The cultivation of critical thinking through university tutoring: A new opportunity after Covid-19

El cultivo del pensamiento crítico a través de la tutoría universitaria: una nueva oportunidad tras la Covid-19

Francisco ESTEBAN BARA, PhD. Profesor Agregado. Universidad de Barcelona *(franciscoesteban@ub.edu)*.

M.ª Carmen CARO SAMADA, PhD. Associate Professor. Universidad Internacional de la Rioja *(carmen.caro@unir.net)*.

Abstract:

University tutoring is, with some exceptions, in a state that should concern us. The model in recent years is sporadic, optional meetings generally used to clarify doubts about academic content, solve problems with completing tasks, review assessment results, and find solutions for students' personal problems that affect their progress in modules. This model of tutoring may make it possible to resolve problems, but it is a limited and insubstantial version of what it could be. There is case for saying that its leitmotiv is university character education, principally what has come to be called the critical spirit or thinking. In addition, it seems that this is what the contemporary social and professional reality misses and demands: university graduates who think for themselves, always seek the truth of things, and focus on the common good. Covid-19, with all of the impact it has had for universities, especially ones that work face-to-face, offers a new opportunity for tutoring, an opportunity to re-establish it. The new situation has brought both a pedagogical-technological message and an ethical one. Both can re-establish tutoring as an ongoing, deep, and unending conversation that enriches other university situations and opens doors that lead to the best version of oneself. This work has a three-part objective: to present arguments that hold that the main purpose of tutoring is cultivation of the critical spirit or thinking; to identify obstacles raised some years ago and possibilities that the new situation brings; and, finally, to suggest a series of future-oriented conclusions so that our

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universities can give tutoring the place it deserves in line with their circumstances.

Keywords: tutoring, character education, critical thinking, university education, higher education.

Resumen:

La tutoría universitaria, salvo excepciones, ha adquirido un estado que debería preocuparnos. El canon de los últimos años es un encuentro puntual y optativo para, grosso modo, aclarar dudas sobre contenidos académicos, solucionar problemas con el cumplimiento de tareas, revisar resultados de evaluación y encontrar alternativas a vicisitudes personales de los estudiantes que condicionan el seguimiento de las asignaturas. Quizá esa tutoría permita salir del paso, pero es una versión reducida y desustanciada de lo que podría ser. Hay razones para afirmar que su *leitmotiv* es la educación del carácter universitario, principalmente, lo que ha venido a llamarse el espíritu o pensamiento críticos. Además, parece ser que eso es lo que se echa en falta y reclama la realidad social y profesional contemporánea: titulados universitarios que piensen por ellos mismos, buscando siempre la verdad de las cosas y con la mirada centrada en el bien común. La Covid-19, por todo lo que ha significado para las universidades, especialmente las llamadas presenciales, ofrece una nueva oportunidad para la tutoría, una ocasión para su restablecimiento. La nueva realidad ha traído un mensaje pedagógico-tecnológico y otro ético. Ambos pueden recuperar la tutoría en tanto que conversación constante, profunda e inacabable que enriquezca otras situaciones universitarias y que abra puertas que conduzcan a la mejor versión de uno mismo. Este trabajo persigue un triple objetivo: presentar razones que sustentan que la tutoría está principalmente para el cultivo del espíritu o pensamiento críticos; identificar obstáculos levantados hace años y posibilidades que trae la nueva realidad; y, por último, elevar una serie de conclusiones en tono prospectivo para que nuestras universidades, según sean sus circunstancias, puedan situar a la tutoría en el lugar que merece estar.

Descriptores: tutoría, educación del carácter, pensamiento crítico, educación universitaria, educación superior.

1. Introduction

In the spring of 1983, the French philosopher of Algerian decent Jacques Derrida gave the inaugural address for the "Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large" chair at Cornell University (Ithaca, New York). He gave it the suggestive title of "The principle of reason: The university in the eyes of its pupils". This was a very profound lecture, and it was presented with the meticulousness and elegance typical of someone who lived and loved the university, who studied it conscientiously, and who, of course, had an exceptional mind. Emmanuel Levinas had good reasons for calling Derrida the new Kant, as did Richard Rorty when he put him at the same level as Nietzsche. At the start of the lecture, Derrida set out a series of clear and stark questions, ones that

could be called eternal, at least for the great majority of the philosophers and intellectuals throughout history who have stopped to consider the university (Bonvecchio, 1991; Fulford & Barnett, 2020), and for more than a few academics, students, and curious members of the public from different times and places who have questioned its sense, its purpose, or the justification for its existence. In Derrida's words:

> To ask whether the University has a reason for being is to wonder why there is a University, but the question "why" verges on "with a view to what?" The University with a view to what? What is the University's view? What are its views? Or again: What do we see from the University, whether for instance, we are simply in it, on board; or whether puzzling over destinations, we look out from it while in port or, as French has it, "au large," on the open sea, "at large"? (Derrida, 2017, p. 118)

These questions about the meaning of the university have taken on special importance since the dramatic and unexpected outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly with regards to the education that universities offer. As well as the constant process of psychopedagogical change that has happened over recent years (Cannon & Newble, 2000), there has been a need to swap classrooms for screens. Many universities had to move from face-to-face education to an online model (Marin, 2022), and this had to be done in record time and with limited resources. Some of these changes were temporary but not all of them, and we could

say that, one way or another, the so-called online university is here to stay (Marin, 2021).

In this situation, university tutoring is also exposed to Derrida's question, indeed, it must inescapably face up to it. Why university tutoring? With a view to what? What is its destination? Dictionaries such as that of the Real Academia Española (Spanish Royal Academy), offer a definition we could be content with, namely: "a meeting that provides guidance and information". But those questions do not refer to just any tutorial or to ordinary tutorials, but specifically the university tutorial, and so this guidance and information must have a special characteristic. It could be said, then, that university tutoring is something like: "the one-to-one meeting that a tutor has with her tutee to discuss course content, concepts or often how the student should approach the course essay or assignment" (Fulford, 2013, p. 115). And, also, with, alongside, or even interwoven with this, we can also think that: "tutoring in higher education is understood as a function that forms an integral part of the teacher's role. It is a personalised model of education that provides comprehensive support for students" (Delgado-García et al., 2020, p. 120). Indeed, university tutoring is academic guidance and information, but this is included in the cultivation of a university character, in the nature of one who seeks truths (Esteban Bara, 2019). University tutoring does not provide just any type of guidance and information; instead they are of a special character, of a level that is profound and complex, and of course, exciting and mysterious.

Nevertheless, reality shows that many tutorials in universities today are meetings that could be classed as utilitarian and which turn out to be bureaucratic and box-ticking exercises (Evans, 2005). They do not generally include intellectual and humanising debate, the mind and soul of the student are not interpellated by those of the teacher, the people who come together do not feel they have been changed. The tutorial becomes an encounter to obtain and offer effective, efficient, and satisfactory responses to closed questions and specific complaints. In other words, contemporary university tutoring seems to be a reduced and insubstantial version of what it should be.

This article has a three-part objective: to present theoretical and practical arguments that confirm that the best outlooks for university tutoring are in university character education, specifically education of the critical spirit or thinking; to identify the principal obstacles to this education, as well as the possibilities that have emerged in the context of post-pandemic universities; and finally, to propose future-oriented conclusions so that university tutoring can fulfil the important and necessary function that has been discussed.

Before continuing, however, we must note that we start from two premises. The first has already been touched on, but is worth repeating. Different disciplines conceive and interpret character education in many ways and so it has become something of an umbrella concept covering everything that relates to the positive development of the person (Berkowitz, 2016). We will focus on what we call university character education, which, while drawing on all of that complexity, directs us principally to the critical spirit or thinking. We believe that this is the main identifying feature of the educational mission of the university, which has persisted over time (Obarrio & Piquer, 2015) and it is one of its most splendid and productive results, as shown by pieces of research that have become international reference points (Perry, 1999). We agree that, in relation to the university and members of the academic community:

> What society should be able to expect from our work is a supply of free citizens, critical in the best sense; people who are capable of reasoned debate with their head and not their heart, and who can therefore protect society from opportunistic strategists and social predators of various types, who ultimately are usually cultural mediocrities. (Barrio, 2022, p. 76)

Perhaps now more than ever, we need graduates who champion this form of being, people who are critical of things that have happened, are happening, and could happen (Barnett, 1997; Davies, 2015). Of course, tutorials are not the only way of working on the critical spirit, but they do seem to be one of the most appropriate, and indeed are designed precisely for this (Vansieleghem & Masschelein, 2012). The second premise is that when we speak of university tutoring we do not mean meetings about matters such as mental health (Marie Martin, 2010), different types of harassment, or addiction (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2021). These meetings are not

tutorials strictly speaking. Furthermore, and it is to be welcomed for the good of the students, many of our universities now have *ad hoc* and specialist units for this type of cases or similar ones.

2. Reasons for educating the critical spirit through university tutoring

We now set out four arguments that we believe explain how the main *raison d'être* of the tutorial is cultivation of the critical spirit or thinking, in other words: learning to live with good judgement (Balmes, 1964) and without allowing others to think on one's behalf (Llano, 2016), becoming accustomed to living with the truth and not allowing oneself to be trapped by lies, becoming an adult in the deepest and most transcendental sense of the word (Biesta, 2022), ultimately, embracing a famous Aristotelian maxim that appears to identify what is in such need today: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true" (Aristotle, 2014, VII, 1011 b 26-28). However, first it is necessary to note some important aspects of this. Firstly: we are not thinking about the education of a person who, rationally, impartially, and autonomously substantiates her judgements of truth or concepts of good (Rawls, 1997; Kohlberg, 1981), but rather someone who is called on to follow the purpose of human nature (*telos*) (Aristotle, 2001). Consequently, this education does not involve preserving a natural state in the face of social and cultural challenges (Rousseau, 1990), but of strengthening and optimising it precisely so that it overcomes the

circumstances in which it can be found (Ortega y Gasset, 1981). Secondly: the end that is pursued is not just any vital or moral option, but the truth of things, a dwelling that offers protection from the ideas currently in fashion, relativism, and scepticism (Derrick, 1982). Thirdly: a critical spirit is championed that is aligned with practical reason or with intelligence informed by the virtues, with the set of qualities and attributes that make it possible to fashion a good life, in other words, one worth living (Spaemann, 1987; Ibáñez-Martín, 2017). Fourthly: it is possible to acquire virtues by participating in cooperative practices or forms of human activity that do not focus solely on achieving external goods but also, perhaps above all, on conquering the internal goods that are typical of and define these cooperative activities (MacIntyre, 1987); also, engaging in them involves the mobilisation of habits, of meeting points between reason and feelings, emotions or passions (Bernal, 1998). And in fifth and final place: the critical spirit requires a constant dialogue to be held with others and with the world, it entails living in the fabric of interlocution (Taylor, 1996). Ultimately, cultivating a way of being that could be summarised as doing what is right, in the right way, and for the right reasons (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010; Cooke & Carr, 2014). Of course, when we speak of what is right, we do not refer to something fixed and immutable but to the process of seeking it, in other words, the exciting and dramatic effort put into locating it and for which it is worth taking responsibility (Nicol, 1977). In this sense, it is important to recall that cultivating the critical spirit involves ques-

tioning and reconsidering our own ideas, and being able to recognise possible errors of judgement. So, although tutors must promote students' autonomy, a central element of their work, which is not at odds with the above, is that they know how to awaken in students the humbleness they require to recognise that they will always need the help of others throughout their lives, since fallibility is intrinsic to the human condition.

That said, of these five reasons we will focus on the four that underpin the fact that the best views on university tutoring relate to the development of the critical spirit or thinking. The first is found in the history of the university. This is not a matter of nostalgia or paying homage to the past, but of observing it in order to be able to know and recognise ourselves, and, above all, to value that which is worth safeguarding and keeping. Ortega, among others, insists on this aspect: "I believe there is no doubt about it. We have but one path, one method: comparing the past with the present to discover whether the same causes are at play now that in the past made possible a healthy life or the triumph of the university" (Ortega y Gasset, 2005, p. 466). The history of the university could well be seen as the biography of the critical spirit (Rüegg, 1994; Tejerina, 2010; Rivero, 2021). Since its first steps, the university has been the home of this spirit, the institution that supports it, even the community that takes the baton from others who went before such as the Pythagorean School, Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, and the museum and library of Alexandria (Esteban Bara, 2022). This thread leads us to Socrates himself, who famously defended the value of thinking for oneself, seeking the truth of things for its own sake up to the ultimate consequence (Nussbaum, 2001). Plato reported that the great Greek master likened himself to a horsefly:

> …you will not easily find, even if it is a little ridiculous to say it, another similar person to me who is placed in the city by the god in the same way that, alongside a horse that is large and noble but a little slow thanks to its size, and which needs to be stung by a horsefly, in the same way, I believe, that the god has placed me alongside the city to do a similar role. (Plato, 2014, 30e)

Today we might speak of troublemaking minds and souls (Fulford, 2022) and, as we have observed, the tutorial seems to be an ideal space for cultivating them. It is important to recall that all students at the earliest medieval universities had a tutor assigned to them, a teacher with whom they would speak frequently (Christpoh, 1994; Verger, 1994). Much water has gone under the bridge since then, but does this mean that we must abandon this way of experiencing the university? Is it not the opposite, that this modus vivendi will save us from the situation we find ourselves in today? The value of thinking for oneself must go hand in hand with teachers defending freedom of expression. Without this freedom, any attempt at dialogue between teacher and student will unavoidably be impoverished. Of course, this defence should not be at odds with respect for the sincere search for the truth and for the dignity

of the person, without which this freedom of expression loses its *raison d'être*. As Ibáñez-Martín notes,

> it is necessary to cultivate a dedicated love of truth, a supreme interest in accuracy, and the utmost respect for people who hold different ideas, and it is also necessary to teach disdain for lies and distortion of evidence, just as it is necessary to eschew all political arguments in the world of science. (Ibáñez-Martín, 2021, p. 45)

The second reason relates to what we have just discussed insofar as it is the entrenchment of the legacy received. We refer to the paradigmatic teaching model founded on tutorials (Mallison, 1941; Moore, 1968; Walton, 1972), principally driven by Cardinal Newman (1986) and his philosophy of university education (Barnett & Standish, 2003; Luque, 2016) and championed by Oxbridge (Oxford University and the University of Cambridge). At the start of the last century, Lord Curzon, who was then chancellor of Oxford University, described the tutorial as the cornerstone of that university's success:

> If there is any product of which Oxford has special reason to be proud, which has stamped its mark on the lives and characters of generations of men, and has excited the outspoken envy of other nations, it is that wonderful growth of personal tuition which has sprung up in our midst almost unawares. (Curzon, 1909, p. 122)

While it is not the aim of this article to analyse this teaching model, we should note that for many years it has been a global point of reference, both because of these universities' outstanding positions in the main university rankings and because it has inspired other universities. Of course, a succession of pieces of theoretical and empirical research have analysed the state of the tutorial model and its adaptation to the universities' current circumstances and students' current needs (Ashwin, 2005; Palfreyman, 2008). Despite any doubts that might arise, everything seems to suggest that Oxbridge tutorials will continue in one way or another:

> Despite these challenges, the tutorial continues to evolve. New generations of tutors introduce fresh ideas, creative approaches and new technologies. They bring to the table a more nuanced understanding of the academic challenges that face students when they leave secondary school. Some mix one-on-on tutorials with larger classes, or individual essays with group-projects. Others incorporate social media and other online resources. If the strength of the tutorial is its adaptability, reports of its likely demise are greatly exaggerated. (Mills & Alexander, 2015)

The third reason. Universities play a fundamental role in constructing a more just, equitable, and sustainable world, one that is more human and humanising. The future that awaits us will largely depend on the university. This task, demand, or desideratum is clearly reflected in reference documents that set out the path of the present and future university. Among others, we should mention the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, which the rectors of 388 universities from Europe and around the world signed on 18 September 1988, later being joined by more universities from

over 80 countries. This was a source of inspiration for the *Sorbonne Declaration* (1998) and, perhaps most famously, the *Bologna Declaration* (1999). This Magna Charta stated that: "The future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technical development; … this is built up in … universities". The *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action* should also be mentioned. This document, like the previous one, has had great influence on the formation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This declaration states that it is necessary to "educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity, by offering relevant qualifications" (UNESCO, 1998). There is also the Rio de Janeiro Summit (1999), which was held almost in parallel with the *Bologna Declaration*. This proposed the creation of the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education (ALCUE). The heads of state of the countries from these regions agreed that the university is a priority for the future. Finally, we should mention the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that the United Nations passed in 2015. This includes 17 targets, the now famous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for which universities are partially responsible. If they are achieved, we will undoubtedly live in a better world. Although it is hard to find an explicit mention of the cultivation of the critical spirit or thinking in these foundational texts and others we could have mentioned, it is not unreasonable to note that it is apparent when reading between the lines and that it fits

in perfectly with their proposals. Also, the overwhelming majority of their signatories and promoters would be pleased to see that university tutoring is in a good time and place for its cultivation.

The fourth and final reason is somewhat pessimistic, but can serve as an incentive. It was identified long ago, but perhaps now has become more visible than ever. We refer to the contributions that note that university education loses its essence if it stops cultivating the critical spirit, love of truth, and an interest in wisdom (Bloom, 1989; Collini, 2012; Deresiewicz, 2019); that without these things, students are denied one of the finest legacies of the university and are left in the hands of those who only talk of employability and accountability (Bellamy, 2018; Torralba, 2022); or worse still, that it is no longer worth the effort of staying in universities that ignore all that is discussed above (Hernández et al., 2013). Of course, for the great majority of these voices, tutorials play a fundamental role in university education and, we believe it is worth listening to them. They should not be accused of being alarmist or pessimistic as so often happens. With a few exceptions, they are authors who are devoted to the university and do not look for excuses. Rather than being pessimists, they are realists, or even optimists. They do not bury their heads in the sand when something is uninteresting or uncomfortable. That said, and as noted in the introduction, the current situation of university tutoring displays obstacles and possibilities that must at least be identified. We will do this in the next section.

3. Obstacles and possibilities for university tutoring after Covid-19

The obstacles and possibilities described below affect both the form and content of university tutoring, and while we consider them separately for reasons of clarity, they are inexorably related. We will start with the former.

3.1. Obstacles for university tutoring

The first obstacle, which could be the root of the others, is a firm decision to train highly qualified professionals. Many bachelor's degrees, not to mention master's degrees, that are currently provided in universities are designed to prepare for a profession, as something like an attempt at a replication or a prelude. One might think that this is good and that things are going well, ultimately the world continues to function and develop thanks to the engineers, lawyers, primary school teachers, doctors, journalists, etc., who graduate from universities. However, there is something that is striking. Research has shown (Chamorro-Premuriz and Frankiewicz, 2019) that employers and leaders of business organisations, at least in OECD member states, report a lack of intellectual proficiency in graduates in recent years, something that speaks of critical spirit and thinking. Seemingly, the decision to train competent professionals has cornered the seeker of truths, creating an imbalance that Ortega (1930, 1937) identified as "the barbarism of specialisation or *specialism*". The result is cohorts of graduates who have considerable technical skill but an underdeveloped and dormant critical spirit. Tutorials seem to be treated as just another teaching resource, usually occasional and trivial, which collaborate with the cause of professionalisation in line with the particular characteristics of each university institution, faculty, and curriculum.

And this obstacle leads to others, such as what has come to be called: *The marketisation of higher education* (Molesworth et al., 2011). In simple terms, this consists of students increasingly taking on the role of clients. This is by no means always so, nor does it happen in all universities, but we should recognise that contemporary university education shows signs of this pseudo-commercial form. Indeed, credits, competences, employability indexes, satisfaction surveys, and teaching load all now form part of the university lexicon, but they are not characteristic of the university as an institution. Obviously, the tutorial is not sidelined. While we do not attempt to give an exhaustive list, its purpose is: to resolve doubts about exams or upcoming assessment activities; go over marks, which the student usually thinks are low and unfair; and find solutions to issues with poor attendance in class or practical sessions, late submission of work, and, more problematically, plagiarism or interpersonal or class conflicts. Seen this way, and continuing with the business language, the tutorial appears to be a "complaints window" or a "customer service office", and above all, it cooperates with what Jaspers identified, years ago, when describing the attitude towards the university of quite a few students: "…they study for the exam and judge everything depending on what is important for the exam; they see time spent studying as an arduous period of transition towards praxis, through which they expect

salvation from this moment…" (Jaspers, 1959, p. 423). This being so, tutorials are ephemeral, occasional, and optional, and, it is easy to find recent graduates who say that they did not attend a single tutorial with any of their teachers.

The position that many university teachers currently find themselves in, often against their will and their vocation should be added to what has been said above. They plan their modules to the best of their knowledge and ability, but they have to focus on research and publishing and on accumulating points to consolidate or improve their academic career (De Rond & Miller, 2005; Thoilliez & Valle, 2015). From this perspective, tutorials become a sort of add-on in response to the student demands mentioned above, and it remains to be seen how often these demands could be resolved by exchanging a couple of emails (Wahab, 2020).

It is also important to note the issue of student satisfaction. Universities have spent years working on making the university experience satisfying in the deepest and widest sense of the term (Staddon & Standish, 2012), with the result that there are numerous activities and also interpretations relating to it (Lyubomirsky, 2010). In the case of tutorials, satisfaction depends on ensuring students feel that they have received appropriate and positive information and guidance, especially in matters relating to the modules they are taking (Retna et al., 2009). As some authors note (Fulford, 2013), the tutorial, and therefore, the professor are expected to fulfil SMART objectives (specific; measurable; attainable; relevant; timely). Some recent studies have shown that students are more satisfied than ever with the tutorial attention they receive. However, these studies also reveal something curious: students feel that they could have been pushed further, intellectually speaking. Perhaps they miss taking part in conversations like the ones Buber (1958) describes as being of "I and Thou", where: "The speaker puts herself rather than the object of the conversation at stake, and in this is the abandoning of any comfortable security" (Vansieleghem & Masschelein, 2012, p. 85). But with the often poorly understood argument of student satisfaction, a space has been created so that, as Buber himself observes, an "I-It" conversation is established, that is to say, a: "technical dialogue, prompted solely by the need of objective understanding" (Buber, 1961, p. 37). Ultimately, and given what is discussed above, we believe that critical spirit and thinking are not considered in the sort of tutorial that is generally practised and is spreading through universities.

3.2. Opportunities following Covid-19

That said, there is room for hope. Alongside the obstacles we have mentioned and other ones that have escaped us, we can see opportunities that have arisen since the outbreak of Covid-19 and with other events that are currently occurring. On the one hand, there are possibilities in form or format. At the start of 2020 when lockdowns were implemented in most countries, face-to-face universities — the majority of them –- had to move their teaching online. It is well known that this was not easy, but it was more or less

achieved, or as some might say, we found a way (Lazar, 2022). Academic activity could be continued thanks to computer programs and digital platforms that facilitate synchronous connection. While many universities already had these resources before the pandemic, they were used only occasionally. The weight of the tradition of face-to-face teaching, the limited training of many teachers in these technological matters, and resistance to change could be some of the reasons for this (Branch et al., 2020).

The transition to the so-called "new normality", in this case in university education, involves learning from lived experience and, above all, maintaining and promoting the novel resources and situations that benefit us, and not just having the university react to the surrounding circumstances (Arnove, 2020). The tutorial must not be sidelined, quite the contrary. A lack of face-to-face teaching does not have to undermine or reduce its significance and meaning or, to put it another way, deep and profound conversations between teacher and student can also take place online (Marín, 2022). Critical spirit and thinking can be cultivated through a screen. Furthermore, online tutorials appear to fit around the lives of today's students: as members of digital generations, they are like fish in water online (Fuentes et al., 2015). They also increasingly have busy diaries, combining study and work and so it is not like the past when students would be on campus all day (Pusztai and Kocsis, 2019). Cabero (2004) noted that the functions of a virtual tutor are technical, academic, organisational, guiding,

and social. This last type relates to when students face risks that are present when working with a computer, such as isolation and loss or lack of motivation. It is precisely in the circumstances caused by Covid-19 that this function occupies an ever more relevant place for the university tutor.

That said, universities in general and teaching staff in particular will have to calibrate this situation well. To suggest that the meeting with the professor can take place at any moment, in any place, and for any purpose would do a great disservice to the tutorial, and strange though it may sound, to the student. The fact that options are increasing should not at all reduce the ethics and aesthetics that university tutor has per se. The "impulse society" (Roberts, 2014) we live in and in which the tutorial could also become part of must be countered by arguments such as those of prudence, decorum, respect, and empathy. The tutorial, like all things of the university, has a way of being that should not be perverted by being provided online or for any other type of event (Bailey & Freedman, 2011).

Furthermore, there are possibilities relating to content. Covid-19, as well as later events such as the invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent global geopolitical and economic crisis have raised questions that were buried and forgotten, but which, however we look at them, are highly relevant (Bizkarra et al., 2021). Human dignity, gentleness, and vulnerability, science and culture, biodiversity and bioethics, international relations, and fake news are some of them. However, it would be hard

to find any university degree that could not include some of these topics; and we can state that most students feel they are called upon to say something on the matter, that is, to cooperate in the current "collective thinking" (Simons & Masschelein, 2018).

The new scenario may help to restore Humboldt's (1959) idea of the university as a community of researchers who confront the reality they find themselves in; it can remind us that "the student and the professor are peers in various key moments in which they find themselves without answers, and this obliges them to think" (Marin, 2022, p. 92). No less importantly, it can also make us see how important and necessary it is to stand on the shoulders of giants of culture and science, on any classic of thought that has the virtue of "[relegating] the noise of the present to a background hum, which, at the same time the classics cannot exist without" (Calvino et al., 2015, p. 19). The words of one of the texts that has had the greatest influence in the analysis of modern higher education seem current:

> Our young people can think or do almost anything that occurs to them, but to act differently, ideas are necessary and these are what they do not have. They have access to all of the thought of the past and to all of its glorious examples. But they have not been taught to take them seriously as living possibilities in themselves. (Bloom, 1989, p. 345)

Ultimately, we believe that the contemporary pedagogical-technological setting provides an opportunity for tutorials; going online increases options to encourage them and give them life. The same thing happens in the contemporary social setting. Topics are emerging that fit into any curriculum and can be covered in conversations in tutorials given that these are opportunities to discover the world and not to rely on poorly formed ideas, to position oneself in it and, at the same time, separate oneself from it without losing sight of it; and perhaps most importantly, to find the best version of oneself and the path to a fulfilled life with the coincidence of critical spirit and thinking (Llano, 2002).

4. Conclusions and outlook for university tutoring

Based on the above, we present four conclusions, thinking of how to facilitate the university tutoring that is being endorsed. The first conclusion is perhaps the most obvious and is the foundation of all of the others, namely: university tutoring should be an essential part of university curricula. We believe that this is an ideal time for university tutoring to be treated as more than just another teaching resource and to be made compulsory. Online tutorials do not necessarily undermine face-to-face ones, and if they do not lose their university ethic and aesthetic, they can be seen as an opportunity to make them compulsory. Online tutorials make it easier to find opportunities for professors and students to meet and enable the cultivation of the critical spirit and thinking, in other words, they can play a role in character education for the professionals and members of the public who appear in society with a university qualification

(Pérez-Díaz, 2010). And this leads us to a second conclusion. It is not enough for tutorials to be obligatory; this will be of little use if they are not enriched and promoted. Any university degree, however closed it may appear, should be seen as something open in nature, disposed to the unexpected and unpredictable. And on this point, the tutorial has a special prominence. The purpose of the personal encounter between teacher and student is not to discuss just anything, but rather to discuss anything that helps to profess a profession, any that relates to the university, but above all and precisely, the profession of being a student (Derrida, 2002). There is not a critical spirit of chemistry, one of architecture, and another different one of philology; the critical spirit pertains to the university in general. The current reality is burdened with ethical matters that catch the attention of the students or that can be uncovered by the professor. University tutoring is a new chance for students to learn to become engrossed by the tree of knowledge (Arana, 2004), fall in love with wisdom, follow the truth of things, and pursue the common good. In this article, we have mentioned the importance Socrates placed on the value of thinking for oneself. Accordingly, a return to the Socratic method in university tutoring might be one of the fundamental ways of promoting the critical spirit.

The third conclusion is perhaps the most challenging and the hardest to accept. University tutoring does not fit a quality-control and evaluation philosophy, at least, not the one that has been implemented in recent years (Palfreyman, 2008).

How is it possible to establish whether the model of tutorial that is being defended here is profitable? What becomes of it if it is has to justify itself in rubrics, numbers, and percentages? And what is the point of comparing some tutorials to others? People who design academic policies should recognise that university tutoring is part of that element of university education that cannot have a value placed on it and is intangible and transcendental. University tutoring requires trust, hope, an act of faith, that is the breeding ground for the critical spirit and thinking and for the process of personal development of those who undertake it. Of course, what we have said above does not mean that evaluation criteria that go beyond compulsory attendance and participation in discussions at a more or less university level cannot be put in place. On this point, we feel that the practice of Oxbridge seems very good. We refer to the presentation of essays or similar work that require prior study and preparation for an intellectual discussion with the teacher and perhaps also with another course mate.

The fourth and final conclusion concerns academic staff. It is necessary to reconsider the place of the tutorial among the tasks teachers are required to perform and how their dedication to the university is recognised. Nevertheless, there are some questions that should be asked. Are all of the academics who teach on given courses suited to being tutors? Is it enough to demonstrate a degree of enthusiasm or willingly accept that the tutorial is part of the employment contract? Can tutorials provide a perfect excuse for killing time, in-

doctrinating students, or any other activity that has nothing to do with cultivating critical spirit and thinking? It is reasonable to think that not all teachers and researchers will comply with the academic and personal requirements for being tutors, and that it will be necessary to select those who display an interest, have been trained, and show they are prepared for the task of tutoring. We believe that in a matter as important as this, it is necessary to follow Aristotle's (2001) maxim that flutes should be in the hands of the best flautists, so that the best music is produced and the flutes and listeners alike benefit.

Ultimately, while there are obstacles to overcome, we believe that we live in times that are conducive to giving university tutoring a new chance. The current situation has bought about new formats that facilitate setting this in motion and has brought to the table matters that strengthen its leitmotiv: the cultivation of critical spirit and thinking. But this will not be enough: universities must believe in this renewed opportunity, that is to say, they must put the tutorial in its rightful place to make university education as complete as possible, or in other words, following Derrida, to ensure that its views are beautiful, broad, and deep.

Notes

[1] To cite three of the most important: QS World University Rankings; Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE); and the Shanghai Academic Raking of World Universities (ARWU).

[2] Various universities have taken inspiration from the tutorial model of Oxbridge, including: the University of Buckingham; New College of Florida; William College

(Massachusetts); Sarah Lawrence College (New York); Ohio University; Maastricht University.

[3] http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum

[4] https://redue-alcue.org/

[5] See: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/

[6] See, for example, the National Student Survey (NSS): https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/; or the Ipsos Mori Learner Satisfaction Survey: https://bollag-stiftung.org/wp-content/uploads/formidable/5/ipsos-mori-learner-satisfaction-survey.pdf

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Authors' biographies

Francisco Esteban Bara is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theory and History of Education at the Universitat de Barcelona. He has been a visiting professor at various universities in Latin America and visiting professor at the Center for Character and Citizenship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis-College of Education. In recent years he has been the Rector's Delegate in the Student Observatory of the Universitat de Barcelona and Vice-Rector for Communication at the same university. His most recent books are: *La Universidad light [The light university]* (Editorial Paidós) and *Ética del profesorado [Ethics of teachers]* (Editorial Herder). He has also published numerous articles in indexed journals. His research interests centre on the philosophy of university education and the formation of the university character.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8679-2090

Carmen Caro Samada is Associate Professor at the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja. She graduated in Humanities from the Universidad Pablo de Olavide (Seville) with a Special End of Degree Prize and a National End of Degree Prize. She has a doctorate from the Universidad de Navarra with a Special Doctoral Prize. Since 2012 she has been a member of the "Educational work as action" (EDUCACCION) research group at the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja. In this academic year, she has joined the "Promoting character skills that support loving relationships and flourishing in schools" project developed jointly with the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University. She is academic secretary of the **revista española de pedagogía** and secretary of the Education in the Knowledge Society and Action in the Fields of Education, Communication, Rights and New Technologies Doctoral Programme.

https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-9975-5694

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