

Elaboration of reflective essays as an analytical tool in the context of Medical Sociology.

Araya-Galleguillos, Fabián^[0000-0002-8823-9512] and Arancibia, Gerardo^{1[0009-0004-2118-6614]}

¹ Departamento de Medicina, Universidad de Atacama

Summary. Medical Sociology is a subject that provides a complementary vision to the training of the medical professional in the face of the sociocultural challenges that cross the health-disease duality. In Chile, there is an important tradition of incorporating social currents in clinical careers such as medicine. In the case of the Medicine career of the Universidad de Atacama, its graduate profile expresses the training from the biopsychosocial approach, with critical, humanistic and social thinking, aspects in which the subject of Medical Sociology contributes.

In this sense, a widely used tool in humanistic subjects is the writing of reflective essays, which allow students to apply sociological concepts to their own medical discipline. Here we present the experience of reflective essay writing in the context of a predominantly clinical career.

Key words: social sciences, medicine, learning strategy, health

1 Introduction

"Everything is social in medicine: diagnosis, treatment, the medical act itself" Belmar, R.

The discussion on the importance of incorporating social sciences in medical schools in Chile has been going on since 1960 at the First Seminar on Professional Training at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile. Even some doctors were already calling medicine as a social, biological and psychological science and that the student should *"sociologically study the hospital and the office as an organic being, to understand, analyze and evaluate it"* (Gaete, Jorge, 2012, p. 2).

In this sense, Medical Sociology is a discipline that studies the involvement of social groups and their behavior regarding health and disease. In the case of Medicine at the Universidad de Atacama, it is incorporated in its curriculum by competencies to strengthen the humanistic approach and complement the biopsychosocial model declared in its graduate profile.

Given the above, during this course the student has been proposed the elaboration of a reflection essay in which he/she progressively incorporates different concepts approached throughout the classes, which serves as input to generate a personal, well-

founded and critical position in front of certain health problems. The exercise ends with the delivery of the essay and a brief presentation of its most important elements in plenary sessions that allow them to socialize their experiences both in the writing of the essay and its conclusions.

The purpose of this proposal is to make known the experience of the process of elaboration of reflective essays as an analytical tool in the context of Medical Sociology, which has allowed to culminate in the elaboration of a text, also contributing to the link with the environment of the Educational Unit.

2 Theoretical Framework

The writing of an academic essay is a learning tool for the training of university students, in terms of the development of argumentative skills as well as in the development of effective written expression competencies (Rayas & Méndez, 2017).

Medical Sociology provides analytical tools for a better understanding of medical dynamics, with the aim of representing medicine in its work beyond the curative, but also requires a comprehensive view of the patient, for which the physician must have the hard skills to remedy the problems based on the social determinants of health (Parada, Romero & Moraga, 2015).

The mission of the physician of today and tomorrow is focused on working in primary health care (PHC), however, the day-to-day training of students is centered and covers biological focuses, where the largest entity is the specialist physician, which has little preventive approach to non-biological aspects, therefore, it is necessary to train humanistic and social thinking (Suárez, 2012), beyond what is described in the graduate profile of the career, but to be a reality within the same (Parada, Romero & Moraga, 2015).

The experience of writing an essay is presented with varied evidence in Latin American universities (Castro & Sánchez, 2013) and the idea of editing an academic text with the essay-like reflections of students follows a theoretical-pedagogical perspective in order to make university students academically literate (Moyano, Estela, 2004).

3 Method

The methodology to be used consists of a participatory process, in the first place, the student must choose a topic to be covered, which is related to medical practice, for which he/she has complete freedom.

After that, and with a constant accompaniment of the teacher, the student or students must elaborate their essay, developing their reflective ideas on the chosen social theme, going through revisions by the teacher and assistants of the subject.

Once the writing is finished, a plenary session is held, where the students must present a summary of their writing to their peers, with the purpose of generating debate and finding opinions both complementary and opposing to their position, within the framework of respect and tolerance.

4 Results

The experience of the essay in the teaching-learning process of medical students has been implemented for the third consecutive year during which it is evident that at the end of the course (during open discussions and debates) students have greater skills and abilities in thinking and dealing with social issues that affect health.

In the same way, a greater development of critical thinking is demonstrated, in areas not previously worked in the career, complementing the social, humanistic and holistic teaching that we seek to deliver to the students.

The students' feedback regarding the activity and the subject refers to the importance of understanding aspects that they experience in their first clinical practices that they develop in parallel. It allows them to visualize in greater depth the problems of medical practice.

To date there is a compilation text that was edited during 2022 and published during 2023; to reinforce the interest of the student body in participating with the writing of quality essays, it is expected to be edited every 2 or 3 years.



Fig. 1. Cover of the edited text with the compilation of essays written by students.

5 Discussion

It has been evidenced in the development of essay writing in the three previous generations that have taken the subject, the awakening of interest in the application of the sociological look in the dichotomy of health/disease, allowing a tool in the integration of the biopsychosocial model in the method that from student medicine is practiced.

The level of the reflections embodied in the edition of the compilation text indicate the quality of the students' written expression, which is in line with what Rayas & Méndez (2017) mentioned regarding students seeing essays as writings that combined autonomous learning, application of theories or subjective concepts in practical and objective experiences.

6 Conclusions

The elaboration of texts that expose the student's opinion, and that forces him to face both the search for problems, as well as to look at it from an angle that is not the usual (biomedical), provides him with tools that are expected to be useful in the development of his future work.

There is concordance between what is expressed in the evidence regarding the writing of essays to deepen critical thinking with the experience presented. On the other hand, it is expected that the development of this activity will provide tools in the development of soft skills, useful not only in academic aspects, but also in the future professional and personal life, relevant aspects in the training of integral physicians.

7 Limitations and Future Research

One of the major limitations faced by this activity is to awaken interest in humanistic and social aspects. Despite the above, it became evident that once students can identify a social problem that impacts on the health care system, curiosity is awakened in the research of social and humanistic sources, to be incorporated into medical knowledge.

It is recommended that research with mixed methodologies be conducted to better demonstrate the impact of this learning experience on the students' education.

8 References

- Castro, M. C., & Sánchez, M. (2013). La expresión de opinión en textos académicos escritos por estudiantes universitarios. *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, 18(57), 483-506.

- Gaete, Jorge. (2012). Ciencias Sociales y Medicina: 40 años después. *Revista Chilena de Salud Pública*, 16(1), 47-57.
- Parada, M., Romero, M. I., & Moraga, F. (2015). Perfiles de egreso de las carreras de Medicina en Chile. *Revista médica de Chile*, 143(4), 512-519. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0034-98872015000400014>
- Moyano, Estela. (2004). La escritura académica: Una tarea interdisciplinaria a lo largo del curriculum universitario. *Revista Texturas*, 4(4).
- Rayas, L., & Méndez, A. M. (2017). Los estudiantes universitarios ante la escritura del ensayo académico: Dificultades y posibilidades. *Innovación Educativa*, 17.
- Suárez Cuba, Miguel Ángel. (2012). MEDICINA CENTRADA EN EL PACIENTE. *Revista Médica La Paz*, 18(1), 67-72. Recuperado en 10 de julio de 2023, de http://www.scielo.org.bo/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1726-89582012000100011&lng=es&tlng=es.