

LIFTING THE VEIL OF AUTISM



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The less one has mastered speech with one's body, the less gifted one is for silent reading ... It is a great mistake to continue teaching silent reading for there is a great risk of blocking all spontaneity and comprehension.

—Alfred Tomatis, *The Conscious Ear*

Helga López

Helga is the director of Centro Tomatis® Colombia and has 36 years of experience as a psychologist and educator in Bogotá, Colombia. She earned a master's degree in psychology, with an emphasis on child development and learning difficulties, from the University of Houston, is a master practitioner in neuro-linguistic programming (Colinde, Mexico), and was certified as a Tomatis® consultant by Christian Tomatis in 2000. Helga is proud to be a founding member of the International Association of Registered Certified Tomatis® Consultants (IARCTC) and is the Director of Project Winnie: Kindergarten in Bogotá—an educational institution that pioneers the use of the Tomatis® Method in the classroom. She is also a dedicated founding member of Preescolares Solidarios, a foundation dedicated to creating therapeutic play areas for low-income children.

Catalina Soto De Gamboa

Catalina is a phonoaudiologist. She obtained her degree from Universidad del Rosario in Bogotá, Colombia, and she has spent more than 20 years working with children from birth to 36 months in neurodevelopment programs. She has also helped school-aged children struggling with language, cognition and learning disabilities both in schools and in hospitals. Catalina was trained as a certified Tomatis® consultant by Gloria Assmar in Mexico City, Mexico, in 2002 and is a co-founder and consultant at Centro Tomatis® Colombia.

Maria Claudia Guzmán López

Maria Claudia is a phonoaudiologist with a degree from the University Museo Social Argentino de Buenos Aires. She has devoted 28 rewarding years to professional practice, both privately and with government institutions. She is an active founding member of the Research and Advisory Group Phonoaudiology, GUIA, and Group CONVOZ: Acoustic Analysis, in Bogotá, Colombia. She has also been a board member of the Colombian

Association of Audiology.

Maria Claudia was trained as a Tomatis® consultant in Mexico City by Gloria Assmar in 2002 and was a co-founder of Centro Tomatis® Colombia in 2004.

Silvia Carrasquilla de Londoño

Silvia has a degree in phonoaudiology from Universidad del Rosario and underwent postgraduate studies at the University Del Museo Social Argentino and University Salvador in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has 30 years of experience in helping people with hearing problems and learning disorders both in government institutions and private practice. Silvia received her Tomatis® training from Gloria Assmar in Mexico City, Mexico, in 2002 and has been a devoted and active member and consultant at Centro Tomatis® Colombia since it was founded in 2004.

Patricia Garcia de Santaella

Patricia has a degree in phonoaudiology and a specialization in voice and speech development from Universidad del Rosario in Bogotá, Colombia. She was also trained in speech by Dr. Barbara Hudson. In addition to her 31 years in private practice as a phonoaudiologist, Patricia has dedicated her time to teaching others, both as a professor at the Phonoaudiology department at Universidad del Rosario from 1996-1999 and director of the Adult Community Practice: Vocal Promotion and Prevention Program from 1975-1980. She is an honorary founding member of the Colombian Association of Audiology and was certified as a Tomatis® consultant in Mexico in 2002 by Gloria Assmar. She is also a co-founder and consultant at Centro Tomatis® Colombia.

Maria Cristina Lievano de Cabrera

Maria Cristina is a speech pathologist at the Universidad del Rosario in Bogotá, Colombia, with 35 years of professional experience in clinical audiology. Maria Cristina is the founder of the Center for Adaptation and Rehabilitation of Deaf Children in Neiva, Colombia. She qualified as a certified Tomatis® consultant in Mexico City, Mexico in 2002, and is a co-founder of Centro Tomatis® Colombia.

You can find out more about the Tomatis® Method and Centro Tomatis® Colombia at: **www.tomatiscolumbia.com**.

CHAPTER 7

Lifting the veil of autism

A five-year-old boy came to our Tomatis® center in Colombia, having been diagnosed with autism by a pediatric neurologist. His parents reported unsocial behavior, an inability to establish visual contact, a complete absence of language development and repetitive stereotyped behaviors, such as constant walking and producing a high-frequency sound. In kindergarten he was often sent out of the classroom and left without any structure to follow due to his frequent tantrums. The child underwent the listening training program with the Tomatis® Method for four months, completing a total of 62 hours of listening, divided into three phases.

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that it was not autism. The child had established social contact with his sisters and showed physical affection; he understood and followed simple orders; he spoke words and phrases, and greeted and thanked spontaneously. He also demonstrated bladder and bowel control, and was more organized at kindergarten; for example, he finished the tasks he was given.

What is autism?

“Autism is characterized by a distinctly abnormal and diminished development of social interaction and communication and a distinctly restrictive range of activities related to personal interests.”¹

Background

The boy was five years old when he first attended our center, and was the third child born in his family. At the time of his birth his father was 32 years old, and his mother was 39, with no important physical or emotional factors in either of their personal medical histories. However the pregnancy was under the threat of miscarriage due to bleeding during the first month, so it was

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recommended that the mother rest. The boy was born by caesarean section, after which he indicated suitable, immediate and spontaneous neonatal adaptation, by demonstrating appropriate responses to post-birth tests.

His psychomotor development had been delayed in general, and an absence of non-verbal behavior, which controls interaction, was observed, as well as a delay in the development of verbal language. When he started preschool at the age of two, before beginning with the Tomatis® Method, he would cry when entering the classroom.

Description of the presenting problem

The child clearly lacked social skills; he did not interact with adults or children or exhibit any social reciprocity; and did not answer when he was called by his name, or in response to almost any verbal language. In fact, he would respond only to the command, “Come to eat.” He would not establish eye contact and explored his environment using only peripheral vision. He exhibited stereotypical behavior while walking: he would run up and down, producing a high-frequency sound as he did so.

Impression of the Tomatis® consultant

Following primary observation the child’s consultant confirmed the description given by his parents—that his behavior was typical of autistic behavior². A Tomatis® listening test was performed, achieving sporadic visual answers. The thresholds of the air and bone conduction were in the range of 20 to 40 decibels, and bone conduction appeared above the air conduction, as indicated by his listening graph (see Image 1).

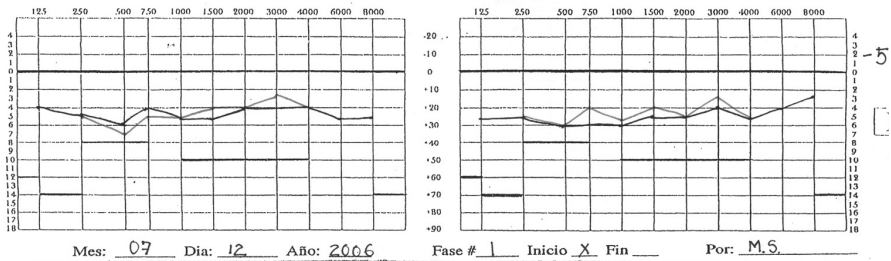


Image 1: Initial listening test

Intervention

The child underwent listening training according to the Tomatis® Method from 17 July through 1 November 2006, completing a total of 62 hours—30 hours in the first intensive period, 16 hours in the second intensive, and 16 hours in the third intensive. The program was based on

Joachim Kunze and Valerie Dejean's criteria.

Results

The results obtained through the use of the Tomatis® Method were successful. Progress was recorded through interviews with his parents and through clinical observation of the child.

Result of the implementation after the first intensive period

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATION

The child's parents reported that he started to express affection physically within his family group. His grandmother had stated previously that when the child came to her house, "It was as if nobody had come into the house." While doing the Tomatis® program, he started to look at her, made eye contact and greeted her with a kiss.

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He also cooperated more in his daily routine, and started to eat on his own. At kindergarten, he began to participate in tasks, and stopped crying upon entering his classroom.

COMMUNICATION

Occasional eye contact was observed, as was an increased desire to communicate and a sustained improvement in his attention span. He also began to imitate sounds and play activities and was taking part in games. The child also started to understand simple instructions and began

to use words repetitively for the purpose of communication. When listening to songs he started to hum tunes.

SENSORY MOTOR

He tolerated physical contact better, it was no longer necessary to puree his food, and the frequency of his stereotypical behavior diminished.

Results of the implementation after the second intensive period

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATION

In general he was more independent in basic daily activities. He asked to go to the toilet and when he was familiar with the center, he went on his own. At kindergarten he continued to have tantrums, although they were of a lower intensity.

COMMUNICATION

He played with objects according to their functionality, produced onomatopoeic sounds and increased his vocabulary. He also developed different communicative skills such as complaining/rejecting, and asking for actions, objects and attention.

Results of the implementation after the third intensive period

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATION

The child was taking part and playing games with both his sisters (aged nine and ten), though he interacted more with his nine-year-old sister. He became aware when a member of his family stayed away and expressed it both through verbal and non-verbal behavior. He cooperated during bath time and tried to dress himself alone, although he was still

reluctant to brush his teeth. He ate by himself, and his tantrums were less frequent.

COMMUNICATION

Eye contact improved significantly. He was using words, such as greetings and farewells, to interact, also employing the right syntax. He was asking for objects, actions and attention and imitated new words.

SENSORY MOTOR

He performed sequences of movements that required physical planning in a faster and livelier way.

He performed sequences of movements that required physical planning in a faster and livelier way. Stereotypical behaviors were observed only sporadically, and then only when he was confronted with an anxiety-provoking situation that required too much multitasking from him.

Conclusion

Progress in all areas of development was attributed to using the Tomatis® Method as the primary therapeutic process. Speech/language pathology and occupational therapy were canceled before starting with the Tomatis® Method, although these were resumed seven months after he finished his Tomatis® program.

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The child's progress cannot be attributed to maturing, as before using the Tomatis® Method there were no variations in his behavior in the socio-emotional context or in his communication skills. Eight months after his listening training with the Tomatis® Method, his acquired social, emotional and

communicative skills not only remained, but kept evolving positively.

His eye contact also continued to improve. In his kindergarten classroom he worked for more operational periods of time and he was independent in his dressing skills. The stereotypical behavior kept decreasing, and it only appeared when the child was left alone and without any direction regarding activity. He started to use simple phrases and began spontaneous communication for social purposes, such as greeting and being grateful. All of which were remarkable results, because, as his grandma used to say: “Before it was as if nobody was there.”

Eight months after his listening training with the Tomatis® Method, his acquired social, emotional and communicative skills not only remained, but kept evolving positively.

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