A culture of inclusion?

Special Education in Britain and Cuba

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Abstract

This dissertation uses a multidisciplinary analysis to examine the historical development of the divergent approaches to Special Education adopted by Cuba and Britain. Interrogating the complex set of intersecting and often conflicting historical, economic, political, cultural and social contexts which inform these approaches, the study offers insights into the reasons for a gap between policies and practice in terms of 'inclusion' and participation for those with SEND in state education in Britain, as well as identifying some unique features which support inclusion and participation within the contemporary Cuban system, an under-researched area within academic literature.

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Introduction

In 2017 I began working in mainstream primary schools as a supply Teaching Assistant (TA), mainly working one to one and in small groups of children with a diverse range of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Some of this work was based on the Early Years Foundation Stage educational programmes (the early years equivalent to the curriculum) which include 'expressive arts and design' and 'understanding the world' alongside literacy and maths, and place equal importance on social and emotional development and physical and communication skills (Department for Education (Dfe), 2021). This was what interested me most about working in this area of primary education, because there was a focus, to some extent, on how children develop as human beings: how they develop friendships, learn to communicate their thoughts, desires and interests, develop a sense of humour and sense of self, move to music, find out what they enjoy playing and what they are good at, and how their inquisitiveness and creativity can be encouraged so they can question and change things as they interact with the world.

Child-development research supports a holistic approach to education: affective or emotional education for example is of primary importance during these formative years. Establishing safe, trusting relationships and an ability to relate to others and understand one's own emotions are prerequisites for developing positive learning behaviours and cognitive abilities (Fernandes, 2002, p.10). A diverse curriculum which bestows value on arts and expression, as well as physical education, provides a range of ways to develop and participate, creating a learning environment which helps include those children who struggle to learn just through reading, writing or listening (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.46). Self-direction, play and coming to 'understand the world' through investigation also enriches learning: psychological research has shown that we learn best when following our interests and aptitudes, and enjoy what we are studying (Fernandes, 2002, p.11). This holistic approach is of clear benefit to those with SEND (and others), who may need more opportunities for self-direction, movement, diverse ways to participate, and support to develop socially and emotionally.

There will certainly be limitations on how far these holistic aims are achieved. These include: a range of teaching and learning techniques applied in different settings;

different aims and goals adopted by leadership of early years settings; wider educational contexts which put pressure on teaching staff to demonstrate pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy primarily, even within nursery age classes, which can lead to a narrowing of focus in order to prepare for high stress testing rather than wider holistic development of pupils (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.45); economic contexts such as austerity leading to chronic underfunding of the early years sector (Lawler, 2018) and inequalities between provisions based on their local economic and social contexts. Despite such complicating and limiting factors, during these early years, children with SEND in England and their families are found to be most effectively supported, their needs better identified and intersectoral cooperation more consistently accessible (Ofsted, 2017, p.5). However, often this does not continue as children move through the state education system in Britain. Concerned parents and carers, campaign groups, educationalists and pupils themselves have characterised the current state schooling system in general as rigid and conformist, characterised by an increasingly narrow curriculum with a focus on discreet skills specific to academic exams, rather than a focus on developing children's critical thinking, cooperation and collaboration skills, a deeper understanding of reality, or their creativity (Gavin, 2021, p.4, Edwards and Parsons, 2020, pp. 30-31, Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, pp. 4-5).

If a student is one of the estimated 1.4 million (15.8%) with a form of SEND, they must also contend with a system of support in perpetual crisis. Despite many green papers, updates and pledges by ministers to improve SEND support, as of March 2022, the most recent government review into the SEND education system found it to be one 'that is increasingly characterised by delays in accessing support for children and young people, frustration for parents, carers, and providers alike': a 'financially unsustainable' system which disproportionately pushes students with SEND out of mainstream education and into often poor quality 'Alternative Provision', and leaves them at greater risk of unemployment and social isolation in later life (DfE, 2022, pp. 9-10). This is almost a decade since 'the biggest education reforms in a generation for children and young people with special educational needs', enacted in 2014 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (DfE, 2014). The Children and Families Act 2014 and the updated SEND Code of Practice, now commonly referred to as the 2014 SEND reforms, it was assured, would 'put

children and parents at the heart of the system', simplify and improve the 'complex and fragmented system' and 'ensure support fits in with their [children with SEND and their families'] needs and not the other way round' (DfE, 2014).

In theory, the reforms were the right ones, according to the SEND campaign groups who were consulted on the reforms, many of whom still call for their full implementation. Indeed, the rhetoric and promises made in the 2014 reforms had many positive elements. The wording of the policy extended the right to provision of support to cover more of a child's life into young adulthood. Now they would be covered from birth to age 25, which was previously ages 2 -19 under the old system. In practice the DfE failed to properly assess the cost of the new system when rolled out across the country, so although families were promised that they were entitled to support, they often found barriers which prevented them from accessing it (Davies, 2019, p.2). In theory, the reforms would 'protect the school budget' (DfE, 2014) but funding for children with SEND decreased by 2.6% in real terms between 2013-14 and 2017-18 (Davies, 2019, p.2) and total school spending was also reduced by 8% per pupil over the same period (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018, p.7). Provision in theory was to be based on need, not on availability or limits on provision available. In practice, limits *were* placed on provision through real terms cuts to funding which resulted in schools cutting TAs and pastoral support, and reduced access to other support services due to a similar lack of funding.

In theory, new Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) would replace the old 'Statement' system and would bring together different sectors, children themselves and their families together to ensure coordination, cooperation and joint rights and responsibilities to decide together the plan for the child. In reality, this joined-up approach was often achieved in rhetoric only with a majority of surveyed school leaders reporting in 2018 that 'professionals from health and social care don't attend annual reviews and meetings enough to provide the support needed', 30% that they received no services from health and social care to support pupils and 83% that they did not receive 'ANY [emphasis in original] funding from health and social care budgets to support pupils with statements or EHCPs' (NAHT, 2018, p.2). In terms of parental involvement, many felt disempowered by the confusing and bureaucratic system to try and access support and felt they must battle the local authority to try and secure specialist provision for their children through costly tribunals.

The abject failure of these reforms to meet their stated objectives is well documented (Doak, 2019, Haris, 2019, The Education Committee, 2019). In a damning report into the implementation of the reforms five years after their inception, the Education Committee warned that there was a significant gap between policy and everyday practice, and that, contrary to the stated aims of the reforms, the resulting system left parents, carers, families and children and young people with SEND themselves to contend with 'a treacle of bureaucracy, full of conflict, missed appointments and despair' (2019, p.3). This was due in part to the issues raised above such as a dearth of funding for schools and local authorities facing a continuing era of austerity, but also because of a 'distance between young people's lived experience, their families' struggles and Ministers' desks [which] is just too far' (The Education Committee, 2019, p.3). Indeed, after thousands of parents, carers and children with SEND protested in the streets in May 2019 and 13,000 people petitioned to demand adequate funding and support for children with SEND, how much has improved in the SEND system, and how many more problems have intensified? (Walker, 2019). Yet these issues did not begin with the 2014 reforms, or their failure to be implemented. A complex set of intersecting and often conflicting contexts work against policy aims of inclusion and greater participation.

This dissertation will examine the historical development of the special education systems of Britain and Cuba, seeking to address the following research questions:

- How are approaches to SEND education in Britain and in Cuba shaped by historical, economic, political, cultural and social contexts?
- Why is there a gap between policies and practice in terms of 'inclusion' and participation for those with SEND in state education in Britain?
- How and why is the modern Cuban approach to SEND education distinct, and what are its challenges and strengths in terms of inclusion and participation?
- What can be learned from the Cuban system and are there areas which merit further study?

In **Chapter 1** I will examine the roots of Special Education in Britain, from pre-capitalist, feudal society, to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of class-based society which created a dichotomy between the 'disabled' and the 'able-bodied'

worker. I will analyse key economic, political and social contexts which have shaped modern Special Education policy and practice, from neoliberal outsourcing and privatisations to austerity in public services, contracting creativity in the state school curriculum and competitive educational ideologies, and explain how these contexts often serve to complicate and contradict policies aimed at greater 'inclusion' for young people with SEND.

Chapter 2 gives historical context to the development of the highly unequal and ideologically elitist and racist (Special) Education system in pre-1959 Cuba. I will analyse key historical eras in education: from fifteenth century 'education' established to enforce slavery and colonisation by Spain; to the segregationist institutions set up during the Age of Revolutions to promote science, literature and culture for the elite, while simultaneously removing black and working-class Cubans from the classroom; to the highly unequal, religious, US-centric system established after the 'independent' Republic of Cuba was established in 1902. Despite legal and policy changes promising equality and democracy, before the revolutionary process began in 1959, high quality education remained behind barriers for many of the poor, working class, rural, black, disabled and other Cubans. This historical context is crucial to understanding why the revolutionary government from 1959 began to take a distinct approach to education policy in the following period.

Chapter 3 analyses the modern Cuban Special Education system, focusing on its key features and how its unique approach has been shaped by wider policy aims and priorities, and economic, social and political contexts. Key features include high prioritisation of education ideologically and as a proportion of state spending, a focus on human development and mobilisation as a development strategy, the role of mass organisations and participation in cultural production, and wider cultural contexts which encourage grassroots and local participation in policy making and local development.

The **conclusion** will ask 'what are the contradictions between policy and practice, or barriers to inclusion within education and society for those with SEND in Cuba?' and which lessons can be learned, as well as indicating potential areas for further study.

Methodology

My interest in alternative approaches to SEND education led me to visit several Cuban classrooms in 2019. On this educational exchange visit, I noticed some distinct features in both the 'special' and 'mainstream' educational settings: relaxed teachers, an affectionate relationship between pupils and staff, students being encouraged to be independent and cooperative, and multiple creative ways to participate in school life. Despite interest in Cuba's health and education systems in general, the Cuban Special Education system remains an under-researched area within English-language academic literature, which merits further in-depth original research. Through my research I encountered depictions of Cuba in academic literature which rely on assumptions, unproven assertions and stereotypes, as well as authors who come to 'polarised and simplified' conclusions (Kumaraswami, 2016, p.528). Therefore, the following chapters engage critically with a range of primary sources, using a multidisciplinary approach to support my qualitative analysis and contextualise barriers, as well as achievements in inclusive and participatory practices for those with SEND. The sources I have chosen intentionally span a range of disciplines: from health and medical science, to sociology, history, pedagogical studies, education policy, economics and cultural studies which address the contextual factors which shape the divergent approaches to SEND adopted by Britain and Cuba. Primary sources include Cuban-produced sources from education and culture journals which demonstrate the rich discussion and debate surrounding education policy which takes place on the island, which is often missing from the narrative *about* Cuba.

Chapter 1

The British Special Education System: understanding historical contexts

The following chapter seeks to understand how Special Education in Britain came to be the system it is today, and why recent policy changes alone have not addressed several entrenched and fundamental issues. According to the government's own review, in 2022 these problems still include poor or inconsistent access to local support, a lack of parental involvement and complex bureaucratic systems, and educational and social exclusion and isolation of children and young people with

SEND, despite high and unsustainable costs (DfE, 2022, pp.9-10). To untangle the complex matrix of factors which shape, complicate and interact with Special Education policy and practice, I will establish the historical context which, I argue, explains some of the central tensions, contradictions and conflicting approaches which impact SEND provision today.

The roots of the crisis? The early history of SEND provision in Britain

My research follows the work of Russel, Malhotra, Oliver, and other disabled scholars who view the oppression and marginalisation of disabled people as intimately linked to the structure of capitalist society which produces disabling and exclusionary barriers for specific economic, social and political reasons. Russel and Malhotra (2002) argue that in England, throughout the Middle Ages and up to the mid-1800s, the kind of work that peasants and farmers carried out to produce the food required for their subsistence and a surplus for the feudal lords was less time-constrained and more flexible to different physical abilities. During this period disabled people faced serious religious persecution, yet the pre-capitalist, feudal open field system of production, despite its naked inequality and exploitation, often enabled disabled people to contribute to everyday economic production (p.212).

During the Industrial Revolution, between 1760 to 1870, roughly one sixth of the area of England was 'enclosed'. Through around 4,000 Parliamentary acts, and other, more violent means, space which had been common land was transformed into privately owned 'enclosed' land (Fairlie, 2009, p.25). The ability to subsist from farming and catching animals and foraging on common land was removed, and a newly proletarianized and impoverished class was created. This period of rapid change in industry, social relations and cultural structures, is inextricably related to a wider matrix of economic change, and violent change at that. As argued originally by Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1964), and more recently reinforced by Mark Harvey's detailed analysis (2019), through the extraction of raw materials, cultivation of crops and expansion of markets the industrial revolution in Britain was funded and supported by slavery, indentured work and colonisation (pp.66-68). On the one hand people under the dominion of the British Empire or its burgeoning private East India Company were compelled to work, for a considerable time through open slavery, the reliance on which continued even after abolition (Harvey, 2019, p.67), and on the

other in Britain itself – the 'metropole' - new social relations also had to be created by force and by policy.

The parliamentary enclosures acts worked alongside other legislation to enforce a new relationship to land, labour and society. Until the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 , referred to as the 'New Poor Law', poor relief was given as 'outdoor relief' or a dole paid directly to the poor for them to subsist on. This was seen as necessary to support the newly proletarianized masses, especially in rural areas where the ability to subsist on the land had been removed but had not been replaced with waged work as it had been in the newly industrialised cities. The precipitating drive behind the New Poor Law was the growing cultural concerns about the newly proletarianized poor, who needed to be compelled to take up their new social role: taught the lesson that they now needed to work to 'earn their living'. The conscious aim of the New Poor Law to shape a working class by compulsion is made clear by the language of some of those who influenced the policy, such as Absolem Barnett, an influential overseer of the poor in a Nottingham Parish who wrote that ''[e]very parish […] ought to have its poor house; but every poor house should be so ordered as to be a place irksome and abhorrent to every *able-bodied* pauper within its walls' (emphasis added, 1833, quoted in Beckett, 2016, p.202). The report which the act was based upon called for greater institutionalisation of the poor in workhouses, whom it characterised as 'debased and 'demoralised' […] alienated from its masters and increasingly dependent on handouts' (Evans and Jones, 2014, p.114). The act was designed to compel more 'able-bodied paupers' to become wage labourers by removing poor relief for this group, who could now only receive support in workhouses under conditions designed to be so punitive that no one would prefer them to finding even the lowest paid work. Concurrently, a category of 'deserving poor', the 'sick, the aged, the children and the mad', was created who could be paid a weekly dole to support themselves with or be institutionalised within workhouses (Thane, 1978, p.29). The new forms of waged work in factories and farming on privately owned land required greater speed and precision, and as the new class of proletarians was created, so too was a class of ''disabled' who did not conform to the standard worker's body and whose labour-power was effectively erased, excluded from paid work' (Russel and Malhotra, 2002, p.212).

Thus we can see that economic and social factors influenced the creation of the earliest examples of Special Education in Britain. Institutionalisation in workhouses and asylums was an established way to regulate the working classes and predating the first policy regulating Special Education there was a patchwork of private and voluntary run 'schools' for children with SEND. In the late eighteenth century, the first so-called 'schools' and institutions for disabled children were established often by the private wealth of individuals and linked to specific factories or crafts production. In 1791 the School of Instruction for the Indigent Blind opened, and similar institutions were set up for deaf children, those with 'physical handicaps', and asylums for those referred to as 'mentally defective'. Following the central aim of institutionalisation as being to train the new class of workers in their new social role as outlined above, these early 'schools' provided 'limited' education which was 'subordinated to training' (Warnock, 1978, p.9). To some degree, one could argue that these institutions aimed to include children with so-called 'handicaps' into society as workers, but due in part to the demands of the kind of labour required in the factories they had been trained to work in '[m]any of their inmates failed to find employment on leaving and had recourse to begging' (Warnock, 1978, p.9).

The era has often been characterised as one of institutionalisation and segregation for children with SEND, having 'developed as much to serve the economic and commercial interests of society' as to meet the needs of those children (Cole, 1990, p.101). This has been contested by some, such as Cole (1990), who posits that philanthropic individuals interested in the welfare and integration of children with SEND set up schools and institutions purely out of humanitarian feelings, encouraged by the aims of some headteachers, grassroots organisations and charities who called for more integration, and community care for such children (pp.101-103). Cole argues that the argument that economic factors heavily influenced the aims and structures of SEND provision at this time are overstated, in part by pointing to the fact that institutionalisation was not so widespread as it is assumed.

The level of institutionalisation indeed varied across the period and across different areas of Britain: for example, England already had widespread workhouses before the New Poor Law, whereas Wales had proportionately significantly far fewer establishments which were of much smaller capacity (Evans and Jones, 2014,

p.110). Cole also points out that the segregation between mainstream and 'special' schools was more permeable than absolute, with some children 'reintegrated into the ordinary board schools' after leaving 'special classes for the feeble-minded' (1990, p.103). However, to disregard the impact of the entire historical period on the education system in general and the special education system in particular, in favour of understanding the aims of philanthropists, educators and others in a vacuum, seems short sighted. This approach cannot for example help to explain *why* the 'education' offered during this early period to children with SEND consisted of mainly of training in factory labour. Why, how and what children were taught, and understanding what kind of participation in society they could hope to achieve, and into what kind of society they could hope to be integrated, can only be found by examining those contexts which Cole seeks to ignore.

Early SEND policy in Britain: integration versus exclusion and eugenics

Policies of segregation arguably continued with the introduction of the Education Act 1921, which called for 'handicapped' children to be educated 'only in special schools or special classes' (Warnock, 1978, p.15). By 1939, 17,000 so-called 'defective' children in England were educated in such schools which were run by local education authorities, and in Scotland 4,871 children were educated in such establishments and those deemed 'uneducable' placed in institutions by local parish councils (Warnock, 1978, p.15). In fact, up until 1970, education policy in Britain allowed for children with an IQ below 50 to be 'classified as uneducable' and thus be excluded from the education system altogether (Daniels, Thompson and Tawell, 2019, p.2). As referred to above, there was already a tension between those calling for greater integration and those who sought more harsh segregation, sometimes on the basis of eugenic 'Social Darwinist' logic which was a genuine and significant belief amongst some influential sections of the ruling classes of the era. Those who followed this rationale argued that biology accounted for the inferiority of certain races and the poor or disabled, and who according to Darwin's model of nature were not 'meant to survive in a competitive society' (Russel and Malhotra, 2002, p.213). This pseudoscience had an impact on contemporaneous policy and practice, with forced sterilisation of disabled people becoming *legal policy* in the US in the 1930s and becoming common *practice* throughout many European countries as well as Britain in the early twentieth century (Russel and Malhotra, 2002, p.213).

Following the horrors of the second world war, in which the Nazi government in Germany killed tens of thousands of disabled people, alongside Jewish, Roma and others, on the basis of the same eugenic beliefs about racial purity and the economic burden of the disabled, there was again a push for greater integration, and better quality of education for those with SEND in Britain. In the post-war period of both economic growth and growing organisation of the working classes who had returned from war to poverty, overcrowded and poor-quality housing and disease and hunger, policy shifted significantly and promised to provide state-funded housing, education and healthcare. This was reflected in education policy, with the Education Act 1944 which offered greater integration of 'handicapped' children in 'ordinary classes', although special schools still continued to function for those with more 'severe' disabilities (Warnock, 1978, p.15).

This mostly segregated system remained in place until the 1981 Education Act put into legislation the suggestions of the major 1978 Warnock Report. The Warnock Report is viewed as a milestone in the shaping of modern Special Education policy in Britain (Daniels, Thompson and Tawell, 2019, Egelund and Dyssegaard, 2019, Norwich, 2019). Norwich (2019) argues that the basic structure of Special Education in Britain is still formed around that which was laid out in the report: individual children are assessed for 'additional' needs and a provision plan is laid out based on these needs. Stigmatising 'handicaps' were removed in favour of assessing Special Educational Needs (SEN), but ultimately the tension between inclusion within the 'mainstream' and exclusion remained. Though the rhetoric had changed, and explicit exclusion was substituted for more 'inclusive' aims of educating children with SEN alongside their peers where possible, the wider context and other conflicting tensions behind shifting education policy mean that many suggestions included within the Warnock report remain unfulfilled to this day.

Competitive, standardised testing: implications for the wider education context

Since the introduction of the 1988 Education Act, a competitive relationship between schools was created, 'driven by measures of attainment' (Daniels, Thompson and Tawell, p.1). An individual's success in this system would, from then on, be judged on progress data and measured against a 'set of norm related standards' (Lloyd, 2008, p.221); a competitive, test-data driven policy which prevails today. Schools (in

England[1]) are still expected to demonstrate a certain level of progress judged by their SATs (Standard Attainment Tests) results in maths and English and falling results can potentially trigger an inspection by Ofsted. The resulting pressure to focus on teaching to show progress with a 'relentless focus on literacy and numeracy' (DfE, 2021) in this hyper-specific way can mean school staff feel 'constrained to prioritise those parts of the curriculum that are tested at the expense of others that are not', which can narrow the curriculum experienced by pupils (Grayson, 2019, paragraph 10). Time spent on more expensive practical and creative lessons and subjects are often squeezed in order to focus on maths and English exam preparation, which means more time spent in lessons which require children and young people to sit still for extended periods of time. Some research suggests that ADHD diagnoses may have increased corresponding to the increase in high stakes testing and the limit this places on practical work and movement in classrooms (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.5). Teaching in ways which will coach children to pass specific tests leaves less room for child-led inquiry and learning: educational authors who advocate child-led learning have been dropped from teacher training, along with the requirement to learn about child development, structures of knowledge and pedagogic skills (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.48). In this kind of learning environment, which can limit time dedicated to practical and creative subjects such as art, drama, music and dance, and reduce the scope of education to primarily passing exams, children and young people can leave school with a lack of 'independent, creative and divergent thinking' and the 'ability to collaborate' (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.5).

The recent policy trend, especially in England[2], has been for greater formal, standardised and external testing, right down to the earliest years of schooling. As of

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[1] Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have abandoned league tables, and SATS have been replaced in Wales and Scotland with other national testing which is used to inform teachers of children's progress rather than to judge school performance as is the case in England – see Sibieta and Jerrim (2021) https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/a-comparison-of-school-institutions-and-policies-across-the-uk/

[2] Since 2019 the Welsh government has used online adaptive assessments for children in years 2-9 (ages 7-14) in literacy and numeracy, which tailor questions to individual children based on previous answers. Assessments are standardised to the results of the specific year group every year, so do not measure progress nationally, but are used to compare 'relative performance, such as the gender gap, differences by area and differences within each cohort of pupils'. A similar system of online adaptive national assessments was introduced by the Scottish government in 2017. Assessment policy in Northern Ireland relies primarily on teacher-led observations. See Sibieta and Jerrim (2021)

September 2020, children now must sit standardised tests and/or assessments in five out of their seven years of primary school, including SATS in years 2 and 6, the more recently introduced phonics screening check in year 1 and multiplications tables check in year 4, and the reintroduced reception baseline assessment at age four (More than a score, 2019, p.4). Such intensive formal testing is unpopular with teaching staff, headteachers, parents and children themselves, according to recent studies. The vast majority of headteachers oppose the current testing regime, stating that SATs tests are inaccurate predictors of children's success, that the focus on these tests leads to curriculum narrowing throughout primary school, has negative impacts on staff and children's wellbeing, and 'encourage[s] some teachers to "teach to the test"' (Bradbury, Braun and Quick, 2019, pp.4-18). Similarly, teaching staff have negative views of the increase in standardised tests for young pupils, arguing that many of the new statutory assessments offer no valuable information which they would not already have from their own assessments and observations, and that such tests can in fact hamper rather than help children's development (More than a score, 2019). Indeed, research suggests that a more accurate indicator of children's potential at a young age is their 'spoken language, play and playfulness, and self-regulation'(Bradbury *et al.*, 2019, p.5). Such skills can be developed through play, group games, and self-directed exploration, rather than preparing for, and taking formal assessments which are generally more rigid, and which cannot 'accommodate, let alone welcome, diversity', for example by taking into account children's background in terms of material wealth, stability and experiences, culture or language, or different ways of learning or communicating (Moss, Dahlberg, Grieshaber *et al.,* 2016, quoted in Bradbury *et al.*, 2019, p.8).

The resulting information from such formal tests is often used to group children by 'ability' right from the start of their schooling, which can lead to labelling of some as 'low ability' before they have been given the opportunities and experiences in order to develop their abilities, disproportionately impacting children with English as a second language (EAL), those with SEND and from poor backgrounds, who may struggle to fit in to the rigid structure of a standardised test, and whose needs would be better met through more experiences, opportunities to play, explore language,

settle in to new routines and the expectations of school. Rather than integrating more as they move up through school, the pressure to show progress against such rigid measures of attainment often continues, reinforcing grouping by 'ability' which can then become a vicious cycle for children with SEND (and others). Those who struggle to meet age-related levels in English or maths can be further excluded from a shrinking curriculum, as they are more likely to spend time out of class for interventions and extra sessions of the areas in which they are deemed to be failing, as judged by these specific, narrow tests, further isolating them and depriving them of wider educational experiences and opportunities (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.6). Consequently, those who struggle, take longer, or who may never gain the specific and narrow skills deemed to be markers of success, or conform to the conditions of the learning environment deemed necessary to teach these skills, are effectively excluded from participation in a significant way. Thus, the wider context of mainstream education policy works as a barrier to participation for children with SEND (as well as others), undermining policies of inclusion (Lloyd, 2008, p.231).

Ethos of educating the 'workforce': current economic contexts and impact on education policy

What other factors or contexts does this prevailing policy of more frequent formal testing, competitive schooling and the narrow criteria for 'success' fit in to? One factor which should be examined is the current context of neoliberal free-market policies which have characterised Britain's economy in the recent period since the 1980s. Neoliberal economic programmes involve the outright privatisation of public services, outsourcing, and other economic changes which increase the involvement of private, for-profit companies in what were previously state-funded and run services, exemplified by policies such as Public Finance Initiatives (PFIs). PFIs as a concept developed from a pamphlet published in 1993 by a Conservative member of parliament with links to private health companies, which essentially argued for private companies to take over the National Health Service's role in building, paying for, and owning hospitals. This was officially adopted by the then Conservative government of John Major, but the practice became ubiquitous under the Labour governments of Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown (1997-2010). The policy took off once the private sector was relieved of financial risk for the contracts they bid on, which would instead be borne by the government, and instead of recouping the

profits made by the private companies, the government would allow the companies themselves to keep any profits, so diverting money from the public to the private sector, which would ultimately cost more in public money (Blakeley, 2018).

Within the education sector, PFIs were used to build schools with the funding of private companies and wealthy individuals, at a great cost to the public sector. Interest fees and other costs associated with PFIs are estimated to have cost schools' budgets £4.8 billion by 2020 (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.10). This, combined with a backdrop of austerity measures in the public sector today, with government funding to councils falling by 77% between 2015/16 and 2020, have been disastrous for the state education system (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.130). Far from the benefits, savings or efficiencies which it was promised PFIs would offer, high profile failures of such initiatives include 'Liverpool City Council paying £4m a year for a school that is empty; overall it will pay £47m for a school that cost £24m to build' (Smith, 2018, p.113).

Other neoliberal economic policies have also impacted the education sector, for example through the outsourcing of testing. Formal external testing, rather than relying on teacher observations, offers lucrative opportunities for outside companies to be paid in public money to offer tests, revision programmes etc, with over £10m paid to private companies running the reception baseline assessment for the 2015 trials and the first 2 years of the programme (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019, p.2). A private company, Edexcel, regulates school exams in the UK and is responsible for running and awarding most academic and vocational qualifications. Edexcel is the exam board arm of Pearson plc, an international company which is hugely influential in the government, has a turnover of £4,500m and has been criticised for having parts of the company registered in off-shore bank accounts (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.12). Thus, while the policy of greater formal, external testing is unpopular with the public, as outlined above, it is in the economic interest of at least some influential private companies, which can influence policy.

The ethos of neoliberal economic policies is underpinned by the rhetoric of increased competition and opening up of 'free market' involvement in public services leading to improved efficiency and innovation. As exemplified by PFIs in state education, such policies clearly favour the private sector by diverting public money into private

companies, which can then draw a profit, regardless of the outcome or implications on the quality of the service. This logic permeates government rhetoric surrounding the aims and goals of education, as ultimately serving an economic function, in this case to create workers in a competitive labour-market society. Both the current and previous Education Secretary have reiterated that the point of education is to produce a 'skilled and agile workforce […] to help kickstart the economy' (Zahawi, 2021, paragraph 37). Though these comments were primarily aimed at young people potentially transitioning into the labour force, they suggest an ideological position about the function of state education in general, the roots of which can be traced back far further than the current Conservative government.

In this neoliberal conception the central purpose of education is to mould the workforce, with an individual's success in society being judged on their ability to create a 'portfolio of personal skills for employability' in a competitive labour market (Kent, 2021, paragraph 4). If the ethos of education in general, at policy-making level, is that it should develop particular discreet skills, qualities and values in those who will come to make up the labour force, this inevitably has an impact on what policy dictates should be taught and how. For example, as discussed above, education policy in England favours greater formal testing, which arguably involves instilling the skills and behaviours of sitting still for extended periods of time, completing a task exactly within the time frame and manner proscribed, recalling information, applying knowledge in a particular and narrow format, condensing information and knowledge down to that which is quantifiable and can be measured with standardised data sets. According to recent UK government statistics, the major areas of employment in Britain are public administration, education and health (30.3%), the service sector- distribution, hotels and restaurants (18.1%) and finance and banking (17.6%) (ONS, 2021). Significantly, the more practical or science-focused sectors of manufacturing, agriculture, fishing, energy and STEM represent a tiny proportion of employment. It could be argued that many of these roles require many of the above skills and qualities instilled by the exams system, and do not *require* a worker to be critical of the world around them, to be able to think creatively and collaborate or to create and enjoy music, art, drama or sports. As Smith (2016) points out, there is no such phenomenon as 'apolitical knowledge', and the dominant hegemony and practice which characterises the education systems in 'developed

neoliberal states' such as Britain, through a construction of education as hyper-quantifiable, individualised and competitive, based on inculcating very specific skills and qualities *is* political and works to reinforce a quantifiable, competitive and individualised society and informs the place and role of the worker/citizen accordingly (p.3). At the other end of the spectrum, those who hold the most influential, powerful and creative jobs are disproportionately likely have been privately educated at elite fee-paying schools, where access to resources, culture, sports and creative training of the highest quality is standard (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission, 2019, pp.2-5).

This stifling structure of education can be alienating for any and all pupils, as it leaves little space for simply sharing and developing ideas and insights into their views, or learning things for the sake of developing a passion for the subject, or for learners to become engaged in inquisitiveness about the world around them. This alienation is especially pronounced for those who may be out of work for long periods in their adulthood or perhaps never be able to be employed. If children and young people's potential is limited in scope to their ability ultimately to become employable, this logically necessitates at least some degree of social exclusion for those who may not become employable.

The logic of using education as primarily a tool of moulding workers, teaching discreet skills for an individual's 'portfolio of skills for employability', however diverse the skills being taught are, thus works to undermine the rhetoric and policy aims of inclusive learning. This political, cultural and ultimately economic context, where education and in a sense human development are judged on one's capability to become employable within the current system, productive in a capitalist sense, has ramifications for those categorised as having SEND.

SEND education policy and practice in Britain today

Children and young people with SEND also face other extra barriers to an education which would allow them to develop to their full potential and participate fully in society. A 2017 report from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission's inspection into the SEND system identified problems such as children with SEND having a disproportionately high exclusion rate, poor access to therapeutic services in half of the inspected areas, poor access to child and adolescent mental health services

(CAMHS) in over a third of areas, and that changes to provision, which should now include those up to age 25, had not been properly implemented (pp.5-7). Significantly, this contrasts to the provision and support provided in the early years of education, where children's SEND needs were well identified and parents were better supported due to '[t]he co-location of education, health and care services in children's centres, child development centres and early years settings' but that the further through the schooling system children progressed, the less established opportunities for education, health and care professionals to work together became, particularly in mainstream schools (pp.5-6).

The subsequent lack of coordination and cooperation between sectors, and gaps in support, have serious consequences for the standard of provision received by children and young people with SEND. As of July 2019, half of local authority areas inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission were underperforming in SEND provision and this has worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic began (Davies, 2019, p.4). Since inspections resumed in May 2021, 13 out of 16 local areas were found to have 'significant areas of weakness' in SEND practice, ranging from delays of up to two years to asses needs, long waiting periods to access educational psychologist and child and adolescent mental health services assessments, children with assessed needs being discharged as there were no support services available in their local area, a lack of specialist equipment due to reduced council budgets, and a high number of children reaching a 'crisis point' before they accessed any support and being consequently pushed towards specialist provision and out of mainstream schools (Dickens and Carr, 2021).

Gaps in what should be a network of comprehensive cross sector support results in children falling through the gaps. Even before the pandemic began, thousands of children were reportedly missing out on any education provision whatsoever. At the start of the 2019 academic year, over 4,000 children with SEND were totally without a school place (Department for Education figures, 2019). There is also evidence that a disproportionate number of children with SEND do not attend the same school after preschool/nursery, suggesting that schools may be reluctant to take on those with SEND, either due to a perceived pressure to produce improving examination results or due to a lack of adequate funding (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.123). In 2018 only 2% of headteachers surveyed by the National Association of Head

Teachers (NAHT) reported they had sufficient top up funding to meet the needs of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or statements for pupils with SEND and 73% reported that cuts to overall funding had resulted in reductions in TAs and pastoral staff numbers, making it more difficult to effectively support children with SEND in the classroom (NAHT, 2018, p.2). Parents may therefore be told that the school cannot provide adequate support for their child and be encouraged to look elsewhere for a school place, sometimes leaving them with no appropriate education setting for extended periods of time.

Lacking a school place, which represents a form of social exclusion which can damage a child's mental health and perceived self-worth, and limit their educational opportunities, could also potentially be caused by the disproportionate rate of exclusion, both fixed term and permanent, faced by children with SEND. A landmark review was released belatedly in 2019 into the use of exclusion in schools and why certain groups of children were more likely to be excluded. The review found there were disproportionate exclusions of Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Caribbean, Gypsy/ Roma and Traveller children and '78% of permanent exclusions issued were to pupils who either had SEN, were classified as in need or were eligible for free school meals' (Timpson, 2019, p.33). One of the primary reasons reported by local authorities, parents and schools for the disproportionate level of exclusions for children with SEND was the misunderstanding of the child's needs and a lack of appropriate support resulting in the child presenting more challenging or distressed behaviour in school (Timpson, 2019, p.38), but there were also reports of exclusion being used in 'cynical' attempts to improve exam results and to reduce costs (p.84).

This is a demonstrative example of an economic and cultural context working against the rhetoric of inclusion for children with SEND; a competitive relationship between schools and reduced funding for provision has created an incentive to avoid taking on those children who may require extra support to partake in the education system as it exists today.

According to figures from 2019, the majority of children (79.4%) with identified SEND do not have an EHCP, which is a legal document setting out the provision which the local authority must provide for them (Davies, 2019, p.7). Due to funding pressures and reduced services, securing an EHCP is seen as a way to guarantee your child

receives some support. Yet accessing an EHCP is fraught with bureaucracy and delays of 'regularly more than a year', with underfunded 'councils putting up additional barriers to services in efforts to ration scarce resources' (King, 2019, p.2). Problems in accessing an assessment in some local areas are so severe that schools resorted to excluding pupils 'as a lever of last resort in order to secure a proper assessment for pupils, all other means having failed' or so that they may be able to access specialist provision in a Special Alternative Provision Unit (Timpson, 2019, p.85). A 2017 Freedom of Information request found that from the 48% of councils surveyed, more than a quarter of SEND pupils only received an EHCP after being permanently excluded from school (Devlin, 2020, paragraph 7). The functioning of the assessment system for SEND is thus pushing many children to the point of crisis before they can receive support – this is contrary to stated policy aims of early intervention and diagnoses and prompt support.

Even if a family successfully secures an assessment for a child and they have an EHCP put in place this does not guarantee provision; in 2018 the chief of Ofsted called it a 'national scandal' that thousands of children who had had their needs assessed and planned out with an EHCP were receiving no support (Richardson, 2018). This has resulted in an increase in the number of families taking legal action against their local authorities when a child's provision as set out in their EHCP is not fulfilled, or if they are placed in a school they do not see as appropriate to their needs. Families and councils spend huge amounts of money on legal advice and on tribunals, with the vast majority of cases found in favour of the families/ children (King, 2019, p.2). Parents have reportedly spent as much as £20,000 on the cost of challenging at tribunal a decision to place their child in a mainstream school, a cost which is clearly prohibitive for many (McAllister, 2021). Though this often lengthy, stressful and expensive process may result in individual children securing provision, to which they already have the legal right, this is clearly not a sustainable solution. Already underfunded councils have spent over £253 million in public money on legal defence at tribunals since the 2014 SEND reforms were introduced, money which could surely be better used within the system itself (Keer, 2021).

In-school support problems are compounded by a lack of access to other support services for children and young people with SEND and their families. Though some areas were assessed by Ofsted as successfully providing support for parents and

carers of children with SEND, for example through parents' forums, many areas were found to have lacking support services, a lack of input from health and social care services into EHCPs, and long waiting times to access various support services (Ofsted, 2021). This must be put into the context of austerity, which has seen council funding from central government slashed by 77% between 2015/16 and 2020/2021 and government funding for specific services such as Sure Start, children's centres and other universal family support services by 42% over the same period (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.130). Inevitably as a result of such budget cuts against rising inflation and increasing need, services from these essential early intervention and support organisations are reduced, and there is pressure on schools to fill the gaps left behind. With austerity and a contraction of family services as a backdrop, during a time of economic and health crises, it is not surprising that there is rising need for children's mental health support services, especially for children with SEND. In this vicious cycle, reduced funding for services such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) coincides with rising referrals, a quarter of which in 2019 were rejected, with others facing extended waiting periods for support (Edwards and Parsons, 2020, p.53). Some services such as counselling and other health services used to be provided in-house in schools, but they are now separate entities whose services must be bought in, and which are run as private companies who need to turn a profit. Thus, inclusive provision is undermined by the economic logic of privatisation and outsourcing.

Poor quality and inappropriate provision has also been identified within the SEND system. Within mainstream schools, a lack of appropriate support or undiagnosed needs can lead to students with SEND presenting 'challenging behaviour', for which they can be removed from their classrooms to isolation booths or rooms, some of which keep the children in silence and with no guided teaching for hours at a time. In a particularly alarming case, the family of an autistic child with mental health problems had to take legal action against the government after she was kept in isolation for over a month of lessons in her academy school, leading her to become depressed and 'taking an overdose while in the isolation room itself' (Perraudin, 2019, paragraph 5). Inappropriate physical restraints have been reportedly used on children with SEND in these situations, which some have argued points to a need for greater awareness of SEND needs and approaches to interventions within teacher

and TA training. Certainly there is a lack of in-depth SEND training as part of statutory teacher training, but this kind of desperate intervention also reflects the culture in schools explored above, where in-classroom teaching is focused on coaching to pass specific tests, and much sitting still writing/ listening is required. This means that any persistent behaviour which could be construed as disruptive within this controlled environment, such as getting up and moving around or making noise, can be seen as a reasonable cause to need to remove a child from their classroom. Clearly this impacts those who may struggle to conform to such behaviour due to their SEND, whether it is diagnosed or not.

Other factors also impact the quality of provision which children with SEND can access within the classroom or within one-to-one or smaller group settings. Children with SEND spend a disproportionate amount of learning time with TAs, compared to their peers. This impacts on the quality of provision they experience because TAs often do not have the necessary planning time or training to carry out this kind of teaching (Webster and Blatchford, 2017, p.3).

As referred to above, children with SEND are disproportionately likely to be excluded from school, after which they may be sent to an Alternative Provision (AP) to receive education. Since 2017, according to the government's own data, the number of children in AP has risen 14% to over 45,000. The proportion is even higher for young children – over the same period primary age children in AP has risen by 27%. There is a concerning trend of unregistered and poor-quality AP providers using a loophole in the law to avoid regular regulation, with Ofsted reportedly finding some APs with unsafe and unsuitable premises, staff who do not check attendance of pupils and 'where children are left to play video games all day' (Spielman, 2021, paragraph 6). These problems represent a glaring gap between stated policy aims and everyday practice in reality for children and young people with SEND.

Chapter 2

The Cuban Special Education system: understanding historical contexts

In this chapter I will trace the history leading up to the development of a distinct Special Education system, that of Cuba, a Caribbean island nation known for its success in consistently aiming to prioritise 'universal, high-quality, free education and

healthcare' since the revolution began in 1959 (Smith, 2016, p.4). Many have pointed to the importance of education to the revolutionary project, which right from the start focused on increasing participation and access to education (Liener, 1987, Gillette, 1972, Macdonald, 2009). The approach to the new education system was formed through the 'very different path […] to democracy' undertaken by the new revolutionary government and wider sections of the population, with an experimental approach to shaping, enacting and evaluating policy on the basis of distinctive aims, goals and measures of societal success and participation (August, 2013, p.xv). Education would be openly ideological, explicitly teaching in ways which would encourage the inculcation of socialist values and behaviours. Incorporating the 'pedagogical praxis' of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the guerrilla commander-come-revolutionary leader, into the classroom, and society at large, education and self-education would develop collective consciousness and teach the necessity of community to support each individual, as well as teaching practical and professional capabilities to build up key industries such as agriculture and science on the island (Barteau & Webb, 2019, p.103). Smith (2016) contrasts this with the more concealed but no less ideological practice in modern 'neoliberal market democracies'; an educational hegemony which represents the individual rather than class antagonisms as the motor of history, normalises 'extant social relations' and structures, and obfuscates the possibility of alternative systems (p.2). Understanding how this 'very different' approach to educational policy and practice developed over Cuban history is essential to understand and evaluate the functioning of the current Special Education system within its context.

In the revolutionary society, greater social participation was called for and education would be a key component of developing consciousness and the skills necessary for socialist development of the productive forces. Mass mobilisations and participatory educational projects started all across the island, with the explicit goal of addressing the entrenched educational and social inequalities which had characterised Cuba's pre-revolution history. Well-known examples of these early and pivotal actions include the mass Literacy Campaign or *Campana de Alfabetización* in 1961 which mobilised students and others to work with rural and historically marginalised communities to improve literacy levels, an increase which was successfully maintained in the following years (Kumaraswami, 2016, p.10), the transformation of

Batista-era forts and military bases into educational, cultural and medical facilities (Barteau & Webb, 2019, p.101), the removal of fees for all levels of education, and increasing the number of university campuses across the island (De Quesada, 2011, p.137). Recent research suggests a continuing prioritisation of quality educational provision, with Cuban students consistently scoring the highest in regional tests (Bruns & Luque, 2014, p.296), a high quality of teacher training which emphasises collaboration between professionals and reflective practice (Bruns & Luque, 2014, p.276), small class sizes (Breidlid, 2007, p.624) and continued free access to university education with 'at least one university and one school of medicine' in every province (De Quesada, 2011, p.138) amongst others.

A perhaps lesser-known early policy shift during the first few years after the revolution which aimed to increase participation in education was the official formation of a special education system in 1962 (Shelton, Kelly and Sánchez Valdés, 2021, p.62). Far less material, at least that which is available or easily accessible to readers outside of the island, evaluates and explores the functioning, successes, and challenges specifically facing the Cuban Special Education system as a connected but specialised part of the education system as a whole. There are useful works which point to strengths of the contemporary Cuban system such as a holistic approach to diagnosis and support, effective coordination between sectors and accessible specialist centres in each municipality (Gorry, 2017, p.5-7), as well as the promotion of parental involvement through both the right of families to decide where their child is educated (Shelton, Kelly and Sánchez Valdés, 2021, p.64) school councils, and other creative initiatives (UNESCO, 2020, pp.90-96). These works also point to several challenges to the Cuban government's policy 'goals of social insertion and inclusivity' (Gorry, 2017, p.5). According to policy, people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Cuba are guaranteed rights, including through the international conventions and agreements of which Cuba is a signatory[3] and the Cuban constitution itself. The constitution was amended by popular consultation and approved in an updated form in 2019 and guarantees those with SEND the right to state provision of 'the required conditions for their rehabilitation or the improvement of their quality of life, their personal autonomy, and their social

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[3] Cuba is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 2000, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007 and the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights 2008, which set out rights for people with disabilities (Gorry, 2017, p.9, footnote 1).

inclusion and participation' (Cuban constitution, article 89). Yet in practice the lack of comprehensive national survey data on the prevalence of specific disabilities (Gorry, 2017, p.5), difficulties in attracting and maintaining sufficient numbers of teaching staff (Shelton, Kelly and Sánchez Valdés, 2021, p.65), and comparatively low levels of internet access can work as barriers to providing and evaluating support in a targeted and effective way (UNESCO, 2020, p.82).

Aiming to avoid some of the assumptions, unproven assertions and stereotypes which are frequently employed in the 'sometimes polarised and simplified' depictions of Cuba in academic literature, this chapter will engage critically with Cuba's Special Education system by placing such barriers, as well as the clear achievements in their context (Kumarawami, 2016, p.528). Post-revolution Cuba is a nation attempting to develop after a history marked by economic exploitation and underdevelopment through colonialism, slavery, and neo-colonialism, and inevitably suffering the resulting social and cultural inequalities and economic problems which all post-colonial societies face (Martín, 2009, p.135). Some of the challenges Cuba faces are the same for many post-colonial countries in the 'Global South'. For example, these nations face the challenge of deciding how to respond to the legacy of environmental degradation unleashed by colonisation and the continuing 'extractivist capitalist model', which expands exploitative industries such as mineral mining and oil exploration, and can lead to the desertification of lands, impoverishment and dispossession of peoples, worsen extreme weather events, and undermine access to clean drinking water (Crook, Short and South, 2018, p.302). Other challenges are unique to Cuba since its Revolution and subsequent adoption of a socialist form of development, such as trying to develop whilst being under an ongoing and illegal blockade[4] by the world's largest economy, the United States (US), for more than 60 years. This ongoing blockade, including new economic sanctions applied under both the Trump and Biden administrations, has cost the Cuban economy an estimated $130 billion since it began, and intentionally blocks access to vital imports including medicine, medical equipment and food, impedes banking, and aims to deter third party countries from trading with Cuba (Adler, 2022).

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[4] There is some debate about the term 'blockade'/'embargo'. 'Embargo' is used to describe one nation state implementing a policy to cut off all trade with another nation state, whereas 'blockade' refers to one nation using force to block another nation from international trade, including other third-party nations, thus I use the term 'blockade' see Yaffe, 2020, p.102.

In order to understand how and why the current Cuban Special Education system functions as it does, I will firstly describe the specific structural, socio-economic-cultural contexts which have shaped the accessibility, ideology, pedagogy, and structure of education available to different sections of the population over Cuba's history. This will offer a crucial framework of understanding for the next chapter which will evaluate the successes and problems facing the current Special Education system in more depth.

<u>Spanish colonialism, slavery, racism: education for domination</u>

In 1492 Cuba was 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus: an ideal place for Spanish colonialism with its useful coastlines, fertile land and the possibility of gold yet to be discovered. The native population would be displaced, converted to Catholicism and forced to labour on behalf of the Spanish monarchy. By 1513, a system of enslavement was set up which would last in Cuba for three and a half centuries, with as many as 1.3 million people forcibly taken from the African continent (Reed, 2014, p.6). The economic and political project of both colonisation and the subsequent plantation-slave economy shaped the form and content of education available to different populations inhabiting Cuba. Enslaved people were banned from education bar a religious one aimed at Christianising their beliefs and legitimising the 'imperative of the conquest' (UNESCO, 2020, p.4). Grech (2014) argues that the process of colonisation involved the creation of a form of educational and cultural socialisation which would work to construct and promote the powerful myth of race and racial hierarchy, as well as enforcing a religious belief which naturalised and sanctified this subjugation, teaching that it was the will of God, a mission to civilise and purify the 'evil spirits' of the natives through back breaking labour and physical torture (p.10). This subjugation, enforced both materially and rhetorically-culturally, was driven by the clear economic and political imperative of the colonising and ruling slave owning class; to create a class of able-bodied 'servile labourers' who would work hard to produce wealth for the colonising force and not put up resistance to their role.

Against the idealised able-bodied colonial subject, a disabled 'other' was rhetorically and literally produced. This group included those who had become disabled through the horrific working conditions, poverty and disease which accompanied the colonial

project as it swept away native societies and relationships to lands and labour, and thus were no longer productive or useful to the colonising force, alongside those intentionally mutilated as a punishment by the slave owning settler class, people whose bodies were used as a public example of what resistance would result in (Grech, 2014, p.9). The conception of 'disability' in colonial society then can be understood in its specific historical context as a form of social control with an economic objective; used rhetorically to discipline the labouring class into conforming to their role and a physical process of controlling rebellious members of that class.

Such appalling and intentional discrimination against particular populations by constructing a subordinate social position in both education and material conditions have left scars which have far outlived the institutions of colonial domination and forced labour. This is evident in the genetic makeup of modern-day Cubans, descended from a mixture of the European settlers, the indigenous and African peoples of early Cuban history, as well as later indentured labourers from China and elsewhere. Research carried out in Cuba by Dr Beatriz Marcheco to trace the genetic ancestry of the population determined that greater African genetic lineage (rather than physical characteristics considered to denote 'race' such as skin colour) could indicate higher risk factors for particular diseases, and concluded the history of colonisation, 'exploitation, extermination, slavery and marginalization […] have left a legacy of poverty and even ill-health long after the original damage was done' (Reed, 2014, p.7). Throughout the following turbulent period of rebellions, uprisings against slavery, and wars for independence from Spain, the racial, social and educational inequalities between the elite European settler-colonialists and the labouring African and indigenous people, created by and through colonial domination, continued. The institution of slavery would not be officially abolished in Cuba until 1886.

The legacy of José Martí: education for liberation

During the 'Age of Revolutions', from 1760 to 1850, a wave of wars for independence from European colonialism swept across Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of these new republics established systems of representative yet exclusive democracy generally led by the middle and elite owner classes, leaving virtually untouched the 'socio-economic stratification' between themselves and the 'subaltern' class of 'slaves, natives, mestizos, [and] unskilled workers' whom they

had fought alongside for independence (Fernández-Sebastián, 2020, p.119). This served as a potential blueprint for the creole elite in Cuba who were descended from the Spanish and other European settler-colonialists and owned the majority of the cattle ranches, sugar and tobacco plantations, and relied on slaves to produce their wealth. Later this class also dominated the large industries and the banking sector which developed as Havana became an economic centre for the Spanish Empire, used as a base where fleets stopped off for long periods on their missions to loot Central America of gold (Gott, 2004, p.30).

Official education policy called for obedience and loyalty to the Spanish empire and the wider cultural policy aimed to supress nationalistic sentiments amongst all Cubans. The news of the Haitian revolution in 1791 was specifically suppressed in Cuban newspapers, in fear of an uprising amongst literate black and 'mulatto' Cubans, though the majority faced numerous barriers to attaining even this basic level of education. The educational and social gulf between the elite white owner class and the labouring and enslaved black and 'mulatto' classes in this period is exemplified by the institution *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* which was founded by elite creole Cubans to develop research, science, literature, and culture, and functioned simultaneously to police the removal of 'teachers and students of colour' from Cuban classrooms (Sartorius, 2013, p.70). Despite legal reform in 1880, made as a concession by the Spanish colonial authorities, which banned racial prejudice against black people in employment, in public spaces and in education, 'ordering […] state schools to admit black children on the same basis as white', in practice educational and social segregation would continue until after the socialist revolution in 1959 (Gott, 2004, p.81).

A prominent figure in the continuing struggle for independence would take up the issues of social inequality and education as part of the battle; José Martí, a philosopher, independence fighter and educational philosopher from the creole elite class in Cuba. Exiled to Spain during its revolutionary upheaval in 1871 because of his support for the Ten Years War, he studied philosophy and was influenced by contemporary nineteenth century Latin American educationalists. Martí travelled Latin America where he developed an anti-racist sensibility, opposing the ruling elite landowners and the Catholic Church who dominated the republics of the nineteenth century with military power, enriching and developing the urban centres at the

continual impoverishment of the rural indigenous and enslaved peoples (Gott, 2004, p.86). The impact Martí had on Cuban education is hard to overstate; though he was killed in battle before Cuba finally won independence in 1898, he influenced educational practice, pedagogy, and ideology immeasurably. With his anti-colonial, anti-imperialist philosophy, seeking independence based on racial and economic equality and demonstrating the liberating potential of education as a means to illuminate and organise to change unjust social systems, Martí set 'the ethical basis of socialist revolution in his place of birth' (Kronenberg, 2014, p.43). Martí also foresaw the dangers of US annexation, which many of the Cuban elite favoured as an alternative to Spanish colonialism. This would come to be the reality as a self-interested intervention by the US finally forced Spain to relinquish Cuba in 1898. The following period of US occupation and neo-colonialism left untouched the inequalities and injustices which Martí fought against.

US occupation: education for the elite

Cuba had caught the eye of US capital and business elites due to its dominance in the international sugar industry, and there was a growing presence of US companies throughout the late 1800s. The US sought to gain further control of Cuba's economy. The proximity of the island to the US and its strategic position as a potential outpost of influence into Central America and beyond, as well as its major export of sugar, meant gaining control of Cuba and bringing about a government amenable to their interests was of great importance to the US ruling class. This project began in earnest with the 1902 recognition of the 'independent' Republic of Cuba, with a constitution shaped by US interests through legislation such as the Platt Amendment, which would solidify 'a unique form of colonial control' over Cuba, directing everything from the military alliances the government could seek, oversight of its public finances, to the right for the US to intervene in Cuba whenever it wished, and to establish a military base (Gott, 2004, pp.110-111). This new US-influenced constitution, along with a variety of trade measures and investments, led to a growing dependency on the US as an export market for its monocrop sugar economy; by the 1940s, the Cuban sugar industry was the largest in the world, and 80% of its sugar was being exported to the US (Yaffe, 2020, p.17). Thus, in newly

'independent' Cuba, the old colonial yoke of Spanish domination had been replaced by another imperial master: US imperialism and its corporate monopolies.

The setup of the new republic suited the 'traditional elites', who 'maintained a privileged position' throughout this period, living comfortably in Havana and benefitting from disproportionately high levels of consumption, and access to highly developed roads, communication and power facilities (Yaffe, 2020, pp.16-18). With its close ties to the US economy through its monocrop sugar industry, the Cuban economy was battered in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, leaving the Cuban ruling class and business elites desperate to restore profitability by pushing down workers' conditions and pay by the late 1950s (Cushion, 2016, p.7). For those workers subjected to this drive to restore profits, it was a time of insecurity, 'poverty, unemployment and underemployment'; those hired to work on the sugar plantations were often only hired for part of the year, there was high overall unemployment and all sectors experienced worsening working conditions, layoffs and stagnant, poor wages (Yaffe, 2020, p.17). In contrast to the urban elites, rural Cubans faced the same inequality and miserable conditions which had so appalled Martí on his voyages into the new Latin American republics. Rural Cubans were mostly landless, facing hunger, poverty wages and unemployment, institutionalised racism and a lack of basic infrastructure such as running water, housing and electricity (Yaffe, 2020, pp.18-19).

Education reflected and reinforced the cultural, economic and social structures of the period: US influence was just as decisive in the classroom as it was in the economy. During the US occupation, American style schooling was established on the island, with US textbooks, teaching methods and a US syllabus parachuted into the Cuban education system (Gott, 2004, p.107). Reminiscent of the Spanish Catholic church's 'civilising mission', the influence of the imperial power was also transmitted through religious education. US church missionary schools were set up across the island to convert Cubans to evangelical Christianity and promote American ideals and provide 'segregated education [for] the children of the white elite (Gott, 2004, p.107). Educational opportunities were kept behind the long-established barriers of wealth and whiteness. Cuba's elite sugar-baron ruling classes had a history of a vibrant and 'extensive intellectual activity', with exclusive institutions which they used to shape

the development of the country's scientific, technological and cultural facilities to their benefit (Gott, 2004, p.43). Meanwhile, the rural, black, peasantry and working class Cubans made up the 24% of Cubans who could not read at all, toiling on sugar plantations for low wages and without access to basic necessities, let alone a mainstream education (Yaffe, 2020, p.19). Poor health from a lack of services, poor living standards and a lack of access to proper nutrition impacts the cognitive development of children, and those children who developed a form of SEND could face traditional religious and Christian cultural prejudices and misunderstandings of disabilities as a 'punishment' for sin, or a challenge from God, leading families to isolate them within the home (Brice, 2008, p.119). Before the changes instituted by the revolutionary government from 1959 onwards, there was no Special Education system to speak of, with 'official enrolment in special education barely exceed[ing] 130 students' (Correa, 2019, paragraph 4).

This context is crucial to understand the kind of factors which shaped SEND education in Cuba before the revolutionary process began in 1959. Despite the legal policy changes which promised to promote inclusion and end racial segregation in education as far back as 1880, in practice the extreme economic and social inequality which persisted throughout the period and into the mid twenty-first century prevented many Cubans from accessing even basic education. Within the economic centre of Havana, infrastructure and education for the elite leapt ahead, while rural Cubans experienced poverty, landlessness and a lack of electricity: decent education could be achieved for those with the economic means, but it remained behind a barrier for many working class and rural Cubans. Ideologically, education reinforced and reproduced the wider socio-economic-cultural contexts of the time, promoting racial and social hierarchies and the values of US imperialism and capitalistic class society. Religious education and Christian ideology, which continued to be influential through missionary schools and through ongoing traditions, impacted the cultural views of those with SEND and their position in society, with care falling to mothers and families and a complete lack of supportive infrastructure outside of the home. Cuba's history as a land dominated by Spanish colonialism and then US imperialism, the imposition of slavery and the predominance of the sugar industry has had lasting implications on economic development and dependency, racism and other inequalities. To understand how

Cuba's 'very different' approach to education policy developed after the revolution, it is necessary to understand the preceding history and the problems and contradictions which worked as barriers to education for many Cubans, despite policy affirming the rights to universal education and equal participation in a democratic society.

<center>Chapter 3</center>

<center>SEND in Contemporary Cuba</center>

As we have seen, economic, political, wider policy and cultural contexts all work to shape, inform, and often complicate special education policy and the aims of greater inclusion and participation of those with SEND (and others) in society. In the contemporary British state education system, for instance, ideas of removing barriers to education and inclusion of students with SEND have been undermined by wider policies and practices, such as using narrow markers of success to demonstrate progress, and a neoliberal ideology which emphasises individual competition and values such individuals primarily on their ability to be productive within the capitalist economy. Likewise, systems of inequality and domination shaped education ideology and practice in Cuba for many years after the formal abolishment of slavery, with effective segregation and unequal access to education for sections of the poor, rural, and black working classes continuing into the new republic and beyond, undermining 'constitutional promise[s]' of free and universal education and democracy (Shultz, 2020, p.219). This chapter will focus on Cuba's post-revolution Special Education system, focusing on the following questions:

- What are the unique features of the contemporary Cuban Special education system?
- How have wider policy aims and priorities, and economic, social and political contexts influenced the system?

There is a lack of specific and in-depth English language academic research into the strengths, weaknesses, contexts and challenges facing the Cuban special education system, despite the obvious interest in both Cuba's education system (Boorstein, 1968; Leiner, 1987; Gott, 2004), and health system (Fitz, 2020; Zahid *et al.*, 2021). However, by analysing the few English language works which specifically address the Cuban special education system, alongside those which address the contextual

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factors which shape it, as well as sources from Cuban educational and cultural journals, it is clear that there are some unique features within contemporary Cuban culture, the wider education system, and SEND system specifically which encourage and support active participation and inclusion in society, and merit further investigation.

Consistent prioritisation of free state education: massifying access and high spending

Since the revolution, the Cuban government has been consistently recognised for its commitment to improve education through 'sustained high levels of investments in education, and a comprehensive and carefully structured system' which has enabled the development of literacy levels and educational results comparable to those of developed neoliberal economies (Gasperini, 2000, p.2). This carefully structured system has been through different phases and updates, adapting to shifting economic, social and cultural contexts, but several defining features have remained throughout its history, including that the state is *'responsable de establecer sus directrices; su carácter universal [y] la garantía de la educación gratuita en todos niveles'* (Espinosa, 2016, p.30). A culture of 'high educational expectations' has been engendered through various projects, practices, and policies which have encouraged the participation of wider sections of the population in this free education provision, including distance learning, courses for workers, and increasing local access to higher education facilities (Domínguez, 2016, pp.22-25). This policy of prioritising educational provision as a public good provided by the state and encouraging greater access and inclusion within it has a number of implications relevant to the overall educational context.

Despite the many changes it has undergone, since the revolution of 1959, the Cuban socialist system has remained relatively stable; in 2018 new president Miguel Díaz-Canel and other Cubans adopted the slogan *'¡Somos Cuba! ¡Somos Continuidad!'* to 'demonstrate their enduring commitment' to the ongoing Cuban revolutionary project (Yaffe, 2020, p.1). This continuity has allowed 'consistent policies and political stability' to nurture the effective implementation of the revolutionary government's educational projects and goals, such as increasing literacy levels and increasing access to educational provision in rural areas (Gasperini, 2000, p.8). Gasperini

(2000) points out this achievement has come 'at the cost of one-party rule' (p.8), which is indeed the case: the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* (PCC) is the one political party which politically leads the country. In order to understand the full context however, this needs to be understood alongside an often-overlooked element of the Cuban system: the existence of, and the active role played by, mass organisations, as well as the wider society in amending, critiquing and shaping policy through 'representative channels, public forums, national consultations and referenda' (Yaffe, 2020, p.4). There is a high level of grassroots participation through both mass organisations which started in the 1960s, such as the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* and the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, and the municipal organisations of *Poder Popular* which began in 1976 as a 'new for[m] of participation' at the local neighbourhood level (Alfonso, Soriano and Flores, 1999, p.100). This allows local areas to be in consistent communication and interaction with the provincial and national levels of government, to influence and participate in policy making and local implementation, as well as aiming to make national policy more responsive to local issues.

The state-owned system of education in Cuba has allowed centralised funding to be more directed towards local need, and less reactive to the sectoral interests of outsourced businesses who sell services and resources in the education systems of Britain and Cuba's Latin American neighbours. While outsourcing and private finance has permeated the state school system in Britain, effectively rerouting state funding into private profit-making companies to the detriment of the quality of services, as discussed in chapter 1, in Cuba, important services and roles have been kept in-house and run not for profit, allowing resources such as books to be produced cheaply and distributed to schools and bookshops for free (Gasperini, 2000, p.11). Doctors and nurses working in the Cuban healthcare system are also regularly deployed and available in schools and day care centres, promoting regular intersectoral support (Yaffe, 2020, p.128). Similarly, teacher training in Cuba is distinct from its Latin American neighbours, where often outsourced companies carry out poor quality teacher training programmes which are of little practical relevance and which include minimal in-classroom practice (Bruns & Luque, 2014, p.276). Teacher training in Cuba is an ongoing and consistent practice, run in-house through regular peer collaboration between teachers in *colectivos pedagogicos*, where

teachers share problems and develop solutions, discuss and systemize best practice, and adapt national curricula to their local needs (Gasperini, 2000, p.9). This is a demonstrative example of national direction encouraging regular and ongoing active participation at the local level in order to respond to local needs, despite a lack of material resources.

The aim to include greater sections of society in education was a crucial project and priority of the early years of the revolutionary process. During the early years of the revolution, quality was synonymous with high enrolment numbers: massifying access was of primary importance (Toruncha, 2001, p.21). Between 1960 and 1974 enrolment in education more than quadrupled, and by 1990 the number of universities had gone from just four to 35 across the country (Domínguez, 2016, p.22). There was also an explosion in the number of schools, including in rural areas which had been previously neglected, and other educational and cultural sites, necessitating high state spending: up to 8.5% of GDP and 21.9% of the total state budget was spent on education during this period (Domínguez, 2016, p.22). This has remained relatively stable, even during the extreme economic crisis of the Special Period in the 1990s education spending was only slightly reduced, and policy changes aimed as far as possible to sustain the progress which had been made in the key areas of education and health (Kapcia, 2008, p.46). High spending on education as a proportion of the state budget has continued more recently, rising to its highest level in 2011-13 at 29.4% of the state budget (Espinosa, 2016, p.30). On the other hand, British government spending on the state provision of education reached a peak in 2010, at 5.5% of GDP, and has since been reduced through austerity measures, falling to 3.9% in 2018 (Bolton, 2021, pp.5-6). Despite its much smaller state budget, state education provision has remained a consistent priority for the Cuban government, both ideologically and materially since the revolutionary process began in 1959.

High state spending as a proportion of overall state budget or of GDP is, however, clearly not the defining characteristic which accounts for Cuba's achievements in educational development. For one, Cuba has a GDP around 100 times smaller than that of the US, while having similar educational output (Trading Economics, 2018-2019 figures). Especially since the Special Period of the 1990s, and the subsequent devastation of the Cuban economy, exacerbated by a tightening US blockade (Brice,

2008, p.119), there has been a need to balance a depleted state budget against rising demand for education and healthcare, and priority has shifted to improving quality of services whilst reducing the cost to the state (Espinosa, 2016, p.31). Looking to developed neoliberal areas of the world such as North America and Europe, where twelve of the world's richest countries still produce a quarter of adults who are functionally illiterate, it is evident that the volume of spending is not necessarily the decisive factor. As Toruncha (2001) explains: '*no siempre, en todas las naciones, se corresponden totalmente los resultados con los 'gastos' realizados en la educación*' (p.20). Other unique features of Cuban educational policy and practice then must be analysed in order to explain the kind of educational progress it has been able to make and sustain, despite a challenging economic situation.

Ideology of education: socialist values and implications for SEND inclusion

The teaching of values is not unique to the Cuban context, nor is it unique to socialist societies. In the early twentieth century, the renowned sociologist Karl Mannheim advocated for education which could develop shared values, as well as encouraging democracy and diversity of thought (Fernandes, 2002, p.9). Civics classes are common within many countries of differing social and political systems, and since 2014, educators have been required to promote so-called 'fundamental British values' to students at all levels of education in England. One can certainly criticise the ideological content of these values as concomitantly vague, nationalistic and intentionally ignorant of contexts of racism, colonialism, inequality and imperialism, as well as criticising the non-democratic nature of such values being decreed by the government with no discussion from either the public or parliament (Adetunji, 2018). All societies attempt to develop values, whether explicitly or not, and many education systems attempt to reproduce existing social structures through these values, to 'prepare young people to enter society' and naturalise the inequalities and issues of that society (Fernandes, 2002, p.9). One particular feature of the Cuban education system is that its aim has not been 'simply to reproduce society […] but rather to produce it'; the values it seeks to cultivate in students then are those which allow active participation in a collaborative 'social purpose [to] reimagine reality' (Smith, 2016, p.3).

Often the existing literature written *about* Cuba does not seriously engage with the written policies, nor evidence of practices, which explain which values the Cuban education system attempts to teach, and how. Frequently, one finds a simplified and feverishly dismissive characterisation of the ideological aims and values of the post-revolution society, often without precisely defining or exploring them. The 'dominant narrative of communism' in Cuba as one of 'hidden agenda[s]', 'authoritarian' and non-democratic rule (Shultz, 2020, p.215), a narrative which has been challenged by Yaffe (2020, pp.1-9) and August (2013), has material consequences for the perceptions and expectations of education researchers. For example, a delegation of educational administrators from the US to Cuba reportedly expected to see 'still, unhappy', 'fearful' and 'brainwashed' students being 'forced to behave in some unreasonable manner' and were confounded by their observations of 'loving, respectful' children with high self-esteem, thoughtfulness, openness and displaying leadership and cooperation skills (Blum, 2011, pp.155-156). If one does not interrogate preconceptions, one can be drawn into making sweeping conclusions which are not supported by evidence, rather than examining the contexts, aims and issues as they present themselves. For example, Barteau and Webb (2019) detail some of the collaborative and participatory values and practices they observed within the Cuban education system. In the concluding section the authors claim that 'Instead of allowing the citizens to endorse these beliefs through the incorporation of methods and practices geared toward displaying the benefits', Cubans are 'forced into acquisition of this ideology through dictatorial control' (p.112). The authors give no evidence for this assertion, which directly contradicts their earlier argument that 'the students were not simply taught through or about the ideology of collectiveness, but they embodied it. They recognized the value of the collective because they witnessed its benefits' (p.106). This section will examine the specific policy aims and the ideological values which underpin the pedagogies of the Cuban education system, attempting to highlight complex aims, priorities and contexts which inform and complicate them.

The priorities for education policy which the revolutionary government began to formulate, as part of a process of debate, discussion and participation of all levels of society, from the earliest moments of the 1959 Revolution contain some notable features which have significant implications for SEND education and inclusion in

particular. Flexibility and active participation in the local community, creative and practical content and the development of critical thinking are all featured in a 1960 ministerial resolution which laid out guidelines for creating new textbooks in Cuba's future classrooms:

> 'It [the ideal new Cuban textbook] centered on the idea of stimulating individual activity and the students' relation to their community. Materials were supposed to support active learning, deemphasize memorizing and testing, and encourage outdoor activities and practical learning. Questions included: "[Does the text seek the] stimulation of student activities and activities within Cuban communities? . . . [D]oes it teach students to think and work for themselves? . . . [D]oes it include projects and ideas? . . . [D]oes it help develop individual creativity?"' (Shultz, 2020, p.221).

Shultz argues that this was a uniquely 'liberal' moment of the revolutionary process, and that in reaction to a threatening and volatile international context, as well as terrorist attacks from anti-revolutionary forces within Cuba, that the education system became more controlled, and a new ideological era in education began. No doubt, the 'chaotic, iconic and euphoric' early years produced momentous changes; just within the year 1961 the US broke off relations with Cuba and increased the blockade on food products, a counter-revolution and US-backed invasion were defeated, Fidel Castro declared the socialist nature of the Revolution, the literacy campaign was completed and education was nationalised (Kumaraswami, 2016, p.529). A new defensive stance in education policy was introduced, particularly regulating the ways in which the US and the Soviet Union could be portrayed within textbooks, which now needed state approval by the Ministry of Education in order to be used in Cuban schools (Shultz, 2020, p.229). However, the overall policy goals and practices of the education system, along with their ideological basis, I would argue, explicitly drew from earlier Cuban history and pedagogical traditions, and have remained relatively consistent since the early years of the revolutionary process until today.

Over a decade after the textbook commission sketched outlines of an educational system which was interested in community action, practical learning, and developing creative and critical thinking, a new era of institutionalisation in the revolutionary

process had begun with the first party congress in 1975. The first Cuban constitution, drafted that year, amended by popular participation and confirmed in 1976, officially defined the ideological basis of the country's educational and cultural policy, a topic which had been subject to much public participatory debate. This constitution defined the ideological foundation of these policies as the ideas of Marx and Martí, progress in science and technology and a 'universal and Cuban progressive pedagogical tradition' (Cuban constitution, 1976, article 39). Patriotic and communistic values would be taught through practical, artistic, physical education, as well as 'participation in political and social activities' (article 39). As we have seen, all societies attempt to transmit values through their education system, in some form or another, and teaching values does not necessarily mean one cannot also encourage critical thinking and creativity (Fernandes, 2002, p.9). Crucially, though specific values were now to be explicitly encouraged, the means in which they should be learned is through participatory and community focused, active and creative activities. I would also argue these values do not contradict the aims of the first textbook commission, but in fact work to support them. To explain this in more detail, we need to look in more depth at what specific ideas and practices are encompassed in the ideas which influenced the 'Cuban progressive pedagogical tradition' and what were considered communistic values.

Martí is perhaps the most influential figure in this 'Cuban progressive pedagogical tradition'; seen as a forefather of early Cuban socialist ideology, he is still frequently referred to in Cuban educational journals and quoted by pedagogical scientists from the island and beyond, his words painted on murals inside and a bust of his head standing outside of many Cuban schools. The values Martí theorised should shape education in a future Cuban society were based on using education as a liberatory tool of participation through which people could understand and organise themselves to dismantle systems and practices of inequality and injustice. In order for education to work like this, Martí theorised that the education system must encourage critical thinking (Suárez, 2003, p.9), and nurture the altruistic values of people rather than encourage a miserly individualism (González Serra, 2003, p.11). With these aims in mind, it was just as important to consider how and why one is teaching, as well as what one should teach. According to Martí's theories teaching is not just about transmitting knowledge, but is about developing a respectful relationship with

students, where teaching 'is a work of passionate and constant tenderness' (González Serra, 2003, p.12).

This kind of educational praxis was further elaborated by influential progressive Latin American educational philosopher Paolo Freire, whose conception of liberatory teaching was based on dialogue and humanization, respect and the bestowal of value onto all people, including those dehumanized and oppressed in society (Schoder, 2010, p.80). Freirean concepts emphasise the importance of the collaborative and caring relationship between the student and the teacher. The teacher should be a co-learner with their students, ready to learn from them, their situation of life and their own knowledge, question and learn alongside them and care about their ability to understand and change the world. The teacher, by humanising the student and themselves, should help the students develop a love of humanity through education, a philosophy that closely relates to Martí's earlier theories. Freire is also influential in Cuban pedagogical discussions, debates, practices and theories, referred to frequently in Cuban educational journals and by policy makers, and arguably his praxis is ingrained in Cuban classrooms. Barteau and Webb (2019) refer to the close individual attention paid to Cuban students, where tailored instruction and support is sensitive to the needs of the individual children and the family and community context as demonstrating a 'pedagogy of love' (p.107). Blum (2011) quotes a Cuban assistant head teacher as saying the quality of education in Cuba is primarily because of 'Love […] That's why the embargo has never nor will ever ruin our quality of education', and indeed highlights practices of deep bonding between students and between students and teachers, as an important factor behind Cuba's 'quality education' system, even despite 'severe economic problems' (p.136). Espinosa (2016), writing primarily for a Cuban audience in popular journal *Temas*, evaluated the success and limitations of policies to overcome inequalities in Cuban classrooms, and highlights that even in the most challenging contexts, schools still manage to succeed in terms of student socialisation and cohesion (p.33). Education policy and practice is influenced by the pedagogies of Martí and Freire: education should be based on a respectful understanding of the student, and explicitly cultivate a culture of understanding and caring for others, striving for justice and equality. There are clear implications here for the inclusion of those with SEND (and others). This context works to encourage

inclusion and the understanding of diverse needs, as well as the principle that everyone deserves to be able to succeed, working against prejudices and attitudes of discrimination against disabled people which still exist in Cuba today (Castro, 2002, p.55).

The other major figure who is most clearly influential in the ideology of education, though not explicitly referred to in the constitution, is Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, who is still referred to by Cuban school children today who pledge they will try to 'be like Che' during special events and through youth organisations. A central contribution to the Cuban pedagogical tradition was Guevara's vision of a communist or socialist consciousness, detailed in 'Man and Socialism in Cuba' (1965). Education in this conception involves the whole of society, aiming to develop a 'new man and woman'[5] who are motivated by moral and social duty to improve conditions for all, rather than personal material gain (Barteau and Webb, 2019, p.101). Thus, a central goal of the education system is to promote the philosophy and practice that in order for a society, and individuals, to develop fully and sustainably, the 'individual cannot succeed in isolation, but requires support and contributions of the community' (Barteau and Webb, 2019, p.103). Whereas as we have seen in the previous chapters, highly competitive, narrow, and individualistic measures of success lead to exclusionary practices for those with SEND (and others), collaboration and emulation can help foster inclusion: if everyone requires the support of society, this works to undermine ideas and prejudicial practices of those with SEND being singled out as requiring 'extra' support and being seen as a drain on resources. Conversely, in 2017 British MP Domonic Raab called properly funding care and services for people with disabilities 'just a childish wishlist', implying it was one which the UK economy in crisis could not afford (Bulman, 2017, paragraph 2). Guevara's praxis also influenced the skill-building focus of the Cuban education system, the diversity of ways one is encouraged to participate and the idea that the responsibility of education rests with the society as a whole, which influences family and community inclusion in schools.

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[5] Barteau and Webb (2019) quote Holst on Guevara, saying the gendered term the 'new man' 'was not at the exclusion of females' (p.102). In some translations of Guevara's 'Man and Socialism in Cuba', the term 'the new man and woman' is used instead. I have used this for ease of understanding.

The ideological aims and curriculum priorities of the system as laid out in the first constitution remain largely very similar in the most recent constitutional update of 2019. This updated model, separated from the first by nearly half a century, still refers to educational policy being based on 'progressive Cuban and universal pedagogical traditions', promoting science and secular values, participation of citizens in society and developing students holistically through moral, patriotic, practical, explorative, creative activities (Article 32, Cuban Constitution). There are certainly limits to the success of values teaching, pointed out by Blum (2011), such as didactic teaching methods, and a challenging economic context which limits the ability of the state to provide collectively for the needs of the society, undermining the ethos where all can and should be supported. Nonetheless, policies and practices have been put in place in order to develop curriculum foci and structures and experiences in schools (and beyond) which encourage a collective ethos, where all can participate and develop individually for the betterment of everyone. Though such values may only be guidelines and we can certainly interrogate how far they are accepted and embodied, as well as how effectively they are taught in schools, they certainly give a sense of a culture which is aiming towards an inclusive education ideology, based on mutual respect, and multiple ways to participate and develop.

Participatory practices in mainstream education

Blum (2011), analyses how far the ideological framework and curriculum foci of the Cuban socialist education system have contributed to achieving the aims of government policy for education since the Revolution. Blum is ambivalent about the success of the explicit teaching of values, for example through reference to important Cuban figures, like Che Guevara, and argues that these approaches were ineffective at influencing students or shaping their values, yet reveals several areas of clear strength which are relevant to SEND inclusion. Crucially, Blum observes that in mainstream education there is a deeply embedded practice of active participation, collaboration between students and peer-peer empowerment, supported by the curriculum and classroom practices, as well as various structures and organisations (p.156). With about a third of students with SEND in mainstream education (11,000 children), it is worth reflecting on these practices and the impact they might have on inclusion and participation (Correa, 2019, paragraph 5).

One such example is the *Organización de Pioneros José Martí* (OPJM), a kind of mass extracurricular classroom organization where students can become leaders of different areas of responsibility, such as culture, emulation, sports or politics, and work as a group to achieve a shared goal, such as maintaining 'the neighborhood garden' or putting on a play (Blum, 2011, pp.153-156). In this structure, students appoint the representatives of these areas, and the selected students represent their classes and areas of focus on the school board where they are actively involved in decision making processes. Their involvement also reaches the national stage through the *Asamblea Nacional* of the OPJM, where elementary age student pioneers discuss, debate and set priorities for the organisation, such as promoting pedagogical careers, or broadening the range of activities on offer to students (del Sol González, 2016). The projects taken on by these groups are student-lead and focused on improving the local community and because the focus is on the outcome of a group task, the culture is one of collaboration rather than competition, with leading pupils playing the role of helping others succeed alongside them (Blum, 2011, p.155). Through their active participation in the world around them and by being given 'far more responsibility, voice, and vote than one would usually find in capitalist countries', pupils are able to follow their aptitudes and interests, resulting in widespread self-confidence and a self-assuredness (Blum, 2011, p.156). Multiple routes into participation, a supportive inclusive culture and different ways to achieve success within education is of clear benefit to those with SEND (and others).

This focus on collaborative and participatory culture extends into general classroom practices, where it is the norm for students to work collaboratively and help those who have not yet grasped the material, whether it be during class or during extracurricular activities or more casual homework clubs (García, 2002, p.20). Activities which encourage critical thinking and student lead inquiry are also evident, such as weekly hour-long student-lead discussion classes, as well as projects which promote greater use of student-lead research style learning, and greater cross-sectoral educational opportunities for students (Blum, 2011, p.158). Students have access to free cultural education through school links to other sectors who are also responsible for their education, such as creative workshops in *Casas de Cultura*, which were set up nationally in 1976 to offer free cultural and artistic education in neighbourhoods (Suárez, 2003, p.3). Students are thus offered a variety of means to

participate, including excursions to the countryside to experience and contribute to agricultural work. Such embedded practices help to explain why '97% of students identified their classrooms as a positive learning environment defined as incorporating active engagement and open dialog' (Barteau and Webb, 2019, p.107). Student-lead learning is of benefit to all learners, as recent educational science has confirmed we learn best when we are studying something which we enjoy and which interests us, and this is of particular help for some autistic and other students with SEND, who may have particular areas of interest and struggle to conform to narrow or overly directed styles of teaching (Fernandes, 2002, p.11).

Families and wider communities are also included in a myriad of supportive ways, by on site nurses, teachers and other educational staff. Parents and carers are encouraged to share their input through school councils (UNESCO, 2020, p.90) and participate in the learning process, as part of an approach which tailors the instruction to the needs of the individual child. In one demonstrative example, a principal interviewed by a literacy delegation in 2011 explained the collaborative approach taken if a student is not making progress in their education: 'the school, the student, and the parents worked with a specialist once a month to determine why' (Barteau and Webb, 2019, p.106). A successful approach was trialled in Cuba's Pinar del Rio province, called *Proyecto Educativo Escolar*, in which a group of students, parents and other members of the community, with guidance from a group of teachers, set out a vision for how the school could develop and best fulfil its social function. The group was responsible for setting out ideas for the kind of activities needed to fulfil the educational aspirations of students, finding barriers, and potential solutions to problems within the school and wider community (Toruncha, 2001, p.24). This approach not only lends itself to a more inclusive atmosphere for parents, but to an early intervention, preventative approach. When students themselves participate in pointing out their own concerns and there is a deeper understanding between students, teachers and communities, there is greater opportunity for educational problems to be identified earlier, as well as making students and families feel involved and comfortable with seeking help where needed, reducing shame and minimising the risk of students falling through the cracks of support.

Blum (2011) argues that despite the practices discussed above, that student leadership, solidarity, leadership skills and collaboration are almost an accidental

outcome, not linked to ideology or values taught to the students, and that the government's policy may *unwittingly* be creating students with aptitudes for critical thought and self-organisation, who will be critical of the government itself (p.136). This is a potential misreading of the cultural and educational policies which the revolutionary government has developed, which included right from the start the principles of encouraging active participation, and practices of societal debates and discussions which shape changes and updates in policy. There are clearly conscious aims behind the policies and practices above which encourage critical thinking and active participation. As well as ideological and cultural aims, Cuba's human-focused approach to development, investing in each person's abilities and allowing them to participate as far as possible is pragmatic, and has enabled project building and achievements in the areas of health and education with lower costs and less technological inputs than many neoliberal developed states. This human-development approach and a commitment that the state should provide education and health are another important feature of the contexts which shape Special Education in Cuba.

Specific features of health system – implications for SEND support

Cuba is known for having a 'well-developed healthcare system and policies which are comparable to developed countries of the world' (Zahid *et al.*, 2021, p.63). As well as being free and universal, the Cuban healthcare system is based on the local Family Doctor and Nurse Plan, introduced nationwide in 1983, in which doctors live in the community in which they work, and have regular and sustained contact with individual children and families, which continue throughout their lives. Each doctor provides services within their block, to a number of local families with whom they develop a sustained relationship, with a 'ratio of 1 physician to every 125 individuals' (Zahid *et al.*, 2021, p.65). There is a focus on preventative healthcare, which takes a holistic 'bio-psycho-social model' approach to diagnosis, promoting health management to patients, and prescribing treatments. Doctors using this model consider not only physical health problems and how to treat them, but also consider diet, habits, environmental, social and other factors which can contribute to poor or improved health outcomes. Doctors consider these factors, as well as family history when diagnosing patients and suggesting treatments, which include a host of natural and traditional medicines, as well as complimentary social activities and therapies

(Gorry, 2017, p.7). A holistic approach which encourages consistent support and contact with a familiar trusted person, the family doctor, can allow consistent support, deeper family knowledge and multiple opportunities for diagnoses and support to be offered and delivered. The benefits of a holistic and preventative approach for those with SEND is clear; it supports early diagnosis, and a holistic view allows health professionals to work with other sectors to build a fuller picture of a patient's issues and strengths. The risk of falling through the gaps is diminished when there are multiple opportunities and regular meetings with a trusted healthcare professional in the community in which you live, and access to support is the norm, reducing stigma and isolation.

Healthcare policy in Cuba has been shaped by political and economic contexts alike. According to the Cuban constitution, the state is responsible for granting all citizens 'access to quality medical attention, protection, and recovery services, free of charge', following the consistent ideological principle of the revolutionary government since 1959 that healthcare is a human right rather than a business venture (Article 72, Cuban constitution 2019). The preventative model is shaped by both an aim to provide decent health and a better quality of life as an ongoing right but has also been shaped by the challenging economic context which Cuba has faced in the past 60 years of development, in particular due to the ongoing blockade by the US. Avoiding costly and high-tech procedures, as well as drug-first treatment, has been especially necessary since a 1982 law introduced by Ronald Reagan banned other countries from 'exporting goods and equipment to Cuba if any part or process in its manufacture had been mediated by US companies or individuals' (Yaffe, 2020, p.128). The impact of this measure on the Cuban healthcare system is dramatic: by the year 2000 half of all crucial drug treatments on the international market were processed in some part by the US and therefore inaccessible for Cuba, and pharmaceutical information from US companies is also blocked from Cuba's access (Brenner, 2000, p.152).

Cuba's community based and locally focused approach to healthcare relies on mobilisation, motivation and participation of people within their communities as essential, rather than relying on technology.[6] We can see the importance of this

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[6] Cuba's biotech sector is actually highly developed, especially for a developing, blockaded country. Yaffe (2020) refers to this as one of Cuba's many unique contradictions (p.3).

approach during the Covid-19 pandemic where the Cuban government adopted a proactive and preventative programme, mobilising trusted local doctors and health workers alongside members of other mass organisations to go to communities and screen preventatively for cases of the virus. This included health workers checking in on peoples' health at home and taking medicine directly to vulnerable patients such as those with comorbidities and disabilities (Dani Films, 2020,8:07-9:919). Research by the BBC has revealed that in Britain during the Covid-19 pandemic many disabled people had no way to access their usual heath treatment and support and were left without any help or human contact, and some had DNRs (do-not-resuscitate orders) placed on them without their consent, leading to mental health problems, feelings of intense isolation and despair (Clegg, 2021). A preventative and proactive approach allowing for early detection and treatment has not only controlled Cuba's death rate from Covid-19, which has been consistently much lower than the global average (Marsh, 2020, paragraph 8), but clearly demonstrated that people and their health and wellbeing are being prioritised through government policies, the health system and mass organisations. This particular approach to healthcare is one of the reasons Cuba is able to provide a coordinated response and ongoing support to those with SEND despite its low GDP and other barriers (Gorry, 2017, p.5).

SEND support: a culture of inclusion?

Inclusion in education was an early priority, and remains one, for a number of reasons. In the early years of the revolutionary process these reasons included the high level of illiteracy in certain sectors of the working class and rural population, and the loss of the skills of the old elite professional classes, who were fleeing the radical changes brought about by the new revolutionary government in the early 1960s (Yaffe, 2020, p.19). The programmes which the new government proposed necessitated the development of a new and highly skilled professional working class, who would also be motivated and mobilized in order to carry out development projects and increase capabilities in new sectors, to diversify away from the monocrop sugar culture of the previous era. Including as many people as possible, especially those who had been marginalised throughout Cuban history, within this project and encouraging them to participate in developing the newly independent and post-colonial nation was ideologically, as well as practically, important. The

moral value of the project to develop state provision of quality and cultural education for everyone, including previously marginalised groups, was expressively demonstrated by Fidel Castro's 1961 speech *Palabras a los intelectuales* where he addressed a group of artist-intellectuals. In this speech he reminds the generally middle-class group that while they have a role within the revolution as storytellers and educators, that they must not see themselves as separate from, or superior to 'the 106-year-old former slave […] who had, in principle, the same rights and ability to narrate her experiences through literature' as they did (Kumaraswami, 2016, p.537). In principle and policy, inclusion in education was a demonstrative and concrete example of the radical social changes which were ushered in during the early period of the revolutionary process, which broke with the history of segregation and inequality which characterised education in the previous era.

This inclusive context, however, has not always translated directly into inclusive practice for those with SEND. Historical practice in Cuban classrooms previously relied on exclusive and segregationist practices such as streaming by ability within classrooms, with those achieving well sitting and learning separately from those who were deemed to not be achieving success (Machín, 2003, p.3). A segregated approach to school placement was prominent after the establishment of the Special Education system in 1962: students deemed to be struggling would be sent to a local *Centro de Diagnóstico y Orientación* (CDO) for assessment, and if they were identified as having SEND they could be educated only in special schools or classrooms, with practically no prospect of transitioning back into mainstream education. Interventions within schools demonstrated a lack of understanding of neurodiversity and of different teaching approaches, with catch up sessions and interventions based on simply repeating previous learning in the same way, rather than tailoring approaches based on the needs of the learner (Machín, 2003, p.3). Brice (2008) critiques this segregationist model, lamenting an assumed lack of parental involvement within this system of Special Education (p.120). Indeed, the previous system did fit within this characterisation in many ways, but as we will see, this has developed over time into a more inclusive approach, and in fact, even during this earlier period some organisations designed to facilitate social participation of those with SEND had already been established.

As referred to above, a third of students with SEND now attend mainstream schools in Cuba, and the remaining students with SEND are educated in special schools, at home or in hospital. Families can seek advice from special schools directly, or through the local network of CDOs where multidisciplinary teams of 'neurologists, geneticists, psychologists, speech and hearing specialists and educational psychologists' identify and assess the needs of children with disabilities and give advice to families based on the same bio-psycho-social model used within the rest of the Cuban healthcare system (Gorry, 2017, p.6). Current practice provides for greater family input into school placements: while specialists at CDOs provide advice, families have the right to decide where their children will be educated (Shelton, Kelly and Sánchez Valdés, 2021, p.63). Those who are educated in special schools receive tailored support, with specialized teachers and teaching resources, multidisciplinary support personnel, and with access to specialist equipment and furniture where required (UNESCO, 2020, p.56). The curriculum can be adapted to the needs of students, including an additional cycle for those within Special Education who complete grade 9 and wish to prepare for work (UNESCO, 2020, p.57). Families are encouraged to participate within freely provided and locally accessible supportive activities, available through CDOs and Special Educational settings, such as group therapy, multi-family therapy, and 'Fresh Air Days, where parents are invited to city parks to spend a day relaxing and not talking about their struggles' (Gorry, 2017, p.8). Whereas in Britain, as discussed in chapter 1, costly and stressful legal tribunals against councils are wasting millions of pounds of public money, and the time and money of individual families who wish to choose where their children with SEND are educated, this context is more inclusive of families and carers of those with SEND, allowing for a less combative and more collaborative approach between students, families, schools, and other supportive sectors.

Students and families can also access specific community focused and intersectoral support from a wider network of cultural, community and political infrastructure, for example through projects like *La Colmenita*, an inclusive children's theatre company where students both with and without SEND write and perform plays and music together (UNESCO, 2020, p.96). Cultural participation which does not emphasise economic production as the only thing of value to society has been built into Cuban cultural institutions since the revolution, for example through the local provision of

Casas de Cultura, through which anyone can participate for free in arts and cultural activities. This infrastructure also includes organisations specifically for those with SEND, such as *Psicoballet*, a national ballet company set up in 1973 to provide access to ballet and theatre classes, taught by expert teachers, for those with SEND. The organisation continues to this day, providing those with SEND a space to participate in cultural activities, 'improv[ing] the quality of life of people with disabilities and […] help[ing] them become incorporated into society' and breaking through the social isolation of families (Cruz, 2015, paragraph 5). In contrast to the context of neoliberal austerity measures which have led to inconsistent access to local support services, as well as the contraction of creative arts in the state education system in modern Britain, as described in chapter 1, in the Cuban context cultural participation is prioritised, available locally and consistently for free, despite a much smaller state budget. This works to provide multiple routes for young people to participate in society, which is of particular benefit to those with SEND (and others) who may not be primarily participating through work.

In the current Cuban SEND system, links with mainstream schools are maintained and infrastructure is in place to facilitate the supported reintegration of students with SEND into mainstream education, allowing a more connected relationship between 'special' and mainstream provision. Transition plans are designed for each student going from a special to a mainstream school, with tasks for schools, families and communities (UNESCO, 2020, p.37). Transition support teachers are specifically trained to carry out a supportive role in helping students with SEND transition from Special Education to mainstream education, by visiting the mainstream classroom 'to orient and provide training to the receiving teacher to help smooth transition' (Gorry, 2017, p.7). In 2019 more than 400 pedagogical graduates joined specially designed transition classrooms and schools which offer highly specialised education services for those planning to make the transition from special to mainstream education (Fole, 2019).

Despite the moves towards a more inclusive version of Special Education in Cuba, and wider contexts of inclusion and participation, there are still many issues and barriers which prevent the realisation of the full participation of those with SEND in society, and the full development of their educational potential.

Barriers to inclusion for those with SEND in Cuba

Many barriers and contradictory contexts still remain which work to disrupt the aims of Cuba's policies of inclusion and participation for those with SEND. One such complicating context which needs to be understood is a cultural one: the continuing cultural prejudices and traditional religious beliefs and misunderstandings of the causes of disabilities and different educational needs. As discussed in chapter 2, Christianity and Catholicism have been influential in Cuba since its colonisation by Spain, and this has impacted some cultural beliefs and practices towards those with SEND which persist today. According to Castro (2002), the general culture of Cuban society encourages an attitude towards parents of responsibility to raise healthy and happy children, so when a child is born with a disability or their health deteriorates, society can view the parents, and especially the mother, as responsible (p.50). To deal with the challenge of social prejudice and the specific stresses which parents of children with SEND can face, some turn to traditional Christian beliefs about the role of the mother in the family and adopt a sense of resignation to disabilities or poor health, which are seen as an act of god, either as a test or as a punishment for sin (Castro, 2002, p.52). Such beliefs can lead to the isolation of children with SEND, as parents may choose to home-school and keep their children away from the rest of society, which in turn has a negative impact on the participation in society of the wider family, especially mothers who are more likely to be responsible for childcare.

Brice (2008) characterises the Cuban Special Education system as inherently segregationist and not inclusive of families due to the socialist or communistic structure of the society and celebrates the family tradition of caring for children with SEND within the home as an antidote to this uncaring model (pp.120-121). However, as we have seen in chapter 3, the modern Cuban model has evolved to become inclusive of families, both in terms of their involvement in decision making processes and the provision of supportive activities alongside other parents and families. Similarly, since much earlier in the revolutionary process, the Cuban government has provided free to access cultural activities specifically so that those with SEND are able to participate within society, rather than being isolated and segregated within the home, as Brice promotes. Clearly the government can do more to achieve these aims: as Castro (2002) argues policies to support SEND must become more participatory by including those with SEND at higher levels of decision making and

promote the importance of links between those with SEND and their peers outside of the home, and active participation in wider society in order to work against these continuing cultural prejudices (p.56).

Another important context which needs to be understood is the economic and technical barriers which Cuban society faces, which have specific impacts on Special Education provision. The ongoing US blockade continues to complicate and increase costs for important resources and infrastructure, such as transport, medicines, equipment, and spare parts, which the Cuban state is responsible for providing to citizens. Economic policies to try to deal with a shrinking state budget have encouraged the tourism sector, for instance, which has indeed brought economic benefits to the state in terms of attracting hard currency but has resulted in exacerbating inequalities, particularly between the private and state sector. Jobs in the lucrative tourism sector can offer higher salaries than the state sector which teachers belong to, and staffing levels in schools have suffered as a consequence (Shelton, Kelly and Sánchez Valdés, 2021, p.64).

Similarly, a low level of internet access within Cuban homes can work to undermine access to informational materials and online lessons for children with SEND who learn from home: only around half of Cuban homes have internet access, and 57% of the population access the internet either through mobile phones, public Wi-Fi hotspots or through universities (Legon, 2020, paragraph 8-9). This is another issue which is common amongst many developing and previously colonised countries, and Cuba has additional barriers placed on accessing internet infrastructure due to the US blockade.

Despite these barriers, and others, which work to undermine the inclusion of those with SEND in society, there are still many useful and unique areas of practice in the Cuban system. Ongoing and consistent grassroots participation in amending and updating policies and actively problem solving at the community and school level provides opportunities for communities to adapt, work around and develop solutions to such barriers.

Conclusion

There are many reasons for the divergent approaches to SEND education and support taken in Britain and Cuba today. Important contextual factors and their impacts on approaches to SEND must be considered, including firstly the economic contexts of the two countries. Britain has a far larger economy, built since the Industrial Revolution on both colonialism and slavery (Harvey, 2019, pp.66-68), which has continued through its position as a financial centre with access to the resources, goods and labour of other smaller economies. Private schooling for the elite at fee-paying schools offers access to the highest quality cultural and multidisciplined education and routes into the most influential and creative jobs (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission, 2019, pp.2-5). However, the state provision of public services has been undermined, and funding slashed during the recent period of neoliberal privatisations and austerity measures. State schools, in which the vast majority of the population are educated, have seen over a decade of real-terms funding cuts, and have been expected to fill the gaps left by other public services which have been decimated by funding cuts and privatisations, such as child mental health services, leisure centres, libraries and other social services.

Ideologically, the function of state education is primarily to train a working-class section of society in order to fit into the competitive labour market, as well as to naturalise the extant forms of social organisation in the current system (Smith, 2016, p.2). This ideological function of state schooling works alongside highly competitive and standardised measures by which pupils and schools are assessed to limit the ways one can participate and succeed within the school environment: those with SEND (and others) who are deemed not to succeed within the narrow markers of success are isolated and marginalised in the mainstream classroom, and later in life in the wider society (Lloyd, 2008, p.231).

Though earlier in the state education system, students and families are well supported by intersectoral support offered by education and health sectors, and a more holistic approach to teaching, this disappears the further through the school the child progresses (Ofsted, 2017, pp.5-6). Meanwhile pressure to show progress primarily in the areas of English and maths, under the weight of chronic underfunding and an ethos of competition between schools, has resulted in a narrowing of the

curriculum, a focus on coaching to pass tests, the reduction of creative and active subjects such as art, drama and music and a subsequent lack of creative and collaborative skills for students (Hutchings and Kazmi, 2015, p.5).

For those with SEND, despite policies of 'inclusion', many are being pushed out of mainstream education due to increased demands on pupils to be seated for extended periods of time within the classroom, leading to difficulties managing to fit into the demands of the classroom, increased distress and challenging behaviour, as well as such long waiting lists to have children's needs assessed that some school leaders are turning to exclusion in order to secure support (Timpson, 2019, p.84). Problems in the SEND system have been entrenched and have not been successfully dealt with through policy changes alone: successive government reports have identified a lack of parental involvement, a complex system which is difficult to navigate, a lack of accessible support services and social isolation of those with SEND (DfE, 2022, pp.9-10). Parents, carers, students with SEND and their communities have protested, organised and used legal means to try to obtain the support they require, yet there is still a definite gap between the experience of the SEND system and policies of 'inclusion'.

To truly move on to a more inclusive and participatory system, it is clear that some of the contexts discussed here will need to be challenged. As Lloyd (2008) argues, the wider educational context and the aims and structures of mainstream education would need to be rewritten for 'inclusion' within the mainstream to be a meaningful concept for those with SEND: I would argue that the ideological and economic structures which underpin the ethos of education would also need to be challenged in order to achieve such an aim.

To interrogate how far different economic, ideological, political and cultural contexts impact the inclusion and participation of those with SEND in society, chapter 3 analysed the approach taken in modern Cuba to SEND education. This area has been subject to little academic research yet there are clearly some unique features which promote inclusion and participation and merit further study.

The Cuban economic context is similarly challenging in terms of the funding available for state education, but for different reasons. A historically underdeveloped and hugely unequal society, it has been under an economic, commercial and political

blockade by the world's largest economy and its previous occupier, the US, for over 60 years of its history. However, since 1959, the government has prioritised the state provision of education as a right and dedicated one of the highest proportions of its national income to education in the world, as much as 29.4% of the state budget in 2011-13 (Espinosa, 2016, p.30). Despite a smaller state budget, educational projects to include greater sections of society within good quality and multidisciplinary education have often been successful due to consistent national aims and the mobilisation of a population at the grassroots level, who are encouraged to actively participate in, and influence, local development (Gasperini, 2000, pp.8-9).

Education as an ideological concept is underpinned by the philosophy of Cuban socialism, influenced by the pedagogical praxes of historically significant figures such as José Martí and Che Guevara. In this concept, education is the responsibility of the whole society, and aims to develop individuals holistically and morally, both to develop each individual as far as possible, and to promote a more collective consciousness through collaborative practices (Barteau and Webb, 2019, p.103). There are certainly limits to the achievement of this ideological aim, but this framework provides a basis for a culture of inclusion: everyone has something to contribute to society and requires the support of the society to succeed. A diverse curriculum is stipulated in the constitution, and school activities and structures are designed to support cooperative and collective experiences (Cuban constitution, 2019, article 32). This educational context supports multiple ways to participate and succeed within mainstream schools, where a third of Cuban students with SEND are educated (Correa, 2019, paragraph 5).

The holistic approach to the curriculum and the participatory aims of education extends to a wider matrix of supportive local organisations and provisions which are freely accessible and through which anyone can learn and participate in cultural production. Grassroots structures and organisations which encourage problem solving, activities to help develop the local community and to debate, discuss and influence policy are available locally alongside arts and cultural activities, providing a diversity of ways to contribute to society other than being economically productive in a capitalist sense. Specific organisations have been developed to support those with SEND to participate within society and to work against continuing cultural prejudices (Cruz, 2015, paragraph 5).

Preventative and proactive approaches are taken within the school environment as well as the healthcare system, which relies more on mobilisation and human relationships than on expensive technological treatments. The family doctor system supports regular contact between families and a trusted medical professional, who lives alongside families and gets to know patients in great detail and holistically, using a 'bio-psycho-social model' (Gorry, 2017, p.7). These healthcare professionals work alongside those in specialist centres in every community to diagnose, support and treat those with SEND. In school support includes in-house healthcare professionals, and intersectoral support is engrained into the health and education systems, reducing the risks of those with SEND getting to a crisis point before their needs are diagnosed and addressed.

Historical practices of segregation of those with SEND only in Special classes or schools and a more limited view of teaching practices and approaches has developed into a system which supports transition back into mainstream education where appropriate and supports family involvement in decision making and in supportive activities. However, the difficult economic context and historical underdevelopment and inequalities place limits on the achievement of the aims of inclusion and participation, and those with SEND need to be brought in to be protagonists in the decision-making processes in order to support the development of a truly inclusive system in which those with SEND can participate and flourish (Castro, 2002, p. 56). The system has shown itself to be responsive to local needs and grassroots demands through recent consultations and referenda: on 25 September 2022, after a period of public debate and updates to the proposals, Cubans voted to accept a new Family Code, which expanded rights for disabled people, the elderly and LGBTQ people amongst others. The updated Family Code seeks to provide those with SEND 'the possibility of exercising their rights as any other person, in absolute equality' by legislating to give greater autonomy to individuals (del Sol González, 2022, paragraph 13). This includes for example the right to access appropriate sex education and family planning, and measures to ensure that the support given to those with SEND conforms to their preferences, and that the person giving the support does not have undue influence on the choices of the person being supported.

Areas for further research

This study has highlighted the need for further study into the Cuban approach to Special Education, which remains under-explored in academic literature. Limited comprehensive data is available to researchers outside of Cuba on nationwide studies of SEND prevalence and experiences of services and therefore to offer a more in-depth analysis of how policy is being experienced differently across local areas, collaboration with peers inside Cuba may be necessary in a future study. More detailed data collection and interviews, as well as research developed by and with those with SEND themselves within Cuba and Britain, could offer a more complete comparative understanding of the impact of the different approaches taken and was outside the scope of this study.

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