

# EDUCATION AND PRODUCTIVE WORK IN AGRICULTURE

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Since the mid-sixties, all Cuban students of junior high school (grades 7 to 9) and high school (grades 10 to 12) level participate in agricultural work as part of their school curriculum. Most of the students go the countryside from city schools for six weeks or longer. This is called "school to the countryside." A smaller but growing number live in schools adjacent to the farms where they do their productive work. This is called "school in the countryside."

The work plus study principle is one of the keystones of Cuban educational policy. Its main purpose in general education is to form young men and women into "complete" human beings. Working together with others for a common goal and without any thought of personal remuneration helps to develop a collective and unselfish spirit. Physical work in the countryside gives young people an intimate understanding of how and by whom the riches of society are produced.

Productive work for students also breaks the sharp dichotomy between physical and intellectual labor. After visiting one of the schools in the countryside, Prime Minister Fidel Castro commented that "past societies condemned man to exclusive manual labor on the one hand or exclusive intellectual labor on the other." He also noted that "...the moments of greatest fatigue, of exhaustion and weariness occur during long, tense and uninterrupted intellectual work."

Cuban pedagogy believes that the formation of the "New Man" is inconceivable without a healthy attitude toward physical work. At first, the link was managed through small vegetable or ornamental gardens around the schools. Some junior highs introduced a half day of productive work within the school program.

In 1965 a new and more ambitious program of productive work was initiated. This was the beginning of "school to the countryside" which since that year has been included in the junior and senior high school calendar. Today every urban secondary student spends six weeks of each year living in the countryside with his school, working in citrus groves, sugar plantations or on vegetable farms.

Early in the revolution "rural junior high schools" were established. These were, in fact, agricultural vocational schools where the general school curriculum was combined with subjects relating to agriculture. Here, students, usually from the farm, cared for animals, worked in adjacent fields and learned to repair and use farm equipment. By mid-decade there were some 4000 students (out of 160,000 junior high students) at these schools. Then it was decided to convert them to a regular urban school curriculum. In 1970, after a profound study, the Ministry of Education decided that the original conception had been correct and returned the rural junior highs to their vocation-oriented path.

In the last years of the sixties the first of new type of "school in the countryside" was inaugurated in the middle of a gigantic banana growing project not far from Havana. The pre-fab school was ultra-modern with pedagogical facilities of the latest type. Five hundred students, on a coeducation basis, live and study at the school. Five times a week, three hours a day, the students work in the surrounding field.

There are now eight schools in the countryside of the ultra-modern type in Cuba. Many more are under construction. Cuba told a Unesco meeting in Geneva that it plans "to progressively move all junior highs to the country." By the end of the decade it is hoped that a majority of Cuba's expected half million junior high school students will be living and studying at these schools in the countryside.