

Review of: "The Young Pioneers of Cuba: The Formation of Cuban Citizens through Civic Education"

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I have read the article, and also the other reviews, with interest. I think the topic is an interesting and relevant one, and the article is a useful start. There are some areas where I think the article could be improved:

1. In terms of the overall argument of the piece, I appreciate that the authors are taking a relatively critical stance towards the Cuban system; but I think that some of the claims made are overstated/do not sufficiently consider Cuba in relation to other states. So the underlying argument that the Cuban state wields the authority to determine the curriculum, and that the national curriculum is ideological in nature, is true of the nation state per se, as Gramsci and Freire argue; and thus not specifically true of Cuba. And the same is true of CGCE. The question is what the nature of the ideology underpinning the curriculum is, and whose interests it serves. This point is actually made during the course of the article; but it is not made in relation to the Cuban state.
2. At various points, there are other moments of contradiction in the line of argument (often a case of different emphasis at different points in the argument). For example, it is argued that there is a veneer of independent learning, which hides the 'subtle influence of the Cuban Ideological State Apparatuses' - but also that some students reject the overtly political indoctrination they see the curriculum as providing. It is argued that the curriculum does not expose students to global issues, but also that it specifically considers the ideologies of other countries, particularly the US. I would recommend tightening the argument a little more to deal with these (and other) anomalies/contradictions.
3. Obviously, a really key part of the argument is the norms and values (and feelings and habits) aspect of the curriculum. However, I really struggled to fully understand exactly WHAT norms and values - at various points, a variety of different things are referred to (patriotism, respect, honesty, kindness), but more or less in passing. Many of these are pretty 'fuzzy' anyway - e.g., respect for whom? why? how are people expected to show respect? I would strongly recommend unpacking exactly what values are emphasised by the curriculum as planned (i.e., in terms of the state documents), the curriculum as enacted in the classroom (by the teachers, by what was observed), and the 'hidden' curriculum. I found it absolutely fascinating that the 9th grade students spoke about 'kindness' as a value necessary to be Cuban. This is so different from the 'usual' values of respect, tolerance, etc., and it would have been good to explore this a little more.
4. I worry a bit about the claim that CGCE would bring something somehow 'better', primarily because of my own claim, above, that CGCE is itself deeply ideological - and needs careful unpacking itself. What, exactly, does it mean by 'democracy', for example? Liberal, representative democracy? Or direct democracy? What does it mean by diversity? By tolerance? Do these rest on notions of difference, as opposed to a radical humanism of sameness?

5. This also relates to an overall feeling I had of the data presented as relatively superficial. At moments, it seemed clear that the authors/researchers did probe deeper - but that doesn't really come through enough. I think I'm arguing for more conceptual and analytical rigour...
6. Related to the data, just to note that in at least one case, a quote from the data is attributed to two different research participants - "There is no conflict between the state's convictions and mine" is attributed to a 9th-grade civics teacher and a 9th-grade student. This needs to be sorted - it really undermines the reader's faith in the quality of the analysis!
7. In terms of style, I thought the piece was well-written, but it could be further improved by cutting down on repetition (some quotes are introduced by more or less repeating the quotes; some quotes are repeated more than once; some sections are repeated almost verbatim) and perhaps eliminating single-sentence paragraphs by integrating them into a tighter argument.