

The UNESCO Concept of Heritage and Teaching of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy in the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznan

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SUMMARY

This article points to the possibility of the creative use of the UNESCO concept of heritage in the teaching of the history of medicine and pharmacy. This enriching teaching concept is of great importance, with 2002 being proclaimed the UNESCO Year for Cultural Heritage. The article discusses long-term experiences gathered at the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poland.

RESUME

Cet article montre la possibilité de l'application créatrice de la conception de l'UNESCO pour le patrimoine culturel dans l'enseignement de l'histoire de la médecine et de celle de la pharmacie. Cette conception a une grande importance étant donné que l'année 2002 a été proclamée L'Année des Nations Unies pour le Patrimoine Culturel. L'article parle des expériences qui ont été réalisées dans l'Académie de la Médecine Karol Marcinkowski en Pologne.

'A man of to-day lives by making use of dodges, by means of which he deceives himself pretending to believe that the world surrounding him is very simple and feasible to an arbitrary description. Nevertheless, his real consciousness forces him to confirm that the real world, corresponding to the whole present time reality, is extremely complex, and challenging. However, he is afraid, as an ordinary man of to-day is very weak, in spite of his blustering gestures. He is afraid of opening to his real world that would require much from him (...)

Therefore, a historical meaning is to be attributed to reintroduction to the University its basic tasks, that is the enlightening of a man, implanting the full culture of the current epoch into him, a bright and accurate disclosure with its whole magnitude of the contemporary world, the world in which the life should first become rooted in order to achieve full authenticity.'

The tasks of universities, as described by Jose Ortega y Gasset many years ago, were still relevant in 2002, the year proclaimed as United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. The mission, derived from the Middle Ages, when university education was limited to the teaching of a profession, aimed at transferring ideas which enabled an understanding of the world, i.e. philosophical and theological knowledge, rhetoric, arts, etc. Contemporary university education is distinguished by an opposite approach to the medieval one, as it is predominated by specialist professional teaching, while its cultural aspects remain only indirect. However, it is culture, inclusive of the consciousness of a common heritage, that provides conditions for the rooting of a man in his time and allows full development of his personality.

However, the area of common heritage is complicated and includes material and non-material culture, as well as

resources of natural environment. Therefore, definition of the heritage variety within the framework of university education is a difficult task requiring appropriately differentiated conceptions.

Among detailed concepts, the Polish experiences in developing consciousness of the heritage within the framework of medical and pharmaceutical studies deserve particular attention. As an illustration I would like to present the example of the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznan in Poland.

Poland was one of the first countries where the history of medicine and the history of pharmacy were introduced as a compulsory item in the curriculum, appreciating the fundamental meaning of developing a consciousness of heritage in medical and pharmaceutical studies. This was done by 1920, with the original character of the proofs of material culture, fundamental to the history of medicine and pharmacy, contributing to the fact that teaching of the subject joined the values of transferring professional knowledge and presenting the cultural heritage.

The original concept, conceived many years ago by Wladyslaw Szumowski (1875-1954), in the interwar period, at the Polish school of History of Medicine, consisted of connecting the history of medicine with the history of philosophy and civilisation. Polish historians of pharmacy also applied this concept.

Development of consciousness of the heritage was one of the tasks of the Faculty of Medicine of the Poznan University initiated in 1920, as the Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine had been established as the first scientific entity. It extended and widened former traditions, creating a suitable climate that served as a basis for the activity of all the other

departments. It provided a climate of candidness and a tolerance for philosophy of life and political liberality, as the history of medicine and pharmacy was affected by achievements of different nations, religious beliefs, and political opinions. It should be emphasised that Prof. Adam Wrzosek (1875-1965), who took up the Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine, was at the same time the first organiser and Dean of the Poznan Faculty of Medicine.

The outbreak of World War II did not stop the development of medical and pharmaceutical studies in Poznan. Teaching students in a full range of pharmacy continued in secrecy, without interrupting tuition in the history of medicine and pharmacy. This occurred, however, in 1950, after separation of medical academies from the universities, formerly dealing with medical and pharmaceutical studies. These subjects had been considered as a sign of idealism, unnecessary in a materialistic philosophy of life.

Teaching of the history of medicine and pharmacy was only restored in 1957, when Poland underwent a political revival. It continues now although considerably reduced as compared to its beginnings. The former Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine became the Department of History of Medical Sciences, dealing up to the present time with tuition in an appropriate range with all specialisations in the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznan.

During lectures and seminars of the history of medicine and pharmacy the students become acquainted with monuments of material culture, visiting museums, examining slides or selected prints. Particularly valuable illustrative materials for teaching history of medicine and pharmacy are ancient pictures, drawings and old manuscripts. They enable the acquisition of knowledge in the range of the history of culture in an attractive manner. Lessons are held in part therefore, in the museum of the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences, where the objects and other archives are collected as evidence of its traditions. Lessons are also held in the Poznan Museum of Pharmacy, where students become acquainted with the artefacts of pharmaceutical history, as well as the Archaeological Museum, where they acquire knowledge of ancient medicine. Direct contact with the museum collections gives an idea of the dimension of the progress in civilisation and shows the need for careful protection of the cultural heritage.

In addition, students of the Pharmaceutical Faculty of the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences undertake a Master's thesis in the sphere of history of pharmacy. As an example, a project of 1995 might be

mentioned, entitled 'Pharmaceutical collections in the National Museums in Poznan'. The student was charged with becoming acquainted with the collections of the National Museum in Poznan and its departments with a view to separating the exhibits to give evidence of material culture related to medicine and pharmacy. The student made use of consultations with specialists in the history of arts, ethnography and archaeology, extending her professional knowledge by a wide understanding of cultural topics. She discovered, catalogued and made comments on many interesting but forgotten museum items related to medicine and pharmacy, which had been hidden in storerooms because of the lack of appropriate exhibition area.

The students' attitude to such an approach to the cultural heritage should be considered. Sometimes students are pessimistic as to whether the lessons develop practical medical skills; that only a humanistic aspect is necessary. However, such an opinion only appears at the beginning of the course. As lessons proceed, doubts disappear and the students show a growing positive and creative attitude. The students presenting selected problems at the seminars usually find some additional material among them, such as pharmaceutical equipment, ancient chronicles, photographs and books. Many presentations make use of the students' own slides or Power Point. One of the students has even developed a didactic game consisting of the organisation of the dates, scientific facts and related comments. The lessons are appreciated as interesting and necessary.

In summary, the UNESCO-inspired concept of putting forth awareness of our heritage through the history of medicine and pharmacy is worthy of notice. The idea connects, in a very interesting way, professional knowledge and consciousness of culture. In effect the conception appears to be a skilful realization of the mission of universities, outlined by J. O. Gasset, with reference to medical and pharmaceutical studies.

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