'Now we don't see the university as something distant. It's here in our hands': Situated pedagogy in Cuban municipal universities.

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Abstract

The first years of the twenty-first century saw the introduction of a new mode of higher education in Cuba. Local university centres were set up across the country offering part time study to a range of students previously marginalised from higher education. As well as massively increasing access, this programme created a new kind of teacher – local professionals teaching part-time alongside their regular employment. Using the personal testimony of students and teachers in rural Granma, this paper examines the role of these teachers, with a particular emphasis on the value of their capacity to offer a pedagogy situated in the workplaces, communities and daily lives of their students.

Keywords: *community, universalisation, municipalisation, workplace learning, localism*

A University for All

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Cuban higher education system developed a new mode of study, which opened up access to tertiary education to more than 600,000 additional learners (ONE 2011: Table 18.19).The 'municipalisation' or 'universalisation' of higher education involved opening new university centres in every one of Cuba's 169 municipalities, offering part time degrees in a range of popular subjects without the requirement to pass the usual tough entrance exams.

The programme flew in the face of a long-standing policy, initiated in the mid-1980s and intensified in the resource-strapped 1990s, of restricting access to higher education in line with economic realities and the commitment to placing all university graduates in employment related to their degrees (Sabina and Corona 2004:164-5; Domínguez 2004:108, 111). While the new policy may have been economically dubious, given the already significant glut of graduates in comparison to job opportunities in professional fields, it was also a politically necessary response to the potential disengagement from education and the revolutionary process of a series of marginalised groups.

It arose in the context of a period known as the Battle of Ideas, which saw a set of policies (closely associated with Fidel Castro personally and rolled back after he retired as President on health grounds in 2008) aimed at restoring revolutionary fervour and social cohesion after the acute crises of the 1990s. The withdrawal of trade and financial aid that came with the collapse of the socialist bloc in Europe, followed by an opportunistic tightening of the US embargo (Roy 1997:79), had inflicted significant damage on Cuba's society and economy, which suffered a 35% drop in GDP between 1989 and 1993 (Rodriguez García 2011). The early 1990s were characterised by fuel shortages, power cuts, malnutrition and poverty. Internationally, the imminent collapse of the revolutionary government and a transition to capitalism were widely anticipated (Kapcia 2008:168).

Against the odds, Cuba held out – but at a cost. Emergency reforms introduced to prop up the failing economy, such as legalising the dollar and permitting limited private enterprise, may have ensured the Revolution's survival, but they also brought about divisive levels of economic inequality, as the state wage no longer provided even basic necessities (Sullivan 2007). On an individual level, it became necessary for many Cubans to make difficult choices, placing the

needs of the smaller collectives of family and the micro-communities of one's building or close friendship group above those of the greater collective of the state. A 'double morality'developed, whereby many who continued to profess socialist and nationalist values felt compelled, in practice, to do whatever was necessary to look after themselves and their families, including engaging in the black-market economy, minor corruption and illegal work. Despite positive examples of community resilience and a move towards greater localism and local political autonomy that arose during the 1990s(Collins 2017:216-241), there was a recognition that popular faith in the state to provide for people's material needs was depleted and, with it, popular identification with the Revolution as a political and social project.

This dissociation from the collective project was particularly notable among young people: in a country that ostensibly guaranteed full employment, more than 20% were in neither work nor education (Gómez Cabezas 2012:40), many were looking for opportunities to leave the island and those who remained often spoke of frustration and stagnation. There was a moral panic about youth, whose perceived materialism and selfishness was contrasted, even in their own minds, with the selfless collective struggle of previous generations (Smith 2016:112, 169-70; Garcés et al. 2013). The Battle of Ideas, however, was a recognition of the fact that increasing disengagement resulted, not from any inherent qualities of the young people, but rather from social conditions, and that the state, therefore, had a responsibility to act (Smith 2016:123-4).

This action was dual-pronged. The most visible aspect was a propaganda offensive against US imperialism, seen most clearly in mass demonstrations, with young people at their centre, around the Elián Gonzalez case,[i] and in public displays decrying US foreign policy, particularly the outrages in Abu Ghraib (Marx 2004). The centre of the campaign, however, was domestic – a raft of

cultural, political and social policies designed to promote inclusion and to mobilise Cubans to resolve social problems. Foremost among these were schemes that recruited teenagers as social workers and teachers (in response to an acute teacher shortage), offering a wage and accelerated training in return for an eight-year commitment.[ii]The incentive to enrol on these schemes was the opportunity to access higher education without taking an entrance exam. Beginning from 2001 and initially small-scale, these courses took place on Saturdays at the University of Havana. As the schemes grew and were extended beyond the capital, however, it became evident that the traditional universities, based in provincial capitals, were unable to meet the new demand. Local university centres, under the guidance of the nearest provincial university, were, therefore, set up in each municipality and a new mode of part-time study was instituted, based on independent study supported by weekly or fortnightly face-to-face sessions.

The scope of these university centres was then extended to address other social necessities. The next group to be included (from 2002) were sugar workers at risk of redundancy.[iii] With the secure Soviet market gone, demand for Cuban sugar plummeted and 71 sugar mills closed after being judged to be unprofitable and unproductive (Pineda Zamora and Pelegrín Mesa, undated). The closure of these mills, however, meant laying off hundreds of thousands of workers, frequently in areas where the sugar industry had been the principal employer for generations and where the mill was the heart of the community. In stark contrast to the attitude of UK governments towards communities facing the consequences of deindustrialisation, it was recognised that this made it politically and socially unpalatable simply to put these workers out of work, particularly in an economic climate where it would be challenging to offer them other work, even in unrelated fields. The decision was, therefore, taken to offer these workers the opportunity to study while continuing to receive their state

wage, with courses available from basic levels up to undergraduate degrees, depending on their existing levels of qualification. In just that first year, more than 90,000 sugar workers re-entered education (Pineda Zamora and Pelegrín Mesa, undated).

This new concept of study as a form of work provided the basis for a further initiative. The young social workers and teachers for whom the local universities had originally been instigated had either (in the case of the social workers) already completed their high school education or (in the case of the teachers) were enabled to complete high school part-time, while teaching, before moving on to their degree studies. The government recognised, however, that many young people who were unemployed or working in the informal sector had not completed Twelfth Grade, and that these young people were among those most likely to feel disengaged from the revolutionary project and most likely to be seen within their communities as a 'nuisance' or 'threat'. In 2002, a new scheme was put in place, using the study-as-employment principle to re-engage this group. The Cursos de Superación Integral para Jóvenes (CSIJ – Integrated Development Courses for Youth) paid a basic wage to anyone up to the age of 29 to attend a full-time course to complete high school and, for those who were successful, to enter the municipal universities.[iv]The significance of this opportunity to re-enter education will not be lost on educators in the UK where the restriction of most funding in further education to those under 19 has effectively eliminated access to 'second-chance' education.

Finally, in a series of initiatives, the majority of which opened in the academic year 2005-6, the universities were opened up to the public, enabling older Cubans and those currently in employment to enrol in the university centres to undertake part-time study. At this point, it could be claimed that the Cuban higher education sector had been effectively 'universalised', with degree

courses now available to anyone with Twelfth Grade or equivalent. This was highly significant in redressing inequalities that had arisen in access to higher education, where restrictions in numbers had led to a student body that had been becoming increasingly white and middle class.[v]

Massively increased student numbers and the local nature of the universities necessitated not only new structures and new forms of study but also a completely new kind of university teacher. Based on fieldwork conducted in the rural province of Granma for an ongoing Leverhulme funded research project assessing the individual and community impact of the whole municipalisation programme, this paper looks specifically at the new role of the educator within that process and within their communities. It also draws on previous research into young 'emergency' teachers of the 1970s and 2000s to understand these new educators within a lineage of mobilisation and engaged pedagogy that stretches back at least to the teaching brigades that worked to eradicate illiteracy in the 1961 Literacy Campaign. The current research project has involved 225 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and policy makers – testimony that sheds light on a conception of educators, not as detached experts maintaining 'professional boundaries' but, rather, as situated individuals, inextricably involved in the personal, family and community lives of their students. The interviews were designed to be flexible and to allow students and teachers to raise and develop the themes that were most important to them. Recognising these participants as the experts on their own experience, the second half of this paper deliberately foregrounds that testimony, quoting extensively from interviews and using the authorial voice more often to contextualise than to analyse or dissect.

Controversy

Creating almost universal access to free, local higher education and even, in some cases, paying students to study, may sound like an unalloyed good but, within Cuba, the Battle of Ideas in general and the municipalisation of the universities in particular were subject to serious and widespread criticism. The severity of this critique is, perhaps, the reason that little has been published outside Cuba about a programme that, in terms of numbers engaged and geographical scope, is comparable with the much-vaunted literacy campaign. Disparaging comments about the programme are more frequently encountered in day-to-day conversation than in published work, but they are recognised by the academic community, with Núñez Jover noting some of the frequent critiques and admitting that universalisation was seen as a 'relative failure' (Núñez Jover et al. 2017: 143).The programme was frequently criticised for: creating a surfeit of graduates in subjects unrelated to the economic needsof their country or locality; rewarding young people who had failed to conform to revolutionary values; offering lower quality education to a less-deserving intake of students and thereby devaluing traditional degrees; and wasting resources desperately needed in other areas, such as health, housing and industry. While these criticisms can be put down in part to latent classism and racism on the part of those, often from more privileged backgrounds, who were able to attend a traditional university, it is undeniable that they have a degree of validity. A Ministry of Higher Education (MES) evaluation of the programme in 2008 showed significant failings and led to a reassessment of organisation and entry requirements.

Having conducted my previous research in Havana, where possibilities for education and employment were more plentiful and where the oversupply of graduates was most evident, I was keen to see whether these criticisms were less relevant and the community impact greater in more remote areas without this

privileged access to education, services and the tourist dollar. The fieldwork for the current project was, therefore, conducted in Granma province, in the less well-off and more rural east of the country. Interviews were conducted in seven municipalities: Bayamo and Manzanillo, the province's two major cities; Pilón and Media Luna, coastal towns with decommissioned sugar mills and, in the case of Pilón, a nascent tourist industry; Buey Arriba and Bartolomé Masó, mountainous areas with a significant proportion of the population living in isolated homes or communities with no transportation links; and Rio Cauto, an inland agricultural zone selected for additional funding and support for local development as part of the PRODEL programme.[vi] Interview material used in this article comes exclusively from the urban municipality of Manzanillo and the rural municipality of Bartolomé Masó.[vii]

Criticisms of the quality of education offered at the SUM (local university centres) centred heavily on the teachers' levels of knowledge and expertise. When local universities were set up in more rural communities, unlike in the major cities, there was no pre-existing faculty of qualified lecturers. In general, the SUM were established with a small nucleus of a few full-time staff, often with other pedagogical experience, such as school teachers. Public appeals were then made for graduates in the municipality to offer their services as 'associate' teachers. These teachers would retain their normal full-time occupations and teach part-time on degree programmes that, in most cases, related to either their job or their degree specialism. In many communities, there were few graduates and accounts speak of 'almost all the professionals in the area being involved in the universalisation process' (I-101),[viii] including older Cubans coming out of retirement to teach. This lack of a qualified teaching force within the area created various problems: some municipalities were unable to run certain degree programmes because they could not staff the teaching; in other cases, courses were taught by people who had spent decades since graduating working in

unrelated fields or who were asked to teach on courses that had nothing to do with their academic discipline. Under the guidance of the full-time staff at the SUM, who, in turn, received support from the provincial university, it was these associate teachers who provided most of the teaching in the municipalised universities, as well as acting as personal tutors. In 2007-8, there were more than 92,000 part time teachers in Cuban higher education, equating to close to 60% of all university teachers (ONE 2009:30).

While this use of variably qualified teachers did provoke significant criticism, it was not as shocking in Cuba as it might have been elsewhere. Throughout the revolutionary period, solutions to new challenges and crises have frequently been provided by mobilising the population, rather than (or, more usually, in addition to) relying on a pre-existing specialised workforce. Nowhere has this been truer than in the field of education.

The New Teachers in Context

The most famous, and often idealised, incarnation of this strategy was the literacy campaign of 1961, when the people were called upon to help the government achieve the ambitious target of eradicating illiteracy in the country within one year (illiteracy rates at that point were around 23% (Veltmeyer and Rushton 2011:157). Along with the existing teaching force, 271,000 volunteer teachers, around half of them children, were recruited(Fagen 1969:47). With minimal training and a standard, government-issued primer, these volunteers then each worked intensively with a small number of students, succeeding in bringing functional literacy (demonstrated by the completion of the primer and the writing of a letter of thanks to Fidel) up to the UNESCO standard for full literacy by the end of the year (MacDonald 2009:58). As the bulk of the teachers were relatively privileged urban young people who spent the campaign living and working in rural communities, where poverty and social injustice

were far more acute, the campaign has been seen as foundational not only to Cuba's free, high-quality, universal education system but also to creating a sense of social cohesion and collective national struggle (Blum 2011:8). Literacy brigades may have been a spectacular short-term solution to the problem of absolute illiteracy, but Cuba's educational challenges remained significant and the existing workforce woefully inadequate to meet them. Responding to fears of persecution and the confiscation of property, the Revolution's early years saw an exodus of the middle classes, principally to Miami, with some '400,000 reaching the United States between 1959 and 1971' (Kapcia 2008:155). These waves of migration significantly depleted the number of education professionals across the sector, particularly in higher education. Cuba could ill-afford this loss, already having a significant teacher shortage, with many schools, particularly in rural areas, unable to recruit teachers and classrooms lying empty. Set this against Cuba's commitment not only to offer universal compulsory primary education to all children but also to provide adult education, with the aim of bringing all workers up to at least sixth grade, as well as expanding access to higher education, and a crisis in teaching provision quickly becomes evident.

At the outset of the 1970s, the need for trained teachers remained acute. The drive to grow capacity continued to place ever-increasing demands on the system. The Battle for the Sixth Grade was followed by the Battle for the Ninth, seeking to make basic secondary education compulsory for all children and encouraging adults to continue their studies through the worker-farmer pathway.[ix] Coupled with a demographic bulge of children born during the first years of the Revolution, this led, in 1972, to a projected shortfall of 18,548 secondary teachers over the following four years (Castro Ruz 1972). The policy developed to meet this shortfall was the creation of the Manuel Ascunce Domenach Detachments, which recruited young people completing Tenth

Grade (then the final year of basic secondary) as secondary teachers. After a brief period of intensive training, these young people would work in the newly created Basic Secondary Schools in the Countryside, teaching students (often only a year or two younger than themselves) for half the day and receiving pedagogical training for the other half.[x]

Increasing the quantity of education was only one half of the battle. The rapid expansion of the education system during the 1960s, and the use of teachers with only basic training that it necessitated, had left the system inconsistent in terms of quality. Dropout rates were high and the number of students required to repeat a year, sometimes more than once, was considerable, with only 36.6% of those who entered first grade in 1967-8 successfully graduating from primary school in the expected year (Ferrán 1976:63). As part of a general policy of formalising, institutionalising and improving the structures that had arisen, sometimes haphazardly, over the first decade and a half of the Revolution, a programme of *perfeccionamiento* (improvement) was developed in the first half of the 1970s, published in 1976 and implemented over the subsequent five years (Ferrán 1976). Programmes of study were reformed and an emphasis placed on ensuring a high standard of teacher training, in terms of subject knowledge and pedagogy but also in terms of political understanding and conformity. Graduates of the Manuel Ascunce programme were able to convert their initial teacher training into degrees, existing teachers were encouraged to work for a degree in education and this became the standard for new entrants into the profession with the result that, by 1998, 94.6% of all teachers in Cuba held a degree qualification in education and all were required to participate in ongoing professional development (Gasperini 2000:67). These high standards of teacher education came to be the expected norm, which may explain why the high levels of acceptance of young and inexperienced teachers during the Literacy

Campaign and the 1970s were not matched in the case of the ostensibly similar programmes that were to come later.

If the 1980s can be seen as the high point in Cuban education (in terms of standards and consistency), the position at by the end of the 1990s was far less propitious. While the Cuban government made much of the fact that no schools were closed during the crises of the Special Period (despite the scarcity of even the most basic of resources, such as paper and pencils) (Lutjens 1996:166), the effect on the teaching workforce was severe. Economic collapse and the repercussions of the new dual currency (which meant that those able to access hard currency via tourism, remittances or private sector work often possessed many times the spending power of a state worker) had rendered the state wage insufficient to meet basic needs. While many state jobs left workers with the time and opportunity to engage in some other, more profitable, kind of work to supplement their income, the workload of teachers (as educators throughout the world will recognise) was heavy, including preparation, marking, ongoing training and monthly visits to the home of each of their students. The result was that many highly qualified and experienced teachers left the profession. Students in school at that time talk of class sizes rising into the forties, classes delivered by assistants and even sometimes classes for which no teacher was available (Smith 2016:129). In the face of the crisis, a call went out for retired teachers to return to the profession and teenagers were again called upon to meet the shortfall.

This time, teenagers were used as teachers in primary as well as in basic secondary. Unlike in the programme of the 1970s, where young teachers only taught for half of each day, these recruits, after less than a year's training, were required to take on a full teaching workload. The primary teachers, referred to as *maestros emergentes* (emergent or emergency teachers), worked within their

local areas, often teaching at the school they had attended as children. In the case of secondary schools, in a reverse of the pattern established in the 1960s and 1970s, where urban young people went and taught in the countryside, youngsters were recruited from rural areas and brought to the urban centres (Havana in particular) where the teacher shortage was more acute. The scheme was accompanied by a restructuring of basic secondary (equivalent to junior high in the United States or key stage 3-4 in the UK) and the creation of the new role of *profesor general integral* (general comprehensive teacher)– a single teacher responsible for instructing a class of 15 students in all subjects, with the exception of PE and foreign languages, the gaps in their knowledge supplemented by the (reportedly interminable) use of video classes. It was not only the new recruits that took on this role; experienced teachers, used to teaching within their subject specialism, were required, often very reluctantly, to retrain as PGI (Smith 2018:40). The schemes were widely criticised, especially by parents, and are frequently blamed for a perceived fall in academic standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

These young teachers were among the first students of the municipalised universities. In the 1970s, all those entering the detachments were expected to remain permanently in the teaching profession and, consequently, were only offered the chance to study for pedagogical degrees. By the start of the 2000s, however, the position of teacher had lost so much status that it was only possible to recruit teenagers by limiting their commitment to eight years and by offering the chance to study popular degree subjects, primarily in the social sciences.

A New Kind of University Teacher

Unlike in the school sector, the role of university lecturer had largely maintained its high status (Smith 2015:200). Traditionally, the highest

achieving undergraduate students are retained in their departments and taken on as teachers, meaning that the academic standard of university lecturers is generally very high.

This élite system was overturned in the rush to find potential teachers for the new local university sites from among the graduates available within each municipality, a task that was easier to achieve in the cities than in smaller and more rural areas, where skilled manual occupations fulfilled by 'technicians' predominated.[xi] Accounts of this period stress a sense of urgency and disorganisation that led to inconsistencies in the selection process. Some responded voluntarily to the public appeal and others were sought out by full time staff at the new SUM, who were given 'the task of looking for existing professionals in the municipality, for those most capable in order that they could work with the students without pedagogical training' (I-9). Many were reluctant to take on the new role, either because of time or because they were uncertain that they possessed the skills and experience necessary:

> I didn't want to do it to begin with because I didn't feel confident about giving classes. I'm a bit shy and I was scared… it didn't have anything to do with what I was taught at university, but the people [from the SUM] kept talking to me until I signed up (I-4).

Potential 'associate teachers' responded to the initial call outs for a variety of reasons, not least the fact that they would receive an additional state wage.[xii] While in major cities, due to tourism and the growth in small private businesses, the cost of living had risen to such an extent that a small increase in state income might not yield significant changes in living standards, for those in more rural and provincial communities, still primarily operating in the Cuban Peso (CUP), it meant that for many teachers 'financially, it allowed us to

become more solvent' (I-98). An additional wage, which was paid according to hours taught but which associate teachers stated was often around 230 CUP (or about half the average full-time state wage),could make a significant dent in the estimated 747 CUP difference between state income and monthly basic living costs for a family with one wage earner in 2011 (García Álvarez and Anaya Cruz 2015:91). While teachers frankly stated that 'I'm not going to lie to you; the main motive was financial' (I-88), most went on to detail other reasons for responding, such as societal contribution or professional development. Analyses by those selecting and grading new teachers recognised and criticised the financial motivation of some but also recognised that other factors came into play once the new teachers were involved in the work:

> Professionals were getting involved, many for financial reasons, others for very personal reasons, which you could see in the dedication and commitment with which they carried out the task. There were many like that, but there were many others who were simply teaching classes for financial reasons and didn't take it seriously. But these fell by the wayside, teachers and tutors as much as students; they realised that they didn't fit that environment, because they weren't fulfilling their role, they weren't fulfilling their function and, in the end, those that remained were those who were truly interested in collaborating, in contributing, in continuing to grow, in developing (I-101).

Those accepted as teachers were then subject to a brief period of training and evaluation, which varied according to their experience. As one teacher involved in administering the selection process noted:

> Many of these specialist teachers had some pedagogical knowledge but others didn't. Our job was to prepare these other specialists, who didn't have this pedagogical skillset, in order that they could pass the exercise, which was to demonstrate a taughtclass at that level (I-8).

Potential teachers could offer a class on any topic related to the subject area and their existing knowledge. For many, this related to their community, such as the former director of the Culture House in Bartolomé Masó, who focussed on 'the loss of the tradition of organ music, which forms part of the identity of this municipality – a very simple practical exercise in methodology'(I-46), or on their current professional role, as in the case of this lawyer from Manzanillo, who explained that:

> In my case, I was in the business sector. I knew something of trade, of finance and of labour [law] and I chose to do it about trade law, which had always been a subject that had enthused me. I prepared my class, turned up and got a grade of four points for methodology (I-88).[xiii]

While she, and others like her, performed at a high standard, there were concerns over the selection process. One associate teacher of sociocultural studies was critical of the evaluations:

> [It was] really disorganised, because a lot of professionals turned up and it became clear that just being a professional didn't necessarily mean that you could be a teacher.So, there was a first stage, which was the evaluation, the categorisation of the teachers, and there they really went too far. Here, someone who turned up with a CV that was only so-so… there were people who had never stood in front of a class before who were given the category of *profesorauxiliar*or*profesor asistente*(I-97).[xiv]

In order to address shortfalls in the pedagogical standards of the new faculty, methodological support and training was offered for those who 'were perhaps knowledgeable about the subject but didn't know how to get through to the students methodologically, to transmit that knowledge' (I-77). This was important even for those with previous teaching experience, who were required to adapt their styles to the new mode of part-time study, where classes took

place usually just once a fortnight. Students explained that 'the teachers here weren't the same as the ones at the main university. They were more like a route for us to teach ourselves how to study' (I-3).

The urgent need for teachers meant that complete training could not be offered before new recruits began to teach, but they were monitored throughout their early development and received ongoing support. The subject lead for sociocultural studies in Bartolomé Masó explained that 'at least once a week we used to provide them with methodological training about how to get through to students and carry out teaching… frequently we would prepare classes together' (I-9).

Teachers felt strongly that their inexperience in teaching could be overcome where there was good subject knowledge. In the words of an associate teacher who was also an engineer at the sugar mill in Bartolomé Masó, 'the important thing is knowledge and I believe we had that; what we lacked was the methodology' (I-17). This subject knowledge, however, was also called into question, particularly where teachers were required to deliver programmes that did not relate to their degree specialism. Compelled to draw upon a limited local base of professionals, it was not always possible to find teachers who specialised in the areas they were to teach. Frequently, it might be the case that nobody in the area had that particular specialism, potentially compromising the quality of any teaching offered but, at the same time, making the need to train students in that area even more vital. Efforts were made to ensure that teachers were assigned as sensitively as possible, but students were aware that their teachers were not necessarily experts in their field:

> We're not talking about a specialist in marketing giving classes in marketing or a PR person giving classes in that subject. We're often talking about a psychologist who,

> by means of their research work and their own personal research, began to, you might say, enter into that field (I-102).

This distinction may be more complex than it appears on the surface. The experience of one teacher in Bartolomé Masó appears to be a case in point. A graduate of geological engineering, she worked on the degree of sociocultural studies, within which, 'initially, I started off teaching composition and style, and then they gave me the subject of Cuban culture' (I-4).She had, however, been working for many years in the culture sector, where her role as an IT specialist had required her to help numerous people with research. She was, moreover, clearly considered to be an exceptional teacher; numerous interviewees commended her by name and, as she notes:

> Often [students] would ask me to explain subjects that I didn't teach. This required me to familiarise myself with different subjects that weren't the ones I taught, to prepare so that I could answer their questions about those other subjects, because they said I knew how to put things across. I never suggested this; it just came up (I-4).

Experience appears to have differed greatly depending on the municipality and degree specialism. In Manzanillo, which had a greater number of graduates to draw on, the degree of psychology was spoken about in very positive terms, whereas in Bartolomé Masó:

> There was only one psychology graduate in the municipality, one who had graduated in it but wasn't working in the profession. Almost all of those who made up the teaching staff were from education and it's not the same… The first time we went up for the exam we failed, all except three. There were eighteen of us and only three passed… because the municipality lacked, at that time, the experience. After that, we were taught by teachers from the University of Granma itself, and, from then on, we all passed. Well, there were a few who unfortunately didn't pass, but they were the minority (I-27).

Even where teachers were working in their own specialism, they were seen as distinct from and compared unfavourably with teachers in the traditional universities, who (as noted above) were generally those with the highest academic achievement in their undergraduate cohorts. Associate teachers admitted that'I had to study a lot, to go back and try to regain that feeling of studying and try to get over the gaps in my knowledge that I had at university, because I also had gaps – I wasn't the best student' (I-40), and many had spent a long time out of academia, 'losing [their] intellectual faculties' (I-40). It was evident from their testimony that many associate teachers were both conscious of this distinction and seriously determined to meet the high standards:

> We're not teachers like they are… we did manage, perhaps not to their standard, but we did manage to get the knowledge across, which is the most important thing, and I don't think we did too badly (I-17).

> I had to study twice as hard as the students because I had to deliver a high-quality class, because it wasn't just the institution that demanded it of us but also the students, students who were also our colleagues. There wasn't going to be any taboo or reticence, or any excuse for not answering their questions correctly. I had to face a little bit of fear, because I used to think that at some point I wouldn't be able to give an answer to a student or to some question about the subject (I-40).

This raises questions about two of the central criticisms of the municipalisation programme: the academic standards achieved by students and the expertise of their teachers. With notable exceptions of high-achieving, prize-winning students and highly qualified teachers whose previous roles had given them a solid methodological base, these criticisms have a face-value validity, with teachers from the traditional provincial universities (which were tasked with assessing the students) admitting in off-the-record conversations that they felt compelled to mark students from the municipalised universities more leniently.

It is important, however, to recognise that, in both cases, success is being measured against a culturally specific yardstick: Cuba's traditional, élite universities. As in England there is a common perception of what a university lecturer should be and what academic excellence looks like. In terms of meeting these preconceived standards, the municipalised universities are less fairly described as good or bad than as patchy and inconsistent, but it is important to go beyond these preconceived standards and consider what these teachers offered that surpassed or was simply different from the traditional model.

Teacher, Worker, Student

The same teacher who admitted that 'I wasn't the best student' (I-40) finished his sentence thus: 'I wasn't the best student, although I used to participate in a lot of scientific research, which was always my strength, and I came out as the best graduating student in terms of scientific research' (I-40). What is evident here is the way in which, in Cuba as elsewhere, theoretical academic knowledge continues, almost automatically, to be privileged over practical or situated knowledge. This engineer's critique of the idealisation and isolation of the traditional university, and of the ways in which it was challenged by the municipalised university, is lucid and complete, and deserves to be quoted at length:

> A positive aspect of the universalisation of education is that its effect wasn't simply encapsulated in the centres of 'high learning'; rather, it had a direct impact on industry and communities. Because we viewed universities in an old-fashioned way, as a centre… as the pinnacle, as something superior, but really cut-off from the community.

> The image I had of this centre of higher learning was as something distant; before this process it was somewhat distant, and this distance meant the interaction was almost non-existant. But this process contributed to a direct relationship with

manufacturing and the community, and this is where you'll find its positive impact. And I believe it to be crucial. Even the teacher who locks himself away in a higher education institution like in a glass case; yeah, he's very academic and seen by us as a man whose interaction is limited to his laboratory, his subject, his books. Because in Cuba there are some great pedagogues, but pedagogy also needs to be put into practice, enriched with practice and then brought back to theory, and I believe that this is the positive aspect of the university, including for those of us who graduated in the other model, the ivory tower.

It was really useful for us because in order to teach a class, we had to educate ourselves, and self-education means that you have to study, to go back to the true roots, you might say. Even to explain a technological process, you have to examine the maths, the general chemistry, making the teacher who self-educates a better person. In the course of the process, we became aware of the distance that existed between the industrial process and the parent university… universities shouldn't be closed off in ivory towers; they have to extend into manufacturing and the community (I-40).

Seen from this perspective, the most immediately apparent strength of the associate teachers is that they were, in the most part, workers, still exercising their professions and with, therefore, up-to-date knowledge and practical experience. This was clearly valued by students:

It was really advantageous to have teachers who were still carrying out their profession (I-102).

It was useful to have teachers currently working in their profession. I remember teachers who worked as psychologists in the health sector… in a way they gave us an insight and basis of what working in healthcare was about and, through their experience, we could see what caring for a patient was actually like (I-103).

The ability to use real-life examples was highlighted as a valuable pedagogical tool by teachers from law to engineering:

> There are distinguished professors who don't know how to teach a class… you've got to explain it to them with simple, practical examples, so that they can take on the knowledge, and they'll understand it in no time. If not, a lot of subjects become tedious – technical subjects. When I was teaching the process of calculating pumps and compressors, we'd take them into the industries so that they could see the machines working (I-40).

> It was easier because it's what I do for a living, and when the student was looking at me blankly then I'd bring in an example and they'd say, 'Teacher, now I get it!'. I looked for ways to help them relate the theory to practice using my experience (I-77).

This teacher then went on to outline how this rooted pedagogy was, in many ways, more effective than the traditional, highly theoretical model:

> A lot of my colleagues could grasp the theory but were far from being able to grasp how to apply it in practice. So, apart from the salary, as I mentioned, I was also motivated by being able to relate the two… because there's a real world out there. When you take classes at, for example, the university of Oriente, the doctors who taught us, for all their knowledge, are really quite detached from how the law is applied, and when you end up in an organisation and start to see a lot of things, you realise that the theory is one thing and that… what's done in practice is far removed from what you see in the theory (I-77).

At the same time, associate teachers clearly respected academic excellence and felt that their new role enabled them to develop as professionals, returning to an academic scene that many felt they had been unable to access since taking their degrees, 'because the culture sector is very difficult, even today; although we do now have centres for professional development in culture, it's very difficult to

achieve comprehensive, systematic development within that system, but it is provided within education'(I-98). For some, this signified the possibility of becoming more qualified 'because, within universalisation, as it was called, people did masters and some even did doctorates' (I-96). Even where this possibility did not exist, the immersion in knowledge and theory required to teach at this level meant a return to fulfilling academic activity:

> It keeps you active, because in our area, development – a doctorate, a master's in our subject, which is chemical engineering – is really difficult, because they all take place in Santiago de Cuba, and at least going back to teaching these subjects – chemistry, which is what I always liked – required me to get back into studying, to take up my books (I-17).

> It's like going to university again – taking another degree (I-4).

The fact that numerous professionals within a given locality were entering into teaching at the same time, with shared concerns about their academic and pedagogical practice, led to the creation of communities of knowledge in which expertise was shared:

> This mutual understanding between the teachers gave rise to a lot of things, because it wasn't every day; it was on Saturdays, and that allowed us to get to know each other, to exchange books, for example. At that time, I was reading a lot about psychology, because I was coming face-to-face with students and, in any classroom, there are always a lot of different personality types who think about things differently (I-4).

Whether or not one undertook formal post-graduate study, there was a growing expectation that the associate teachers would fulfil all the normal functions of a university teacher, including research:

> They were also committed professionals, because it's true that you got paid, but it reached a point where universalisation wasn't just about getting paid for the classes you taught, and they started to require these teachers to do research, to require them to attempt promotion to the next grade, just like in a university, and, in that sense, universalisation was a success and provided the locality with a good number of qualified professionals, which had an impact on that locality and which gained it some recognition.

The improvements that this psychology teacher notes in a general sense were felt on a personal level and teachers felt that their performance of their professional roles had also improved:

> After going back into Culture, I feel that I've changed as a professional through being a teacher. The vision you have from organising your work in education brings you so many tools for working systematically in any environment that you find yourself in. It's useful – it's a basis for a management role in almost any organisation… They say that the best preparation for working in any environment is working in education (I-98).

> Even in terms of practising law, I learnt more teaching classes because I had to study aspects that sometimes I hadn't seen in daily life. There were elements that I taught that I knew existed, but which had receded to the back of my mind because I hadn't been using them in practice; nevertheless, in order to teach them, I had to study heaps of material and pretty much do a university study (I-77).

It is important to remember here that it was not only the teachers that were present in this work environment. Many students, especially those who entered university via the CISJ, were in work placements; others were experienced workers, with technical qualifications in their field, who continued to work while studying, often in the same institutions as their teachers, extending the pedagogic role into the workplace and creating a praxis for both student and

teacher, in which work was informed by the teaching and learning process and vice versa. These practices extended the classroom into the workplace and made the workplace a classroom.

Many interviewees spoke of the benefits of being able to test out at work the concepts they had been learning and discuss them with a teacher who was also a part of the workplace and fully engaged with the real context,repeatedly drawing attention to the value of having their teachers on hand in the workplace. In one representative comment, a student working in the sugar mill explained that:

> In order to complete the additional tasks that we were assigned, it's not the same to be getting on with your work and say, 'Hey, teacher, how do you do this?''What does this mean?''In this case, what should I do?' It's a lot more effort to have to then go and seek out your teacher (I-37).

Recognising the value of putting learning directly into practice, pedagogy was built into the working environment. In the case of the sugar mill:

> Given that the students worked in industry, we organised it so that the drop-in sessions could take place within the plant they were working in, on a timetable that wouldn't affect their work – it could be at the end of the working day. And, because the specialist was right there, it made the whole task a lot easier… It was possible for me, as a teacher, to create a methodology that developed out of the students' workplace experience… [some] classes took place within the factory and during the manufacturing process – there are subjects that are specific to that process and those classes took place here because it was the best classroom (I-8).

The siting of university centres in the localities where people lived, together with the fact that so many students were also workers, enabled the development

of a curriculum where coursework and dissertations were expected to relate to the workplace or community. In the case of sociocultural studies, this generally involved completing diagnostic research either of a small community or of a particular cultural service. In Bartolomé Masó, the results of these studies enabled, for example, cultural promotors working in those areas to improve the activities they offered, and they frequently left a concrete legacy, such as mini libraries in hard-to-reach communities. In the sugar mill, the use of students' work was yet more systematic, with the teachers directing students' research in accordance with the technical problems that affected production in a mill that combined US, Soviet, UK and Cuban technology, some of it many decades old:

> At the same time, I was working as an associate teacher and here in the sugar mill, and I looked for ways to make sure that all the out-of-class work, coursework and dissertations were directed towards resolving problems… that constitute bottlenecks in production. In my area, we've identified about nine of these bottlenecks – technological problems that haven't been solved, although they're on their way to being solved… Because, since we don't have great specialisation, on account of the lack of master's, of post-graduate courses, in terms of the design of technological equipment… it falls to us to design them… that's what we've got in the pipeline for this year, and this is work for a student (I-40).

It is clear from this teacher's testimony that the students' work was more than theoretical exercise: it answered concrete problems that needed to be addressed and that, moreover, had not yet been resolved by the engineers who were these workers' supervisors and teachers. Not only did this make study more meaningful for the students, there are also clear cases where their work was of tangible value to their employer. The student interviewed (I-37) was awarded a prestigious Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment prize for his work improving the efficiency of a processing machine within the mill. More

importantly, he was also able to see his engineering solution put into practice and the productivity of the mill improved as a result.

A lawyer and associate teacher from Manzanillo argued forcibly that the presence of students alongside their teachers in the workplace (whether existing workers or those given work placements) ensured that graduates of the SUM were not only equal to those of the traditional university but were, in some regards, superior:

> They came out better prepared than we did, because they came out already able to take on, as many did, a caseload. When I faced my first caseload, I did so with a great deal of apprehension…We taught them these subjects and illustrated them with real cases drawn from practice, not from theory. Because when you handle a case purely by the book, that's a long way from the cases that come up for us… For example, at the University of Oriente, nobody ever taught me how to act in front of a board of directors, how to deal with a client, how to behave and what the vulnerable points were that we should touch on with a particular client (I-77).

This defence of the standard of the graduates of the SUM is vital because we see similar hierarchical thinking in relation to the students as is described above in the case of the teachers. In both cases, a deficit model is applied, which evaluates standards purely in relation to the unquestioned marker of the traditional university. Those critical of the programme point out that students in this modality were less likely to achieve excellence in terms of the range of sources to which they had access, the time available for study, the accuracy and style of written work, etc. Those defending the programmes tend to do so on the same terrain, repeatedly pointing out that the final exams were the same for the new and the traditional universities and demanding legitimacy on that basis. The question of who would actually be a better worker, citizen or person at the end of their university experience is notably absent from public and academic

discourse but comes through forcefully in the testimony of both teachers and students.

A difficulty that arises when we try to overturn this deficit model (one which denigrates the kinds of knowledge and experience held by these teachers and students) is that it can easily be replaced by an alternative deficit model that, by excusing weaknesses in rigour, content and pedagogy, makes the implicit assumption that a standard of education that would not be considered sufficient for an élite student is sufficient for the more racially and economically diverse groups that have traditionally been excluded from higher education. It is also necessary, of course, to recognise that the use-value of a degree comes not only from the intrinsic knowledge and skills gained through study, but also from societal perceptions of the status and prestige that the qualification signifies. While it is possible to frame a coherent argument that the degrees taken at municipal universities were often of equal or greater value than those taken through the traditional route, this only pertains fully if they are perceived as such within that society.

The general tenor of the interviews (and other conversations I conducted on this subject in Cuba) suggests that degrees gained from the SUM commanded more respect and were less questioned in smaller, more rural communities than in bigger cities with greater access to other routes into higher education. Critiques that were expressed strongly in Havana were less present in provincial Manzanillo and markedly absent in rural Bartolomé Masó. This may be explained by the fact that citizens of these larger conurbations were able to make more informed comparisons between the different modalities or it may be that something different and more powerful was happening in these smaller communities. The whole notion of municipalisation signifies that the experience of each locality will be different, so it is not possible to give here the

experiences of Manzanillo and Bartolomé Masó and extrapolate out to make generalisations about the national experience. What is possible is to view these cases as examples of what is possible when your educational experience is embedded into your life and community – when it belongs where you do. Taking the workplace as a starting point, we can see the importance of the educational relationships between students and teachers extending into every aspect of the community.

Collaboration and Respect

Working together as colleagues disrupted the traditional teacher-student relationship. Students often knew and trusted their teachers and respected them because of their work, noting that 'the majority of the teachers had been workers, our own colleagues, who were well-equipped in terms of knowledge (I-42)', and were able to approach them with confidence. One teacher explained that:

> Having our own colleagues as students helped us a lot. Because of this, at the point when a student would come to ask about some point of uncertainty, there was trust. This relationship helped the process to flow more easily' (I-17).

The mutual respect of colleagues made for a more horizontal structure, as knowledge was exchanged between equals. In the case of sociocultural studies, a great number of the students were experienced workers in the field, typically working in libraries, cultural centres or as cultural promotors in the community. The degree was a new one and the first specifically designed for workers in the sector, which meant that it was an opportunity for many experienced technicians to formalise the wealth of knowledge they had built up over the course of years. In the case of Bartolomé Masó, which has a particularly strong and well-

integrated workforce in culture, it was clear that this knowledge was harnessed and respected in the classroom:

> We were a group that everyone recognised anyway because we were from Culture and already knew a lot… we were very creative because we would put on assemblies and things that the rest of the people weren't used to. Yes, those of us who worked in Culture had a certain affinity with the teachers, because we were also helpful to them. If we had to develop, for example, an action plan, we'd known for years how to put one together. In practice, we knew how to do a lot of things that were helpful, and the teachers always trusted us and there was mutual respect because, as well as all this, we were all adults of more or less the same age (I-7).

This recognition of the value of the knowledge brought to the classroom by the student was reinforced by the fact that, often new to teaching or working outside of their specialism, 'many [of the teachers] were learning at the same time' (I-7).

> Fundamentally, from the first day, I told them that there needed to be a great deal of communication and that I was learning along with them… that it might be that one day they'd ask me a question and I wouldn't know the answer, that we were all there to learn, as much them from me as me from them. This contributed to a sense of working together (I-4).

The horizontalism developed at this time was later embedded into professional life, as new graduates worked with their former teachers on an equal footing:

> It's easier now or, rather, all of us colleagues are at the same level. They consult me; I consult them. We do research together, students with teachers, which was more difficult before, and we're all enrolled on a diploma now. The exchanges now are on the same level; already, we don't see it as me being the one who was the teacher and them the students. Now everyone's on the same level (I-88).

This mutual respect was essential when it came to supporting students through the challenging process of part-time study. In addition to returning to study after an often significant length of time out of education, practical challenges made it difficult for many students to continue with their studies, and dropout rates were high.[xv] Expensive and inadequate transport from isolated areas and the difficulty of combining study with work and household responsibilities were the most frequently cited problems, with a general recognition that these presented greater challenges for women.

A key strength of the municipalised university was that the teachers were from the communities in which they worked. They knew these societal factors and challenges, not as outside observers, but as part of their own lived reality. Many earned similar wages to their students and it is clear from their interviews that their teaching roles presented many of them with the same challenges faced by their students on returning to study. In the examples below, it is difficult to distinguish the experiences of the teacher from those of the student.

> In my case, I think it was a bit more difficult than it was for him [a male student present at the interview] because I had a very young baby, who was also asthmatic. My company never wanted to contract another lawyer and I had to keep on doing the bulk of the housework… I was working, studying until 1am, and my husband used to laugh at me because he'd ask me questions and I'd reply in my sleep (I-88).

> I was working and going to university on Saturdays. At the same time, I had family responsibilities (my children were small) and family problems. My mum wasn't able to leave her bed and my brother had cancer… I thought I'd go mad because I had so many things to do…I went to work in the day, did the housework in the afternoon and, at night, studied a bit and looked after my sick family (I-47).

A Situated Pedagogy

In the introduction to her collection of essays on teaching, *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks underlines, through her own experience, the vital importance of having teachers who have a complete understanding of their students' lives. In her case, she describes the approach of the teachers she had in primary school, almost all of whom were black women from her own community.

> My teachers made sure that they "knew" us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated by our family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters, and brothers. My effort and ability to learn was always contextualised in the framework of generational family experience. Certain behaviors, gestures, habits of being were traced back (hooks 1994:3).

The model put forward here by hooks emphasises a knowledge of the student that is situated, rather than limited to the intense and fragmentary engagement with students solely in academic settings. There are students, for example in further education or schools (where boundaries are even more rigidly enforced), who I have known extremely well, working with them sometimes daily on a one-to-one basis, but my knowledge of their lives outside of education has been limited to their own accounts and reports passed on, on a need-to-know basis, by the institution. In general, I have neither lived in their area, walked down their streets nor spent time in their homes. Such professional boundaries are usually imposed with the best of intentions – the safeguarding of the young person and protection of the educator – but can have the effect of alienating the student from a teacher, who is seen as an institutional other, only concerned with their academic progress, and of diminishing the teacher's ability to

understand the learner as a complete individual and the factors that limit or nurture their development.

In the municipalisation process, just as the boundaries between work and study were permeable, so too were the boundaries between homelife and study. This has been a consistent feature of education in Cuba during the revolutionary period and can be seen in the 'very strong interactions between family, school and community', many of which are 'prescribed officially and incorporated explicitly into the structures of the respective institutions' (Álvarez-Valvidia et al. 2009:317), and in practices such as the requirement for primary school teachers to visit each of their students at home at least once a month (Smith 2016:139). This approach, however, reached its apotheosis in the municipalisation process, particularly in the form of the new figure of the personal tutor.

Recognising the challenges that learners would face on returning to education, often after a long period without studying, and doing so in a modality that required significant independent study, each student was assigned a tutor who would be responsible for their personal and academic development. This tutor did not necessarily work in their subject area; their job was to get to know their students intimately and to support them as a whole person engaged in a learning process.

Despite the lip-service paid in the UK to the provision of personalised and differentiated learning, there is a tendency to view the student's learning as isolated from the rest of their life. It is true that where specific students are seen as being at risk, the school may be involved in an integrated response, along with social services, medical services, police and so on, but this approach is reserved for students who are seen as having significant problems. Support

structures within the Cuban municipalised universities, by contrast, clearly regarded each student as an integrated whole.

Initially, each tutor was assigned just five students to supervise, with whom they would usually work for the full duration of their studies (a minimum of five years). In interviews conducted in Granma province, it appeared that most had retained this high tutor to student ratio (although anecdotally this was not the case in all areas),which enabled them to work with students:

> In the most accessible, convenient way, without taking too long about it, we'd seek out the core of each student, because we almost always had a total of five – it wasn't possible to go beyond that, because it would be impossible with 30 students like that… We'd check on them constantly, give them tasks and see how they were working, evaluate them (I-9).

When starting to work with a new student, the tutor would conduct a lengthy interview with them, discussing their personal and work situation, strengths, challenges and aspirations, and this was just the start of the process:

> Don't think that the work of a tutor was easy, not at all, because, above all, you had to put yourself in their place, make friends with them, be a comrade but without being tiresome… to guide them, help them. That's why we started with a comprehensive diagnostic, a diagnostic where we examined their private home, their family, their illnesses, their children, their living conditions, everything. This made for a pretty complex task.

> We didn't just converse with them; sometimes in conversation not everything gets said, so, in order to do our job well, we'd visit their families, even the mass organisations – the Federation [of Cuban Women], the CDR–[xvi]we'd look at how well integrated they were, their interactions in their neighbourhood, their personal relationships, their relationship with their families. It was a big job. From there, we'd

look at where they worked (if they were in work), the job they carried out and their conduct, everything.We tried to create an internal and external photograph of the students – that was the tutor's objective. And from there you created an action plan to work towards achieving each year: values that needed strengthening or shaping or developing, what to change in their behaviour, how to guide their studies from a position of being so disconnected (I-9).

Instinctively, to a foreign researcher, particularly one imbued with stereotypical British reserve, this level of scrutiny feels potentially intrusive and claustrophobic. Part of the tutor's role, for example, was to chase up students who missed classes. In a society where almost no-one has access to the internet at home and few have it at work, and where many houses have no landline phone and mobile phone calls are prohibitively expensive, this often involved tutors taking long journeys to visit students unannounced in their homes. While many families appear to have greatly valued this intervention on the part of the tutor, it is clear that some were resistant and that tutors had to modify their approach on occasion. In contrasting accounts, two tutors explain that:

"Come on! We've got to go and visit someone who lives miles away!" We'd go by bike, or sometimes on foot, seeking out the family environment: what was going on, how they were, what they were doing. We'd turn up at all hours. And that was really gratifying, because a lot of the time the parents would say, "Thanks, teacher. Look, it's because of you that my son, who couldn't get a degree because he messed up at high school… and this, now, is a really big and important opportunity for him to move forward, and you're helping us" (I-9).

When a student reaches this age, a lot has already happened to them (and not all of it good) because of their family background. Sometimes the family doesn't co-operate sufficiently, and you've got to be on top of it and, in order not to make a bad impression, you have to consult them on everything. Whether they'll let you help also depends on how you present your intentions to them – if they're not convinced, they'll close the door on you (I-100).

Scruples over the potential invasiveness of this approach, however, are partly allayed by the fact that this privileging of community and connection over privacy is consistent with other aspects of Cuban society, both politically and in terms of personal relations. More importantly, the balance of power was redressed by the fact that it was a two-way process. Rather than teachers and tutors being distant figures, coming into a student's home to make judgments then retiring into their own anonymous lives, students repeatedly highlighted the way in which they opened up their own homes and free time. In the case both of tutors and of class teachers, despite time being set aside each week when students could meet their teachers for 'consultas', it was considered normal for students to contact their teachers between classes for help and advice, by phoning or, more frequently, going to their houses to seek advice directly, including late at night. In two representative comments, they explained that:

> The teachers gave us the opportunity to go to their houses at any time, whatever the hour (I-33).

> There were even teachers who used to say… "anyone who has any problem, come to my house, whatever time it is, so that we can look at it and analyse it". Sometimes, we'd go as a whole class so that they'd only have to explain once and because everyone giving their opinions and ideas was better (I-13).

This willingness was not just the product of cultural norms; it derived in great part from the comprehensive and empathetic knowledge of students' lives detailed above. Here, one teacher explains her motivations for taking a flexible approach:

> There was flexibility for those people who had these kinds of needs in order to help them finish their degrees. At least in my case, I always offered them this flexibility.

> I'd say to them that at whatever time, at my work, at my house, they should come and find me so that I could explain [the work] to them. Because it's not the same when you don't have anything to do except for study, when you aren't married, you don't have children, you don't have responsibilities of any kind except for studying. The circumstances of most of these people were difficult, and they needed to be helped, whatever the time (I-4).

Local identification, along with teachers' willingness to give up their time for students and welcome them into their own space, created a sense of trust, whereby (in contrast to the counterproductive dynamics often seen in the UK, where school students often view teachers as antagonists and university students frequently see them as service professionals providing a commodity), students recognised their teachers as on their side and motivated by their success.

> The challenges were difficult but, thanks to having the teachers right here in the municipality, who were from the university, who were from here, you could visit them, even in their own houses, or ask them a question right on the street… I'd say that the great strength of this little group of teachers was that they didn't see it as something to get out of the way or something they just did because they received a salary, but rather because they already saw us as family… it was like a family, not that they were under any obligation or anything like that (I-41).

This sense of trust and connection allowed students to see their teachers and tutors not simply as intellectual guides but also as humans to whom they could go with their emotional needs. Recognising education as a journey as affective as it is academic, numerous interviewees described how the sense that their teachers cared about them and were there for them helped them overcome crises. For one student of sociocultural studies, who later passed her degree and took on a leadership role in local government, the crisis was failing her final exams on the first attempt.

> Yeah, I got on really well with my teachers because, as well as being our teachers, they were also our friends and everything and, let me tell you, I was so disappointed the first time I took the exams that I couldn't… and they stuck with me – "You can do it; yes, you can do it" – giving us the courage to continue, because I was devastated, but there they were. I don't know whether it was because they cared about us or what it was; all I know is that they helped us right up until the end (I-11).

Their stories repeatedly highlight teachers going beyond their professional roles and boundaries and offering a genuine human connection.

> I had teachers within the universalisation process who gave so much of themselves. They took an interest in every one of their students and, really, I'm so grateful to them because, in some ways, they weren't just teaching us, they were also our friends… they helped us to resolve personal problems that might have stopped us from getting on with our degrees (I-103).

> For example, my teacher rescued me any number of times… because you go through times of uncertainty, indecision, and she knocked on my door and told me, "No, the mission is that you graduate; it's to keep moving forward". Thanks to her help, at the moment when I needed this, maybe, emotional support… and what she gave me, other teachers gave me too. It was like a family (I-41).

The language of emotion recurs frequently in testimony from both teachers and students, using terms that can seem surprising from an external perspective, but which are common markers in discussions of education at all levels within Cuba (Smith 2016:226; Blum 2011:136).

> They were like our family. We took all our teachers into our hearts; even now, in the street, it's "Teacher! Teacher!". At the end of the day, it was six yearsof study (I-47).

> I graduated six years ago, and I still get on with all of them. For me, they're like part of my family because I've come to love them (I-37).

> It's true that when you speak well and conscientise your students you achieve a lot, but it has to be done with love because if there's no love in what you achieve, that doesn't get you anywhere (I-100).

A discourse of love and affection between teachers and their students underlines the themes of horizontalism, personalisation and respect that characterises much of the testimony around associate teachers in Manzanillo and Bartolomé Masó, emphasising the connection between the two figures as individuals.The repeated use of the terms 'family' and 'friends' is also significant here in designating teacher and student as part of the same collective, working towards a shared goal, and is replicated again and again in the testimony both of teachers and of students. In this account, the student repeatedly emphasises the supportive and collaborative nature of the task, referring consistently to teachers as 'with' their students, as opposed to simply guiding or assisting them in their separate endeavour.

> We started off with a set of subjects common to all the degrees: it covered everything and we were all there, like a family, the teachers just the same, always right there in lockstep with us, with us in all of our problems. There were teachers who started with us who, in our sixth year… came and accompanied us on the day we went to defend our dissertations… It was a programme, and programmes start up and close down, and still today we haven't stopped calling the teachers, 'teacher' (I-10).

The programme did, indeed, 'start up and close down'. Municipal university centres still exist in Cuba, but their function today is principally directed towards post-graduate study and to research and evaluation to support municipal governments in local development projects. Undergraduate numbers in the centres are tiny in comparison to their former mass enrolments, with most municipalities offering very few courses, chosen specifically to meet the labour needs of the area, most frequently in pedagogy or agriculture. Undergraduate

enrolments across the whole of higher education, which had peaked at nearly 750,000 in 2007-8 (ONE 2011: Table 18.19), reduced to around 166,000 by 2015-16 (ONE 2017:25).

As is the case with many of the policy initiatives associated with the Battle of Ideas, policy makers, academics and much of the Cuban public seem keen to draw a line under the process of municipalisation. Quite apart from the high financial cost of such schemes, the mass mobilisation and hyperbolic rhetoric of the epoch seem to be regarded with a degree of embarrassment – overly-grandiose undertakings associated with Fidel Castro and a political model that seems out of place in the apparently more pragmatic and moderate era of Raúl Castro and, now, Díaz-Canel. In the case of higher education, it is clear that many of the critiques of municipalisation are justified, including, in some cases, in relation to teaching. Not all areas saw the same successes outlined here; it is also undoubtedly true that not all within these municipalities had experiences as positive as those of the students and teachers who were willing to share their stories with a foreign researcher.

Testimony from two very specific communities cannot give a full picture of the role and significance of this new kind of teacher, but it is, perhaps, the right level of focus at which to examine processes defined at and significant at precisely this local level. Viewing the period as an isolated event or aberration risks de-valuing these local truths and transformations, as well as failing to place this situated pedagogy within Cuba's tradition of radical education undertaken by radical educators.

One interviewee from Manzanillo had a particularly clear perspective on this development, having been involved in the process since its inception. He explained that, 'when I was 25, the Revolution triumphed and I went off to teach

people to read in Pinar del Río… and there I discovered my vocation' (I-100). Teaching during the Literacy Campaign, he will have been required to live as part of the community he was working in – staying in their homes, working the land with them and building the language of their daily experience into his teaching. He had five students.

He retired in 1997, after a working life spent in various different levels of education. When municipalisation began, however, the need for teachers brought many retired professionals back into work. He took on a leadership role within the teaching team and was also contracted as a personal tutor, finding out about his tutees' lives and building that knowledge into his guidance and support. He had five students.

The key difference in the two roles, apart from the disparity in the prestige in which they are held, is that the Literacy Campaign involved, for the most part, educated urbanites going into rural areas to teach the people who lived there. Teacher and student shared their experiences and learned from one another and then the teacher left. In the case of municipalisation, communities educated themselves, learning from friends and colleagues and then using that knowledge in the work they did together.

Sitting together on rocking chairs in his front room, the tutor tells me about his tutees from the university, listing their names and explaining in detail what each of them is doing now. He describes how 'we became united to such an extent that still, even when you're retired, you meet young people in the street who thank you and tell you that you saved them' (I-100). Siting higher education within local communities and enabling local people to teach one another allowed them to take control over their education, moulding it to local industry

and the study of local problems. Most importantly, at least in the communities studied here, it meant that their education and knowledge belonged to them:

> Now we don't see the university as something distant. It's here in our hands. It's possible; I can do it. Before it was a dream and today it's a reality and so close that I can take hold of it and make it happen (I-9).

Interviews cited

Number	Municipality	Notes
3	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, cultural worker (library), F
4	Bartolomé Masó	Associate teacher, cultural worker (museum), F
7	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, cultural worker (director of the library), F
8	Bartolomé Masó	Full time teacher of agro-industrial engineering, former engineer, M
9	Bartolomé Masó	Course leader for socio-cultural studies and tutor, F
10	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, CSIJ, senior local government role, F
11	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, CSIJ, senior local government role, F
13	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, social worker for ministry of labour, M
17	Bartolomé Masó	Associate teacher, engineer at the sugar mill, M
27	Bartolomé Masó	Student of psychology, postal worker, F
33	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, shop worker at a tourist hotel, F
37	Bartolomé Masó	Student of agro-industrial engineering, engineer at the sugar mill, M
40	Bartolomé Masó	Associate teacher, engineer at the sugar mill, M

41	Bartolomé Masó	Student of agro-industrial engineering, manager at the sugar mill, M
42	Bartolomé Masó	Student of agro-industrial engineering, former head of a local agricultural co-operative, M
46	Bartolomé Masó	Associate teacher of socio-cultural studies, former head of the Culture House, F
47	Bartolomé Masó	Student of socio-cultural studies, head of the local Federation of Cuban Women, F
76	Manzanillo	Associate psychology teacher, F
77	Manzanillo	Associate law teacher, F
88	Manzanillo	Associate law teacher, F
96	Manzanillo	Associate teacher of socio-cultural studies, film-maker, M
97	Manzanillo	Associate teacher of socio-cultural studies, historian, M
98	Manzanillo	Full time teacher of socio-cultural studies, M
100	Manzanillo	Tutor and head of department, retired teacher, M
101	Manzanillo	Full time psychology teacher, F
102	Manzanillo	Student of social communication, HR at ministry of labour, former social worker, F
103	Manzanillo	Student of psychology, tax worker, former social worker, F

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[i]Elián Gonzalez was a young boy rescued at sea after his mother died attempting to escape with him from Cuba to Miami by raft. According to the 'wet-foot, dry-foot' agreement, the US government was legally obliged to return him to Cuba. His family in the United States, however, were determined that he would remain there, leading to mass mobilisations led by Cuban youth calling for his return.

[ii]For a more detailed assessment of these schemes, see Smith 2016, chapter four.

[iii] Although 2002 saw the introduction of the programme, students hoping to take university courses were required to undertake a year long 'levelling' course, meaning that the first cohort entered university in the 2003-4 academic year.

[iv] Again, the first university cohort began in 2003-4.

[v] By the late 1980s, the proportion of university students from working class backgrounds had fallen to 62% from a figure of 89% in the 1960s (Domínguez 2004:110), and one small study, undertaken at the university of Havana, showed a student body that was 82.7% White (Domínguez 2004:118), as compared to around half of the population as a whole.

[vi] PRODEL (Strengthening Municipal Capacities for Local Development) is a project developed with Swiss finance and collaboration to offer targeted support for local development strategies to 20 selected municipalities across the country.

[vii]29 interviews were carried out in Manzanillo and 47 in Bartolomé Masó. A list of interviews referred to here is provided in at the end of the article. Interviews are numbered from the full sample for the wider project. Translations from the Spanish are mine.

[viii] In Cuba, 'graduate' and 'professional' are used more or less interchangeably.

[ix] The worker-farmer pathway refers to the provision put in place for adult workers to return to education, from primary level provision to high school equivalence, with routes into higher education.

[x] For a fuller discussion of the Manuel Ascunce detachments, see Smith 2018.

[xi]'Technician' refers to workers who had completed the technical equivalent of a high school diploma.

[xii] This was an exceptional condition as, under normal circumstances, no Cuban is allowed to receive more than one state wage.

[xiii] Grades in Cuban university study are numbered from one to five, with five being the highest.

[xiv] The categories used to designate different grades of teacher in the Cuban university system are (in ascending order) *profesor instructor*, *profesor asistente*, *profesor auxiliar* and *profesor titular*.

[xv] It is very difficult say with certainty what the dropout rates were for a particular course or mode of study because national figures do not differentiate. Local university centres were happy for me to go through their records in detail, but these showed only those who took their final exams. From the accounts of interviewees, it appears that dropout rates varied dramatically from course to course.

[xvi] Cuba's mass organisations are an integral tool for popular participation, with the FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) and the CDR (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution) the most massive in terms of membership, and the CDR, in particular, have also been seen as the 'eyes and ears of the Revolution' (Kapcia 2008:134). Originally set up for civil defence purposes ahead of the Bay of Pigs invasion, they have since developed into local organisations on every block in the country, undertaking tasks from organising study circles, ensuring that citizens receive immunisations and repairing and maintaining local facilities to policing political conformity and organising rotas for night watches.