

# MENDIVE

REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

*Translated from the original in Spanish*

## **Educational Gerontology: A Cuban experience from the Chair of the Elderly**

### **Gerontología educativa: una experiencia cubana desde la Cátedra del Adulto Mayor**

### **Gerontologia educativa: uma experiência cubana desde o Equipe do Adulto Maior**

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**S**ufficient evidence indicates that older adults in Cuba are active agents in the changes and transformations that are promoted with the updating of the economic - social model. Nowadays, they are studied for implementing strategies in all sectors of society, that allow to face high levels of population aging, helping achieve an active and satisfactory longevity.

The economic and social challenges imposed by the progressive aging of Cuban society are significant. The aging population represents 18.7 % of its inhabitants; and in 2015 ascended on approximately 25 % Cubans aged 60 or more, a figure that will double by 2050

(Barnet, 2010, p.8). The challenge is therefore imposed to ensure that this population reaches advanced ages with a high quality of life and less dependency.

The issue of population aging is one of the main focuses of studies around the world and Cuba is not exempt from it, It is a country aged it has a population over 60 years of more than 2 251 930, of them, in Pinar del Río 122 083; the oldest municipality in the province is the capital itself with 41 637 older adults. The life expectancy of Cubans has increased to 77.9 years, that is, 76 years for men and 80 years for women, which indicates how urgent and necessary it is to study this stage of life, its changes, motivations, neo formations and their psychological development. It is necessary to delve into the characteristics that identify the social development of this stage and, more than its study, it is about the training of these older adults is that they are hungry for knowledge and that today they are trained to travel together with our educators in the formation of our future generations.

The university program with elderly or Chair University of the Elderly (CUAM) was created by the University of Havana in the year 2000, on February 14, under Resolution 73/2000 under the auspices of the Central Workers of Cuba and the Association of Pedagogues of Cuba. It has established an institution of a multidisciplinary nature, dedicated to the development of the education program aimed at Cuban seniors, as well as research and training in the field of Educational Gerontology.

In Pinar de Rio, the CUAM was created in 2002, led by the University of Pinar de Rio "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", the Association of Educators of Cuba (APC) and the Central of workers of Cuba (CTC). The University of Pinar de Rio "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" is the responsible of the training process and it is responsible for the preparation of curricula, the constitution of the cloister

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of teachers and the delivery of graduate certificates; The CTC is the one that has to do with students or geo-educated (with retirees) and with the classrooms in the different unions; and the APC with training for teachers (gero educators).

The teaching program has two modalities: basic course and continuity courses, which has contributed to the improvement of the social image of aging as a process and of old age as a stage of the life cycle, as well as creating a new gerontological culture, placing older in the school space as a development space and not only as recipients of care and protection. Assuming old age is not sitting down to wait, but filling itself with energy to live a new stage.

What a charm have white hair, what men and women those who have lived 80 years and over, even when they speak and walk shakily to slow steps, they can be seen as Titans and Marianas! "We must give a place of honor in society to those people who lavished their lives at work, gave every day their dreams, their appreciation and also their company. They deserve it" (Vigueras, 2004, p. 2).

In older, psychically healthy people, personality hardly changes, but character traits are accentuated due to lived experiences. There are a number of situations that are not associated with normal aging, which can be frequent in older people and cause a deterioration of the personality. Between them:

- Changes in thinking, affectivity or daily behavior
- Tendency to introversion
- Disinterest in life
- Loss of autonomy
- Insatisfaction and sexual maladjustments

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- Rejection and maladjustment to old age

- Inconformity with its body image

- Isolation or decrease of human relationships

"In any case, the authors have tried to classify old age by type. Thus, some have referred to the third age (satisfactory old age) and the fourth age (pathological old age) or to the "old young" (healthy old) and the "old-old" (old sick) in order to account for the different ways of aging" (Fariñas, 2017).

In recent years, the classification is gaining more relevance is what establishes three types or forms of aging: usual aging, the pathological aging and old age successfully. This typology of old age is important today since, from the policies of care for the elderly, from international organizations (such as the World Health Organization or the European Union) and from gerontology itself, the empowerment of old age is intended with success and reduction of pathological old age.

"It has been shown that the characteristics of the elderly or old age depend a lot on the characteristics of each person's personality, on the environmental conditions and on the way of life they lead, and not so much on age, if it is maintained the healthy individual" (Álvarez, 2010, p 4.).

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"For this reason, expressions appear about the "old young people" or older adults of the first decades, and about the "old men" or elderly people to mark the idea of changes" (Orosa Fraiz, 2001, p. 42). Precisely at this stage in which a change occurs in the activity of the elderly, retirement, is that they enter the University Chairs of the Elderly.

The object of study of the Cuban Senior Adult Pedagogy will be education for human development with a high level of demonstration of life skills, skills that, according to Viviana González Maura, are characterized "(...) as a psychological configuration linked to the performance of the subject" (Referred by Dr. Gilberto García Batista, 2011, P.27).

The object focuses on the development of personality of the Elderly through education that competent man on two essential points, Dr. Gustavo Torroella has been called marksmanship and urgency; the first referred to the need to hit the target as much as possible because there is no time to return many times, the second refers to a limited life, finite, in which we cannot afford to try a lot of times how to live, when the most we have to do is to live it satisfactorily.

"Some researchers believe that in both theory and practice of education, should be included within the field of science education, while that for other authors, their place of secondment is the field of gerontology as a multidisciplinary field devoted to the study of the processes of aging and old age" (Orosa Fraiz, 2014, p 128). This discussion refers to different ways of naming educational practices with older adults, such as Andragogy, Geragogy, Gerontagogy, or simply older adult education.

En Cuba it is suggested naming Pedagogy of the Cuban Elderly (CMAP), as referred to Cuban researcher Omar Roque Martínez (Roque Martínez, 2004), it is still a developing science. According to experts engaged in this field, it has its

bases in the Andragogy as a branch of adult education, popular education, education throughout life or *lifelong learning*, psychology of the development of old age from Vigotsky's historical-cultural perspective, Gerontology as a multidisciplinary science, in particular the branches of Psychogerontology and Educational Gerontology, which at the global level is known as Gerontagogy and comes from the Greek *gerontagogeos*: lead an old man.

Gerontagogy is defined as the branch of Gerontology or Education Sciences that deals with the training of older people. The term was first used by Professor Almerindo Lessa in 1978 at the University of Évora and in the United States by CR Bolton, as an expression of education for the elderly, applied science that aims at the set of methods and techniques selected and regrouped into a body of knowledge oriented towards the development of the oldest discente. The theoretical basis is educational Gerontology and etiology (Lemieux, 1997).

"Educational gerontology refers to the study and practice of teaching the elderly during their aging. This discipline, known as "educational gerontology", received a letter of introduction in the United States in 1970 " (Lemieux, 1986).

Older adults are inserted, for their training, in an education program, such as the University Chairs of Older Adults (CUAM), in which they enter as students in a study modality that constitutes a new event for all people who are enrolled. Therefore, this program aims to:

- Promote the cultural and scientific-technical updating of the students
- Stimulate the cognitive, affective-motivational and social development of the students

- Contribute to the social reintegration of graduates in various community projects
- Enhance a social image of aging and old age in educational settings
- Promote identity with age and with the corresponding change processes
- Develop actions of an intergenerational nature
- Foster a new gerontological culture of development and non-paternalist about aging

The teaching program consists of two modalities: the basic course and the continuity courses. The basic course lasts a scholar year made up by the thematic modules: Propedeutic, Human Development, Promotion and health Education Social Security and Contemporary Culture; then the trainees (geroeducandos) elaborate a final work or dissertation. The other modality is that of continuation courses, so that the graduates of the basic course can delve into various subjects, generally selecting courses in informatics, heritage, economics, history, traditional medicine, family, sexuality, among others. The post-basic course called *Abuelidad* deserves special mention.

The Chair of the elderly program in Cuba has contributed to the improvement of the social image of aging as a process and of old age as a stage of the life cycle. It has contributed to creating a new gerontological culture, placing the elderly in the school space, as a space for development, and not only as receivers of care and protection. The program is an action of gerontological and no geriatric character as their starting theoretical bases are settled in gerontology as a multidisciplinary science that science or taxed different approaches.

Cuba is a country with a high index of population aging. It is known of the

numerous efforts to improve the quality of life of the elderly that are carried out mainly in terms of health and social security. It is also known that to grow old with fully and psychological comfort it is necessary to work hard in the field of education and training for dismantling prejudices that still stigmatize this period of human development.

"Training thus understood fosters a full understanding of the professional context of the educator, which can only be achieved through discussions, explanations and evaluations". (Addine Fernández, 2013, p. 90). From this perspective, the solutions will depend on the own construction of the situations in the context of the older adult's classroom, where the uniqueness and good treatment they create for these older people is an appropriate environment for educational development.

Regarding the profile of the professional, Otmara González Pacheco (cited by Alberto D. Valle Lima. 2012, p. 146) considers that: "(...) It constitutes a model, an idealization of the characteristics, knowledge and skills that the student who is graduating from a professional career, which is commonly expressed in the form of terminal objectives that aim to achieve a given level of education in the training of students should possess". The professional profile is one of the concrete ways in which the relationship between education and society is expressed in the aspect related to professional training, although in the case of the elderly it is the Cuban modality of what in the world is known as universities of third age.

"If we bet on a model that does not lead to a degree (if at all, to an accrediting diploma), training can suffer, turning teaching into a kind of "gathering of friends", which clearly departs from the university spirit. The universities committed for the training of older adults, in competition with other

institutions (popular universities, universities of the third to age) (Pruna Goodgall, 2010). It is clear that the University must offer a teaching according to the university level.

"... The stereotypes widespread discrimination of older adults by their age as people who are always fragile, represent a burden and dependent care, have no empirical basis and limit the ability of society to appreciate and release the potential of social and human resources inherent in the elderly populations", sustains the world report on aging and health of the year 2015, published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015). They are stereotypes that in no way represent the older adults of these times, who go hand in hand with social development and continue to be at the side of our children, adolescents and young people, as a guide and support of our childhood and youth.

"We associate old age with laziness, inactivity, poverty and illness and we are eager for them to come to retirement to give them the management of the house, childcare and the basic basket, without thinking that they are people who have reached a stage of life in which they are still useful to society and that they have their own interests, concerns, and individual needs as any person, regardless of age" (Fariñas Acosta, 2017, p. 4).

In this sense, it should become essential not only the role of health professionals, family doctors and Geriatrics but educators, multidisciplinary groups working with that age, *gero-teachers*, *gerontolics*, *geriatrics*, that make a healthy and prolonged old age through their attention, and that makes them feel useful even in their years. This is an issue that involves the entire society, as more than old age itself, are the problems of society and unfavorable environments that lead people to live old age in

conditions of discomfort, dependence and dissatisfaction.

"In the psychological development, the psychological or psychological neo formations that are studied as part of the social development situation in every age appear. These are formations corresponding to each stage of life as oscillatory processes, depending on the vital elements that we are experiencing" (Bozhovich, LI, 1967, p. 200). In this way, the formation of self-awareness at an early age, the volitional-emotional sphere in preschool, the development of self-awareness in adolescence, the scientific conception of the world in youth, the maturity of regulation of behavior that is carried out through the training and development of critical or reflective self-consciousness in adulthood, and the formation of the so-called self-transcendence in old age; Self-transcendence, such as the need to transcend those around them, stay with them and not with them, bequeath to the other.

The Cuba's National Hero José Martí said that "education has to go where life goes" it for much, if life fortunately leads to old age must remain active and updated people.

The need to keep up-to-date with data on the percentages of people aged 60 years and over, in our country and worldwide, must be taken into account, since they constitute figures that are changing in an ascending way. If we look for this population aging index in other countries, its increase can be observed. This has led to the creation of new types of programs that guarantee living old age with a higher quality of life.

The program for the training of the elderly Pinar del Rio (University Chair of the Elderly) has been represented by a chair, seven subsidiaries and 14 classrooms, a total of students graduates since the program starts to date of 6041 and a total of 128 teachers and lecturers.

Seven continuity courses have been taught. There are currently 2 389 gerolearners enrolled.

Although the numbers are small, the results are encouraging, as it has been a chair solid and efficient in the formation of those older adults who have developed a comprehensive educational project in the community, which has helped in the formation of the future generation, with the work of supporting all social programs for the human improvement of the modes of action of citizens.

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