Honors Thesis Proposal

for

The Importance of Education from a Global Perspective: Teaching Don Quixote in the 21st Century

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This study examines the importance and significance of education from a global perspective using a 17th century text, Don Quixote as part of the teachings in the 21st century classroom, and it will explore pragmatic approaches that may be applied to a new generation of scholars and students. The objective of this study is to concentrate on the topic of education in the Cervantine works. Don Quixote’s education is well reflected through his adventures and has many teachings within the text that can be related to the 21st century. In order to fulfill this objective, the following exegesis will take into consideration specific episodes of Don Quixote of La Mancha and it will delve into the following questions: How do specific episodes reflect how education influences those surrounded by Don Quixote? How do Don Quixote and his squire Sancho have a continuous learning of ideal versus real? How are Don Quixote’s values reflected in the 21st Century? How has the story of Don Quixote of La Mancha impacted the 21st Century’s education? In order to answer these questions, this study will include theological aspects of the period in time and its historical and social context. The view of education of Don Quixote’s teachings affects audiences of all different ages, from children to adults. In today’s educational system, even though it is a modern world and there is so much information and efficient models in place, there are still areas that may be considered for assessment and consideration and for motivational reading and teaching. The importance of education is reflected in an effective and practical way throughout the story of Don Quixote of La Mancha.

The story of Don Quixote of La Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra is about a man educated by the books of chivalry and the Bible. After reading the books of chivalry and the
Bible, Don Quixote, who was a *hidalgo*, then decides that his career will be of a knight. He goes on a search of Sancho Panza to make him his squire. The importance of education is reflected in an effective and practical way throughout the story of *Don Quixote of La Mancha* in his adventures.

In his adventures, Don Quixote and Sancho learn about what is ideal vs. what is real. Don Quixote teaches Sancho about what is ideal, since, for Don Quixote, life was better during the medieval and chivalry times. The code of conduct is a great example, because during this era, 17th Century Spain, the values had changed. Don Quixote teaches Sancho about the books of chivalry, of how to become a knight and how to be a squire. Sancho teaches Don Quixote about what is real, the simplicity of life and of how things have changed from medieval to the baroque times; because there was not a formal education in place or lack of an educational system, which may provide a complete formation. During his adventures, both Don Quixote and Sancho, were able to learn much about themselves. The change of values was a reality, society’s vision had changed, and the focus of life was centered on the individual’s contribution.

In chapter 16th of the second part: “Of what happened to Don Quixote with a discreet knight of La Mancha”, Don Quixote has the opportunity to advise Don Diego. Don Diego tells Don Quixote that he is preoccupied for his son, because his son’s only interests are about poetry and not about the sciences. Don Quixote tells Don Diego “The sons, sir, are pieces of the hearts of their parents, and like that they should be loved, as good or bad that they are, like how souls are loved and give us life” (532). Don Quixote also adds:

And about the forcing them to study this or that science I do not have for certain, although the persuading should be harmless. And when there is no studying taking place for bread making money, the student being so venturous, that heaven gave him parents let
him keep them, I think that he should follow that science that he may find to his liking, and even though poetry is less suitable, is not of those that usually dishonor those that know it. (532)

Don Quixote advises Don Diego based on his career as a student. He does not advise him on how to be a father, on the contrary, the knight only speaks about his expertise of being a student. Don Quixote also has the opportunity of educating Don Diego about what poetry is and he tells him:

Poetry, nobleman, to my knowing, is like a dame tender and of low age and in all extremes beautiful, to whom is cautious to enrich, polish and decorate other many dames, that are all the other, sciences, and she is of serving all and all have to approve with her. But this dame does not want to be mishandled, nor taken through the streets, nor published at the corners of the town squares nor corners of palaces. She is made of alchemy of such virtue, which who knows how to treat her will turn it on pure gold of inestimable price. It is not to be tried by the buffoons, nor by the ignorant mob, incapable of knowing nor estimating the treasures that are enclosed within her. (532)

With this rhetorical description, Don Quixote explains that poetry is pure and of great value especially in the hands of the right person.

Education is one of the most potent tools of humanity. With only knowing the past, the present can be fixed and the future can be bettered. The critic James March speaks about the human development and mentions:

Quixote reminds us that if we trust only when trust is warranted, love only when love is returned, learn only when learning is valuable, we abandon an essential
feature of our humanness our willingness to act in the name of a conception of ourselves regardless of its consequences. (205-206)

March explains the symbolism of Don Quixote as character in depth. One of the most valuable privileges of being human is doing things without expecting anything in return. Another example that March mentions can be found in chapter 25 of the first part, when Cervantes mentions, “The turning crazy of a knight with cause nor grade nor thanks. The touch is in a destiny without occasion.” (206), which symbolize the implications of the religion as part of the society of this time that of helping your neighbor without expecting something in return, as is stated in the Bible “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3). This is what altruism is all about.

March also focuses in the value of the academic institution. He speaks about the university and all its qualities, benefits, and contributions. March mentions:

A university is only incidentally a market. It is more essentially a temple, a temple dedicated to knowledge and a human spirit of inquiry. It is a place where learning and scholarship are revered, not primarily for what they contribute to personal or social well-being but for the vision of humanity that they symbolize, sustain, and pass on. Soren Kierkegaard said that any religion that could be justified by its consequences was hardly a religion. We can say a similar thing about university education and scholarship. They only become truly worthy of their names when they are embraced as arbitrary matters of faith, not as matters of usefulness. Higher education is a vision, not a calculation. It is a commitment, not
a choice. Students are not costumers; they are acolytes. Teaching is not a job; it is a sacrament. Research is not an investment; it is a testament. (206)

The education should not be looked at as an investment or just an option, but instead as a vision and compromise for a better future. It is clear to see a great difference between a student and a consumer. A student can be described with positive qualities such as being honest, responsible, and studious; on the other hand, a consumer may be described with not so many positive qualities such as demanding and uninformed. The student knows how to achieve goals and knows that to obtain results it requires time, honesty, effort, work, and patience. At the same time the consumer, expects to obtain results fast, without effort and is not interested on how these results should be obtained through a process. It is interesting to notice that in this modern world of the 21st century expectations are somewhat similar, however, the institution of education maintains its rules and the values have not faded away. The methods have been modernized, but the values remain the same. Education provides a complete set of matters, subjects, and core values, which prepare students to succeed in both Humanities & Sciences.

Don Quixote is a symbolic character, whom during his adventures from place to place finds himself in different situations and always reflects clearly his values of honor, faith and education. Don Quixote is a universal allegory and because of that, his story is presented to children in Europe starting from elementary school. In the article by Leo Spitzer, he mentions:

If the child follows well the lesson he has learned in this book, he will, later in life, adapt his own will power to criticism, and be able to understand reality, without despising too much imaginative type of man who is a failure dealing with life, and without sympathizing too readily with the so-called “successful realist” who knows only the laws of mechanics and of behaviorism. (128)
In Europe the difference in the culture is clearly shown since the children at an early age start learning about major works of literature that have a great impact in the cultural society. The children learn how to analyze the past, live the present and plan their future. They learn more about life through literature and they tend to be open minded. If this model of education could be integrated in the United States, especially in Florida, a large majority of the students would be more focused in their education and well-rounded formation. All cultures are different, but by learning about works of literature like this one the education tends to have more value than the economical investment itself. This is why society should invest resources more in education for its fundamental value and that way the younger generations can embrace their studies as part of their life. Leo Spitzer mentions in his article about Don Quixote:

The greatest works of art have, indeed the power, after making us see the most unexpected perspectives, of restoring, to the renewed world, that primeval simplicity and richness which it must have had on the first day of creation, that inner beatitude of self-enjoying beauty that is as well God-like as child-like. (128)

Spitzer’s opinion shows that in order to appreciate a work of art, one has to see the magic, and the marvelous things that are God-like and child-like. Not all the works of art have to have a purpose from the beginning, one has to rest the mind, and imagine the marvelous things of life, in order to be able to appreciate the work of art. Spitzer appreciates Cervantes’s Don Quixote of La Mancha as a work of art, which can symbolize the beauty of life and God’s creation. In the iconography of Don Quixote in visual art can show that there are different levels of education that can be identified in Don Quixote’s adventures. In this same article of iconography it is mentioned that; “the images constitute of a fundamental chapter in the human communication and establishes a rich and complex language such as the written and the oral” (2).
In the story of Don Quixote, Dorotea is presented as an educated woman. She is a strong and prepared young lady, whom Martha García on her study describes her persona and personality the following way: "Her physical attributes were not significant, but her use of reason was not omitted, her intellect of her own domain, qualities that were stereotyped and magnified in male characters" (70). Cervantes presents Dorotea as a beautiful and an educated woman; nevertheless physical attributes are not as important as her intellect. This is another example of how education is reflected in the story of Don Quixote of La Mancha.

In conclusion, the story of Don Quixote of La Mancha is important for children, young people and for adults, because it conveys many teachings and lessons that can be connected to many situations in today’s world of the 21st century. It is part of the nature of human being’s to have a vision to achieve goals. To illustrate this point we may think about the biggest innovations of the past 20th Century, walking on the moon, Internet, concord planes, even though they could be seen unreachable. With faith and hard work and determination they could be achieved, but also the education forms part of this equation in order to reach the impossible. Even though there is so much information about education and literature and-verry solid models to observe, there are still aspects of teaching and learning that deserve attention and consideration in the United States of America, a country open to innovations and constant evolvement. The significance of education is an artistic and efficient platform throughout the story of Don Quixote of La Mancha.
Works Cited


