

HUMANISTIC TRAINING OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

LA FORMACIÓN HUMANÍSTICA Y HUMANISTA DE LOS ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

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ABSTRACT

University trains professionals who are able to face the challenges imposed on them, but this training should not focus only on the technical and scientific areas, it should include topics that are essential for the acquisition of a general culture. Higher education develops the processes of teaching, research and outreach, the latter one supported on cultural promotion, which influences the development of the students' spirituality, as well as their personality. This article offers a proposal to favor the students' humanistic training through the outreach process that takes place in the university educational project. In the preparation of this article, theoretical research methods have been employed, such as analysis and criticism of sources, and the hermeneutical method. Both methods foster interpretation and analysis of the study topic criteria, assessment and conclusions.

Keywords: humanistic training, outreach process, university

RESUMEN

La universidad prepara profesionales capaces de enfrentar los retos que se les imponen, pero esta no debe centrarse solo en lo científico-técnico, debe abarcar aristas esenciales para la adquisición de una cultura general. En la educación superior se desarrollan los procesos de docencia, investigación y extensión, este último tiene como soporte la promoción cultural, lo que influye en el desarrollo de la espiritualidad de los estudiantes, de su personalidad. En el artículo se reflexiona sobre una propuesta para favorecer la formación humanística y humanista de los estudiantes mediante el proceso extensionista que se desarrolla en el proyecto educativo universitario, lo que constituye su objetivo. En su elaboración se han empleado métodos de

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investigación del nivel teórico: Análisis y crítica de fuentes y el método Hermenéutico. Ambos propician la interpretación y análisis de criterios sobre el tema objeto de estudio, las valoraciones al respecto y la elaboración de las conclusiones.

Palabras clave: formación humanística y humanista, proceso extensionista, universidad

INTRODUCTION

“And he who has not read Homer or Aeschylus or the Bible or Shakespeare is a man who does not think, nor has he seen the whole of the sun or felt his own wings fully unfold from his shoulders.”

Jose Marti

University nowadays has a social responsibility regarding preparing professionals capable of facing the challenges that the development of science and technology impose. For that, it must contemplate training that allows students to perform in a competent manner; this must not only focus on the scientific-technical aspect but it is necessary to encompass other essential topics for the acquisition of a broad and integral culture, which have an effect on the harmonious development of their personalities.

In higher education the following processes are developed: teaching, research and outreach (Pelekais and Aguirre, 2010), which contribute to the achievement of the purposes set forth. These are the substantial functions of the university (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006), which propitiate the interrelation of higher education centers with the social context, in addition to favoring the training process of the student body.

University must allow the students, to the extent that they are preparing for the challenges they must face, to educate themselves as cultured individuals, understanding this quality in its broadest sense. It is expected that the students' training will make them capable of learning and applying the achievements of science and technology and, at the same time, acquiring knowledge about world and local history, appreciate the beauty in art in all its manifestations (which helps them value it in life), among other aspects. The preparation they receive will influence their future professional performance and in life in general, which acquires a special relevance.

The university educational process must bear in mind the need to cultivate spirituality, sensitivity in the student body, elements that are essential to every individual as a social being. This does not mean that it is not recognized that man should have an objective view of the surroundings; the objective and the subjective are interrelated allowing the human being to assume its role in society.

Remember, for instance, the poeticizing of such idea given by Cervantes in his immortal characters Don Quixote and Sancho. Them, in spite of their differences, both physical and in their thinking, complement each other and feed each other reciprocally on their characterizing features; each one drinks from the other's sap

as the events involving them take place, until what critics call the “quixotization” of Sancho and the “sanchification” of Don Quixote occurs (Delborge, 2005).

The university educational process can stimulate the training aspired to, because the educational project allows the adequate linking of the processes or the substantial functions of higher education already mentioned: teaching, research and outreach. This last process is characterized by promoting the links between university and society (Tünnermann, 2000; Lopez, 2010; Gainza and Paz, 2011) and the integral training of students, in close relationship with others.

This process is known as an outreach process or university outreach (Guzman, 2014; Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2015) or as linking with the community (Law on Higher Education, 2010; Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education, 2011; Araque, 2012). In general, this process indicates the ways in which the relationship between university and society results from the institution’s potentialities and the ones present in the context in which it is located. In this article, it is assumed as an outreach process or university outreach, since it is considered that in this way the function to which it refers is expressed with clarity.

The development of the outreach process makes possible that students, oriented and motivated by teachers scientifically trained and with a vast culture, display actions that favor their performance. This active-transforming attitude will allow them to act, in the future, as capable professionals and, which is essential, as full human beings prepared to contribute to society as individually, as a family and socially, in the broadest sense.

The educational work carried out with the students must also train them to contribute to the preservation of their cultural identity (Garcia and Baeza, 1996), which is threaten by the neoliberal and hegemonic globalization. As it is known, science and technology must not be separated from the sociocultural context; all the opposite, they must constitute a path to get closer to knowing and appreciating it. It is necessary to recognize that the functions of the university enable its interweaving with the context in which it is embedded.

This assumption is currently vital when the preservation of identity values in regions, countries, territories and localities constitutes an imperative. To favor this endeavor, an integral education of the students is needed, which implies teaching work aimed at that end. It would contribute to reach the goals set with their humanistic training, understood, in general terms, as their full preparation as human beings (Mendoza Portales, 2005), independently from the existence of a differentiation between the concepts, which is analyzed in this article.

The development of the outreach process, establishing the corresponding links with teaching and research, must propitiate the humanistic training of the students. For that, it is required that the teacher searches for the appropriate ways, considering the students’ characteristics and the context of the university. In this article, we reflect upon a proposal to favor the humanistic training of students by means of the outreach process developed in the university educational project, which constitutes its objective.

In the preparation of this document, theoretical research methods were employed: analysis and criticism of sources utilizing as

procedures the general methods of logical thinking: analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, from abstract to concrete and the historical, logical and the hermeneutical method. Both foster the interpretation and analysis of criteria about the topic object of the study, assessments in this regard and the preparation of conclusions.

1. THE OUTREACH PROCESS IN THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Society demands that university maintains a close link with its environment. This educational institution has the social assignment of preparing future professionals from whom actions in favor of social development are expected. To reach that important purpose, processes are executed: teaching, research and extension, closely related (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006).

In the educational project, the outreach project or university outreach performs an essential role (Serna, 2004); it has as support cultural promotion, training on and development of values from culture, both in university campuses and in their interrelation with the community. It is conceived that an educational institution constitutes the most important cultural center of the community. In university, to reach this objective, it must be accomplished that the future professional is capable of participating in cultural development, becoming an agent of change (Alvarez de Zayas, 2012).

In the current context, the university cannot be understood as a closed center, far from society's interests, because it would lose its essence. That is why university-society links must be strengthened (Ortiz and Morales

2011). The development of the outreach process makes possible compliance with this assumption; for this, the institution's strengths, both in faculty and student body, must be utilized appropriately.

For future professionals to contribute to fulfill that mission work must be done since the pre-graduate stage, contributing to their cultural training; in other words, for them to possess a general and integral culture, it is needed that the outreach process influences them substantially. An essential way to make this objective real is the development of the educational process in the higher level. This is defined as "that educational process where it is shown the relationship between education, instruction, teaching and learning, directed to the development of the personality of the students for their preparation for life" (Alvarez de Zayas, 2001; p. 74). For this, it can be said that this process materializes in each of the activities planned by the educational institution.

Activities to be carried out at the university center are of a diverse nature because the educational process transcends teaching to encompass all the elements that converge in the student body's training; teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular activities are spoken about (Jardinot, 2013). Teaching activities correspond to the development of subjects contemplated in the curricular net of each degree; in them the academic component prevails.

Teaching activities complement extra-instructor and extracurricular activities, which acquire marked importance in the development of the outreach process. Extra-instructor activities have predominantly a training and recreational character; they take place within the university. Extracurricular activities may

have a labor, artistic, recreational character, among others; they are carried out inside or outside the institution. They must be planned, directed and controlled by the university; this type of activities, particularly, contributes to the integral training of the student body.

The university educational project must propitiate the development of teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular activities. Their planning, making sure that a balance exists among them and adequate links, will help propitiate the integral training of students. By carrying out these activities, they must acquire instruction, to the extent to which they are trained on mastering the scientific foundations of their field (teaching activities).

It is necessary to point out that the training work with the students does not end with the academic component, of major importance; it is a process directed to the education of the students, to shaping their personalities. In this sense, the outreach process strengthens because, due to its own nature, contributes to reach this goal, complex in itself, but requires concrete actions to materialize it (extra-instructor and extracurricular activities, related to teaching).

The educational influences that students receive are not only limited to the classroom; they comprise other spaces in the university and the community, the outreach, as noted. It is essential that this process develops under the direction of the teacher, who ought to plan, control and assess it. The outreach process, within the university educational project, is an adequate space for activities that allow the student not only to develop the cognitive component but cultivate the emotional one: foster feelings and emotions, essential to the development of his personality.

A road to follow may be found in planning activities related to culture in a general sense, specifically to history, thought and artistic-literary topics, elements that contribute to the humanistic training of the students, essential aspects to achieve a general and integral culture, as aspired to. Contact with culture, expression of an integrating human vision, has an effect on the spiritual growth of individuals and their fulfillment as human beings (Mendoza Portales, 2005); having an impact on the individual's improvement by endowing him with the sensitivity required.

The components of the students' training, mentioned before, are essential due to their contribution to the development of their personalities. They acquire a particular sense in the complex contemporary context in which cultural models coming from the centers of power are presented to the students. These models are not always carriers of the values and spirituality that must be fostered in an individual.

A trend is recognized in the trivialization of culture (Vargas Llosa, 2012), in detriment of its essence, which affects the human being. To this respect, it is noted that, "If we convert culture into entertainment only (...) then it loses that function it has had (...) of concerning us with the world we live in (...) and creating in us a critical attitude towards society and history" (Vargas Llosa, 2012: 1). On occasion, also, these manifestations affect ancestral, indigenous cultural values which impact negatively on the development of people's cultural identity.

Facing this situation, which worries intellectuals of several disciplines, education is a sort of antidote. Its role in the training of men is recognized, who should be capable of

propelling humanity towards progress which means peace, freedom and social justice (Delors, et al., 1996). Meeting such as an essential commitment requires a humanistic training of the student body.

The humanistic training is related to the study of Humanities (Mendoza Portales, 2005). This word derives from the Latin word *humanitas*; it is a branch of learning related to human culture in the general sense; it is also called the Letters. In the Renaissance period, they would talk about human letters as opposed to divine letters. It should not be ignored, in addition, that this discipline is usually called the Social Sciences; however, the essence, within the limits of this work, is to highlight that humanistic training is given through the study of the Humanities, hence this name. In this case, the Humanities are conceived as those subjects in the curriculum closely related to human culture. This position results from a scope that exceeds the purpose of this work; that is why a field related to history, thought and diverse art manifestations is determined, because its study can be stimulated, particularly in the university outreach process.

The disciplines mentioned have the particularity of contributing in an essential manner of the training of individuals, in this case students. This is not a new idea; its importance has been recognized since antiquity. The study of Humanities has been related directly to the education of man. The conception of an education that includes knowledge, skills and values can be appreciated in different moments of the history of humankind, in correspondence with conceptions existing in each period. A review of literary works in which this particular idea is reflected may be useful for the analysis of this topic.

Think, for example, on the *Iliad*, that monumental epic poem that allows to reveal, like a frieze, characteristics, customs, think patterns of the period in which it was created. The Greek hero par excellence recreated in an imperishable manner in the epic, Achilles, is educated by the mythical centaur Chiron. The training received turns into a pedagogical model of transcendence in posterity. Achilles is educated to be brave, strong, respectful, with a broad knowledge that included medicine, the art of eloquence, music, horseback riding and hunting.

The hero is not only expected to be dexterous with weapons but with the use of the spoken word because in the agora it is: “where men become illustrious” (*Iliad*, Song IX: vv. 434 et seq). Old man Phoenix, who is also involved in his training, reminds him of the purposes of the training requested by the father of the hero: “he ordered me to teach you to speak well and carry out great deeds” (*Iliad*, Song IX: vv. 434 et seq). In a few words, Achilles had to be prepared as a citizen up to his lineage and times.

It is recognized that the study of Humanities has a special meaning for the education of mankind; that is why subjects belonging to this branch of study are within those marked for study in the different historical periods (Borrero, 2008). Since antiquity, the study of poetry, philosophy, eloquence, among other aspects, was conceived. In subsequent times these topics are addressed, although they could have different names; for example, during the Renaissance era, the teaching of grammar, rhetoric, music, among others, is talked about. In a general sense, a concern is perceived which reaches current times when including humanistic topics, recognizing its contribution to education; it is considered that, in reality, it could not be any other way.

From the analysis we can sense that special care must be taken when preparing the curricula, study plans or curricular meshes so that humanistic disciplines occupy their corresponding place in the preparation of students. In particular degrees, whose profile is related to the humanistic area, these topics are addressed as part of the teaching process. In others, of a different nature, new paths must be utilized to achieve it; as pointed out, the outreach process that must be developed in higher education is an ideal medium for that.

It is necessary to consider that the humanistic training of the students leads, due to its own essence, to humanist training. This is a key element in every educational process, to the extent that it is directed to training present and future generations. The ideal of education, with emphasis on human values, implies not only knowledge but also attitudes, behaviors, principles, postulates, paradigms that impact on individuals' performance, which constitutes its humanistic training.

If one continues looking at representative literary works of specific periods, from them one can analyze the educational ideal of society, in accordance, of course, with the context, with the predominant worldview of the period. In this sense, a literary work from the Middle Ages is taken as an example: the Song of Roland.

As indicated by its name, the poem refers to the noble who served under Charlemagne and is killed by the Saracens, but keeping his honor intact, defending his ideals. This concern is noticed in his words: "Evil example will never come of me!" (The Song of Roland, Stanza LXXIX). The words of the hero make evident that he does not conceive any evil example coming from him; he acts consequently, showing a high sense of

duty, until offering the most precious value: his life.

The analysis carried out allows to propose that the humanistic training includes a system of knowledge, skills and values: feelings, convictions, attitudes that denote the cultivation of sensitivity and spirituality in the individual (Mendoza Portales, 2005). Their interrelation makes possible a critical-reflective attitude, which allows the development of an autonomous, creative thinking which must favor a transforming position in man, an expression of the full development of his personality.

What was stated indicates that to achieve such training of the students, a process must be conceived in which the component contained in its most encompassing conception is developed; that is, constituted by knowledge, skills and values. Activities planned in the university must contribute to raise the level of knowledge of the students and, in correspondence with them, develop their skills and values.

Students must operate with that knowledge and those skills, must learn to be responsible for them, making evident attitudes and feelings in accordance with society's aspirations. Students in the university campus must acquire information about culture in a general sense regarding their area of specialization, but, in addition, about history, thought and art manifestations, just to mention essential topics for the proposal presented.

The training process must allow them to acquire knowledge, to develop skills, to get impregnated with emotions, feelings that express their assessments in this regard, all of which must have an effect in their

development as individuals, capable of perceiving reality and contribute to their transformation. In summary, it is considered unthinkable an educational, training process that does not propitiate the humanistic training of the students because this indicates what constitutes the supreme aspiration of education: the integral shaping of the students' personalities.

2. PROPOSAL TO FAVOR THE HUMANISTIC TRAINING OF STUDENTS BY MEANS OF THE OUTREACH PROCESS THAT IS DEVELOPED IN THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROJECT.

Modelling of the outreach process, within the university educational project, leads to determine three dimensions: teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular, in correspondence with activities being planned (Hernandez Infante and Infante Miranda, 2015). This process, in close relationship with teaching and research, substantial functions of the university, must favor the humanistic training of students, which will have an impact on the acquisition of a general and integral culture; therefore, in the development of their personalities.

The proposal presented includes carrying out a variety of actions. In each case an adequate prior preparation of the students must be achieved; their motivation is essential. Students are expected to be aware of the contribution to them from their participation in the activities scheduled. The teacher must direct this process but propitiating a leading, active attitude in students.

Each of the actions to develop must pass through three essential moments: preparation,

execution and assessment. In the first of them, the teacher must create the necessary conditions (start from the prior knowledge of the students, motivate them, guide their preparation so that they can fully participate in the upcoming activity). The second moment demands an adequate behavior and self-preparation by the students, who can be receivers or leaders, but in any case they must assume an active attitude so that the activity in which they participate leaves a mark on them.

The third moment acquires a peculiar value. The teacher must propitiate that students communicate criteria, judgements and opinions about the activity carried out. It is very important to utilize different ways for that: debate, round table, panel, forum, report preparation, among others. The most important is to allow them to value the activity, expressing what they consider positive or negative, starting always from the purpose outlined.

Next, it is exemplified the proposal prepared with actions directed to favoring the humanistic training of students within the outreach process developed in the university educational project. These actions correspond, essentially, to extra-instructor and extracurricular activities, not ignoring its relationship with teaching activities:

- Meetings with writers, both from the artistic-literary field and history and thought (may be known at a regional or national level or in the locality). They will communicate their experiences and motivate students to read their writings.
- Book presentations, whose topics should be related to the Humanities. This activity can be carried out by writers, teachers or students.

- Commemoration of historical-literary anniversaries, such as the date of birth or death of writers or personalities recognized for their contributions to the humanistic field, publishing dates of relevant literary works.
- Celebration of the Day of the Spanish Language, World Book Day, World Poetry Day, International Museum Day, Culture Day (in each country), among other dates of interest.
- Conferences and discussions on a variety of topics related to universal, national and local culture. Each university must have specific spaces that can be taken to carry out activities of this nature. They must propitiate a pleasant climate that favors the exchange, the communication about topics which contribute to the student's cultural preparation.
- Exhibition and sale of books. It is necessary to point out that this activity is referred to not in the commercial sense but in the cultural sense, since the aim is put the students in contact with works of interest to their training, since they do not always have developed the habit of going to bookstores, know what is being published and try to purchase a particular book. This attitude is to be fostered, so necessary in the student period and in the future life.
- Visits to historical monuments. These activities can be carried out in person, considering the possibilities offered by the history of the locality where the university is located, or virtually, which allows for a meeting with universal and national culture, in addition to local.

The proposal emphasizes the performance of actions that motivate students to read, which is very important, particularly in the current context in which diverse strategies are boosted to promote reading habits. In a general sense, these actions tighten the links between university and society. The university campus must open its doors to the community or get out of "its walls" to interrelate with other institutions which in turn are enriched by the presence of teachers and students.

The outreach process, within the university educational project, must contemplate teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular activities. Its nature will depend of the objectives proposed and of the conditions had to carry out each one of them. It is possible that the curricular mesh allows carrying them out from the teaching process. Otherwise, it will be the teacher's preparation, his creativity and initiative, as well as his commitment to his students' training, what will propitiate the development of such activities for the purpose propounded.

These activities can be carried out in the university campus or in the community. It is essential that in all cases they are directed by the high teaching center, with emphasis on its training purposes. They constitute an effective means to link the students closely to their locality and, therefore, attain their participation in the socio-cultural environment, a key element to strengthen the sense of belonging to the territory, that is, their cultural identity.

Within extracurricular activities the utilization of the teacher excursion as a form of organization of the process is recommended. To achieve its commitment it must properly move through the stages

on which it is structured: prior preparation, execution and conclusion (Lopez and Perez, 1988). These activities, properly developed, can constitute an incentive for the students, if they are motivated and guided in such manner that they are capable of displaying their capacities and abilities.

The outreach process, through teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular activities, complements the work developed through study programs. It allows to deepen into the content covered, take the student out of the classroom, always in an environment characterized by dynamism and creativity, which favors students' training and provides them with models of professional behavior. It is necessary to consider that the educational institution is the space for socialization par excellence for the students. The performance of activities such as the ones pointed out, must contribute to their humanistic training, so that the university complies with its social responsibility: an integral preparation of future professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

- The adequate development of the outreach process in higher education, in harmony with the others, impacts on the training of the students for exercising their future professional work, favors their humanistic training and the development of an integral general culture.
- Carrying out teaching, extra-instructor and extracurricular activities within the outreach process, has potentialities to allow the student body to dynamically link with the cultural values of the

region, the country, the locality in which it lives or studies, which has an impact in its training by contributing to the development of the cultural identity.

- The outreach process propitiates the approach of students to the Humanities through expressions of a historical nature, thought, artistic manifestations, all of which contribute to knowledge, makes the development of their abilities possible, fosters feelings and values that favor the cultivation of sensitivity and spirituality, which contribute to their humanistic training and, consequently to their education within humanism, one of the most important missions of higher education and, of course, of the educational system in general.

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