

## **The efficacy and importance of structured education and visual help: the clinical case of a child with autism and severe mental retardation**

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We report the case of a 4 ½ year old boy with autism and severe mental retardation, who was integrated into preschool after an educational treatment based on the Teacch (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children) method. After one year of preschool, he was enrolled again in the Teacch program. A psychological evaluation was performed at each stage of treatment using the PEP/R (Psico Educational Profile/Revised) and the VABS (Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales) scale. Results obtained show a global worsening of the child's performances as a consequence of the change in the treatment program. This was mostly due to a worsening in the child's behavior, which in turn prevented an adequate expression of skills.

Four months after beginning a new treatment based on the Teacch program, we observed a significant improvement in all the fields assessed with the PEP/R and the VABS. The evaluation done 9 months after the beginning of the program demonstrates that all these improvements are gradually increasing, mostly in the cognitive domains. We comment on the results obtained and discuss the differences and similarities between the two different treatment programs, highlighting those responsible for the improvement. Similarities between the two treatment programs include the goals, the activities, the individualization and the gradual increase of help.

On the other hand, there are many differences between the two experiences: the group of peers, the caregivers, the physical organization, the communication system, the work system, the tasks organization, the time visualization. The integration of the child into preschool, without considering the differences between this and the Teacch program, has caused the restoration of hyperactivity and a lack of improvements.

The Teacch structured program allowed the child to learn new skills and express his abilities, promoting some degree of independence in daily life.

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