

## **Some reflections and a methodological proposal for the realization of doctoral dissertation workshops**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article deals with a problem related to doctoral training, the thesis workshops, which is an expression of the project Management of professional capacities for doctoral and postdoctoral preparation at the University of Guantánamo. Its objective is to offer some methodological recommendations to the coordinators of thesis workshops about their essential peculiarities, in order to improve the quality of the orientations and observations made. Among the methods applied were: analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, participant observation, analysis of the product of the activity and interview. The proposal improves the work of guidance to doctoral students by the coordinators and other participating members.

**Keywords:** Thesis Workshops; Recommendations; Methodological, Doctoral Students.

### **Introduction**

In the process of doctoral training, the development of research skills is decisive, for this reason it is necessary to take advantage of all the spaces that are created for the achievement of this purpose; hence the thesis workshops are of great value for the

systematization of the different actions that are part of the structure of such skills. According to Gonzalez and Castillo (2020, p.1), the strengthening of the preparation of doctors in Cuba is an urgent need that requires changes and transformations that take into account national and international experiences.

The materialization of the above purpose requires profound changes in all senses, based on the agreements made by the National Commission of Scientific Degrees, the permanent tribunals and the directions of the different institutions authorized for doctoral training. In the opinion of the authors of this work, the most important are the changes that must occur in the way of thinking of the members of the teaching staff responsible for the training process in each of the responsible institutions.

It is imminent the use of new methods and ways of conducting the learning of future doctors, so that there is correspondence between the training process and the characteristics of the new times.

Regardless of the fact that the thesis workshops can be organized in the different learning spaces for doctoral training, for the interests of the present work, the clarifications that are made will be directed to those that are planned and directed by the doctoral committee, which have as a fundamental purpose the evaluation of the research process carried out by the doctoral students.

The aim of this article is to offer some reflections and methodological recommendations to the coordinators of thesis workshops about their essential peculiarities, in order to raise the quality of the orientations and observations made in the professional exercise of thesis workshop.

The previous purpose is conceived on the basis of the difficulties that the authors of the present work have verified in their professional performance as coordinators, properly speaking, tutors and specialist teachers in different thematic areas for several years. Among the methods applied were: analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction, participant observation, analysis of the product of the activity and interview. The proposal improves the orientation work of the coordinators and other participating members to the doctoral students.

## **Development**

The pedagogy of this level of education must overcome the erroneous assumption of assuming that candidates, and in these times, doctoral candidates, "already and always" are autonomous scholars at the beginning of their application (Johnson, Lee and Green 2000) cited by Gonzalez and Castillo (2020).

Hence the need for the realization of a new vision towards the direction of the realization of thesis workshops, as one of the essential activities in the formative process for obtaining the scientific degree for the sake of satisfying the social need that is presented.

It is necessary that we think carefully once again about everything that has happened in our own training process as doctors, and very importantly, in the time in which it took place. Even without ignoring the existing level of demand for obtaining the degree, it would not be fair to continue thinking that the doctoral student must overcome the same barriers that we crossed to achieve his or her objective.

It is necessary to adapt to the current context. For this reason, the workshop must become a true learning space in which the fulfillment of the functions of the training process are manifested: educational, instructive and developmental. Many times we want to strengthen the instructive one to the detriment of the others; very far from a true pedagogical and didactic conception, which satisfies the demands required by today's professional.

Regarding the workshop, the Postgraduate Regulations (Cuba, 2019), defines it as a form of secondary organization within the professional improvement. The thesis workshop can be considered as the action that mediates between all the research tasks, which lead to the final result. According to Hernández, et al (2009) the thesis workshop: It is a particular type of scientific-pedagogical activity proper to the training process of the doctoral student, directed by a scientific work body in order to develop and check the achievement of the necessary skills for the successful oral presentation of the essential aspects of the research activity carried out and its defense with the appropriate support of means and an adequate scientific vocabulary. (p. 9)

In the particular case of the present research, the workshop is assumed as a general method, Matos, 2005. This makes us see that the purpose of the thesis workshop is the verification and at the same time the contribution to the development of the research skills that make possible the construction of the doctoral thesis and its presentation in parts or integrated in a leading manner before a group of specialists, who offer the most

appropriate recommendations and ways, based on the research logic followed by the doctoral student for the improvement of the thesis.

The thesis workshop requires an adequate preparation of the doctoral student where he/she can show in oral and written form the results achieved in his/her research, which makes possible a positive evaluation of his/her performance; which in each case should be shown as a reliable proof of the resources used in all the actions undertaken for the realization of the corresponding task.

The success of the workshops will also depend on the self-preparation carried out by the coordinators and other members participating in the workshops, on the part of the thesis or dissertation to be presented. Only in this way will it be possible to issue critical evaluations with their corresponding proposals in each of the cases; otherwise, the interventions will not fulfill the objective for which the activity was conceived. It is of great value to consider the requirements for the activity to have formative and developmental value.

It is very important to emphasize the role of the methodological and scientific-methodological teaching work in the preparation process of the program's faculty, it constitutes a way to achieve some homogeneity of the theoretical and practical conceptions, that is to say, of the research methodology that is applied; so that it can be consistent with the presentation made by the doctoral student and the guidance received by each of the doctors participating in the workshop. This will contribute greatly to achieve the development of research competencies, qualities, skills and values that the doctoral student should possess at the end of the training process, so that the correspondence with Article 35 of Resolution NO.3 / (2020) is achieved:

- a. Obtaining original scientific results in an independent manner that will allow him/her to defend the scientific degree for which he/she opts.
- b. Mastery and adequate use of the updated scientific literature of the doctoral topic and ability to critically analyze it with own criteria.
- c. Selection of appropriate methods to develop their research.
- d. Clear, coherent, logical and concise exposition of the results of their work in oral and written form (p.11).

In the research process, a diagnosis was made. The sample was conformed by the study of 32 thesis workshops (presentation of research designs, chapters 1, 2 and 3 respectively) developed between 2019 and 2022 in the universities of Oriente, Guantánamo, Holguín, Enrique José Varona Pedagogical University and the Central

Institute of Pedagogical Sciences; the 32 participating doctoral students were also included.

The participant observations made to the thesis workshops made possible the detection of insufficiencies that affect the process of doctoral training, since in them it is still appreciated, theoretical positions that do not always correspond to the current demands posed by this level of education. Dissertations are made by some professors that are far from the problems being analyzed; changes are suggested in the thesis, regardless of the logic followed by the researcher. A logical order is not always used in the critical evaluations made and in many cases they are of a general nature.

Individual wisdom is continuously displayed. It seems to many that we are not in a thesis workshop, but in the presence of a postdoctoral improvement activity, which means that the doctoral student does not perceive with all the necessary clarity the observations and orientations that we are trying to offer him/her.

The analysis of the product of the activity, in this case, the research designs presented by the 28 doctoral students, somehow adjust to the requirements established by the research methodology followed by them; only 5 of them (17%) require the revision of the wording of some of their components to achieve a better relationship between them. On the other hand, 100% of them have an adequate foundation of the problem under investigation, in addition to the fact that in the course of the research process, it is logical that it can continue to be improved.

Likewise, in the designs reviewed, in the problem foundation, the consultation of updated literature is perceived, although in 18 (64%) of them the existence of works in foreign language is insufficient.

In the case of scientific novelty, practical significance and contribution to the theory, in 32 (100 %) of the designs they are conceived and in some way they are all linked to the problem, the objective and the proposed solution offered, although even in the course of the process they can be improved, only in 9 of these the need for reflection is noted to gain greater precision in each case, specifically in the novelty and contribution to the theory, which seems to be almost the same.

With respect to the proposal for the solution of the scientific problem, 26 (92%) designs fully correspond to the problem and the stated objective, only 2 require better clarity with respect to the didactic and/or educational elements stated.

In the interview conducted with the 32 doctoral students, it was found that 100% recognize the value of the activity, since according to them it makes possible the

exchange of opinions regarding the subject in question; however, 18 (64%) agree that recommendations and orientations are offered that do not correspond to the logic they have taken into account for the solution of the problem, they affirm "it seems that they did not read the report".

Regarding the way of making the signals and/or changes in the thesis, 24 (85%) express that it is not always adequate, since forms and ways are used that do not favor the exchange, on the contrary, fear, so it is difficult for them to ask about the doubt that has arisen at that moment. The same percentage stated that their tutors disagreed with many of the points made.

The same percentage expressed that "it seems that everything they have done has no value". Those of us who are already educated know how important it is for us to receive a message of encouragement at this difficult time.

Without "losing the tenderness", as Turner and Pita (2002) put it, it is important to point out the errors and offer suggestions, observations and whatever we consider necessary to improve the work presented, as well as to use the method of persuasion, so necessary and important in these times, to contribute to the success of the doctoral training process and, in fact, to the development of society.

As can be seen, regardless of the efforts made by national directors to organize a formative process at this level of education that is characterized by being centered on research, essential and flexible, it still requires new visions to achieve such an enormous purpose.

It is essential to learn to help each other, to be attentive to what students need to communicate, to value what can be contributed by all, to have full confidence in their potential and to always remember that with trust, respect, effort and love, everyone will be able to achieve their goal. Turner and Pita (2002)

The aim is to develop research competence in doctoral students so that they can present a thesis that is as complete as possible and that responds to the current demands and scientific canons in the area of education and pedagogy. It is understood that this scientific competence is according to Matos et al (2021):

The systemic integration of knowledge-skills-modes of action, values, and procedures that allow the educational researcher to perform the tasks of the research process in education, which are necessary to promote a change from the initial state to the desired state in the educational reality according to the social and educational needs,

personalized in the contexts of action (society-school-family-community) where the educator works. (p. 16).

In the development of the workshop, taking into account the objective of its execution, either for the presentation of the design or the chapters of the thesis, it is important to pay attention to the elements detailed below, not because they are unknown to anyone, on the contrary, but because of the need for their accurate assessment but from the logic followed by the doctoral student and his tutor or tutors in the research process carried out, these are:

1. Theoretical-methodological design
2. State of the art
3. Results of the diagnosis of the initial state of the object
4. Proposed solution to the scientific problem
5. Validation of the results

Some methodological recommendations for the analysis of different parts of the thesis are presented below, as a reminder of significant aspects that should not be overlooked during the execution of the workshop, so that the doctoral student can be offered sufficient, necessary and adequate guidance, based on the logic followed by him/her, to enable him/her to undertake the improvement of his/her work.

The fundamental purpose of the introduction is to present in a complete but succinct manner the information on the research process that is being undertaken, it should reflect, among other elements, the following:

- Lack of science to solve certain dissatisfaction present in the educational reality, which affects the fulfillment of the social demand.
- If it is determined by direct means: observation, or indirect: revision of documents, recommendations of other theses, study of scientific literature, consultation to specialists or others of scientific nature.
- If they are formulated in terms that characterize the deficiencies or dissatisfactions detected in reality and not the causes that originate them. They are descriptive in nature.
- If the source or the procedures that allowed the formulation of the determined problematic situations are expressed.
- The practical reality is made to coincide with the investigative reality.

The conformation of Chapter I, in a general way, will gather:

- The philosophical position adopted, the aspects assumed from the reference theories, the categorial system used (from the analysis of the proposals of preceding authors), the positions of the doctoral student (through the exercise of scientific criticism) and the methodological procedures with the main actions leading to the decision taken, duly argued.
- The theoretical framework reveals the consultation of various bibliographical sources, both from the geographical and historical point of view, variety of languages and types of sources. The level of actuality of these sources and the presence of the bibliography of the author's country and of the institution that executes the program will be taken into account. But above all the theories that are assumed and those that collide in the subject being worked on, with a wide geographical spectrum and the enhancement of the actuality of the theses consulted, for the last five years.
- It reflects the author's ethics and honesty when quoting ideas from other authors and criticizing them, and assuming theoretical positions.

**Epigraph. Historical development:**

- Reflects the genesis, evolution and historical actuality of the object under investigation from an adequate philosophical position, and updated that is, dialectical materialist.
- It makes a logical, chronological, analytical and comparative study, if necessary, of the emergence and evolution of the field of action in the object of study and determines its most significant features, the main milestones and evaluates its object in a casuistic way.
- It reflects from a critical and creative personological position, in the theoretical-methodological aspect of the problems totally or partially solved, and specifies the aspects still to be solved in its object of study.

The previous ideas are expanded in the different epigraphs that could form part of the chapters according to the organization of the thesis:

**Epigraph. Theoretical references:**

- It systematizes and deepens in the historical-logical development that has had the scientific knowledge already established by the sciences of education that have studied the object addressed by the thesis.



- It describes the object as a system: its components, internal and external relations, structure and functioning.
- It reveals the significance of the field of action as one of the essential subsystems of the object of study.
- It declares the critical position of the doctoral student, in which the philosophical position of each of the authors consulted, is evaluated from the conception professed and solidly argues this position.
- It determines the system of concepts, categories, principles, laws and theories assumed, which support or were taken into account as references to explain the functioning of the object as a system from all the required points of view: philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, among others.
- Demonstrates the scientificity of the theoretical positions assumed and declared through the rigor, precision and accuracy with which they are raised, valued and argued in function of revealing the importance and possibilities of reaching the objective of the research linked to pedagogical and educational sciences.
- It maintains ethics by critically assessing the educational practice, the theoretical-methodological contributions and the official regulations, without losing the perspective that each of the steps taken by other researchers in the evolution of the process under study, has contributed to be able to advance one step further in the set of sciences in which the thesis is defended.
- To consider the philosophical position of the authors consulted, the date of publication of the source, as well as the historical moment in which each assumed reference was elaborated and the use of foreign language literature.
- Critically evaluate the conditions of the educational practice of the authors and researchers consulted.

**Epigraph: Exploration of the reality or factual study: initial diagnostic study.**

- It starts from the identification of the problematic situation, it has a moment of deepening, after carrying out the first theoretical studies that bring the researcher closer to the characterization of the desired state and to the knowledge of the possible causes or factors of the identified problems.
- The study variables, the dependent and independent variables are determined in correspondence with the problem, object, field and objective.

- The study variable is operationalized in dimensions and indicators with their parameterization, which express the main qualities of the object and guide the types of techniques, instruments and procedures for data collection, recording, processing, organization and interpretation, and drawing conclusions.
- The indicators used at this stage may or may not correspond to those used for the study of the object's background. They may even surpass them because they enter the educational reality.
- The research instruments to be used must have the required degree of reliability based on the use of a pilot test for their adjustment. They take into account the indicators assumed, as well as the methodological requirements of selection, elaboration, processing and interpretation. .
- The results of the diagnostic study are communicated in an appropriate manner. That is to say, a general report is elaborated giving support to the data with a critical interpretation and in a logical way of each one of the indicators and dimensions to the variable to reach conclusions of how its initial state is.
- In order to achieve objectivity in the exploration, according to Valle (2012, p. 44), "the diagnosis acquires much more complex dimensions because it involves investigating problems as difficult as those related to the formation of the personality of students or the stages of professional development of teachers" (Valle, 2012, p. 44).

## **Chapter II**

Construction of the scientific result. Main contribution of the thesis

- Correct selection and determination of the scientific result to be achieved or forms of their output (model, strategy, program, theoretical-methodological conception, system, methodology, alternative, system of indicators, profile, among others) of its characteristics, components, relations and structure, including its trafication if necessary.
- The adoption of the result is conscious and duly justified based on the results of the diagnosis, the theoretical references assumed and the objectives and scope of the research.
- Demonstration of the mastery of the result and of the creativity shown in its elaboration and substantiation.

### **Item Basis of the proposal**

- The theoretical foundations of the result (definitions that have not yet been stated because they are intrinsic to the result) and the characteristics, principles, relationships or other attributes that differentiate it from any other of a similar nature and give it identity may be stated.

### **Proposed solution heading**

- The result is presented in detail and an exhaustive analysis is made of the relationships between its components and other theoretical interpretations. This is fundamental in determining the contribution to the theory.
- The very essence of the result is placed in the corpus, under no circumstances in annexes.

### **Validation of the proposal**

- The validation of the scientific result or contribution implemented in the educational practice is carried out using, among others: the expert's criterion, the user's criterion, and the different modalities of introduction in practice, differentiated among them by the degree of rigor in the control of the variables. The latter procedures will have the name of the authors that are assumed as a reference. If the qualitative methodology is used, the methodology followed in the introduction into practice and the results obtained are made explicit in the same way.
- It is acceptable to validate the results by the expert judgment method, complemented by some other means of verification (pre-experiment, quasi-experiment or experiment). It is required to use some form of intervention in practice, complemented by one or more other forms of validation. It may include triangulation as a way of analyzing the results obtained with the introduction in educational practice.

### **Conclusions:**

- They are a reflection of the fundamental approaches made, as well as the new scientific reflections that the doctoral student has arrived at.

- They should be linked in one way or another to the objective and scientific tasks carried out to demonstrate the transition from the initial state to the desired state.

### **Recommendations:**

- They point towards research lines to be developed in the future, if future studies related to the results obtained are proposed, as well as possible avenues of inquiry and/or considerations for the continuation of the research.

### **Bibliography:**

- If it conforms to one of the established norms, both in the bibliography and in the form of citation throughout the research report. Likewise, if the same are used for the realization of a critical analysis and with autonomy, which shows mastery and adequate use of the most updated literature related to the subject of the research, in relation to the current problems of Pedagogy and Didactics.
- To value that many schools work with the updated version of the APA norms because it is very convenient and it is also the norm required by the vast majority of scientific journals in the world. However, we assume the one required by the regulations of the school where the thesis is defended.

### **Annexes**

If they are necessary and sufficient, if they are referred to in the body of the report, respecting the numerical order given for a better understanding of the study carried out. Only those that really complete the information of the thesis corpus.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis made about the behavior of the thesis workshops and the methodological recommendations offered contribute to ensure that both the coordinators and the other participating members raise the quality of the orientations and observations they make, adjusting them to the research process followed, with the purpose that the doctoral student presents with the required quality, in a staggered manner, each of the chapters

endorsed by the tutor or tutors. This will contribute to the success of the pre-defense act and of the research in general.