

_____ Primos

_____ Hermanos

_____ Vecinos

_____ Miembros de la iglesia

_____ Otra persona

11. ¿Sus hijos hablan español? SÍ NO

12. ¿Sus hijos hablan inglés? SÍ NO

13. ¿Cómo le ayudó a sus hijos a aprender a leer?

14. ¿Utilizó algún método de enseñanza que aprendió en Cuba para ayudar a sus hijos a aprender a leer?

15. Comentarios o preguntas:

(Si tiene alguna pregunta o información que desea agregar al cuestionario, puede hacerlo aquí).

Former Teachers Focus Groups

What is the structure of Cuba's Ministry of Education?

Can you tell me about the differences among Cuban schools?

What is your view on Cuban Education?

How does the school where you worked operate? Who is in charge of which things?

What types of professional development was available for teachers?

Who decides on lesson plans? How are they distributed? What teaching method was used?

Have you worked at another Cuban school? If so, what was your experience?

How do you think your school compares to the other Cuban schools that you are aware of?

How do parents and community members become involved in the school?

What is an area of improvement you would like to see in this school?

What are your views on American education?

Focus Groups of Former Students:

Group 1959-1989 & Group 1990-2010

Describe your elementary school?

How did you learn to read?

Did you teach your children to read the same way you did? What did you do?

If you learned a language outside of school, were you able to employ your language learning skills to that other language?

Describe your elementary school teachers.

Did you ever use a tutor to supplement school?

Was reading practiced in your home?

What do you think Cuba does particularly well in educating youth?

What do you think Cuba could improve in education?

What are your views on American education?

Individual Interviews

Will consist of asking for more information on questions that were addressed during group interviews. Also, there will be time for individuals to divulge any further

information that they wish to and may have not been able to discuss during the group interviews.

Español

Grupos de enfoque de maestros que enseñaban en Cuba

¿Cuál es la estructura del Ministerio de Educación de Cuba?

¿Puede hablarme sobre las diferencias entre las escuelas cubanas?

¿Cuál es su opinión acerca de la educación cubana?

¿Cómo funciona la escuela donde enseñó? ¿Quién está a cargo de qué cosas?

¿Qué tipos de desarrollo profesional estaba disponible para los maestros?

¿Quién decide los planes de lecciones? ¿Cómo se distribuyen? ¿Qué método de enseñanza se usó?

¿Ha trabajado en otra escuela cubana? Si es así, ¿cuál fue su experiencia?

¿Cómo cree que su escuela se compara con las otras escuelas cubanas que conoce?

¿Cómo se involucran los padres y miembros de la comunidad en la escuela?

¿Cuál es un área de mejora que le gustaría ver en esta escuela?

¿Cuál es su opinión acerca de la educación estadounidense?

Grupos focales de ex alumnos;

Grupo 1959-1989 y Grupo 1990-2010

Describe su escuela primaria?

¿Cómo aprendió a leer?

¿Les enseñó a sus hijos a leer de la misma manera que usted? ¿Qué hizo?

Si aprendió un idioma fuera de la escuela, ¿pudo emplear sus habilidades de aprendizaje de idiomas en ese otro idioma?

Describa a sus maestros de la escuela primaria.

¿Alguna vez usó un tutor para suplementar la educación de la escuela?

¿Se practicaba lectura en su casa?

¿Qué cree que Cuba hace particularmente bien en la educación de la juventud?

¿Qué cree que Cuba podría mejorar en educación?

¿Qué opina acerca de la educación estadounidense?

Entrevistas individuales

Consistirá en solicitar más información sobre las preguntas que se abordaron durante las entrevistas grupales. Además, habrá tiempo para que las personas divulguen toda la información adicional que deseen y que no hayan podido debatir durante las entrevistas grupales.

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