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Differentiated attention to people with special educational needs (SEN) is the key to the success of this type of education that is celebrating 56 years.

From its creation to date, Special Education in Cuba — January 4 marks its 56th anniversary— has “grown” not only in number of institutions, but also in its scientific approach and pedagogical contributions of an education that, different from others, is special in every sense of the word.

The first steps were taken half century ago. Back then, the country was not prepared to focus on the SEN. Nowadays, Special Education is paramount to several countries in the region. It is important to highlight the supporting role and sensitivity of our Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz in this subject.

The developments of the Special Education in our country have in Fidel Castro's efforts the best ally.

Diversity, inclusion, and personalized care are some of the terms that experience and praxis have ratified in the interest of achieving a quality education for all. In this regard, CubaSi talked to Dr. Marlen Mederos, national director of Special Education in Cuba.

Why is so essential to talk about an inclusive school?

Human beings are diverse. Therefore, each individual needs a certain education. It means to pay attention to interests, motivations, and concerns of each of our children, teenagers, and young people, whose learning pace is diverse as well.

Diversity is, thus, the expression of the acknowledgement of the difference of genres, cultures, development, and learning pace of students who need to be taken into account for their education, not their exclusion.

Hence the importance of talking about an inclusive, flexible school that serves the interests and needs of pupils, their family origins, and environment.

What is the teacher's role to reach such goal?

First of all, the most important thing is the motivation every professor should have to work with diversity. Hence it is vital that professors may be aware of the need to enhance their professional level, self-improvement, and work on the basis of diagnose and characterization of each pupil.

Professors must notice that every learning step requires certain activities and learning tools. They must know how to adjust the level of demand. If a child needs more time, the teacher must cede to it. Everything is possible in our reality as our professors are very creative.

When we refer to inclusion, does it mean that children with SEN can study in general-education schools?

Today, the country has 12,000 children, adolescents, and teenagers, studying in comprehensive schools, from elementary schools to universities.

We are talking about more than 35,000 students in 365 institutions all over the country in Special Education. However, the registration rate decreases every year. It does not mean they do not register here and does it in regular education, but it is the process of monitoring and early detection we have of SEN and we get involved.

What is the importance of interdepartamentality in this work?

It is relevant what we are doing now. After the Third Process of Educational Reform in Cuba, we are now encouraging the work online. We are referring to the full knowledge we should have regarding the context where the school is located as well as the human and material resources we have.

We must work together with other professionals in the formation of children, adolescents, and teenagers, which is paramount. Thus, the close link of the

Ministry of Education with others such as the Ministry of Public Health, Labor and Social Security, Culture, and Sports must be highlighted.

We should keep in mind that houses of culture, sports facilities, and workplaces near schools can contribute to this goal. That said, interdepartamentality is essential to advance.

As national director of the special education in Cuba and your own experience, are there obstacles that may jeopardize a full attention to diversity?

Grabbing the interest of other institutions within society is a major challenge for the education. The goal is to boost such participation that we truly need that is, indeed, a human right.

We must have the support of all of them: family, neighbors, and the community itself. Likewise, it is essential to improve the preparation methods of our teachers so they can provide a personalized care to students by acknowledging that SEN single features are closely linked to the learning possibilities, interests, levels, and pace.

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