

# The Teacher's Ideal, School and Education in Ramiro Guerra Sánchez (1880-1970)

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**Abstract:** Ramiro Guerra Sánchez, a representative figure of Cuban culture, historiography and education, was one of the educators whose imprint was developed during the first half of the 20th century who, from the perspective of bourgeois liberalism of positivist affiliation, developed a theory and practice education whose central axis is the promotion of a Cuban, democratic and progressive school during the Bourgeois Republic (1902-1958). Defender of the Cuban public school, his philosophy of education is part of the intangible heritage that represents Cuban progressive educational thought, which is based on the analysis of the categories Teacher, School and Education. The work reflects on the facts, processes and social and intellectual interactions that contributed to the determination of a vocation towards teaching from an early age as the basis of said philosophy of education. Which allows us to understand the formation of an ideal of the teacher, school and education as professional ideals, as well as the place that these ideals occupied in his philosophy of education from the perspective of his contemporaries. The bibliographic review carried out takes as its starting point the primary sources of information that reveal the educational theory and practice developed by Ramiro Guerra Sánchez.

**Keywords:** Ramiro Guerra Sánchez, Educational Philosophical Literature, Contributions, Positivism

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## 1. Introduction

Ramiro Guerra Sánchez was a Cuban intellectual who belonged to the so-called "Pedagogical Action Movement" [1]. This movement defended a

Nation's cultural project for itself in the face of the denationalization of the country and the need to consolidate the bourgeois Republic. It developed the Cuban pedagogical theory and its patriotic purposes. He denounced the abandonment of popular education and the growth of illiteracy. The solution of these problems was assumed as a cultural and patriotic task essential for the economic development of the country, for the reaffirmation and defense of the national identity [2].

The study of his figure has been present in several researches on the development of social sciences in Cuba in the authors Deschamps [3], Le Riverend [4], García [5], Solás [6], Borges [7], Rojas [8], Buenavilla [9], Pestana [10, 11], which have approached, from different angles, his contribution to the development of a thought that defends identity and Cuban identity. Among the most relevant

researches is the one published by Solas, with the title Introduction to Ramiro Guerra's pedagogical thought [6]. It proposed a periodization for the study of his educational work, which consists of the following stages: First stage: 1900-1902. Process of formation as a teacher. Second stage: 1902-1923. Critical and progressive stance in the face of the country's educational crisis. Struggle to structure a school system with national roots. Third stage: 1923-1933. Stage of maximum contradiction between the written production and its actions. Fourth stage: 1933-1958. Process of deepening in the study and analysis of the imperialist penetration in Cuba. Fifth stage: 1959-1970. Contribution to the tasks of organization of the literacy process and the school from January 1, 1959.

The magnitude of Ramiro Guerra's contributions to Cuban educational philosophical literature deserves to be known and studied in depth not only for the mark he left on later generations, but also for the learning derived from the practices to understand the historical context in which he lived and enriched. The work reflects on the contributions of this representative figure of the educational philosophical

literature in Cuba as evidence of a fruitful generation that enriched the ideal about the teacher, the school and education for Cubans, committed to the intangible heritage it represents.

## 2. Development

### 2.1. *The Rise of the Teacher Vocation*

Ramiro Guerra's vocation for teaching developed from adolescence, given his interest in the work of outstanding Cuban educators, a condition that allowed him to learn about the progressive national educational tradition, the teaching methods contributed, the conception of the human being, the vision of the theory of knowledge, the purpose of education in each era, the values to which education was directed, how teacher-student relations should be, how the categories education, instruction, teaching had been defined, what ideal of the teacher they conceived, what type of education they projected, what type of human being it was necessary to educate in each historical context, among other elements.

In addition, he systematically read the verses of Cuban poets, among them those of Juan Cristóbal Nápoles Fajardo, for cultural and spiritual enjoyment.

Under this influence, in 1900, he won by competitive examination, a position as a teacher of public instruction. In this way, he learned about the problems of the Cuban teaching profession, a situation that he had observed from his work as an elementary school teacher in Batabanó. He verified that:

We wanted nothing to do with the colonial school (...) Its routine spirit; its bookish and rote teaching; (...) and boredom; the order imposed on the basis of the "palmeta", the "varetazo" and the humiliating "penitencias", seemed to us unworthy of a free, dignified people, responsible for itself and with elevated feelings. It was indispensable for us to take other directions, to discover sources of noble inspiration, sure guides for our effort to form strong, industrious, faithful and enthusiastic children for the Republic [12].

### 2.2. *The Teacher, the School and Education in the Formation of Professional Ideals*

Just as he began his educational work, he was selected to join the Special Course for Cuban Teachers at Harvard University in the United States (June-September 1900). One of the strategies of the American government to influence the Cuban society. There he integrated the first teaching course, in which he demonstrated tenacity and perseverance.

Based on a positivist and pragmatic educational model, the school in this country was based on material resources, above teaching methods, and responded to strong class interests, an aspect that was not grasped by Ramiro Guerra. The dazzling of an apparently perfect educational model laid the foundations for the development of several ideas that in later years he tried to incorporate into the national educational panorama.

From a very young age he identified himself with the backwardness of the public elementary school, a conviction he developed during a long career linked to education. At the beginning of the 20th century, he began to define the central axis of his philosophy of education: the progressive sharpness in the criticism of the education of his time and the proposal of solutions to its problems.

He trusted in the broad possibilities of the national public school as the essential way to contribute to the education of Cubans and to the solution of the country's social problems. Thus, he identified himself with positivism as the predominant current of thought in the first half of the 20th century in the American continent and especially in Cuba. However, his positivism, linked to his philosophy of history, had an objective character.

The conception of education from scientific positions laid the foundations for the assumption of a positivism that over the years managed to exceed with the proposal of concrete solutions to the educational reality in Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century. The relationship between educational policy and the needs of the nation would become an enigma that he deciphered with sadness and dismay.

He criticized private education as an elite activity that forgot the popular sense of the people and minimized public culture to a sector of the population. He began to evidence concerns that laid the foundations for the development of a conception of education from the precepts of nationalism -in germ- in his thinking. The study of the development of education in the United States motivated him for the creation of the public school system in Cuba and the need to introduce in it some of his most significant experiences (vocational schools). These were definitely not in correspondence with Cuban educational needs. He himself would recall with pride his condition of "old teacher of 1900" [12].

In 1903, when he joined the magazine *Cuba Pedagógica*, he developed the exercise of criticism in the face of the deterioration of education in the country, a process that was also favored by the presence in its editorial board of several intellectuals also identified with the solution of the problems of Cuban education [13]. Thus, its educational thinking was known by the country's teachers and professors. In essence, he turned the scientific dissemination and debate of educational problems into a weapon of struggle to criticize the reality of the Cuban school.

In 1904, he traveled to Mexico for family reasons and was replaced as school principal. Upon his return he settled in Havana. In the 1905-1906 school year, he took over again as school principal in Batabanó. He underwent competitive examinations to graduate as a third grade teacher, a condition he acquired on August 31, 1906. He then worked for a few months as a teacher and was appointed director of School No. 65 in the Santos Suarez neighborhood. Again he was incorporated to the tasks of educational management. At this time he did it with the knowledge -at least from the news of the press of the time during his short stay in Mexico- of the educational reality of another Latin American country, as much in need of attention as the Cuban one.

Between 1909 and 1912, he passed with distinction almost all the subjects of the Pedagogy course. He obtained several ordinary prizes and the congratulations of his professors Enrique José Varona, Manuel Valdés Rodríguez and Juan M. Dihigo for the defense of his degree thesis. He also represented Cuba in international educational organizations, contexts in which he dialogued with teachers from other regions of the world on educational practice and theory.

In 1911 he was elected regional president for Cuba of the Bureau International de Documentation Educative, founded the previous year in Ostend, Belgium. In this new activity, he became acquainted with the educational models of several countries, of which he had only had a first approach from the exchanges carried out in meetings, events, and the short stay in the United States. With a more integrative vision of education in the continent and in several countries of the rest of the world, he understood that Cuba could apply some of the foreign experiences, basically, from the United States, only possible from their contextualization.

At only 31 years of age, he was ratified, in the position of director of the Practical School attached to the School of Pedagogy of the University of Havana, a process that took place between 1912 and 1913, without abandoning post-university studies in higher national and foreign centers. His eagerness to improve himself contributed to his formation as a pedagogue, historian, economist and sociologist, a condition that earned him respect in important literary and scientific centers of the American continent. This work was accompanied by an extensive written work related to education.

In 1913, when occupying the superintendence of schools in Pinar del Río -until 1915- he deepened in the characteristics of each one of the teachings that were given there. With an integral vision of education in this province, he gave a lecture at a teachers' meeting in Guanajay entitled *La patria en la escuela*, in which he showed his concern for the promotion and development of patriotic feelings in the students. He considered that, in order to reach their hearts, it was "...indispensable that we touch their intelligence more directly..." [14]. His concern for reasoning in the child was not only focused on the gnoseological aspect, but also constituted the possibility of reaching, by reasoning and conviction, the development of patriotism as a quality of the individual from a reflective and conscious position. One of the ideals defended by Ramiro Guerra was revealed: the promotion of national sentiment in the education of Cubans was increasingly necessary.

The prestige achieved in his professional career -until 1915- was enough for him to join the Society of Pedagogical Studies. When the Normal Schools for teachers were created, he obtained the chair of pedagogical studies and was appointed director of the Normal School of Havana until February 1920. Also in 1915, he was editor-in-chief of the magazine *Cuba Pedagógica* until the disappearance of this organ in December 1922 [7].

In 1917, the Sociedad de Estudios Pedagógicos commissioned him to write the work *Fines de la educación*

*nacional* [15], a fact that meant a recognition of the criteria sustained up to that moment.

In 1921, the University Pedagogical Association decided to make a detailed study of the national educational system. Ramiro Guerra, then vice-president of the Association, was once again called upon to collaborate. Together with other outstanding pedagogues, he prepared a report with the title: *A National program of pedagogical action*, published in 1922. The text insisted that it was "...necessary to carry out an immense pedagogical readjustment in the whole system, starting from the top..." [16]. However, in the face of criticism of the educational system, the government did not offer a favorable response and Ramiro Guerra continued to see the social problem only in the educational context, without declaring the need for a radical change in the Cuban political system.

His pedagogical activity was aimed at facilitating the learning of Reading and History. He collaborated with the Cuban pedagogue Arturo Montori in the authorship of several texts for that purpose [17-19]. The study of child psychology -collected in his work *Los problemas del niño*, 1920- was the result of knowing the cognitive needs of an age in which learning is incredibly fast. Based on these reflections, he conceived several textbooks for public schools. He strengthened the idea of education in patriotism as a way for the formation of citizenship.

In 1923, he published the text *La defensa nacional y la escuela*, in which he revealed the importance of forming and developing, from the school, the values and traditions of a people that for more than 30 years shed the blood of its best children. This work was the result of more than 20 years of reflection. From his educational practice, he organized the first trade school in Havana and participated in the elaboration and reform of school plans and courses in 1914 and 1925. With the objective of perfecting primary education, he proposed the creation of higher primary schools [20] and organized the first forty schools throughout the country.

In December 1925, he began to collaborate as editor of the *Revista de Instrucción Pública*, which replaced the *Revista de Educación*, monthly organ of the Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, in which he reflected on the educational problems of the time and in his articles he expressed the main aspects of his philosophy of education. With an integral vision of national education and its needs, he was entrusted in 1927 with the general superintendence of schools of the Republic of Cuba, a responsibility in which he remained until 1930.

In 1932 he was appointed secretary of the presidency of the Republic, a position he left when the Machado dictatorship was overthrown a year later. This controversial fact of his life has been very much questioned. It highlights the lack of political radicalization and his utopian position characteristic of the most progressive sector of the national bourgeoisie, class to which he belonged.

His departure from the country meant that his philosophy of education was basically expressed through his work as a publicist. He did not renounce the concern that had

characterized his life: the need to educate Cubans in the attachment to their land. He assumed the teaching profession with an increasingly social character through the publication of history books, thus his works *Manual de historia de Cuba* (1938) and *Cuaderno de trabajo de historia de Cuba* (1938) and *Cuaderno de trabajo de historia de Cuba* (1939), to be used in connection with the *Historia elemental de Cuba* (1939). In this way, he developed an old yearning: to contribute -in a more sustained way- to the delivery of notebooks and texts that from the knowledge of the national roots would allow the development of love and commitment to the defense of its identity, as an expression of the need to build the spiritual life of the nation. Between 1943 and 1946 he edited the *Diario de la Marina*, considered the dean of the press of the time.

From the pages of the *Diario de la Marina*, he showed firmness in the defense of the public school and continued the struggle for an education based on patriotism. In this organ, he published more than 2,000 articles, among which those of his section Education and History stand out [21].

Between 1947 and 1950, he edited the magazine *Trimestre*. In 1948 he published another text for primary education: *Nociones de historia de Cuba para uso de las escuelas primarias elementales*. This work, characterized by its clear and diaphanous language, managed to awaken the interest of its readers. In addition, it radiates Cubaness, patriotism and identification with the heroic national history.

Another way he used during these years to express the ideas that underpinned his philosophy of education was the radio program *Universidad del Aire*, in which he participated four times between 1949 and 1951, with topics related to political and economic issues. The 40's and 50's were prodigal in his historical-educational production. Although the texts he wrote in this period were not aimed at official teaching, their educational nature went beyond the framework of any curriculum to address the people.

He also directed his efforts to the edition of the largest historical work addressed collectively in the country: the *History of the Cuban Nation*, elaborated in ten volumes in homage to the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Republic and for which he was one of the main responsible.

In 1952, he published a text in which he summarized, in a testimonial way, the influence of Martí's educational ideal in his formation as an educator. Its title was *Martí en las primeras décadas de la escuela primaria republicana*. In this work, he declared himself heir to the progressive tradition of Cuban educational thought, when he pointed out that

The reality and persistence of these [educational] evils, at least in part, imposes on us the duty, (...), to try to revive by all means at our disposal, the memory and the imperishable work of Martí, and with his, that of all the great poets, thinkers, educators and liberators of Cuba, figures representative of the most noble, exemplary and exalting of the homeland [12].

In the same year, he published *Pedagogía para las escuelas normales*, a text in which he synthesized the most current pedagogical theory with his own experiences in the training

of teachers for the republic. He gave master lectures on education in prestigious institutions of the country, among them: Havana Normal School of Teachers, the Pedagogical School Annexed to the University of Havana, the Economic Society Friends of the Country, the Havana Athenaeum, the Liceum Society of Vedado, the Hispanic-Cuban Institution of Culture of Havana, the Athenaeum of Matanzas, the Academy of History of Cuba, in the National Congresses of History encouraged by Dr. Emilio Roig (1889-1964), as well as in several international events.

Under the new conditions, each book became a lesson in Cuban history. Another evidence of his identification with the national was the fact of outlining the elements on which he sustained the "debt" with the Apostle during the years of the Republic. His philosophy of education during the 1950s was based on the development of an educational theory in which he took up again the criticism of the acute crisis situation the country was going through. He again published works written between 1903 and 1933.

In his work, *La educación primaria en el siglo XX* (1955), fourth volume of the *Biblioteca Cubana de Educación*, he reflected -from the point of view of comparative education- on the backwardness of Cuba and proposed concrete measures to overcome this situation. By comparing the Cuban educational model with the English and American models, he was able to see how far Cuba was from the results achieved by both nations. Thus, another particularity of Ramiro Guerra's positivism was evident: the study of the most widespread educational models both in the American and European continent, fueled his optimism to achieve a change in the public culture in Cuba from the transformation in education. His enthusiasm, although it was not enough to solve the problem of Cuban education, contributed to keep alive the ideal of raising the public culture needed by the people and he saw in criticism his main support.

The revolutionary triumph in 1959 surprised him at the age of 78. However, he contributed to the organization of the literacy process and the Cuban school in general. In the years 1959 and 1960, he served as advisor to the *Biblioteca Escolar Lex*, a task he had begun in 1955, from which he collaborated in the publication of new textbooks, adapted to the new historical conditions.

During these years he also maintained, with the logical decline of age, a cultural work in national institutions. He presided over the Academy of the History of Cuba, where he intervened in 1960 with his speech *Two heroic and tragic episodes of our wars for the independence*. In that same year he gave the commemorative speech for the death of Antonio Maceo and published the text *El General Leonardo Word y la instrucción pública en Cuba*.

At the request of the Ministry of Education, he served as advisor to the Literacy Campaign in 1961 and shared his experiences as an educator since the beginning of the 20th century. His analysis and studies on educational change as part of the integral reform of education in Cuba since 1903, were also an important contribution to the educational transformations developed since 1959.

### 2.3. *The Teacher's Ideal, the School and Education in the Philosophy of Education of Ramiro Guerra Sánchez Through His Contemporaries*

When carrying out a comprehensive study of the educational thought of Ramiro Guerra in the light of his historical context, it should not be lacking the precision of those aspects that limit to some extent his philosophy of education, among them:

He conceived education as an agent of social change without contemplating a political-economic change that would move the foundations of the republican society of the first half of the twentieth century. This aspect, in turn, is identified as a manifestation of the *sui generis* positivism that developed in Latin America and Cuba respectively.

He based his comparative education analysis of Cuba on countries such as the United States and England, without taking into account the great economic, social and cultural differences between our country and these imperialist powers.

In addressing the need to raise the culture of the Cuban people, he understood the importance of eradicating illiteracy, however, he identified as one of its causes, the non-attendance of children in public elementary schools. This analysis reveals that Ramiro Guerra did not realize that the underlying problem was the lack of economic resources of Cuban families.

Although he took into account the historical character of education, he did not understand its class character.

However, the recognition of these aspects in his philosophy of education does not detract from his contributions to Cuban education during the first half of the 20th century.

The legacy of Ramiro Guerra's philosophy of education to the tradition of Cuban educational thought is also evident in the mark he left on his contemporaries and in how Cuban intellectuals, before and after 1959, critically valued his imprint on the Cuban teaching profession during the first half of the 20th century.

The educational theory and practice developed by Ramiro Guerra motivated sharp analyses from his early maturity as a teacher, manager and critical publicist.

The recognition of the scientific objectivity that characterized Ramiro Guerra's work in a general sense, became an aspect that was repeated again and again in the evaluations made by different intellectuals about his educational work. Accordingly, the words of the Cuban intellectual Juan J. Remos (1896-1969), show him to be

One of the best documented writers of our century; serious and careful in his research, serene in his judgment, perspicacious observer of the historical phenomenon, (...); clear and correctly expressed prose writer. As a historian and publicist, he is one of the highest values of the Republic [22].

Referring specifically to his activity as an educator, he added: "He made it by his own efforts. He was a teacher of

public instruction, and graduated from the University, with a doctorate in Pedagogy; titular Professor of the Normal School of Teachers of Havana and General Superintendent of Schools of the Republic." [22]. When discussing his work in newspapers and magazines he valued that "...at all times he was essentially concerned with problems of national interest, which he approached with technical criteria and inspired by the highest purposes, without letting himself be dragged by political passion." [22].

Meanwhile, Salvador Bueno (1917-2006), in his work *Historia de la Literatura Cubana* (1954), emphasized that Ramiro Guerra carried out

A remarkable work in the fields of education, economic and historical studies. In each of them he has carried out fundamental studies for a better knowledge of Cuban problems. From his initial dedication to teaching, he moved on to broader analyses of Cuban issues, always in an objective, impartial and scientific manner. Ramiro Guerra gave depth to historical studies in Cuba. A man of liberal ideas, with positivist criteria, he wanted to show the different factors that drive Cuban history" [23].

After the revolutionary triumph, the transcendence of Ramiro Guerra's work continued to be recognized by several writers, even during his lifetime. Among them, José A. Portuondo highlighted in 1963 his contribution to the renewal of historical studies in the 1920s, which "...he disseminated through university texts (1921-1925) and, from 1922 onwards, in the other levels -primary, upper primary schools, normal preparatory schools- of public education." [24].

Raimundo Lazo (1904-1976) considered him in 1967 one of the most "...laborious historians engaged in the research and exposition of the Cuban historical process as a whole..." Furthermore, he added "...Guerra is an objective historian, of plain exposition very well accommodated to the essential details as well as to the synthesis he tries to expose. He is the author of very valuable studies on education and economic matters." [25].

Another Marxist historian, Julio Le Riverend, highlighted in 1969, how Ramiro Guerra had acquired "...great technical and theoretical knowledge in Pedagogy..." [26], at the same time that he began to be interested in historical problems. Of Ramiro Guerra's book entitled *Manual de Historia de Cuba* (1938), he would say that "...it has constituted the best possible guide for students and teachers, because of the abundance of its information, the extent of the aspects it deals with and the concrete scientific interpretation it gives to numerous moments of our past." [26]. Furthermore, he recognizes that in Ramiro Guerra "...his interest and love for the land is a constant attitude of his thought and of his life..." [26].

The philosophy of education developed by Ramiro Guerra, which is based on the ideal of the teacher, school and education, was one more effort among those made by other Cuban intellectuals who, during the Neocolonial Republic, defended the desire of a people to achieve full independence and sovereignty. The history of progressive educational ideas

in Cuba, as well as the philosophy of education that sustains it, cannot be written without recognizing his legacy.

Julio Le Riverend, on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Ramiro Guerra said:

Those times witnessed the accelerated formation of some hundreds of young people, illusioned then by the appearances of independence and democracy. There were numerous among those creators of the public school, those who exercised a teaching capable of maintaining in the daily work of the classroom feelings of deep-rooted patriotism, fighting for more than twenty-five years an honorable defensive battle, worthy of being remembered in our days. Among them was Ramiro Guerra [4].

### 3. Conclusions

Ramiro Guerra, a representative figure of Cuban culture and education, is a reflection of the complex and contradictory social and intellectual context of the late 19th century and essentially during the Bourgeois Republic. From his educational theory and practice, he influenced the philosophical, psychological, sociological and pedagogical culture of the educators of his time. He was a teacher essentially committed to the destiny of the Cuban nation, its improvement and preparation for a life of peace and consolidation of Cuban citizenship. His work shows traits that express the relationship with positivist philosophy, the New School Movement and a sustained admiration for the work of Cuban educators of the past, especially José Martí.

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