

Cuban specialists talk about autism

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CubaSÍ held a dialogue with PhDs in Pedagogical Sciences (Special Education), Yaima Demesthene Sterling and Imilla Campo Valdes, who have been studying autism for over 20 years, a disorder that affects 1 in 150 children in the world.

Both professors took for granted that specialized literature considers the term “autistic spectrum”. However, they stated that it is an inappropriate translation, because Cuban psycho pedagogical conception defends, in first place, human beings and their potentialities. “That’s why; the correct thing is to say that they are people with autism, because the term autistic itself is pejorative.

Despite the difficulties these children may have in their socialization, communication and behavior –remarked Yaima–, they can develop such skills from early ages through systematic pedagogical actions, mainly organized and directed to stimulate their development and to insert them into various educational contexts.

As a specialist of the Latin American Reference Center for Preschool Education (CELEP by its Spanish acronym), she advocates for the need of greater understanding to these families “who never expected to have a child with autism

and, therefore, they need understanding, help and solidarity.

“We must also see this from the perspective of optimism and humanism, because they are human beings.”

When do we know we are in the presence of a person with autism?

“One is born with autism —replied Imilla—. At first, there’s a seemingly normal development; however, from the first or a year and a half of life some symptoms begin to appear. In our country, it is being diagnosed very early.”

When commenting some of the characteristics of these people, she stated that “they prefer to be alone, they isolate themselves, they do not enjoy sharing with other children; they find it hard to say what they want, they laugh with no apparent reason and their tears are very difficult to interpret.”

She added that at first, and according to families, people with this disorder say some words, which decrease considerably later and even their oral language may disappear.

“They often have odd movements; they like to stack objects, line them up; they do not grant toys a logical sense; they react inconstantly before auditory and sound stimuli. Sometimes, they move their hands, wave their arms (mannerism); they rock back and forth; they run short races with no destiny, in other words, they can run from one place to another.

“They also have routine behaviors, without functional nature (stereotyping), they like to do the same thing every day and look peripherically (sideways).”

In these cases, can we speak about inclusion?

“Cuban educational system is inclusive by nature”, pointed out Yaima, specialist at the Latin American Reference Center for Special Education (CELAE).

“Inclusion is to have possibilities, and the fact that we have special schools does not mean there is exclusion, which can be present in the intentions and attitudes of teachers, executives or other people.

“The essential thing is to respect differences, diversity; to offer resources to every individual according to their needs, and not only the didactic ones, but those of affective type as well.

In schools, since their early age, they receive a specialized education; they are provided with indispensable tools for their stimulation. But these institutions have a transitory nature, because many, according to their real possibilities, can insert themselves into general education later.”

Is it possible to educate them?

“Perfectly, especially when their education is carried out intentional, proactive and plannedly. In these cases, nothing can be left to spontaneity. I defend the idea of creating more spaces where these topics can be approached, since they are common in any society today”, Imilla remarked.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamin / Cubasi Translation Staff
