

[Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the graduation ceremony of the Schools for Art Instructors in "Ernesto Che Guevara" Square, Santa Clara, October 20, 2004 \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Professors and workers in the Art Instructors Schools;

Young graduates with a Junior High School Degree in Humanities and Art Instructor Diploma;

Guests;

Residents of Villa Clara;

All fellow Cubans:

Exactly four years, five months, and three days have gone by since, in a meeting held on May 17, 2000, the Battle of Ideas Working Group approved a project for training art instructors. The first thing that had to be done was to find quickly 15 school buildings with available capacity located all over the country and to create there the material base required to start the first course in September of that year with no less than 4000 students and to train about 30,000 art instructors in ten years.

The program created to that end in the early years of the Revolution, although it had borne modest but promising fruit, had been reduced to almost zero and it was absolutely necessary to re-establish it on a solid base using all the strength, the knowledge and the revolutionary consciousness that our people now possessed. The students had to be rigorously selected from among young people who had recently completed grade nine. As for the intake capacity of the schools, that would be adjusted as far as possible to the population of each of the 14 provinces and the special municipality of the Isle of Youth.

The 15 schools were ready in only three months and at the same time the first 4000 students were selected in close coordination with the Young Communist League, the José Martí Pioneers Organization and the ministries of education and of culture. The curricula and time tables were designed, the faculties were organized, uniforms were designed and produced, the books needed to start were made available and a start was made on purchasing work tools and materials.

Classes began in the 15 Art Instructors Schools on September 14, 2000.

In that first year, 12,000 students applied for the courses. In subsequent years an average of 17,000 students have applied. Therefore, it was possible to choose the best students from such a big group.

Some people did not believe this plan could be possible. They wondered where the professors and study materials would come from. Other wondered how were we going to create new schools if the conditions in existing schools were not good.

On February 18, 2001, after it had been up and running for six months, the Art Instructors Schools Program, which is working as a substantial and integral part of the Battle of Ideas, was officially inaugurated at the Manuel Ascunce Domenech school in Villa Clara.

Building projects have been completed over these first four years, which have opened up space for 16,200 students.

The dollar expenditure for the basic investments made was the following:

- \$1,795,036 in the material base for general and specialized studies.
- \$1,958,796 in creating adequate living conditions.
- \$9,891,975 in construction and technological investments.

As an interesting fact it could be said that at the current world market prices for oil, the total expenditure in dollars, over these four years, to develop the facilities for this extraordinary cultural, educational program is approximately equivalent to the cost of the oil consumed in three days in Cuba.

The first year started with 4,086 students and 1,111 professors.

Today, there are 16,168 students registered: 4,535 in Music, 4,202 in Visual Arts, 3,692 in Drama and 3,739 in Dance.

The faculty has 2,852 professors, 715 for general education and 2,137 for specialty subjects; 1,228 of these professor are permanent staff and 1,624 are collaborators.

It is only fair to point out that many professors, artists and intellectuals have joined in the effort to staff the faculty at the Art Instructors Schools; they have enriched the curricula and have caused something that had at one time disappeared to rise up again with greater strength, as part of the colossal battle waged to bring a general comprehensive education to our people. We must also acknowledge the role of the 2,531 art instructors who for many years over the course of the Revolution have continued with their work and who have given decisive support to this initiative.

The total number of students enrolled in the Art Instructors Schools over these five years, that is, including the present course, is 20,235.

Today, 3,237 students of the 4,086 who started in the first year are graduating; 34 students are preparing to take their final exam soon, which gives a total of 3,271 graduates. They are graduating with a High School Diploma and an Art Instructors Degree in Music, Visual Arts, Drama or Dance after having completed a 7,000-hour curriculum in the case of those who took up music as a specialty, 7,320 hours for those in visual arts, 6,840 for those in drama and 7,000 for those who took up dance. All of them received extensive training in the other art disciplines, in addition to their own specialties.

The curriculum has been improved over these years. The program includes reflection and discussion sessions, the audiovisual program, pre-professional practice and independent study planned during school hours.

In order to be able to meet these objectives, the schools are equipped with video rooms, libraries and computer laboratories where the ratio of computers to students is 1 to 30, music cubicles, small stages for dance and drama training and workshops for visual arts.

During their four years of study, those who graduate from these schools must read or consult on average 167 books related to their special subject and on Cuban and World history and literature.

Of those graduating today:

61.04 percent are white, 13.3 percent are black and 25.6 percent are of mixed race, which corresponds in a very satisfactory way with the ethnic composition of our population. Likewise,

* 62.09 percent are women and 37.90 percent are men.

* Of these graduates, 1,822 are members of the Young Communist League that is 56.3 percent.

Those who are graduating today did not dream when they were children that they will be art instructors. A new option appeared overnight. Many of them, perhaps, had dreamed of the possibility of becoming professional musicians, artists, dancers or theatre people, but had not had the opportunity.

We have been haunted by the dilemma of whether they would be artists or not. Today it is more and more common to hear people say that they are artists in the fine profession of teaching art to the people. In their work with children, they have found an area of teaching that enriches them and there is no reason why there should be a contradiction between one function and the other. Nor is there any reason to cut off opportunities to develop their own art if they fulfill their duties as instructors in a school.

Their individual responsibility to the commitment entered into with the revolution and with their work will lead them to fulfill their duties as instructors.

Four years ago, 93 percent of those who are graduating today had not taken a class in any of the special subjects of which they have knowledge today. And if they still have a lot to learn about their profession, about art and about life as workers and about their dedication to the Revolution, the truth is that they are not the same as they were when they arrived to blaze this trail. They have matured, physically, politically and socially.

As from September 6 of this year, they began to work in primary, secondary and special education schools in every municipality in the country. They are distributed in the following manner:

684 in primary day-schools.

704 in primary semi-boarding schools.

56 in primary boarding schools.

117 in junior high schools in the countryside.

50 in urban junior high schools.

50 in schools for adolescents with major behavioral problems.

The work of these instructors in our schools has five basic aims:

* To develop creative and appreciation workshops with all the students in the schools.

* To work with amateur artists groups and clubs.

* To provide technical and methodological training to the teaching staff.

* To promote artistic education in the schools.

* To improve the school ambiance.

Now that the art instructors have arrived, the position of the school as the most important cultural institution in the community is secured. The results of their work will be seen in the family. The work of these instructors will reach out beyond the schools and depend on this link with other cultural and social institution in the community.

Their work will enrich the programs with children, adolescents and young people that have been developing during the years of the Battle of Ideas. The bonds between the general teacher, the computer teacher, the social worker and the art instructor will be of paramount importance.

And we already have some idea of the results that can be achieved. This was demonstrated through every stage of the pre-professional practice when the students from the second year on established a connection with schools and communities. Two examples will suffice:

The fourth-year-students' pre-professional practice at La Sierpe municipality in Sancti Spíritus included a week of work in communities or schools where conditions were more difficult than usual.

In that province, it was decided that the 183-fourth-year students at the provincial school who are graduating today would work in La Sierpe municipality since it was a new municipality lacking a solid cultural tradition and where there had not been any professionals working in the cultural area for decades. In other words, a municipality where there were no instructors who had graduated in previous times and where it was difficult even to recruit students for the art instructors schools, to the extent that in the first year only one student, who is graduating today, came from there. Students were placed in all the schools and the result was that it was the first time in many years, as far as students and teachers could remember, that such a strong cultural movement began to develop there. The students were housed in the schools and worked there and in the communities: some of them had to walk several kilometers.

Children and their parents still talk of what happened there. Three students from other municipalities asked to be given work placements in La Sierpe municipality because of this experience. They managed to recruit 25 students for the course that just began in the art instructors' school. The most remarkable thing is that every time one of the students graduating today referred to their training in a meeting held a few days ago with their representatives, they spoke of the decisive impact of this week. The image that remains with them of their experience in La Sierpe is like that of an internationalist mission, of having been in a battle or in a long workday, that is, they have been left with the feeling of something beyond the usual, of an act of total dedication.

In the time they spent in the municipality, they combined what an instructor in a Cultural Center does and what should be done in a school: they worked in the school in the morning, worked with the community in the afternoon and took part in cultural functions in the municipality in the evenings. All this happened in just one week. The municipal government and the Party feel that a cultural transformation has begun, which is significant if we bear in mind that this is a municipality with cultural institutions whose building are in good shape in a general sense but lacking a professional work force.

The second example:

Ever since the 2002-2003 school year, the Eduardo García Delgado Art Instructors School in Havana was instructed to select a group of students to do their pre-professional practice in the University of Information Sciences.

During the 2002-2003 school year they were there for 15 days. Then in the 2003-2004 year, a permanent arrangement was made for a group of instructors to work in that higher education center twice a week. The work they have done has been evaluated by comrades at that University as being

very necessary and they have asked that the students continue to work with them to bolster the amateur movement there.

The results speak for themselves. In just two years, the University of Information Sciences has an amateur movement with 799 members, that is, one in every five students. In the first year, they won five prizes and three special mentions in the Provincial Festival of the University Students' Federation (FEU). And in the second year they won 11 prizes. Of those 11, three will go on to the National FEU Festival.

Graduates of the Art Instructors Schools will be able to study any of the subjects or degree programs in Humanities taught in the Ministry of Higher Education's institutions and any of the special subjects or degree programs offered by the Higher Pedagogical Institutes under the Making Higher Education Available to All Program.

Given the special nature of the work done by an art instructor, the need for them to constantly upgrade their skills as professionals committed to their work as instructors, and the interest many of them have in continuing their education for a career related to their training, it was decided to create a bachelor's degree in Education, Special Subject Art Instructor with the ministries of education, culture and higher education cooperating closely.

Of the instructors graduating today, 1,476 have registered for this program, or 45.5 percent.

The new degree program will be taught at the Higher Pedagogical Institutes under the Making Higher Education Available to All Program, and will last four years. It will focus heavily on the Audiovisual Program and on other audiovisual materials and will equally emphasize on the importance of learning through one's own efforts and with tutors.

The degree program promises to expand humanist education, to expand teacher training and to improve artistic skills in the special subject in which students graduate from the Art Instructors Schools.

In the next few days, a work module tailored to the special subject of the instructors working there will begin to be sent out to the schools who have art instructors.

In order to give continuity to the overall care and attention given to this program, it has been decided that the instructors who have graduated will continue to be attended to and be directed from the Battle of Ideas Working Group by the Young Communist League.

In order to achieve this, structures have been set up at the provincial and municipal levels where professional YELL cadres will take on the responsibility for coordinating the actions of the Culture, General Education and Higher Education ministries and all those institutions and organizations related with the art instructors' work.

At the national level there is a headquarters in Old Havana, which will become the National Center for Art Instructors' Upgrading. This will be integrated into the heart of one of the most important of the country's social and cultural projects; functions will be held there for the public and these will become a standard of reference for all.

This young work force will be organized as the José Martí Art Instructors Brigade. To some degree it will function as a youth movement and as an army of culture whose principal theatre of operations, although not the only one, will be the schools.

When this brigade comes into being, the identification of these young people with their responsibilities as art instructors will be strengthened and the essential connection, which they must maintain with the artistic movement in the country and in each particular province, will be given a channel.

The José Martí Art Instructors Brigade will make better care and attention in all senses. We have done something similar with the social workers, a powerful, growing force that the Revolution has at its disposal today.

We cannot afford to allow this colossal revolutionary force to be left stranded in no man's land, with no political direction and no firm support for its multifaceted task because of bureaucratic contradictions, self-centered attitudes and institutional jealousies.

Similarly, every art instructor will respectfully submit to the authority and powers of those who direct every center where they work, regardless of which department they belong to.

This is the way the art instructors' organization and activities have been envisaged. As always, life will have the last word. The doors to improvement will always be open for everything the revolution creates.

The National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists and the Saíz Brothers Association will keep in close contact with these young cultural workers through the booming movement, which will come into being as thousands of art instructors join every year.

Interesting news, impressions and anecdotes:

The YCL, the ministry of Culture, and the ministry of General Education have been touring the country and through discussions with the Party, the government and institutions in each province they have been learned of the enthusiasm with which the new instructors have arrived in the schools and their wishes to be useful they bring with them.

They have arrived full of dreams and have been welcomed with special affection and enthusiasm by the children.

The schools and communities have many expectations.

Now they are in a learning phase. The head teachers and teachers are not used to having an art instructor and in many instances are not familiar with the responsibilities of these instructors.

In recent weeks, they have been working on diagnoses of the children, the teaching staff and the school ambience; they will begin to organize some workshops, go to university, and to the upgrading process designed by the ministries of Culture and Education for each one of them.

The close work between the YCL, and the ministries of Culture and Education has made their reception in the schools easier, and has helped with organizing their class sessions and helped them to fit into the work collective.

A call was put out to grassroots cadres of the YCL and the José Martí Pioneers Organization to look on the schools as the most important Pioneers' Palaces, because they are a new kind of school. Previously, computers, VCRs, TV sets and many art workshops were to be found in the Pioneers' Palaces and camps. Today, they are in the schools themselves.

The TV sets and VCRs as well as computers which schools have will be the instructors work tools, too. They will guide children and adults on the visits they can make to the world's museums through compact discs or videos.

The instructors have been called on to recognize the privilege of having a gallery, a theatre, a visual arts workshop whose programming they are responsible for and which are precisely the very schools where they are working today.

The Youth Video Clubs and the TV rooms located in isolated areas of the country will also provide a

setting for the instructors' work.

First impressions have been heard on the tour made around the country. Many are the same from one province to another:

"The children want to be with me all the time. When I walk along the street, I feel proud that the children say hello to me and say to their parents: 'Look that's my music teacher'. I would like to work in a team with the instructor in the other school." An instructor from San Luis, a municipality in Santiago de Cuba province.

"I have had a lot of support from my Cultural Center... I should like them to authorize me to work with the children from the school where I did my pre-professional practice as well, I don't want them to relocate me because I adore the children I have now but the others see me in the street and almost cry. I could perfectly work with all of them. An instructor from San José de las Lajas, a municipality in Havana province.

"Thank goodness for the classes I took in the fourth year, because I have had to do everything, I have had to give dance classes and music classes although my specialty is visual arts... the people from the Cultural Center help me a lot and everyone in my school loves me." An instructor from Holguín.

"I have two children with a health situation, one of them has cystic fibrosis; they are my first two students, we are preparing a special program for them... that has moved me very much... I feel useful." An instructor from Las Tunas

"My specialty is drama but I have already arrange a choir... one of the student's father is a musician...I chose the best students I have, organized them.. I asked the student's father for help and we are working now. The work is very stimulating and the children are really interested." An instructor from Jobabo a municipality in Las Tunas province.

"I am in a rural school. The head teacher didn't know much about an instructor's job, so I organized a meeting with all of the teachers and explained about my work. The head teacher is my staunchest ally. I fell very good... and I already have an adopted son... he is a student with learning problems, I began to work with him through drama techniques... and found out that his dad didn't live with him and that he hasn't given him the attention he should for a long time. I went to look for his dad who lives in another municipality... I introduced myself and explained what was going on... today my adopted son is beginning to do better at school...these things make us discover that we all have a heart." An instructor from Camagüey.

"I have taught dance and music classes. The children love the classes. Sometimes they don't want to go to classes in other subjects. I am a fine arts instructor." An instructor from Camagüey.

"We were given a lovely welcome... in a school for adolescent with special behavioral problems, the work is very difficult but it is going to have results. There are four of us in this school... the school is having repairs done and we are working on the repairs with other teachers... if the school doesn't have the proper conditions we have to create or invent them, that is why the instructors are there..." An instructor from Granma.

"I am in Buenavista, a village in Remedios... There had never been an instructor of anything there... I teach classes of all of the specialties...the director of the Cultural Center asked me to go on weekends to work with the old people in the Senior Citizens' Group. "My specialty is drama and what the old people wanted was dance. I had learned the Majagua dances (peasants' dances which are taught in the Art Instructors Schools) I taught them the Majagua dances and the old people taught me the ones from Remedios and we ended by all of us dancing El Gavilán". An instructor in Remedios, Villa Clara.

The above is part of the work done in the Battle of Ideas in the fields of culture and education.

Throughout these four school years we have not only started the 15 new Art Instructors Schools; the new national Ballet School has been built, which can take 300 students for professional training, and where they also have vocational ballet workshops in which more than 4,000 children have enrolled. Seven new visual arts schools have been built, which brings to 17 the number of such schools in the largest cities of the country; extensive repairs were done on the visual arts school in Trinidad and fairly extensive repairs were done to the one in San Alejandro; the Camagüey Ballet, Drama and Visual Arts School was rebuilt; a new Art School which can take 500 students was built in Bayamo; a school to train music bands came into being, and repairs are underway in 21 schools where various kinds of artistic activities are taught; and there is some very important work underway, the extensive remodeling of the buildings already in use and the continuation of building work until that jewel of Cuban artistic culture, the Higher Institute of Art is finally completed.

I have been privileged to take part in the opening of five of these schools. Others are awaiting their official opening, although they are in full operation.

If in the 1992-1993 school year we had 5,978 students registered in our art schools, we can say that in the middle of special period that figure has almost doubled, and today there are 10,722 students registered; if you add to these the 16,168 in the art instructors schools, that means there are 26,890 young people who will be enriching the artistic and teaching forces in the great battle for a general, comprehensive culture and for improving our people's quality of life.

This work has not been in vain. Success has rewarded our efforts. I invite any other country in the world to show a similar harvest.

The capture of Bayamo by Mambi troops, led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes is commemorated on October 20.

That day, the Cuban national anthem, with words and music by Perucho Figueredo, Major General of the Liberation Army, was sung for the first time in the atrium of the main church in Bayamo.

The singing of the anthem on that October 20 came at the same time as the feat of arms with which the Revolution achieved its first and most important victory over Spanish colonial troops. Bayamo's surrender and Céspedes' victorious entry marked the culmination of the act of rebellion begun on October 10 in La Demajagua sugar plantation which marked an turning point in the country's history and gave birth, over the rubble of the first colonial redoubts, to the Cuban nation.

October 20 is also the birth date of Abel Santamaría, the heroic fighter and second in command of the troops, which attacked the Moncada Barracks.

For all of the above reasons, a decree of the Council of Ministers issued in 1979 established this day as Cuban Culture Day.

We wanted to celebrate it with the graduation of the first contingent of art instructors and the creation of the José Martí Brigade as a special present to the people of Villa Clara who are an example in the work to preserve the cultural traditions which uphold our nation's identity and the winner for the site of the July 26 celebrations this year.

Let's go forward, brave standard bearers of culture and humanism! A life of glory awaits you!

When in the today uncertain future of humanity truly profound, imperishable revolutions and social changes are discussed, no one can overlook the achievements that bring us together here. Our people are proud of you.

Long live our homeland!

Speech given at the graduation ceremony of the Schools for Art Instructors in "Ernesto Che

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Long live the Revolution!

Long live socialism!

And as someone who came back to Cuba from Bolivia with his reinforcement detachment, who is here with us, said: Ever onwards to victory!

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