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Review article

Aesthetic training and critical thinking in the Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Management for Development

Formación estética y pensamiento crítico en la Licenciatura en Gestión Sociocultural para el Desarrollo

Formação estética e pensamento crítico no Bacharelado em Gestão Sociocultural para o Desenvolvimento

Olga Lisbeth Crespo Hernández¹



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3772-7652>

Tania Yakelyn Cala Peguero¹



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1172-9182>

¹University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca". Pinar del Río, Cuba.



crespo@upr.edu.cu; taniac@upr.edu.cu

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ABSTRACT

The topic of aesthetic training and its impact on the development of critical thinking skills in the initial training of graduates in Sociocultural Management for Development becomes imperative, since this graduate must influence in social and cultural processes from the perspective of understanding, appropriation and dynamization of culture and sociocultural praxis. The purpose of this article is to argue, through an exploratory theoretical study, about aesthetic training and its impact on the development of critical thinking skills in university students of the major in question, analyzing sources that allowed corroborating the initial judgment and the logic behind this reasoning. To do so, the model and the modes of action of the professional were independently analyzed, as well as the theories on aesthetic training and the development of critical thinking skills, to determine the relationship criteria. The methodological approach used was qualitative and a document review, supported by the search for articles from scientific journals and master's and doctoral theses in browsers and academic repositories, and with the use of the ATLAS.ti software as a technological tool for the organization, analysis and interpretation of information. The study allowed us to conclude the importance of the subject in the skills of perception, appropriation, interpretation, judgment and assessment of symbols, meanings and human behaviors, these being determining as professional skills that guarantee the fulfillment of the social mandate of this professional.

Keywords: aesthetics; critical thinking; sociocultural management.

RESUMEN

La temática de la formación estética y su impacto para el desarrollo de habilidades del pensamiento crítico en la formación inicial de los licenciados en Gestión Sociocultural para el Desarrollo deviene un imperativo, pues este

graduado debe incidir en procesos sociales y culturales desde la perspectiva de la comprensión, apropiación y dinamización de la cultura y la praxis sociocultural. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo argumentar, a través de un estudio teórico exploratorio, acerca de la formación estética y su incidencia en el desarrollo de habilidades del pensamiento crítico en los estudiantes universitarios de la carrera en cuestión, analizando fuentes que permitieron corroborar el juicio de partida y la lógica detrás de este razonamiento. Para ello, se analizaron de forma independiente el modelo y los modos de actuación del profesional, así como las teorías sobre la formación estética y el desarrollo de las habilidades del pensamiento crítico, para determinar los criterios de relación. El enfoque metodológico utilizado fue cualitativo y de revisión documental, apoyado en la búsqueda de artículos de revistas científicas y tesis de maestría y doctorado en buscadores y repositorios académicos, y con el uso del software ATLAS.ti como una herramienta de uso tecnológico en la organización, el análisis y la interpretación de información. El estudio permitió concluir la importancia de la temática en las habilidades de percepción, apropiación, interpretación, enjuiciamiento y valoración de los símbolos, significados y comportamientos humanos, siendo estas determinantes como habilidades profesionales que garantizan el cumplimiento del encargo social de este profesional.

Palabras clave: estética; pensamiento crítico; gestión sociocultural.

RESUMO

A temática da formação estética e o seu impacto no desenvolvimento de competências de pensamento crítico na formação inicial dos licenciados em Gestão Sociocultural para o Desenvolvimento torna-se um imperativo, uma vez que este graduado deve influenciar os processos sociais e culturais na perspectiva da compreensão, apropriação e dinamização de cultura e práxis sociocultural. O objetivo deste

artigo é argumentar, por meio de um estudo teórico exploratório, sobre a formação estética e seu impacto no desenvolvimento de habilidades de pensamento crítico em estudantes universitários do curso em questão, analisando fontes que permitiram corroborar o julgamento de partida e a lógica por trás desse raciocínio. Para tanto, foram analisados de forma independente o modelo e modos de atuação do profissional, bem como as teorias sobre formação estética e desenvolvimento de habilidades de pensamento crítico, para determinar os critérios de relacionamento. A abordagem metodológica utilizada foi a revisão qualitativa e documental, apoiada na busca de artigos de revistas científicas e teses de mestrado e doutorado em buscadores e repositórios acadêmicos, e com a utilização do software ATLAS.ti como ferramenta de uso tecnológico na organização, a análise e interpretação da informação. O estudo permitiu concluir a importância do tema nas habilidades de percepção, apropriação, interpretação, julgamento e avaliação de símbolos, significados e comportamentos humanos, sendo estes determinantes como competências profissionais que garantem o cumprimento da responsabilidade social deste profissional.

Palavras-chave: estética; pensamento crítico; gestão sociocultural.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Higher Education is in charge of graduating competent, high-quality professionals, capable of meeting the demands of the specialist model demanded by society. This responsibility was recognized in the second thematic area of the UNESCO Work Plan for Culture for Latin America and the Caribbean (2016-2021), when referring to the fact that training "is key to achieving the development of cultural policies and measures, as well as their effective implementation, to achieve the sustainable development goals" (2016, p. 53).

Similarly, goal 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure that students: "... appreciate cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development..." (UNESCO, n/d, p. 14).

At the same time, the Cuban University has as its supreme goal a comprehensive and humanistic education, facing the constant challenge of adopting pedagogical concepts and study programs that result in a subject that promotes social change. Such is the case of the Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Management for Development (hereinafter GSPD), an undergraduate training program resulting from the improvement of the Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Studies. This degree is aimed at preparing a university student capable of understanding and acting on the sociocultural aspects present in the projects, actions and processes aimed at social development.

This graduate, according to his Professional Model, must have a direct impact on spirituality, cultural identity and the capacity of the population to participate in social development.

It is therefore a priority to foster critical thinking in these students, seen as the intellectual capacity that allows them to understand and create symbols and meanings to stimulate the experience of transcendent social emotions. This is because sociocultural management is an interdisciplinary field that is based on a variety of sources, including history, philosophy, sociology, art, anthropology and political science. As a result, students must be able to think critically about a wide range of information from different perspectives. To do so, teaching must generate specific learning that leads to development, "by leading people beyond the levels reached at a given time in their lives and fostering the achievement of learning that exceeds the goals already achieved" (Vidal Pla López *et al.*, 2012, p. 28).

It is precisely in the "intellectual process that seeks to make sense of information to achieve a meaningful understanding" (Facione, 2007, p.

20) in this professional, that aesthetics plays a fundamental role, by providing a sensitive understanding of reality and the construction of spirituality, based on the integration of educational influences that take place in the contexts where he or she is trained and must act in the solution of professional problems.

Therefore, it was taken as a premise that aesthetic training is essential to the sociocultural manager, due to its selective nature of perception, appropriation, interpretation, judgment and assessment of symbols, meanings and human behaviors, and would provide tools to understand and energize culture, seeing it as a resource for social change in itself.

In this process, skills are acquired and developed by training the student to evaluate information, identify biases and form their own opinions, make decisions and communicate effectively while solving professional problems associated with sensitive realities and art.

The present article aims to argue, through an exploratory theoretical study, the aesthetic formation and its impact on the development of critical thinking skills in university students of the Bachelor's Degree in GSPD.

The research methodology had a qualitative approach. The method chosen to obtain the information was the document revision (Hernández *et al.*, 2016) on the subject in the governing documents of the Bachelor's Degree in GSPD, and in 23 articles in scientific journals and master's and doctoral theses on aesthetic training, and the same number on critical thinking skills, belonging to the last 15 years in search engines and academic repositories. The criterion used to determine the sample size was the reiteration in terms of information saturation. The data obtained was processed with the ATLAS.ti software as a technological tool for qualitative organization, analysis and interpretation.

Likewise, the analysis-synthesis-abstraction-generalization procedures allowed the

decomposition of the premise into its various parts and qualities, mentally establishing the union between the previously analyzed parts. This made it possible to discover the general characteristics and essential links, with a view to being able to make generalizations useful for the fulfillment of the proposed objective.

DEVELOPMENT

The results of the theoretical exploration, built from the use of ATLAS.ti software, yielded the following.

The model and modes of action of the graduate in Sociocultural Management for Development

The Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Management for Development is presented as a major curricular redesign of the Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Studies. In Study Plan E, the contents and some of the subjects were modified, and a more pertinent vision of the professional was presented, in line with the social need to focus "on sociocultural management processes aimed at enhancing individual and collective human development through various strategies, projects and actions of a preferably local-community nature, linked to social development programs" (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023, p. 318).

It is a degree that has a multidisciplinary base, with cultural transformation in the broadest sense at its centre. Consequently, it provides graduates with tools for understanding, appropriating and dynamising culture and sociocultural praxis, as stated in their modes of action.

The documents also state that this professional has a direct impact on spiritual enrichment, on strengthening cultural identity and a sense of belonging, on the quality of collective life and the capacity of the population to participate in social development.

For this reason, aesthetic training is essential due to its selective nature of perception, appropriation, interpretation, judgment and assessment of symbols, meanings and human behaviors, and it is necessary to understand and energize culture, seeing it as a resource for social change in itself.

This criterion is supported by Baby (2017, p. 55), who conceives it as one of "the actions and operations that can be integrated, subordinated and systematized in the professional practice of the student of the career", to promote sociocultural promotion and stimulate the relationship between the population and culture; and in Puebla and Villarreal (2018, p. 197), for them aesthetic training is one of the "significant elements, characterizing the sociocultural perspective", essential in the construction of the sensitivity essential to this profession.

Theories on aesthetic formation

The information obtained revealed that, to understand the process of aesthetic training of professionals, it is necessary to assign learnable qualities to aesthetics as "knowledge that is acquired through the senses, the pleasant way in which knowledge is presented in its broadest sense, whether abstract, theoretical, or pragmatic, everyday" (Fernández, 2019, p. 55).

This is why the essentially social component of aesthetics implies the indisputable possibility of having an intentionally conceived content, as an expression of its educability. This, without a doubt, has an implication in the conception of assuming aesthetic training with the development of critical thinking skills.

For Estévez (2017), aesthetic training is a "system of teaching-educational actions that is exercised on the personality with the purpose of forming its integral general culture and the ability to value and create by the laws of beauty in all spheres of the material and spiritual life of society" (p. 13).

But it is much more than that, because in informal settings there is also an "exchange of impressions; it receives positions and models, and is susceptible to spontaneous, local, arbitrary, unconscious and intuitive influences that, in a way that is often decisive, shape tastes and preferences" (Sánchez, 2010, p. 132).

The above arguments allow us to agree with Fernández that the objective of aesthetic training has ceased to be "just knowing the object in itself, in its context, but being able to identify the aesthetic reality that gives it meaning and that, in turn, enables new interpretations" (2019, p. 57).

Whether through informal consumption (in the family, or individual cultural consumption), or formal consumption (in school, or in cultural institutions), aesthetic training is promoting the establishment of relevant relationships, values and educational influences on the subject and influencing the development of his or her personality throughout life.

Assuming this vision of aesthetic training, we can say that as a process it has a broader character and covers aspects such as ethical and civic training, personal and social development, as well as the acquisition of values and attitudes that allow the person to function in society.

The above is based on the fact that the research consulted is focused on five fundamental areas of study:

1. As cultural transmission: there is a tendency to favour aesthetic training as a form of cultural transmission, of values and cultural traditions from one generation to the next.
2. As personal development: emphasis is placed on the role of aesthetic training to help people develop their creativity, imagination and emotional intelligence.
3. As a promoter of social change: this line has a lot to do with criticism of the cultural industry, mass culture, consumer culture and the active role of the subject

in the face of his or her cultural consumption and as an active agent of transformation.

4. As a form of environmental education: Aesthetic education is presented as a means to help people develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world.
5. As education for peace: its contributions to the promotion of peace and understanding between different cultures are highlighted.

Regardless of the focal area chosen, all agree that, in aesthetic training, the training-instruction-teaching triad should focus on fostering an environment conducive to meaningful learning. This would allow the sociocultural manager in training to appropriate essential critical and sensitive thinking skills, focusing on the development of aesthetic awareness and appreciation, while the teacher analyzes the ways in which students experience and respond to beauty, art and other forms of aesthetic experience in a variety of controlled environments, including audiovisuals, interactive platforms, museums and cultural institutions.

Theories on critical thinking skills

According to Lopez (2012), critical thinking is based on the ability to analyze information, evaluate its importance, identify patterns and relationships, and make judgments. This theory focuses on the role of the individual in the development of critical thinking, emphasizing the teaching of specific skills to analyze and evaluate information.

Likewise, Facione (2007) argues that critical thinking involves an "intellectual process that seeks to make sense of information to achieve meaningful understanding" (p. 20).

Fundamentally, other authors consulted such as Paul and Elder (2003) agree that critical thinking is essential for success in school, work and life. Critical thinkers can identify and evaluate evidence, consider different perspectives, detect

inconsistencies and common errors in reasoning, form arguments and make sound decisions that lead to creative problem solving, know how to communicate their ideas and evaluate their own performance.

According to Chavez (2019), in contemporary Pedagogy there are mainly two theoretical strands: cognitive and philosophical theories.

The main representatives of the first trend are: Ausubel, Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky; it emphasizes the cognitive and intellectual processes that the student develops internally, acquiring a series of capacities, abilities and skills, in order to have successful learning results.

In the second, there are several exponents who start from understanding what are the categories and concepts that a critical thinker must handle (Bloom, Engels, García, Miranda, Emnis, Fisher, Bowel and Kemp). Then, they opt for developing attitudes towards the interpretation of information when finding reasonable solutions to problems, Paul and Elder (2002) and Facione (2003). Finally, researchers such as Rumelhart and Bartlett (Chavez, 2019) dedicate themselves to the study of self-regulation and how mental processes themselves work.

The authors mentioned group a series of critical thinking skills according to moments and functions: thus we find exploratory skills (observing and describing, comparing, searching, gathering and organizing data), classifying skills (summarizing, classifying, coding, judging, estimating, assessing) and resolving skills (imagining, formulating hypotheses, interpreting, making decisions).

All of them are essential to achieve a competent professional in tune with the professional performance modes demanded of the future GSPD graduate.

Aesthetic training and its impact on the development of critical thinking skills in GSPD university students

The relationship between critical thinking and aesthetic education is dialectical, since the latter, seen as the ability to appreciate, interpret and analyze works of art and cultural expressions, can help students better understand the world and develop critical thinking skills; this is an idea that we find in Fernández-Caballero *et al.* (2006). Thus, according to Fernández (2019) "it is essential if we try to educate critical people, capable of innovating, modifying and (re)creating social realities, as well as controlling their own process of construction and adaptation of personal identity" (p. 20).

This vision is reinforced in the Anglo-Saxon model of aesthetic teaching, which is more focused on the development of aesthetic skills and abilities associated with critical thinking, the development of creativity, as well as aesthetic judgments, attitudes and consumption, based on the theories of analytical philosophy and individual expression, which allows dialogue with other sciences such as psychology and neuroscience. This pattern is more geared towards practical ends, autonomy, innovation and learning through experimentation.

We also find it in the Hispanic American model, because although it is more oriented towards the transmission of cultural values, it also encourages the development of sensitivity to appreciate art in its historical and social context. This pedagogical practice, closer to the Cuban school, seeks to rescue and preserve the traditions and cultural heritage of each country, fostering the sense of belonging and national identity. It is also directed towards formal spaces and emphasizes the contents of the teaching-learning process and artistic education as a means to achieve a more scholarly aesthetic formation.

There are many ways in which aesthetic experiences can promote critical thinking skills: they can help students develop their ability to

observe and describe, leading them to pay attention to details and communicate what they see clearly and concisely, making them gather information and present their ideas; they can also develop imagination, by seeing the world from a different perspective; and they allow students to understand the perspectives of others and make fair, empathetic and effective decisions.

The systematization carried out through of the exploratory theoretical study made possible understand that aesthetic training deals with the process of developing sensitivity in the appreciation and creation of art, culture and reality, in formal and informal environments, conceived for the multifaceted assimilation and transformation of the world and the subject that receives it.

The authors consulted are references in each of the topics addressed and are integrated to form a coherent theory on critical thinking and aesthetic training in the Bachelor's degree in GSPD.

The study exposes the importance of the subject in the skills of perception, appropriation, interpretation, judgment and assessment of symbols, meanings and human behaviors, these being determinants as professional skills that guarantee the fulfillment of the social mission of the sociocultural manager, along with personal growth. This will help, to a great extent, for graduates to be competent in their ways of performance professional since evidence cultural values and sensitivity, in such a way that they allow act on the object of work of his profession in a creative way.

It is also stressed that, regardless of the model adopted, or whether a mixed approach is preferred (the best option in the authors' opinion), in the case of university aesthetic training, students must be able to think critically. They must be able to analyze the sensitive elements of art and reality, identify the artist's intention and interpret the meaning of the work.

It is clear that developing critical thinking skills helps students develop their aesthetic sense, helps them articulate their own personal preferences and understand the preferences of others regarding art and other aesthetic experiences, develop their creativity and imagination, improve their communication skills, learn to work independently and collaboratively, and develop a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy. In addition, it fosters informed judgments about the aesthetic value of art and other products in the extremely complex cultural environment of today's globalized cultural industry.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from the exploratory theoretical study allow the authors to assert that, in terms of vocational training, the above arguments have a direct impact on competent graduates, but also help them become more committed and reflective citizens, to understand the world around them, to be empathetic and to make sense of the different ways in which sociocultural reality is constructed, assumed and transformed.

The conscious, planned and systemic integration of aesthetic training for the development of critical thinking skills in university students of the Bachelor's Degree in GSPD will allow them to establish sensitive relationships with the social context, art and the community, achieving aesthetic solutions to professional problems.

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The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

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