

Cuba: Educating in Diversity

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Multiculturalism and diversity —as premise of its educational work— are still unresolved matters in Cuban schools.

Families are already gearing up for the new school year by fixing uniforms, buying schoolbags as the Academic year kicks off this September 4th.

Professors carry out their provincial, municipalities meetings and they also gear up for the Academic year. Meanwhile, the school equipment slowly emerges in the classrooms waiting for the students' arrival.

It is —no doubts— an outstanding preparation for the school year that sets up apart from other regions in the world. There are places where students will not go to schools because they do not have shoes to go, or they just cannot go because their need to work is bigger.

I believe it is paramount to highlight that the “students' body” will not go to schools, but the students, and each of them is a different story when it comes the time to educate them.

In this regard, Cuban Pedagogue and Doctor of Science Ramon Lopez Machin,

claimed that “Cuban educational system has worked for many years with the homogenous concept of perceiving the class as an analogue amalgam. Age, territory, and habit coincidences authenticate the achievement of the uniformity of the whole.”

Let’s take into account that when we talk about multiculturalism, we are not only referring to ethnic groups, but the coexistence of several associations and formal and informal groups, different genres, sexual orientation, moral and ideological beliefs, religions etc..., which is a fact at schools and society.

In Cuba, the difference between students has to do mainly with their learning skills. Indeed, if we talk to professors about diversity, some of them see it through disabled students enrolled in the so-called special education.

But all of students to attend their schools from September 4th on are special. Schools can become “a privileged context for socializing aiming at forming individuals capable of coexisting fraternally with others. The goals should not only be to spread knowledge, but teach within the culture of democracy thought the process of negotiation/agreement, the exercise of the freedom of speech, thought, and collective decision-making.”

This is the viewpoint of Doctor in Sociological Sciences Yisel Rivero Baxter, professor at the Department of Sociology in the University of Havana and Assistant Researcher of the Cuban Institute of Cultural Investigation Juan Marinello in her paper Cultural Diversity in Cuba. Treatment in Scholar Institutions, published online in 2015.

The specialist suggests “turning schools into an exchange, consensus space, not imposing or socio-cultural domination. This experience would allow a learning process capable of being used in other fields of life. It is about the development of “know-how”, as long as all the skills can be developed.”

Setting diversity and multiculturalism aside in every Cuban classroom is not the intended purpose. It seems that the efforts for trying to secure equity for all have confused the importance of individuals to the eye of the professors and decision-makers.

But the acceptance of other individuals is one of the strength to achieve cohesion. Therefore, Cuban schools should insist on this lesson that lacks taking a step forward to a more inclusive education instead of one less vertical.

If we agree with Dr. Rivero Baxter’s opinion “cultural diversity strengthens the educational processes”, then we will be leaving behind a paternalistic and asymmetrical education. It is the sort of education where professors decide and question and students just memorize without creating or generating ideas. It is not

the general panorama, but you can find this example in more than one Cuban classroom.

The professor also states “we should reverse the idea of the professor as a representative of the system and the students and their families as the target group. They must be regarded as historical subjects capable of getting involved in the social project we are building.”

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