



## Daniel Pérez González - Cuba

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Hello, I am Cuban and I have passed my entire life between the streets, sounds and stories that are part the everyday life of Cuba. A few years ago I joined a project that is not only my job but much more than that. The Children's Theatre Company of Cuba, La Colmenita, is a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. As part of this educational and inclusive cultural project for children and teenagers, I have had the opportunity to represent and share our project of games, theatre and values on stage around the world, but I never imagined that someday I would be in an institutional space like this, sharing our story in this manner. I would like to start by saying thank you, thank you very much.

In La Colmenita we are accustomed to communicating through theatre, to share deep emotions studying, singing and dancing together, really taking care of each other – on and off the stage – and educating ourselves with values of solidarity instead of competition or rivalry. We never had great goals or desires to expand, nor great plans to work within logical frames, we just took simple steps and the doors opened by themselves thanks to our work. La Colmenita is a company created in Cuba, made possible in a society where children and teenagers are at the centre of the country's priorities. I would like to begin by sharing some truths about Cuba that have benefitted our work.

Cuban children are born in specialized health facilities, which offer their services free of charge. Education is universal, compulsory and free throughout the whole island, including in mountainous and poorer areas. The educational system also comprises children with special educational needs. All Cuban children live in a community, in and out of school. Their neighbourhood and neighbours complement their family in taking care of them, without fearing any type of danger. Mass media and informational technologies promote messages that contribute to the development of a healthy sexuality. Cuba has efficient legal tools that allow it to confront human trafficking, child prostitution, and corruption of minors.

La Colmenita, founded on 14 February 1990, under the inspiration of its director, Carlos Alberto Cremata Malberti, began with no other support than the family. Today it is an UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, thus becoming the first Cuban grouping, and the first theatrical group in the world to hold this distinction. La Colmenita is inspired by the Martian saying: "Children should get together at least once a week and see to whom they could do good". It is like their second family, where they grow up, spend time together with children of different ages, beliefs, and skin colour. It was born to contribute to ethical and aesthetic education through the staging of Cuban and universal cultural classic pieces. It promotes the learning of various artistic skills, which makes it one of the country's most recognized and legitimized experiences as an educational space that promotes and encourages children to know and love their roots and culture, confident of the possibilities to grow up with the freedom and richness that every human being deserves.

La Colmenita reaches all Cuban children through social media or live presentations, which can either be held in the most important theatres of the country, or in hamlets in mountainous areas. We work for the full welfare of our children, for the development of their social skills. More than the show itself, what matters is the process of preparing it and the effect on its audiences. Together, we promote a culture based upon the Rights of the Child, and an integral development based upon the psychological and physical well-being of children; their empowerment as to their right to express themselves, becoming active subjects and protagonists of their own educational process and artistic learning; respecting their right to seek and receive information in all spaces, making them less vulnerable to abuse, or child prostitution.

Thus, in 2006, La Colmenita was appointed as a health promotion centre in Cuba, through a resolution issued by the Ministry of Public Health. The Company has taken part in international tours in more than twenty-five countries, always receiving the best criticism from theatre specialists and child pedagogy experts. With its "Colmenero" principles of work, such as doing good and promoting equality among children beyond their differences, Colmenitas were created in ten municipalities of La Havana, and in nine Cuban provinces, which exceed one thousand members of all ages between 5 and 14. Our project has already become a movement and has spread throughout other parts of the world. Colmenitas have been founded in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, 21 Colmenitas in Venezuela, 15 in El Salvador, 3 in Argentina, and 2 in Spain.

Each child's family is also an important partner in wardrobe preparation, in the creation of scripts, and in the time devoted to accompanying their children to each rehearsal. The Company starts from the understanding that we are healthy human beings if we feel a physical and spiritual well-being. From that perspective, by giving children with downs syndrome or other physical-motor problems space to blossom, they can feel as good as those who seem to have no difficulties at all. Thus we provide a great service to those families who

see their children grow up joyful, forgetting their difficulties. Motivated by the North American doctor "Clown" Patch Adams, and following the "Colmenera" philosophy, within the Colmenita we have created movements of therapeutic clowns, present in hospitals throughout the country, doing workshops with child patients with long hospital stays, and bringing this healing experience to countries like El Salvador.

La Colmenita has much to contribute to the current moment that Cuba and the world are experiencing. We have the potential to deliver affection, culture, experiences of humanity and solidarity in all circumstances. It is the duty of La Colmenita to continue doing good so that children who receive their art and joy increasingly stay away from the evils that, unfortunately, affect children and adults around the world, as has been the focus of this meeting. The Company humbly and without vanity undertakes this responsibility of saving others and helping them grow. It is willing to learn and exchange with other similar experiences around the world and to share efforts in this regard; forming human beings to think by themselves, knowing their roots, their rights and proud of their history, and the awareness of the future that they must build.

Thank you.