

Logotherapy as a means to find meaning to life in education, an experience from the normal school

Abstract

The research is framed within the Escuela Normal Experimental de San Antonio Matute in the municipality of Ameca, Jalisco, and within the experience of 20 years as a teacher in front of a group, it has been realized that the students of the different semesters with whom we have worked, not only in this institution but in the others in which we have participated, do not have clear what their life project will be during their stay in their formative stage and once it is concluded. In this way, we helped the students to have a clear idea of their purpose in studying this formative path. The institution was helped to reduce the rates of disapproval or desertion because, by having a clear idea of their goals, they were motivated to complete it. It had an impact on the reduction of social problems in the community by helping students and graduates understand the meaning of the stage they are living, preventing them from being diverted by other social or public health problems such as alcoholism or drug addiction

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Introduction

The general objective of this research was to *implement a strategy to support students in the construction of their life project* at the Escuela Normal Experimental de San Antonio Matute. Consequently, the specific or particular objectives were:

- I. To analyze the relevance of logotherapy as a strategy for the construction of a life project in adolescents during this formative stage.
- II. Implement logotherapy as a strategy for the construction of a life project with the participants that make up the sample.
- III. Evaluate the effectiveness of the application of the strategy implemented with the selected information retrieval techniques and tools.

The hypothesis that was sustained throughout this research is that *if students are supported with a strategy to build their life project in regular education, it allows them to find meaning in what they are doing and decide in the future what they are going to do, considering other alternatives to those they are traditionally exposed to in their community of origin.*

Logotherapy is a term that comes from the Greek *logos* which translates as “sense, meaning, purpose, treatise or discourse”.¹ Logotherapy, also known as the third Viennese school of psychotherapy, “focuses on the meaning of human existence, and on man’s search for such meaning, which, according to this school, is his primary motivation”.¹ The connotation that was used of *logos* for the purposes of this research is the one referring to *sense and meaning*, “something that the human being is always looking for in the face of the circumstances of destiny, life, death, love, pain”.²

Viktor Emil Frankl (1905-1997),³ the main representative of this psychotherapeutic current, was born in Vienna on March 26, 1905. His father, a Jew, was a director in the Ministry of Education of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His mother came from an aristocratic family. As a child he wanted to become a doctor, but without the use of drugs. Following the fall of the Empire with the First World War, he suffered starvation along with his siblings. As a teenager he maintained an epistolary relationship with Sigmund Freud, of which all the material was lost, as it was confiscated by the Gestapo when

Frankl entered the Nazi concentration camps. In 1923 he wrote for the Viennese newspaper *Der Tag* an article specializing in the existential problems of young people after the war. He entered the Medical School of the University of Vienna and became interested in Sören Kierkegaard, whom he said had the qualities to be a psychiatrist. Along with his doctorate in Medicine, he was part of the ranks of the Socialist Party and collaborated with Alfred Adler, whose individual psychology he considered that he paid more attention to existential problems, while about Freud he mentioned that he devalued the search for the meaning of life. This was reason enough for Adler to expel him from his movement, while Frankl wrote a manuscript in which he defended the relationship between philosophy and psychotherapy. In 1926 he used the term *logotherapy* for the first time when he belonged to the Association of Medical Psychology. In 1930 he graduated and at the age of six he became a specialist in neurology and psychiatry. He worked at the Neurological Clinic of the University of Vienna, as well as at the Psychiatric Hospital of the same city. In 1937 he opened his private practice, but the following year together with his family because of his racial status. In 1942 he married Tilly and, in November, he was imprisoned by the SS with his family, from which his sister was saved by obtaining a visa for Australia. The ordeal lasted two and a half years. He was separated from his wife and lost his identity, being assigned the registration number 119104. He experienced the atrocities of the Hitler regime in Theresienstadt, Kaufering, Türkheim and Auschwitz, where his parents, spouse and brother died. He sought to make sense of an impossible existence. In 1945 he suffered from petechial typhus, which caused disgust for food and delirium. During the nights he mentally recited speeches. On April 27 of that year he was released, when he was 40 years old. He was appointed head of the Neurology Department of the Viennese Polyclinic. The following year he published his book *A Psychologist in a Concentration Camp* about his experience in the concentration camps, which was a great success as the first edition sold out in three days and the second edition in three months. In 1947 he published *La psicoterapia en la práctica médica (Psychotherapy in Medical Practice)* and, the following year, *La presencia ignorada de Dios (The Ignored Presence of God)*. Between 1951 and 1955 he participated in a series of radio conferences that were later collected in the work *La psicoterapia al alcance de todos (Psychotherapy within everyone’s reach)*. In 1956 appeared *Theory and Therapy of Neurosis*. In 1969 he published his most emblematic work: *Man in Search of Meaning*,

which he had written in 1946. In addition to being a therapist, he was a mountaineer, caricaturist and collector of lenses. He died in 1997 at the age of 92 after a heart failure. He published about 27 works that have been translated into 21 languages, including Japanese, Korean and Chinese.³

Frame of reference

Frankl⁴, unlike his teachers, goes beyond the Freudian sexual drive or Adler's will to power, because he considers that the true characteristic of the human being is the permanent search for the meaning of his life. "The fundamental need of the human being is not sexual satisfaction or self-affirmation, but the search for the meaning of life".³ Despite the horrible, imposing and contrary context he suffered, Frankl⁴ came to the conclusion that human life, even in the worst circumstances, has some meaning. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), Viktor Frankl concluded that the human being is not only a bio-psycho-social being, but also a spiritual being that leads to transcendence through this search. For something *logos*² in Frankl⁴ is *meaning* and *sense*, something that the human being seeks in the most extreme circumstances such as life, death, love or pain. Logotherapy is inspired by existential philosophy and is based on the idea that the human being is an individual being in the world,³ and that the explanation and understanding of his nature goes beyond physics, chemistry or neurophysiology. The subject has a concrete task, a mission to fulfill, so that one should not look for an abstract meaning of life: its essence is to take charge of its own existence.⁴

Frankl⁴ comments that the neurotic is not properly a sick person, but is facing an existential void, is wondering about the true meaning of life; therefore, to do so, he must respond with his actions to the questions he asks himself and must take responsibility for his existence. "Man increasingly suffers from an existential void that is difficult to overcome due to the loss of references and concrete values that today's society lives [...] Man faces his existence without a clear reference of what life can be".³ Frankl⁶ argued that the state of neurosis is not properly due to the causes that Freud imputed to him, that the human being was repressing his desires, but rather it was due to his inability to be aware that his life leaves its mark on the world, so he only lives the present and covers his existential anguish at the moment he needs help. Logotherapy invites him to escape from the melancholy or irrational anguish in which he finds himself, caused by an uncertain long-term future.

Although, as Frankl⁴ says, life does not offer us complete happiness, it does endow us with meaning. The main mission of life is to endow it with meaning. "It is not a question of what we want from life, but the way in which this questions us here, now. Only everyone can answer the question. Because life is not addressed to life in general, but to my life in a personal key".⁶ The fundamental principles of logotherapy are: 1. Life has meaning, even in the worst circumstances; 2. The greatest desire of the human being is to find meaning in life, to answer what is its meaning, how to live knowing that one is going to die, and 3. Human beings are free, because they are able to choose something meaningful for themselves in the long term.

It is precisely when the human being realizes his own finitude that he finds meaning, when he directs his existence beyond what is determined. Although⁵ asserted that one is never sure if one is going to fulfill a purpose in life, since one has the feeling that life would have been otherwise (which creates an existential void or emptiness), the human being must be aware that it is only in his hands to transform it and he can only do so by finding some meaning in it. For⁵ education only focuses on the transmission of knowledge, but does not address

a movement of consciousness. Man's movements of consciousness have only reduced him to guilt, feelings and injustices, but not towards his own life in general. When the human being becomes aware of his own life, he strengthens his capacity for resistance, so that he does not yield to conformism or lean towards the absolute; for this, he must develop responsibility, which implies choosing, even if he is afraid of making a mistake. Although, as Sartre⁷ says, the human being is condemned to be free, he is also condemned to find some meaning in everything he does and is part of his inevitable existence.

Giving meaning to life does not strictly speaking mean justifying it. Actions and decisions can be justified from an ethical point of view; however, most people do not find a concrete meaning to their existence. If an existential attitude towards life is assumed, a subject can distinguish what is true from what is false or superficial. For⁵ every hour and every day of life holds a new meaning and, therefore, a new circumstance that must be faced; therefore, meaning can only be given to life in a particular way. Human life offers multiple opportunities that allow the individual to discover the meaning of his existence. This meaning is autonomous and independent of the human being's own constitution and the surrounding environment.

Another of the conditions for giving meaning to life is suffering, since it is the "organ" that activates the search for meaning. Therefore, no psychiatrist or therapist can tell his client what is the meaning of his existence, but they can affirm that life has a meaning. What is clear is that life without meaning generates suffering and throws the subject into existential emptiness and vacuity. Science can neither capture nor describe the experiences of a normal human being who only intends to give meaning to his existence. The human being only discovers this meaning in desperate situations. "The important thing is not the knowledge that one has of suffering, but the attitude towards pain, that one is able to transform it in its right measure into something important".⁵

To find meaning in life,⁶ recommends creativity, experience and change of attitude. By creativity, human beings offer to the world a talent we possess. By experience, the human being receives the world, learning. By attitude change, the human being is aware that there are situations that cannot be transformed, however, if he comes to understand the condition in which he finds himself, which is possible when the suffering is absolutely unbearable (as in a concentration camp), there can be modifications.

Logotherapy

For Frankl the *logos* is the noetic (spiritual) part different from the psychic. Therefore, logotherapy "more than an existential-humanistic approach or attitude", is "a complement to psychotherapy in general",⁵ it allows to make a *noogenic neurosis*, that is, "that neurosis that does not arise from conflicts between impulses and instincts, but rather from moral, spiritual or existential conflicts".³ For such effect, it treats difficulties such as the existential crisis, the existential emptiness and the lack of sense of life. The speech therapist accompanies the person in the search for the meaning of his life, the meaning of his suffering, "helping him to discover values or meanings linked to a specific situation, also assuming adequate attitudes and making responsible choices".²

Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis that focuses on the pleasure principle or Adler's psychology on the will to power, logotherapy starts from the will to meaning. Logotherapy is an appropriate therapy to help people find meaning in their lives, as well as meaning in their existence.⁸ "The search for the meaning of life is a primary force; only by finding it does man reach a meaning that satisfies his will

for meaning".¹ If the meaning of existence is not found, according to logotherapy, there is existential frustration. Therefore, this existential psychotherapy "penetrates into the spiritual dimension of human existence".¹ Likewise, it focuses on health and not on mental illness, on freedom and not on limitations, on values and not on instincts, on the tasks of the future and not on the traumas of the past.⁸ Among the benefits of logotherapy can be enunciated:

- I. It contributes to mental health, as it is a preventive and therapeutic element to avoid noogenic neurosis or neurosis of the spirit, with the feeling of living a meaningless life.
- II. Combats collective neuroses of our time, especially those that look at life in a provisional and fatalistic way.
- III. Relieves existential sufferings, mainly of those subjects who have strong pressures or vital conflicts, since the relationship between therapist and patient is that of two partners who participate in finding relief.
- IV. Supports in the treatment of psychogenic diseases, such as phobias, compulsive neurosis, anxiety neurosis, obsessive neurosis, melancholy and schizophrenia.⁸
- V. It is suitable for the treatment of obsessions, obsessive-compulsions, phobias and sexual problems.²

Existential frustration, according to Viktor Frankl⁴, "can be pathogenic and lead to neurosis... A neurosis can have its origin in existential frustration, in a lack of confidence or in a total despair about the concrete meaning of one's own personal existence".⁸ If frustration becomes pathogenic, it implies a neurotic disease, we speak of noogenic neurosis. The technique with which logotherapy works is the *Socratic dialogue* or maieutics. Its principles are: "1. Life has meaning in all circumstances. 2. Man is the owner of a will of meaning and feels frustrated or empty when he ceases to exercise it. Man is free, within his obvious limitations, to consummate the meaning of his existence".² As already exposed, logotherapy allows the search for the meaning of existence, therefore, it is essential for the construction of the life project in young people. The construction of this project not only includes the biological, social and psychological planes, but also the spiritual, since *logos* also means *spirit* -not in the religious plane, but rather philosophical-; therefore, this project must contemplate all these dimensions so that the transcendence of the human being who builds it is possible. It should be clarified that the construction of this plan must be in charge of the learning subject himself, not the teacher, who is only a guide, since the search for the meaning of existence is personal.⁹

Logotherapy is fundamentally based on the therapist-patient dialogue, so that, as in psychotherapy, the teacher should encourage it with his students, so that they, through different techniques, can access to self-knowledge and assume individual responsibility for their actions. On the contrary, if they are internally repressed, they will only find existential emptiness, so it is essential the support they receive from the teaching staff so that they can provide their life with fullness of meaning and find it meaningful, so that they can find spiritual peace, mental stability and ability to develop a self-transcendent life project.⁹

Logotherapy in teaching practice

In his magnum opus, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl⁴ reflects on the cruelty of the Nazi extermination camps in Auschwitz that he experienced. Contemplating the rows of perfectly aligned graves, Frankl⁴ wondered, as he observed each of the graves, the lives and

projects that were cut short there. A good exercise that was proposed to the students, when applying logotherapy for the construction of their life projects, was to count the graves of children and young people in a pantheon and to reflect in a letter how many professional projects were split and what opportunity they have, unlike the corpses, to develop themselves fully. Also, if they were in that position, what projects would be cut off as a result of death, as well as highlighting the importance of being alive.

In his contemplation of the tombs, Frankl⁴ reflected on a mother who left her children distraught and helpless; a couple who planned to grow old together; a girl or boy who still had a smile but whose smile was extinguished by the horrific death of a concentration camp. These scenarios were vital to raise with the students and, through dialogue, the treasure and opportunity of life was recovered and how others were robbed of it either by disease, war or violence. Another situation that also motivated the reflection of the students were two heroic, but sad and distressing acts that Frankl himself experienced. The first of them was when the Nazi persecution began, the destruction of synagogues and the deportation of German Jews, including his brother who, together with his family, was planning to escape to Italy, he had the opportunity to escape by means of a work visa to the United States; however, this implied leaving his elderly parents in distress. Although he had the chance to flee and apply the logotherapy in the American nation, and avoid all the suffering he endured, however, he decided to stay to shelter his parents, which implied the deportation of both his family and himself and to be entrusted to Auschwitz. Faced with this complicated situation, the students were asked: What would you have done?

Another extreme situation was when he entered this extermination camp. He tells in his memoirs contained in this essential book that, when the prisoners entered Auschwitz, they had to part with their personal possessions. Frankl⁴ was powerless to give up a manuscript containing his scientific work. He tried unsuccessfully to hide it in a fold of his jacket, but the army seized it. The anguish with which he narrates the event is painful, for although he begged an officer to help him keep these written ideas, he was mockingly stripped of them and even in his presence they tore them up, throwing away his years of research. Frankl⁴ narrates that, after a typhus epidemic in his cell, his companions and he tried not to sleep so as not to succumb to the symptoms; Frankl⁴, in order not to do so, tried to remember line by line the content of his manuscript, in the manner of a fictitious lecture delivered to an academic audience. After long, long hours and days, sleepless nights, Frankl was finally able to write up his ideas in his book *Psychoanalysis and Existentialism*. These anecdotes motivated the students to analyze: what would they have done if someone burned their ideas and they were imprisoned with no possibility of escape, why did Frankl treasure living so much, why did he come to affirm that even in these extreme situations human beings were capable of finding meaning in life?

Despite this stoicism that can be seen in Frankl's biography, like any human being, he had strong declines. A few weeks after entering Auschwitz, his spirits plummeted due to the absence of his wife who was pregnant with their first child, the death of his father after a horrible agony and the farewell of his mother who would see her for the last time in the Theresienstadt camp. Finding himself malnourished, scantily clad and ragged, with lice, edema, sickness, hunger and cold, he had a certain disdain for death and no hope for the future, but it was a conversation with a friend named Benschler, a famous Austrian television actor, who exchanged a bowl of watery soup for a cigarette, that gave him back the meaning of life.

The other terrible event that led him to lose confidence in living was months before his liberation on April 27, 1945. Frankl⁴ physically and psychologically exhausted, learned of the death of his mother in the gas chambers of Birkenau, as well as the abortion of his wife before entering Auschwitz, as the Nazis did not allow Jewish women to give birth in the death camps. Before the abortion was consummated, both Frankl and his wife decided together to give the child a name: Harry if it was a man or Marion if it was a woman. In *Psychotherapy and Humanism*, Frankl dedicated the work to Harry or Marion who were not yet born. After these sad events, the students were asked: what importance do you attach to life when you hear these terrible stories? Living in a climate of insecurity and violence, in what way does it allow them to rethink and value their life? If they had the opportunity to do many things right now, but faced with this climate of insecurity and violence, what list or actions would they take to protect and take care of themselves? And, in what way do these events experienced by Frankl make them reevaluate their life, the moment they are living, what they have?

After his release and with a temporary job as a neurologist that allowed him to live decently, Frankl set out to finish writing *Psychoanalysis and Humanism*. To do so, he was convinced that if he verbalized all the atrocities he had experienced, he would heal his wounds. With the help of secretaries who transcribed his ideas, while he sat and cried at the memory of all the painful moments, he finished the book in only nine days. As he himself said, although he did not overcome the experience in the camps, he did overcome his pain. The success of the book was such that it was reprinted three times and sold out. It was initially titled *A Psychologist in a Concentration Camp* (1946). In view of this experience, the students were asked to write down in a manuscript what experiences of pain they had lived through, but also what experiences of joy they had experienced and, above all, they were asked to devise actions to avoid the former and to relive the latter in the future, in order to project their personal life plan and their search for meaning, as well as to heal their wounds.

Frankl⁴ recommends to find meaning in life or *metasense*, as he called it, to put oneself in the place of a person facing an imminent death and remember loves, friendships, projects, obligations, illusions and nostalgia. It is these concrete, everyday actions that allow access to this meaning. It is therefore essential to make a list of them in the concrete situation in which the individual finds himself as a way of putting together this personal project. An essential question to ask, especially to a desperate man, recommends Frankl is that "it does not matter what we expect from life, but it matters what life expects from us".⁴ This Copernican turn is also possible to formulate to students, not so much to narrate what they expect from life, but rather what life expects from them. The meaning of life says Frankl cannot be elaborated in abstract terms or with absolute statements, but in concrete terms: "what does life expect from you?"

On the other hand, at the moment of putting this project together, Frankl advises, "one must always give an answer, not resign oneself to the destiny that was imposed on him, to carry one's own cross, because each situation is unique and unrepeatable".⁴ If life is loaded with pain, it is in the attitude shown before it that exceptional achievements will be obtained. If the attitude is one of resignation there will be no change, but if it is, on the contrary, one of courage, it will be able to transform the situation in which it finds itself. We will not be able to change the disease or the sufferings, but we will be able to change the economic, sentimental and social situation; the responsibility to do so is individual. For example, Frankl himself mentions that it was a victory to undergo so much suffering and stay alive; all that pain allowed him to know how strong he is. As Rilke says: "Through how

much suffering one must go through!"⁴ Now, in the face of all this pain it is valid to cry. While some inmates said that they expelled all that emotional burden through work, others did it with tears; both are mechanisms of relief and renewal. This was essential to have communicated to the students when answering the question about what life expects from you.

Another fundamental element of all this psychotherapy is the inner discovery. The moment the human being reveals that his work is exceptional, creative and creative (that is to say, that he produces things that he does not even expect) and that he has both the capacity to love and to forgive, when he realizes that, although he is mortal, he is also irreplaceable, because he is unique and unrepeatable, at that moment he assumes the responsibility of his existence. Therefore, despite the hardships and sufferings, he can realize that if he is still alive it is because he has a pending work to finish and that only he can do it; therefore, it is not worth throwing it away. By knowing this *why*, he can endure any *how*.⁴ It was essential to reflect on these words with the students so that they could see the importance of being alive at this moment and with the possibility of building, consolidating and developing a project for the future in the short, medium and long term.

Likewise, it was analyzed that if Viktor Frankl could endure all these atrocities, completely lose his family of origin and his wife, be released in total poverty and helplessness, he was able to write a book that changed lives in only nine days and even opened himself to love again. Contrary to another person who, dejected, desperate and sad would have been in his place, for not being reciprocated in love or not finding meaning in his life, with all the possibilities ahead of him, he indulges in various harmful behaviors. Therefore, they were asked: what is the attitude towards pain in one or the other example, what allowed Frankl to believe in existence again, how can one rise from the ashes? And, if you are not in Frankl's position, since you have all the possible alternatives without having to go through this tortuous path, why not develop all your potential, what stops you from doing it?

For the success of logotherapy, Frankl points out that the subject must be put in a position in which he faces life and confronts his behaviors. Contrary to Sartre's statement that man is the one who invents himself and conceives his own essence, he considers that "he does not invent the meaning of his life, but discovers it".⁴ The task, therefore, of the teacher was to enable the students to discover the meaning of their existence (not to invent it) and to confront themselves with themselves, as in a mirror. If the human being is not able to discover this meaning, he may fall into a *noogenic neurosis* as opposed to a *psychogenic* one, according to Frankl. The noogenic neurosis is rooted in the spiritual dimension, not religious, but human. Therefore, the conflicts he suffers are not neurotic or necessarily pathological, but rather existential, of existential frustration, therefore, the lack of meaning reveals a spiritual anguish, so logotherapy helps the individual to find meaning in his life, "the hidden *logos* of his existence".⁴ As Nietzsche says: "Whoever has a *way* to live can endure almost any *how*".⁴ In Frankl's case it was the act of reworking that manuscript that was stripped from him in Auschwitz that ultimately gave meaning to his existence.

The issue on which our author reflects is that humanity, with the system we are living, rather than being free, is forced to choose. We observe today with the mass media and social networks that present certain jobs or activities (sometimes illicit) as successful, that young people, rather than leaning towards a career that satisfies their interests or concerns, opt for one that remunerates them economically; however, in the end, they become frustrated professionals who work

in something they did not choose, not because their parents imposed it on them, but because it was the most economically convenient thing to do. This explains why some people choose when they see what other people do (conformism) or what society wants them to do (totalitarianism). For some reason, Schopenhauer⁴ stated that “humanity is condemned to oscillate eternally between tension and boredom”.⁴

By asking students what life expects of them, they are not being asked what society wants them to do, but rather what they must do to make their existence meaningful. When one speaks of “life”, one speaks rather of “their life”. Something that was posed to the students, at the moment of applying the logotherapy and building their life project was: what does *their* life expect them to do so that it has meaning, what do they really long for or can do? “The meaning of life must be sought in the world, not inside the human being or his *psyche*”, it must be formulated in concrete terms, not abstract. Being human implies turning towards something or someone other than oneself, either to realize a value, to achieve a meaning or to meet another human being. The more one forgets oneself - by giving oneself to a cause or to the loved one - the more human one becomes and the more one perfects one’s capacities.⁴

The purpose of this whole project was to achieve personal self-realization and while “the meaning of life changes continuously... it never ceases”.⁴ There are only three ways to find meaning in life: by performing an action, by accepting a talent or gift, or by suffering. Frankl recommends that, when contemplating life, from the proximity of death, it is possible for a person to find meaning from the mission to be performed, among which suffering is included. This is contrary to what existentialist philosophers affirm that one must endure the absurdity of life. Another practical exercise was to have asked the students: what is your mission in life, what actions must you take to achieve it, what are your talents? If you have not discovered them, what is the best thing you do?

Methodology

The participants with whom the study was conducted and who made up the sample were the 70 first-year students, ranging from 18 to 21 years old at the Escuela Normal Experimental de San Antonio Matute, during the January-June 2022 semester. The criteria for the selection of the sample is that students were sought with whom a class was taught according to the research topic and that allowed, according to the curriculum, the implementation of the proposal. The methodological perspective adopted was *interpretative* or *qualitative*, since social phenomena were described and understood through interpretation, finding a meaning or logic to actions, events, processes or concepts, through inference.¹⁰ “Qualitative studies tend to understand social reality as the result of a historical process of construction seen from multiple logics present in the diverse and heterogeneous social actors and, therefore, from their particular aspects and rescuing interiority”.¹¹ This approach allows developing “questions and hypotheses before, during or after the data collection and analysis”.¹⁰

Researchers using the qualitative method seek to understand a social situation as a whole, taking into account its properties and dynamics.¹² Qualitative studies tend to understand social reality as the result of a historical process of construction seen from the multiple logics present in the diverse and heterogeneous social actors.¹¹ It is oriented to deepen in some specific cases and not to generalize based on large volumes of data. Its concern is not primarily to measure, but to describe textually and analyze the social phenomenon based on its determining features, as perceived by the members of the

situation under study.¹³ Initially, under this approach, the research questions were posed and did not necessarily seek to test hypotheses. The data collection methods used were based on description and observation; therefore, the questions and assumptions arose within the research process itself and the model of inquiry was flexible, since it depended on the facts, interpretation, responses and theory. It sought to reconstruct reality as it was observed within the social context. The model was holistic, because it encompassed reality as a whole, without reducing it to a numerical study of its parts.¹⁴

The overall design of the research, that is, the general plan through which the data collection techniques and the analysis of the information were defined, in order to answer the questions formulated¹⁵ was of the bibliographic type, because “secondary data, that is, data that have been obtained by others and are elaborated and processed according to the purposes of those who initially elaborate and handle them”¹⁶ were used. The design was also qualitative because the intention was to describe the phenomena as they occurred naturally (without experimenting or applying a previous treatment); it was heuristic in nature, with inductive reasoning, since it did not start from hypotheses or a priori questions, but allowed to discover the phenomena within their social system. After collecting the data, they were classified or categorized,¹⁷ using techniques such as observation and documentary analysis.¹⁸ A research technique is understood as “a data collection activity that is applied systematically to a subject or groups of subjects”.¹⁹ The technique for the analysis of the information was documentary, since the document was analyzed, it was the unit of analysis to make a description of it, trying to unveil the ideas expressed by its author.²⁰

The research was also bibliographic, since it was mainly applied to the analysis of bibliography.²¹ It was also documentary because it was formal, theoretical and abstract, since it collected, analyzed and interpreted information contained in documents or information supports registered in books, newspapers, indexed magazines, iconographic and ideographic, sound, digital or electronic, legal and non-legal materials.²⁰ The documentary study made possible “a search and treatment of information generated from the studies made on a particular subject, which have been accumulated in the course of the history of mankind and are presented under the most diverse modalities”.²⁰

In parallel, it was applied because its purpose was “change and human improvement, solving practical problems”.²² The units of analysis were logotherapy and life project. It was also of the descriptive type since it was proposed “to describe some fundamental characteristics of a homogeneous set of phenomena”²³ in order to find the structure or behavior of the phenomenon under study, thus providing systematic and comparable information with other sources. Similarly, it was intended to “point out in a rigorous and systematic way the characteristics, functions, frequencies, association relations of a given phenomenon or fact, at an internal or external level”.^{16,24} Finally, through description, the aim was to represent a thing in such a way that a mental image of it is constructed, that is, “to enumerate the properties of a thing without defining it”.²⁰

The research method, that is, a “way of approaching reality, of studying the phenomena of nature, society and thought, with the purpose of discovering their essence and relationships”,²⁵ was the *hermeneutic* method. Hermeneutics is present in all research, as a phase of the process. The researcher must interpret the results to which he submitted his research to discover the findings and make contributions to the state of knowledge, so it is an inherent part of his activity and cannot be dispensed with. Therefore, it is important for

every social scientist to know and master it in order to incorporate hermeneutics to his task; therefore, he must not only have an epistemological (theory of knowledge) or methodological scaffolding, but also a philosophical, anthropological (study of man), semiotic (study of signs) and linguistic (study of the rules of language), from which hermeneutics is configured.

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek *hermeneuein* which literally translates as “to interpret”.²⁶ It is conceived as “the art of interpretation”,²⁷ and is linked to language,²¹ because the subject is a creator of language according to Nietzsche;²⁸ in addition to the fact that hermeneutics is based on dialogue, a dialogue that constitutes us as human beings.²⁹ In this sense, more than an analysis (in the Cartesian sense of decomposing an object into its parts to understand it), it is an *understanding*, that is, finding the “global meaning” of a discourse, *excavating its background*³⁰ to find out what it meant, what signs or codes it uses, to whom it is addressed, how it is said. Generally speaking, hermeneutics is applied to the understanding of texts,³¹ however, with³² Gadamer³³ in *Truth and Method*, it was formally established that “every objective dimension of human life” could be subject to a *reflective work*. For some reason, a century earlier,^{34,35} defined it as a “process by means of which we know psychic life with the help of sensible signs that are its manifestation”.

Regarding the techniques for collecting information, one of them was *observation*, through which data on nonverbal behaviors were collected.³⁶ Observation, within qualitative research, “is a technique that consists of observing a phenomenon, fact or case, taking information and recording it for later analysis”.³⁷ The type of observation carried out was *participant observation*, which allowed for social interaction between the researcher and the participants and, at the same time, to collect data in a systematic and non-intrusive way.³⁸ The characteristics of this type of observation is that the “researcher observes and participates in the lives of the subjects studied”.³⁶

Another technique used was the *analysis of document content*, through which an interpretation of the discourse that exists in the texts was made, thus constituting a technique that made it possible to read and interpret the content of any document, especially written ones. It is mainly based on reading as an instrument for collecting information, which must be done in a systematic, objective, replicable and valid way.³⁹ *Informal dialogues* were also held with the students with whom the proposal was applied in order to gather their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about it.⁴⁰ Finally, another research technique was *bibliographic* (books) and *videographic* (videos). In this case, bibliographic cards and video cards were used, as well as worksheets to record “literally what was said in the source of information. To elaborate this card, the idea of interest is selected and copied between quotation marks”.⁴¹

Results

For the analysis and interpretation of the results of the qualitative data, two categories were chosen according to the main research topics: speech therapy and construction of life project, which allowed to manage the amount of information collected in the research and to present the results in according to the proposed objectives. For the presentation of the results and interpretation of the informal dialogues held with the students, as well as the observations made and recorded, the analysis was made from the perspectives of the categories. In the dialogues, the participants shared their experiences based on the application of logotherapy in the construction of their life project, so they were open to tell their pain, joy and achievements. Rather than describing the discourses, the focus was on the experience of

the individuals. According to Bruner⁴², lived experience is richer than discourse, since it is thought and desire, word and image.

In the first activity where the students were given the task of exploring the cemetery near their home or their context and counting the graves where there were people such as young people or children, when asked what they thought about the fact that many of these lives were cut short prematurely, one student answered that she felt sad about this possibility, because how many dreams for the future did these people have that could not be fulfilled because they lived too short a time. When asked what would happen if they were also in that position, another student said that she had never thought about it and that, if so, it would be very distressing, since she considers that she has much to live and much to do. Frankl⁴³ comments that, if the human being is not threatened by any death or limitation to his possibilities, he does not see as valuable to devote himself to any activity or experience, since he always considers that there is time for it; however, he points out that when he thinks that life may end, that our time is limited, as well as our possibilities, it will make sense to do something and take advantage of his time to make it fertile.

At the end of the session, a student was freely interviewed and was asked, after this activity, why she important to make a life project and she answered that it was to list the dreams she has to make in the future in the short and medium term. When asked directly what she would do to avoid truncating all these dreams with a premature death, she commented that first is to take care of herself, not to fall into addictions, to avoid violent environments and people, as well as to listen to the advice of her parents, who already lived and went through her stage. For Frankl⁴³, death gives meaning to life because it not only teaches human beings the unrepeatability of their existence, but also the unique and unrepeatable character of their independence.

As could be seen, this exercise of counting the graves in the cemetery near their home and thinking about the possibility of finding themselves in that situation, provoked in the young people a self-awareness of the importance of living and having life, when other people no longer have it and would have liked to be in their position to achieve their projects. Although the experience of thinking and narrating their experience was distressing and sad, so is the need to build not only a life project but also to describe concrete actions that lead them to self-care in the face of the dangers and risks that life represents. Meaning, according to Frankl⁴⁴, must be sought, since traditions and values disappear.

In the second session of the project construction, the learners also analyzed the two heroic but desperate acts that Viktor Frankl himself experienced. When they were told about his anecdote when his manuscript containing all his ideas was taken away from him and destroyed by the Nazi troops in his presence, when the participants were asked what they felt and thought about this situation, they agreed in their participation that it is sad, desperate to know that the entire professional career could be shattered by a totalitarian regime. Likewise, a student participated questioning how it is possible that there were governments that were masters over people's lives and how they dared to exterminate en masse. The conclusion reached was that it is important to be attentive to this type of systems and that as a society we must be vigilant to avoid their repetition with the signs that Frankl himself shares with us. In this regard, Frankl⁴⁵ points out that “a living and vital consciousness is the only thing that can enable man to resist the effects of existential emptiness, namely conformism and totalitarianism”.⁴⁵ Faced with the question, What would you have done if you were in Frankl's position? Some participants agreed that it is difficult to determine, because if there is no help and the whole

family is confined to an extermination camp, it is difficult to have an escape at that time.

In the third session and after analyzing Frankl's decision to stay with his elderly parents despite the risk of being deported by the Nazi regime, which ultimately led not only his parents and he were deported, but also his brother who was planning to escape to Australia and even his wife who was pregnant, When asked what they would have done, whether to take refuge in the United States or stay with their parents, one student said that it was a difficult decision, especially because his wife was pregnant, the best thing he would have done would have been to leave his parents because they had already lived in some way. Another student thought about the alternative of escaping all together, especially when they began to see the accumulation of deportations, so they would have seen the possibility of escaping to another place where they would not have been found without waiting for the events to have advanced.

But when questioned directly about what they would have chosen, whether to run away to the United States or stay with their parents, in the position that Frankl had, the group in general did not give a definitive answer; what was painful was what this character experienced. Frankl⁴⁵ indicates, "as soon as a painful fate cannot be changed, it must not only be accepted, but it must also be transmuted into something meaningful, into an achievement". Now, they were asked that after listening to this story, what do they think that they have all the opportunities, they do not live in a totalitarian regime like the Nazi that persecutes not only those who think differently, but even those who are of another race or religion, or are born with a different ancestry like the Jews, three participants agreed that it is a good fortune to live in these times and have every possibility to be fulfilled as a person.

Two students answered that this is because they do not value their lives and the opportunities they have, especially since in this government they are giving scholarships for studying at any level; Frankl⁴⁶ says that there are patients who do not present palpable clinical symptoms, but rather have a "lack of content in their lives"; one of the students even commented that one should thank God that one does not have illnesses, because there are people who thank him for the fact that they are alive one more day. The above had an impact on the students' motivation to begin to build their own life project, as they were enthusiastic when evaluating the different alternatives available to them.

Another fact that also saddened them a lot was the loss of their child, there were even two students who were observed to have their eyes rubbed when they heard that Frankl together with his wife decided to give a name to that child that the Nazi army forced her to abort. They were simply asked what they felt and one student dared to say that she was very sad, mainly because the couple was not given the opportunity to decide whether or not to have their child, they were simply forced to lose it; besides she was very sad about the pain they both felt, especially because she considered that the future baby was not to blame; the opportunity he had to live was taken away, especially when his parents wanted to have him, educate him, raise him and form him to be someone in life. They were asked what they think about the fact that they were not given this opportunity and that they have it to live, they said that it is a gift either from God or from life, but that they should make the most of it. One student even said that he thought it was fundamental that his parents had taken care of him until today, for which he thanked them for having done so; he even thought it was pertinent to take advantage of this opportunity to do something great in his life, of which his parents would feel proud.

When it was analyzed the fact that Frankl, despite the murder of his parents, his brother, his wife and his son, having lost everything, the only encouragement he had to continue living was the fact that he was able to write that manuscript that he remembered as a lecture and that he managed to do it in only nine days, the students were asked at this moment what situation or fact motivates them to continue living, one student said working in her career, and being able to achieve everything she wanted, besides helping her parents; another said also to work and get married.

In the fourth class the students were asked about the climate of insecurity and violence, what actions can they take to take care of themselves? And one student said to choose friends well, not to go alone to parties or meetings, even ask her parents to go for her when it is after midnight; not to consume drugs or excessive alcohol, drink in moderation and, if not controlled, it is best not to drink; as well as not to promote a macho culture with their children, not to watch violent content and to promote equality between women and men. They were asked to write this list in their notebook as a first approximation. Another action that was also carried out with the participants was to describe and narrate in their notebooks their experiences of pain and they were asked in general to share them with the group. Only one student answered the call -it was observed that the others were embarrassed to share these situations-, so she shared that something that made her very sad was that they laughed a lot about her physical appearance, for the fact of having been overweight, it was something that marked her for life, because it caused her a lot of pain because she did not accept her body.

After this event, the students were asked what they should do to avoid pain and another student answered that they should avoid bullying, cyberbullying, as well as school bullying, because we do not know the pain we cause to others. On this point, it was reflected that we are no one to be judging others by their physical appearance, by the way they speak or express themselves, in short, by their body; it is unfortunate that we make fun of others for these aspects when it is what distinguishes us as people.

Following Frankl's recommendations, in the fifth session, the students were guided to find the meaning of life or *metasense*, for which, as the author himself recommends, they were asked to put themselves in the situation of being in an imminent death either by an illness or by an accident, and to all the loves, friendships, projects, obligations, illusions and nostalgia that they left along the way. They were then asked to make a list with concrete terms that they could understand and without being ambiguous, to write them down in their notebook. They were also asked to respond directly to the question: What does *your* life expect from you? Clarifying that they should not answer this question as Frankl advises: what do you expect from life? But on the contrary. He even spent part of the session clarifying this fundamental question.

In sharing the results, one student said that the loves he would leave, in the face of an imminent death, would be his parents at the moment, because he does not have a girlfriend. The friendships are those of soccer, the projects are to finish a career, get married and have two children. The obligations are to help his parents financially, because the situation at home is difficult. The illusions are to grow, to work on his degree, to achieve as a person and to form a family. Finally, when he answered what *his* life expects from him, he said to take care of himself, study with a lot of effort, finish his normal education, make an effort to work in what he studied and, if he is lucky, find someone to have a life with and have children. He hopes for two, but that they will decide together.

Another student also participated and pointed out that among the loves she would leave are those of her parents, but also that of a boyfriend she has at the moment. Her friends are two friends whom she loves very much, they are even her confidants and share many things. The obligations she leaves and has at the moment are to study, to be a good daughter and, her dreams are to finish her career and to be able to achieve herself as a teacher serving the community that touches her. When answering the question of what *her* life expects from her, she said to achieve all these purposes, so that the life she is living is worthwhile. As could be seen, in many of the questions, the answers were similar, since the students coincided in indicating that the loves they leave behind are their parents, the obligations are to study, work and contribute to their homes, the illusions are to study, work and form a family; However, not all of them share the illusion of studying for a university degree, but when answering the question of what their life expects from them, they all agreed in answering that they want to be good people, dedicated, based their life on effort and doing something productive, not necessarily getting married and forming a family, as there were those who only indicated that study, work and be able to buy their own things. The students warned that a life dedicated to addictions, to laziness, is not a life, it is a waste of life.

Effectively with these answers it is verified that the solution that logotherapy offers is noogenic and not psychogenic, because it focuses more than in the social or psychological dimension of the human being, in the spiritual, not in the properly religious aspect, but interior, of personal growth, of putting another face in front of the life in spite of the vicissitudes that are being lived. It is considered that the students understood that one does not always achieve what one sets out to achieve, so one must be resilient and apply the maxim of Marcus Aurelius: "My God, give me the courage to change the things I can change, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and the wisdom to distinguish between the two".⁴⁷

Regarding the effectiveness of the strategy, the students pointed out that it allowed them to give meaning to their existence, but above all to value life and the opportunities they have ahead of them. Viktor Frankl's story seemed desperate, sad and distressing, but some of them pointed out that it taught them to value life differently, to value the time in which they are living, even though there is generalized violence; here the fundamental thing, they indicated, is to choose friends well and not to follow what the mass media says. The change they perceived is that there are people who do not have the opportunity to live because of an illness and would like to have the opportunity they have, so they should make the most of the moment and the stage they are living, without excesses.⁴⁹⁻⁹⁴

Conclusions

It is considered that there were no significant differences between what the theory exposed and the researcher's findings, because precisely by analyzing Viktor Frankl's life story, it allowed the students to find meaning in living and to value the opportunity they have to live, given the extreme situations that our protagonist lived through. It is considered that a fundamental experience was when they answered the question about what *their* life expects from them, which allowed to mobilize their thinking and dare to answer such a challenging question, as it made them reflect on extreme situations that they often do not consider, as well as to rethink their future with meaning.

It should be noted that this qualitative research favored the analysis of the participants' experiences and meanings over their own discourse, so that priority was given not only to the expression of their

thoughts, but also of their feelings. The experience, Bruner⁴⁸ points out, represents the adoption of new meanings which in turn generate changes in the emotions, sensations and thoughts of the participants, which was perceived as such, since in the free and informal dialogues held with the participants after the sessions, it could be seen that, after studying these topics, they saw their lives endowed with meaning that they had not conferred before.

The most outstanding points of the present investigation were that, through the psychotherapeutic work proposed by Viktor Frankl, it was possible to help adolescents in high school to find a *metasense* to their existence, through a list of actions and purposes in the short and medium term, as well as to find meaning to continue studying at the level in which they were. Two other key points were the qualitative research approach, which privileged the description of social phenomena over numerical accounting, as well as the hermeneutic method, on which it was possible to make an interpretation of what the participants narrated, their experiences, as well as the analysis of gestures, postures, attitudes, thoughts, feelings and emotions.

The most important findings that can be rescued is that students were interested in the topics, were sensitive to the events and atrocities that Viktor Frankl suffered and used them to value his life, which confirms the thesis that logotherapy can be applied as a teaching-learning strategy in education, in particular, so that young people can design and implement their life project, as well as to avoid school dropout that affects so much at this stage, during the first year. Finally, it is suggested to include logotherapy for the construction of a life project not only in higher education, but also in basic education, for the purpose that children and adolescents find a meaning to their life and to the formative process they are living. In this way, we can prevent the neurotics of the future who suffer from frustration and existential anguish, as is currently being observed. It is estimated that this study constitutes a pilot research that opens the doors for further research in terms of expanding to more questions and topics that can be carried out to make students reflect and can find these what *their* life expects from them, as well as to find the *metasense* to their existence, since, in the case of the present proposal, it was mainly based on the life story of Viktor Frankl written in his work *Man's Search for Meaning*.⁴

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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