
*María Luisa Dolz y Arango, pedagoga y activista social
cubana de avanzada*
*María Luisa Dolz and Arango, pedagogue and social
activist advance guard's Cuban*

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Resumen: En el ensayo se recogen aspectos destacados de la labor educativa y de activismo social de María Luisa Dolz y Arango, pedagoga y defensora de los derechos de la mujer. Se destaca su labor formadora, caracterizada por sus pioneros métodos de enseñanza sobre la educación de la mujer, de los niños y jóvenes en los centros correccionales, la inclusión de la Educación Física en el currículo docente por primera vez, entre otros, poniendo de manifiesto su fidelidad a los ideales pedagógicos de Félix Varela, José de la Luz y Caballero y otros cimeros exponentes de la educación en la isla.

Palabras claves: Labor educativa; Educación de la mujer; Ideales pedagógicos; Activismo social.

Abstract: The essay includes highlights of the educational and social activism work of Maria Luisa Dolz y Arango, pedagogue and defender of women's rights. Her training work is highlighted, characterized by his pioneering teaching methods on the education of women, children and young people in correctional centers, the inclusion of Physical Education in the teaching curriculum for the first time, among others, highlighting her fidelity to the pedagogical ideals of Felix Varela, José de la Luz y Caballero and others leading exponents of education on the island.

Key words: Stint educative; Education of women; Pedagogical ideals; Social activism.

Introduction

History as a science is based on two essential components. On the one hand, facts, events, events, framed in a well determined space and time, which give it its factual character. On the other hand, it constitutes a reflection of the past that shapes the economic, political, social and cultural processes of the present, based on principles and values of behavior, which gives it its axiological character and characterizes each epoch and historical period, showing its indisputable social nature and the essential concrete socio-historical contextualization of a given period.

In our history, the evolution of pedagogy occupies a preponderant place due to its role in the formation of personality and universal values linked to national identity through

the synergy between the individual and the collective. In this sense, very little has been published on the role of private elementary education during the period between the last decades of the 19th century and 1958. However, many examples could serve to support the importance of private schools in the different levels of education during that period, a subject that has been insufficiently addressed up to the present. The Isabel La Católica School, located in a populous neighborhood of the Cuban capital, renamed in the early 20th century with the name of its new owner, the notable Cuban educator and social activist María Luisa Dolz y Arango, is a remarkable example. Dedicated to the social good, her innovative and even rebellious educational work for the era in which she lived, deserves an assessment that from today's circumstances contributes to rescue her legacy. Contributing to enrich and deepen her important contributions to Cuban pedagogy, to inclusive education and to the improvement of the human being to which she devoted her whole life, and which remain unquestionably valid and relevant, time-proof, becomes the main objective of this article.

The mark left by María Luisa Dolz y Arango in the history of Cuban pedagogy between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century leads to reaffirm the need to revisit in today's light, at least the fundamental basic elements that nurtured her talent and perseverance. From her roots, deeply rooted in the history of her country and in the ethics of those who preceded her in the formative work of the new generations, her pedagogical ideology was born and her work as a social educator was molded.

Her work shows a pioneering vision of gender mainstreaming for her time. From different tribunes she defended it with all her strength, both in her role as a pedagogue and as an activist in defense of the tireless struggle waged by Cuban women for their insertion in the processes taking place within that society dominated by sexist and discriminatory patterns of behavior.

In spite of the importance of her legacy, her work, mostly scattered in newspapers, magazines, archives and other documents, and in a few short texts compiled in pamphlets of the time, has not been sufficiently disseminated. In the author's opinion, a debt with the best of the history of pedagogy in our homeland, which, except for a few exceptions, has not been properly settled, with renowned exceptions such as professor Fernando Portuondo, pedagogue Alfredo Miguel Aguayo and a few doctoral theses defended at the University of Havana that have been consulted. To this list are added a

book by researchers Dania de la Cruz Martínez and Marcos D. Arriaga (1990) as well as a work by compiler Ivette Fuentes (2019), unique as far as the author has been able to investigate.

The intermittent nature of the dissemination of the work of this teacher and feminist fighter shows the urgent need to overcome this situation. To publish both the active and passive bibliography about the work and thought of this distinguished Cuban will undoubtedly contribute to enrich the history of Cuban education. It would be a well-deserved tribute to the Cuban woman who (Planas, 1924) "Triumphed everywhere. Everywhere she spoke of Cuba, attracting praise and sympathy for our country and later reaping in her school the fruits that came from those seeds she had sown with so much fervor and enthusiasm." 1

For these reasons, it should be considered pertinent and urgent to re-contextualize her work and place each element of her work in its proper place in the history of pedagogy and Cuban nationalist feminism from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the republic.

Development

Approach to a woman and her time.

Born in Havana on October 4, 1854, María Luisa Dolz y Arango was the fifth of nine siblings who grew up in a wealthy family environment with strong Catholic religious ties, without being identified with the Spanish colonial policy on the island. That situation of socioeconomic comfort made it possible for him to attend the best schools of the time, in the capital and elsewhere on the island.

Thus, for family reasons, he lived and studied in Pinar del Río, where he completed his primary education. Back in Havana, he successively attended several institutions such as Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles and Sagrado Corazón schools.

His elementary studies were complemented at home with the assistance of private teachers of literature, science, music and English, French and German. By then it was the year 1872 and her teaching vocation had already been revealed in the classes given to her younger brothers and sisters in the family compound, when she was 18 years old. Shortly thereafter, in 1876, the 22 year old girl obtained the title of Elementary or primary school teacher, and the following year she became a teacher of Higher Primary

Instruction, beginning her teaching work at the Nuestra Sra. de la Piedad School while giving private classes to several families in her social environment.

Those were the beginnings of a long and fruitful pedagogical and social work, without neglecting his own educational and professional improvement, which he carried out with tenacity and will in the face of the traditionalist and prejudiced moral norms of the time. At this stage of his life

...she studied high school and her grades were outstanding, later she obtained a degree in Natural Sciences on October 16, 1889, also obtaining outstanding grades. At the end of the Spanish domination in Cuba, and when the university statutes were renewed, she did her doctorate in the same subject with her customary grade of outstanding, the first Cuban woman to reach the university classrooms with a degree in Pedagogical Sciences.² (Sola Arruebarruena, 1950, p.18).

Since 1879, she had acquired the Isabel la Católica School, which she would designate with her own name from the end of the century, as has already been mentioned. That institution became the first secondary school for women in the country, and incorporated in 1885 to the Secondary Education Institute de La Habana (Secondary Education Institute of Havana). There she taught and was the general director until December 20, 1923, when she retired.

She was, in addition to being a brilliant educator, a promoter of women's aspirations in those conditions. An adverse scenario in which the thrust of the female sector in struggle for their rights as citizens of a modern and democratic republic in the best American style was already felt with growing strength, whose antecedents date back to the last quarter of the 19th century, characterized by strikes and demands of the growing female workers' sector.

Subsequent years enriched the virtue and role of women in the palpitation of Cuban society. Thus, in the decades of 1910 and 1920, numerous feminist and suffragist groups emerged, coinciding in the need to achieve for women their rightful place in history.

Meanwhile, the feminine presence in music, literature, journalism, pedagogy and other social and cultural fronts grew and consolidated, shaken with new and powerful ideas, counting on the support of men of the stature of Nicolás Guillén, Carlos Loveira, Miguel de Carrión, Enrique José Varona and many other Cubans worthy and respectful of women.

By then Cuba was already the scene of a process aptly described (López Civeira, 2008, p.31) in which "...Cuban culture, with the important contribution of the new intellectuals, assumed the need for change, for the transformation of society from a national and popular perspective."³

Protagonist and guide of many of the demands made by women, María Luisa Dolz y Arango put her talent and professional skills at the service of the struggle for women's equality, in which her unquestionable and numerous contributions to the educational sciences also played a leading role. She was undoubtedly an exceptional woman within her social class and among the Cuban intelligentsia, becoming one of the most radical leaders of the Cuban feminist and suffragist movement. At every opportunity she had, her voice was raised to demand women's rights, mainly those dedicated to their education.

The Club Femenino de Cuba was one of her main public tribunes. Along with its top leaders Pilar Jorge de Tella, Rosario Guillaume and Dulce María Borrero, among outstanding female figures who served as advisors to the organization was María Luisa Dolz.

She was also present at the sessions of the First National Women's Congress, considered a feminine revolution within Cuban society, financed by women and held from April 1 to 7, 1922 in the halls of the then Academy of Sciences. In its sessions María Luisa Dolz encouraged, supported and applauded the initiatives that arose in the heat of the discussions in pursuit of advances for women in the social sphere.

The event, considered the first of its kind held in Latin America, was of transcendental importance for the feminist movement in Cuba. In its sessions, issues such as the right to vote, the fight against drugs and prostitution were raised to society, elements that were among the popular education plans of the prominent educator and therefore received all possible support from her...

The pedagogue who was ahead of her time.

According to Sanger (1900) cited by Cordoví (2007), according to data from the 1899 Census there were 2,708 teachers in that year, of which 1,502 were women (55.46%) and the rest, 1,206 were men, data that demonstrate the female preponderance of a sector such as education for the strategic development of any country.

One of those teachers was María Luisa Dolz y Arango, a worthy representative of Cuban intellectual thought understood as (Torres-Cuevas 2006)

... that which raises and tries to give answers to the historically established problems of Cuban society.... (...)... what characterizes Cuban Thought is the union of the most current universal thought - for each era - with the autochthonous urgencies arising and re-emerging from our reality... (...)... it was an elective thought from the beginning.

... reaches its legitimacy in the discourse that has as its substratum the problems of the formation, preservation and development of the nation, of the contradictions, specificities and internal social paradoxes, of the search for new and sustained cultural expressions (...), of the economic, social, social, cultural and political ideas (...).) the economic, social, gnoseological, ethical, aesthetic ideas (...) among others, are no more than expressions (...) of the search for the ideal of the Cuban nation, free, sovereign, just in its popular foundation, cultured, humanist of full social justice and of a high cultural and social quality of life.⁴ (t/1, p.416)

The teacher was characterized for being tireless and creative; proactive, in a current term. Making her way through educational schemes and limitations, she is part of the group of representatives of Cuban pedagogy that advocates for Cuban solutions to the theoretical-practical problems of teaching from elementary levels.

Although some authors and researchers point out in his pedagogy the presence of Lancaster's and Pestalozzi's pedagogical principles, as well as the incorporation of North American and European experiences in his institutional and curricular conceptions, it is worth recognizing that he created his own style and methodology, with an outstanding nationalist connotation. From the assimilation of features coming from different cultures, he was able to sustain in his educational work the defense of national interests to the extent that his possibilities and the socio-historical context itself allowed him to do so.

In his speeches, interventions in national and international events and in his writings, he upheld the importance of forming worthy citizens, competent and moral professionals with deep patriotic roots. As part of his pedagogical ideas, he advocated for a Cuban pedagogical school, attached to idiosyncrasy, identity and the defense of Cuban citizenship.

He was one of the outstanding pedagogues who assumed positivism as a fundamental element of his work. Undoubtedly, a current of educational thought of capital importance for the celebration of the First Cuban Pedagogical Congress held in the city of Matanzas in 1884, a conclave where his presence was notorious, under the imprint of making an education of his own style, a Cuban school in tune with the advances of the most innovative pedagogical sciences applied at international level.

In line with these ideas, she was a pioneer in integrating into the curricula of her school, fundamental elements for the integral formation of children and young people, such as the unification of the teaching plans of the different disciplines, school excursions, the inclusion of drawing, handicrafts, gymnastics, Physical Education, the benefits of enjoying the natural environment and contributing to its care, and other innovative and even challenging pedagogical practices for that time.

As a bold representative of this thinking and a notable and advanced educator, María Luisa Dolz y Arango was an advocate of the most complete education for girls and women. In her educational work, she set out to form healthy women of action, aware of their potential.

Based on such principles, she shaped the profile of her school; she was the first one to link men and women in the teaching staff of her school in a wide range of subjects and disciplines that meant a revolution in Cuban education at that time, by including in her teaching staff outstanding personalities of national art and culture.

In the halls and classrooms of his school, outstanding women such as Mercedes Matamoros y del Valle, teacher, poet and writer; Adriana Bellini, recognized in the literary and artistic world; Carmen Casal; Pilar Romero; Esther Fernández and María Dolores Guerra, the latter trained under his tutelage and who would remain in charge of the school upon her retirement.

Enrique José Varona, Carlos de la Torre, Rafael Montoro, Lincoln de Zayas, Ramón Meza, Alfredo Miguel Aguayo, Salvador Salazar, among others, also gave lectures, dictated classes and participated in some way in its educational premises, which gave such prestige to the institution that it soon became a reference of innovations and cradle of the most advanced ideas in the world in the field of education, contributing to facilitate the subsequent entry of women to university studies.

Two basic ideas stand out in his pedagogical ideology; his confidence in the perfection of the human being in all aspects, so that in his institution corporal punishment was strictly forbidden as a method to correct indiscipline and inadequate behavior of the students. With reference to the second, she advocated for including, and in fact demonstrated in her school, the need to teach Physical Education classes as part of the educational program at different levels of education. For her, this subject constituted a basic element for the strengthening of the integral formation essential for the preparation for life.

In accordance with these advanced educational criteria, her school was equipped with innovative auxiliary materials for its time. At the same time he encouraged field trips (including trips to his rural properties in Bejucal, Artemisa, and El Lucero), collections of objects and animals as samples for use in Geography, History, Biology, Astronomy, and Physics. In many cases acquired with his own personal resources, others donated and brought from his constant work trips abroad, put at the service of the best education in the conditions then existing on the island.

A follower of the ideas of Luz y Caballero, she considered the preaching of example as the backbone of any educational-formative system, highlighting the importance of a climate of friendliness, respect and harmonious dialogue between teachers and disciples, as essential for the proper development of the teaching-learning process. Reaffirmation of this criterion were his words in the speech he delivered at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of his school.

According to several researchers, on that occasion he stated, in a clear allusion to the pedagogical ideology of the illustrious teacher José de la Luz y Caballero: "the method is life, the guarantee of teaching (...) give life and joy to the classroom and success can almost be assured" (Author 2009, p. 32).

This idea constitutes a transversal axis of his educational theory and serves as a foundation for his learning theory, undoubtedly his most significant contribution to Cuban pedagogical sciences in which method plays a fundamental role as a pillar of the teaching process.

It can be affirmed that in his pedagogical ideology also beats the thought of another illustrious Creole; José Antonio Saco y López Cisneros, whose contribution to the conformation of the Cuban nation is still the target of criteria and opinions that are not

infrequently opposed. But in spite of such disagreements, the certainty prevails that it is impossible to deny it. So solid are his arguments raised about the individual and his formation, especially when in reference to the school and the methods used in the instruction, he affirmed (Saco 1858) "If our schools have to be the campus where the youth is formed, it is necessary to organize them according to our necessities.... (...) Long has been the divorce between ideas and facts, between theory and practice "6 (t/2, p.3).

Maria Luisa Dolz embraces these ideas and makes them part of her ideology and pedagogical thinking. These ideas are also identified with her insistence on the need to convert instruction and teaching into useful tools for the lives of men and women without discriminatory distinctions, all criteria of deep humanist value.

In his theoretical postulates he defends the education of the people, of the great dispossessed masses and demands that the republican governments of the day fulfill their electoral promises to promote public schools with the support of institutions such as recreational societies of the wealthy classes, with the aim, according to his ideas, of at least providing them with knowledge that would help to spiritually alleviate their misery and material deprivation, and therefore the removal of deviant behavior of children, adolescents and young people immersed in a context conducive to crime, prostitution, etc.

In view of the characteristics of her teaching work, with clear inclusive purposes, her character as a social educator can be affirmed, since her constant appeal to the teacher's example shows her influence in the environment in which she carried out her work. She promoted commitment and defended the massiveness of public education and its methodology. When analyzing them in the light of contemporary times, it can be seen that they coincide with those recognized as the "four fundamental pillars" of the educational process, that is, learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together: forming society from society.

In contemporary times we recognize that in social education, the educator is the subject, who from the qualities of his personality exerts influence on individuals and their social behavior. In this way, he/she contributes with his/her work and performance to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the members of society, to the formation of their

convictions and values. In this sense, María Luisa Dolz was an eminent social educator who even assumed a pioneering gender perspective that would accompany all her work. Her vast pedagogical knowledge, her permanent thirst to expand and improve her educational work, led her to study the work of great men of science, with some of whom she coincided in their arguments about life and education, and others she confronted openly and fundamentally from her own experiences and studies.

Undoubtedly, the study of the natural sciences; his study of the work of outstanding scientists, educators and philosophers of the time such as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Emmanuel Kant and other renowned intellectuals; his travels and participation in various educational congresses served as a source of nourishment. Thus, he forged an educational legacy that anticipated in Cuba the application of what today is known as integral education.

At the same time, she opened guidelines for the education of Cuban women with the introduction of pedagogical practices and disciplines that were not common in schools for girls. Very few in Cuba possessed, as she did in her time, such abundant and updated information on all aspects of culture concerning the problemal aspects of education, as she assures (Sola Arruebarruena 1950) when she says

...in pamphlets and speeches she deals with the important problem of popular education, she fights for the education of women, she was the first in Cuba, who dealt with child delinquency...she was a precursor of the pedagogical movement in our homeland, her pedagogy is of social type. ...(...) She breaks with everything that means routine, in accordance with the conception of active education, she wants the child to search, investigate, to expose his word, she wants the student to think, and judge, thus advocating self-education.⁷ (pp. 18-47)

During the performance of her educational work, the desire to know and keep abreast of the progress of science, education and culture in the world, took her to North America and Europe, as an eyewitness of the progress of science and universal technique in the international exhibitions of Chicago in 1893; Paris in 1900 and Liege, Belgium in 1905, the only Cuban participant in the International Congress on the teaching of Physical Education.

Subsequently, she visited in Germany several schools of pedagogical teaching, conservatories and boarding schools. His sad Cuban experience of the prison for female

minors of Guanajay, in the then province of Pinar del Río, led him to visit a German Reformatory School. In the educational enclosure he verified how the background of the children and young people who received there a special instruction and education, of learning of trades, practice of sports and civic activities was studied. He was able to verify the effectiveness and importance of the individualized attention provided by substitute families who gave them the human warmth they may have lacked in their own families.

When he left Germany to return to Cuba, in Paris he visited several correctional and Catholic schools, and in the United States he visited public and private institutions in several cities, propitious occasions to nourish himself with the most innovative pedagogical practices applied in those countries, used to consolidate his research and practical trajectory in pedagogy.

A reliable proof of the usefulness of those long but necessary international journeys was the incessant search for and application of better and more updated methods of teaching marginalized children, adolescents and women. She gave an account of them in her speeches as Delegate to the I Pedagogical Congress in Havana between May 7 and 10, 1913.

Simultaneously to her research and educational work, the experience and prestige gained in long years of teaching earned María Luisa Dolz full membership in pedagogical and intellectual societies in Cuba and in others of international renown. Among her responsibilities, she held the presidency of the Tribunal for the Competitive Examinations for Professorships of the Normal School of Teachers in Havana, and that of Corresponding Member in Cuba of the League of Schools of Brussels.

From her extensive pedagogical work it is worth highlighting the basic elements of some of her fundamental postulates, called by her as pillars of education in Cuba, which due to their transcendence survived the educator, but that only with the triumph of January 1959 could become a reality.

In them Maria Luisa Dolz highlights the need for a radical reform of education in Cuba because of the importance of this sector for the future of the country and its development, that education should be in the hands of competent personnel, adequately prepared and trained to bring knowledge to the classrooms, discarding favoritism and proliferating

influences. He also called for respect for the work of teachers, often performed in precarious conditions, and for the government's need to comply without justification with the deadline and the amount of the salaries they received in public schools, facilities that in his opinion should have the minimum conditions necessary for their educational and social work.

As an epilogue to his life, not to his imperishable work.

In 1923, after more than half a century of hard work in the classrooms and academic halls, María Luisa Dolz y Arango retired. She was then 59 years old. Jealous of the continuity of her work, she left her former disciple María Dolores Guerra in charge of the school.

A year later, in 1924, her students paid tribute to her at the headquarters of the Academy of Sciences, occasion in which she spoke for the last time in public, leaving for history these words: "*I think that if heaven has given me a brain that harbors some idea, a will that knew how to channel and drive it, and an energy that overcame the barriers of the road, those gifts have not been for my pride or for my conceit, but to return them in benefits to the society in which I live.*"⁸ (Dolz 1924).

La salud quebrantada por tantos años de ejercicio y de resistencia a limitaciones mentales y burocráticas, finalmente cedió ante la muerte inevitable, pero dignamente asumida por esta singular maestra, investigadora y combatiente social, el día 27 de mayo de 1928, con 73 años, en su ciudad natal de La Habana. En cumplimiento de su última voluntad, su tumba en el Cementerio de Colón exhibe el epitafio que dictara personalmente a sus familiares. Sencillo como ella misma, inmenso en el alcance de las palabras como lo es su obra; *María Luisa Dolz educadora cubana.*

Still today his teaching contributes to guide teachers, political and mass leaders, artists, workers and social communicators. Each one from their responsibilities and functions at the service of the construction of the new society, in their respective spheres of knowledge and social influence, with the prism of inclusion and equity as indispensable conditions to achieve such a human endeavor.

In the light of our reality and of the paths of the national education system at all levels, the codes of their pedagogy and their activism for women's equality, precursors of the

struggle for inclusion and gender equity in their time, transcend their era and acquire singular relevance at a time when the formation of our students goes beyond instruction to become principles and convictions closely linked to the professional preparation they receive in the Cuban school institution.

Today, when a society is being built with greater opportunities for all, inclusive, balanced, in which women occupy the place that by right and by inheritance corresponds to them, the ideas of María Luisa Dolz y Arango constitute a banner in that battle. She always acted in accordance with her own ideas and social actions throughout her creative life; from the classroom and from the social tribune, among whose postulates can be summarized as follows:

To elevate women on their own merits and for their definitive redemption (1893).

To impart female education based on reason. (1893).

Necessity to sustain the vindictive advances for women with a complete education and to maintain the struggle for their access to the different spheres of work and society (1893 and 1894).

Women as tireless collaborators in everything that leads to the welfare of families and the regeneration of peoples (1894).

Education must be placed at the service of the Fatherland (1899).

Cuban women are called to continue the work of liberation. They formed heroes and will be able to form citizens, maintaining in the home "the patriotic cult" (1899).

Conclusions

The teaching work of María Luisa Dolz y Arango is based on the most advanced pedagogical conceptions related to participatory education, whose primary objective was the continuous improvement of the behavior of individuals and the development of interpersonal relationships based on equality and respect as universal values. For its development, he sought and systematically applied a broad and advanced innovative sense adjusted to the Cuban context. These ideas encouraged in her students the sense of justice, and consequently she left it reflected in her written work from the human

sensitivity and the objective analysis of the prevailing social evils in the republican society, preparing them to confront them in the search for their rights.

The educational work and social activism of María Luisa Dolz y Arango transcends her time and reaches us with all the validity and relevance of the battle for the achievement of an integral formation of the new generations, in harmony between the socio-historical factors and the environment as a scenario where the principles of defense of the Cuban identity and national identity are claimed, and patriotism as a fundamental element to understand and contribute to transform that scenario from the educational practice.

Her educational and social work at the service of the dispossessed, fundamentally vindicating the civil rights of women, combines the defense of national interests with the necessary awareness of the role that the female sector of society should and can play in all the processes that take place within it, a factor that she defended from the classrooms and international tribunes to her speeches, interventions and writings in the press of the time that denote her broad inclusive and transversalizing vision of the potential of women in their insertion in the development of the nation. These qualities of her pedagogical and civic work earned her forever the appellation of precursor, and the place she has in the memory of the country.

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