

EXPERIENCING RESEARCH IN GRADUATE STUDIES: TEN LESSONS FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

Emerson Augusto de Medeiros¹

Abstract

This essay aims to reflect on research training in *stricto sensu* graduate education through ten lessons, understood primarily as lessons drawn from experience in supervising master's and doctoral students and from professional practice in higher education. Among the recommendations, the following stand out: conceiving graduate education as a life project; researching with social and ethical commitment; developing intellectual autonomy; fostering sociocultural development; researching creatively; constructing research in dialogue with others; making writing a formative tool and, moreover, a defining feature of the researcher's identity. Generally, the advice suggests that *stricto sensu* graduate studies are a period in one's professional life marked by intense growth when undertaken creatively and with engagement, as well as through critical reflection on the formative experience. These considerations reinforce that conducting research in graduate studies inherently offers the possibility of self-development for the early-career researchers. Furthermore, graduate studies will fulfill their purpose when they enable researchers not only to acquire fundamental knowledge in their field of research and foster self-development, but also to deepen their social awareness at both the individual and collective levels.

Keywords: Education, Graduate Studies (*Stricto Sensu*), Early-Career Researcher.

Introduction

*I would have preferred to start this story like a fairy tale.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

The reflections presented here emerge from the professional practice of professors who train researchers in *stricto sensu* graduate programs. Within this context, diverse situations have prompted critical reflection on the conduct of research in graduate education, particularly in the fields of Education and Teaching. This text, written in the form of an essay, aims to explore the research training in *stricto sensu* graduate programs through ten lessons. It is intended for novice researchers or those who have reflected on and been concerned with formative processes in this academic context. The focus is particularly directed at the fields of Education and Teaching.

The essay is anchored in experience, understood, following Bondía (2002), not as something that simply happens (an event), but as that which passes through and affects researchers, that traverses and transforms researchers. Furthermore, the text is grounded in sustained engagement with research in master's and doctoral education, where one first develops as a researcher, as well as in higher education teaching. This trajectory encompasses undergraduate

¹Emerson Augusto de Medeiros, emerson.medeiros@ufersa.edu.br, Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3988-3915>.

supervision in teacher education programs, graduate supervision, the coordination of research groups and graduate programs, the conduct and dissemination of research, and the evaluation of scholarly articles and academic works, including undergraduate monographs, dissertations, and theses.

Moreover, the text draws on the scholarly work of researchers such as Nóvoa (2014), who eloquently offered, through a letter, advice for those embarking on an educational research journey. It is important to highlight that this is inspired, especially in terms of their semantic approach and textual organization, by the writings of the aforementioned Portuguese researcher. However, the experiences of recent years in graduate education, as well as the concerns that emerged through dialogues with supervised master's and doctoral students, have been central to the reflections developed in this essay.

Considerations are presented through ten lessons, which evoke reflections on conducting research in *stricto sensu* graduate programs, contributing to the training of graduate students who sometimes feel lonely or confused in the process of becoming researchers. These lessons are not considered sentimental or as conveying absolute truths. In this sense, the essay distances itself from the popular saying that states, "if advice were any good, it would not be given away." Advice is understood, above all, as lessons from experience (Bondía, 2002) built from particular trajectories, as well as from experiences of other researchers shared in educational literature.

In terms of textual organization, the essay is structured into ten sections, in addition to this introduction and the concluding remarks. Each section presents notes on a specific lesson, contemplating aspects involved in the training process for research in *stricto sensu* graduate programs. Although the text is primarily directed at early-career researchers in the fields of Education and Teaching, it presents reflections of general interest for students in *stricto sensu* graduate programs.

Therefore, this essay aims to contribute to this thematic issue by offering new insights into research practices in the context of graduate education. It is intended for these lessons to serve as a guiding framework for early-career researchers navigating the *strictu sensu* graduate experience.

Lesson One: *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Education is a Life Endeavour

The stars are lit so that everyone can one day find their own.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).

In *How to Write a Thesis*, Umberto Eco emphatically states: "live your thesis as a challenge. The important thing is to do things with pleasure" (Eco, 2010, p. 169). This recommendation invites a critical examination of contemporary research practices in graduate education. Today's master's and doctoral programs differ markedly from earlier models of training, having become increasingly oriented toward speed, performance metrics and employability skills - often to the detriment of the student's broader intellectual and personal formation.

Immediate returns on work are increasingly demanded, extending to both training and daily practices—including the expectation of instantaneous



communication. In this context, graduate education has become markedly utilitarian. The prioritization of rapid outcomes overshadows the acknowledgement that that research fundamentally requires time, reflection, and maturation. But what does this imply?

First, it is argued that graduate education in Brazil, as structured by the quadrennial evaluation conducted by the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES), has oriented training toward a neoliberal logic. Faculty members are pressured to produce at all costs. Publish or perish: that is the question (Evangelista, 2022). In this context, they are compelled to establish partnerships with foreign institutions and researchers. Moving beyond productivity, the current hegemonic discourse is that of internationalization.

It is argued that the production of knowledge should not be configured as a mechanical or merely bureaucratic process, but rather as a creative and formative practice capable of promoting the personal and professional growth of the researcher (Araújo; Fortunato; Medeiros, 2021). As Nóvoa (2000) points out, when exercising a profession—in this case, that of a researcher—one should not dissociate the personal from the professional, since these dimensions are continuously intertwined. Research, when genuinely lived and experienced, constitutes a powerful device for awareness and transformation of the human being in their totality.

It may be stated that at no other moment in one's life is such growth experienced as during the time as a student in *stricto sensu* graduate education. This is because graduate education was conceived as a lifelong endeavor. Thus, it is reiterated: experiencing research fully is fundamental. It means conceiving it as a sensitive intellectual and artisanal work that, more than the pursuit of an academic degree, is oriented toward epistemic, ontological, axiological, technical, and, above all, human growth.

In defending the need to truly experience graduate education, attention is called to the time dedicated to reading, to the maturation of both the investigative object and the methodological design of the research, as well as to the appropriation of the fundamentals of scientific practice in the field in which one intends to obtain a master's or doctoral degree. This process demands time and dedication. It is observed with concern that students and faculty members are immersed in an alienating productivism, where the number of articles published in journals overrides the knowledge produced throughout the development of a dissertation or thesis.

With this reflection, one does not position oneself against the production of knowledge nor against its dissemination through publications in journals, book chapters, among other formats. Such practices are necessary and relevant. Early-career researchers should be warned against is the excessive emphasis on an alienating production—for instance, in predatory scientific journals and other communication channels—which contributes little, in qualitative terms, to the advancement of knowledge and to society (Nóvoa, 2014; Soares, 2021). Conceiving graduate education as a life project implies recognizing it as a continuous device for growth, which enables self-knowledge based on the experiences lived by the researcher within the investigative process.

Furthermore, this does not mean opposing internationalization in graduate education. On the contrary, the experience within formative contexts

that transcend the borders of the spaces in which one is formed contributes to broadened learning and intercultural training, elevating one's condition as sociocultural beings (Candau, 2024). The warning issued refers, above all, to the frameworks to which one is frequently subjected, almost always justified by the need to earn points in reports at the end of each graduate evaluation cycle.

In this way, it is advisable that graduate education be conceived as a life project, in which time, effort, and energy converge as an emancipatory human achievement, built from experiences shared with different people and in distinct spaces, leading to self-formation. Research, in its essence, carries this characteristic: self-formation.

Lesson Two: Deepening Knowledge of Academic Field While Acknowledging the Creativity Demands of Research

*People have no imagination! They only know how to repeat what we say.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

There has been a growing recognition particularly in the context of thesis and dissertation defense committees, a lack of conceptual and methodological depth in studies. It is observed that texts that are limited to presenting, often only superficially, what has already been stated by other researchers, without establishing a substantive connection with the object of investigation.

It is evident that some researchers holding master's or even doctoral degrees are unaware of basic conceptual foundations, from both an epistemological and a methodological standpoint. This is evidenced by insufficient familiarity with research approaches (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods), types and methods of research (case study, field research, documentary research, bibliographic research, among others), data generation techniques (interview, questionnaire, observation, documentary analysis, focus groups, among others), and data analysis techniques (discourse analysis, content analysis, thematic analysis, among others). Therefore, it is essential to master the theoretical-methodological and epistemological foundations of the field in which the research is conducted.

Considering the paradigms (positivism, critical theory, constructivism, among others) or the epistemological approaches (phenomenology, multireferentiality, historical-dialectical materialism, scientific bricolage, among others) that guide studies in the field of education, for example, it is evident that many graduate students conduct their research without a clear understanding of the scholarly field to which they belong or the epistemological foundations on which their research is grounded.

Furthermore, inconsistencies are frequently observed in research design, namely: the overarching research problem is conflated with the specific research question; the general and specific objectives are incompatible with each other; the methodology does not align with the stated objectives in the study, among other issues. In addition, theoretical eclecticism often mixes divergent epistemological perspectives.

With the expansion of methodological and epistemological perspectives in the field of education, arising from the emergence of critical and post-critical theories in the 1970s (Ferreira, 2009), there is no consensus—nor should there

be—about the way knowledge is produced in the educational area. However, the issues raised here refer to basic aspects of educational knowledge production.

Additionally, it is frequently observed that students conducting research in the field of education do so with little creativity. When studies do not exhibit the aforementioned shortcomings, they are often reduced to mechanical reproductions of methodological manuals, lacking originality and innovation.

In addition, Nóvoa (2014, p. 14-15) argues:

[...] conhece bem aquilo que fazes, a tua ciência, o teu campo académico, as regras, as metodologias, as normas da arteciência da educação. Conhece-as, mas cumpre-as quanto basta. A investigação ou é criação ou não é nada. É preciso assumir riscos. Se passarmos a vida a evitá-los, renunciaremos à possibilidade de produzir algo interessante, com significado para nós e para os outros.

Taking the initiative to conduct research that deviates from conventional approaches is of fundamental importance. A well-conceived master's thesis or doctoral dissertation in the field of education is characterized by creative elements, which can emerge at any stage, from the theoretical-methodological approach to the writing style (Corazza, 2022). A creative researcher employs diverse investigative strategies to understand the phenomenon under investigation and conveys it through an engaging writing style. Freitas (2022, p. 97) states:

A produção intelectual é ardilosa, por ser flutuante e escorregadia. Ela oscila e tem caprichos. O que chamamos de criatividade é a capacidade de reter e ampliar, com um toque próprio e único, por meio de uma inspiração, um *flash* ou um *insight*, uma coisinha de nada que atravessa o nosso pensamento e pode fugir. Boa parte dessa criatividade, porém, é fruto da nossa capacidade de concentração, de disciplina, de esforço mental e até de teimosia. Precisamos não de um dia bonito de céu azul, mas de uma boa dose de paciência para produzir alguma coisa interessante, para organizar raciocínios, transformar barro em tijolos e tijolos em casas.

It should be noted that creativity in research entails transcending existing knowledge, which implies developing research by establishing novel conceptual connections and innovating methodologically. By balancing creative freedom with methodological rigor, creativity aligns with the production of more original knowledge. However, it should be emphasized that creativity in research, like research itself, is learned through experience. Inventive production demands time and intellectual maturation.

When researchers revisit their own theses and dissertations, they readily perceive the extent of their intellectual growth. It is common to hear colleagues remark that, in hindsight, they would approach their master's thesis or doctoral dissertation differently. The authors of this text have likewise undergone this process. Researchers are encouraged to venture beyond conventional approaches and to cultivate creativity in the production of educational knowledge. Rather than merely reproducing existing research, one should innovate in light of the specificities of the research object.

Lesson Three: Develop Intellectual Autonomy



Humans no longer have time to know anything. They buy things already made in shops.
[...] You must be very patient.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).

It is widely acknowledged, particularly through the reading of acknowledgments sections in master's and doctoral dissertations, as well as through conversations and celebrations following thesis or dissertation defenses, that *stricto sensu* graduate education represents a significant stage in one's life trajectory, one that can profoundly shape researchers' lives. Far beyond the attainment of an academic degree, as previously discussed, it transforms researchers as social and human beings.

However, for this journey to develop fully, it is desirable to develop intellectual autonomy. In this sense, it becomes essential to intensely cultivate critical thinking, curiosity, and the ability to construct one's own ideas (Freitas, 2022). It is necessary to learn how to search, to move autonomously, even if under the guidance of a more experienced professional with greater expertise in scientific practice—the advisor.

One of the greatest mistakes a graduate student can make in their training process, as a master's or doctoral student, is to become excessively dependent on their advisor. It has been observed that students often limit themselves to such an extent that they cannot meet the program's completion deadline. Dependence on the advisor has also resulted in the production of works excessively similar to the style and ideas of the advisor themselves.

It is worth noting that the advisor is a professional who does not experience graduate education entirely as a sole labor function. Teaching in Higher Education is configured as a multidimensional job, which places them in various roles, both inside and outside the classroom, involving teaching, extension, research, and academic management activities, among others (Tardif, 2016; Medeiros, 2020; Araújo; Fortunato; Medeiros, 2021). These aspects constrain the advisor's time in graduate education.

Graduate students should not undertake this journey without their advisor, since this professional helps them navigate their path with wisdom and experience, being an essential figure in the educational journey—especially in the master's program, the initial moment of immersion in *stricto sensu* graduate education. Without guidance, the path tends to be less secure. However, it is equally important not to become dependent on constant attention or direction for the development of research and one's own academic training.

After all, it will be the graduate student who will be awarded the master's or doctoral degree. It is they who will enjoy the potential benefits that this title provides within the academic and broader community. If they do not develop intellectual autonomy throughout the graduate studies process, they will likely face greater challenges and feel the weight of the researcher's role when they later undertake that role, after completing their master's or doctorate, should they choose an academic career.

In our perspective, a thesis or dissertation in the field of education must demonstrate intellectual authorship, allowing the researcher's imprint and voice to be recognized in their production. With the expansion of digital technologies

and the expansion of means of access to information, scientific knowledge has become increasingly accessible. Furthermore, dialogue with other peers and participation in academic activities—previously restricted to an in-person format—contribute to the development of the graduate student's intellectual autonomy. All of this with a pinch of investment in the research process.

Given the multiplicity of communication and information channels available in the present time, it is advisable to seek out and visit specialized websites, scientific journals, databases, libraries, and online repositories, among other sources that offer reliable collections and materials. Within this set, there are numerous possibilities that favor the development of intellectual autonomy, such as books and edited collections, scientific articles, videoconferences with renowned researchers, dissertations, theses, and thematic dossiers, among other materials. Considering the wide range of available resources, it is advisable to avoid relying on a single source or space for one's intellectual formation. Upon finding relevant materials on the topic, it is crucial to also explore the references indicated at the end of the texts.

Another aspect to be considered is prioritizing the work of classic authors in the field, without neglecting contemporary ones, as well as foundational works on the research topic and recent academic productions. Caution is necessary not to get lost in the amount of material available. Narrowing the scope of one's reading collection can be accomplished with the assistance of the advisor, when necessary. Likewise, it is important not to indiscriminately use everything found, especially on the internet.

Intellectual autonomy will be consistent with the ability to produce scholarly work during the graduate studies in an independent, creative, and critical manner, drawing on different possibilities for the development of research and for the personal and academic growth of the researcher.

Lesson Four: Cultivate Your Cultural and Intellectual Repertoire

*Sometimes it doesn't hurt at all to leave some work for later.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

This recommendation may be interpreted as rebellion, indiscipline, or even irresponsibility toward research and graduate education. This is because, for those who regarded graduate studies as a "vow" of exclusive dedication, becoming a researcher is related only to mastering procedural techniques or the subject that is the focus of one's dissertation and doctoral research. Thus, a continuous dedication is demanded, exhausting both mind and body, with the intention of absorbing as much knowledge as possible related to the object of investigation in graduate education.

There have been circumstances in which a graduate student—especially a scholarship holder—has been advised (by their advisor, of course) to dedicate themselves exclusively to reading and activities related to the thesis or dissertation, with no rest on weekends. In another situation, an advisor determined what the student could do during hours not dedicated to research, under the justification that all time should be directed toward academic

production related to the object under investigation. In another case, the graduate student was even told what they could read, provided it was related to their dissertation. Such situations have been witnessed as part of the experience as graduate professors. These examples seem disproportionate, yet they are real. They are part of the less visible reality of graduate education, to which, at times, few have access.

Conversely, it is understood that researchers are not formed within confines of their own intellectual bubbles. It is necessary to cultivate one's cultural and intellectual repertoire; no one broadens their perception of reality within the boundaries of one's own field (Nóvoa, 2014). Graduate education is articulated with the capacity to expand social awareness, which is built through the exchange of experiences with plural spaces, readings, people, and life experiences (Couto, 2014; Bianchetti, 2021).

During the advising process in graduate studies, advisees are encouraged to travel (when they have the financial means to do so), to explore environments beyond academia, to read literature, to spend time relaxing with their families, and to take language courses, for example. Intelligence stems from *inter-legere*—the ability to interconnect—and relates to the act of establishing connections with the world (Nóvoa, 2014).

To build a thesis or a dissertation, one must read—read a lot, read slowly, read diverse things, and, at times, even "useless" things. The ideas that fuel research, graduate studies, and writing often emerge from unexpected situations. They emerge in conversations with family or friends during an afternoon coffee; in at a public park, in a dialogue with street vendor selling candy or roasted corn; in reflections while watching a movie or documentary; or even on a trip to the beach, for example. Once again, it is pertinent to return to Nóvoa (2014, p. 16), whose insights offer further elaboration on the matter:

As ideias novas estão na fronteira, porque esse é o lugar do diálogo e dos encontros. Talvez seja o momento de te lembrar que grandes descobertas foram feitas por acaso, mas que o acaso nunca é acaso: favorece sempre os olhos preparados para ver. Não há nada mais útil que o conhecimento inútil. É ele que nos prepara para ver e para pensar fora dos quadros rígidos em que tantas vezes nos deixamos prender.

However, these movements—so necessary for cultivating one's cultural and intellectual repertoire and one's humanity—do not exempt researchers from their responsibility toward graduate education. Disconnecting from research for a period is healthy. Through such distance it becomes possible to perceive reality and the object of investigation more clearly. Rest is necessary to achieve estrangement, especially on days when progress in reading and writing proves difficult.

Clock time is neither the time of our cognition nor of our body. At times, one sits before the computer for minutes or even hours and manages to express nothing; not a single meaningful paragraph is written, and occasionally a certain repulsion toward research develops. It seems that researching—something so pleasurable—is also thorny. Through moments of detachment, one regains breath to continue. Researchers are not machines.

Developing one's cultural and intellectual repertoire constitutes an act of responsibility toward mental and physical health, among other dimensions. Dedication to study demands daily or weekly commitment; however, in this demanding process, interaction with the world remains essential. It is advisable that researchers, whenever possible, cultivate moments of leisure with family and friends, enjoy restful days, value time alone, and engage in physical exercise. *Stricto sensu* graduate education needs to be conceived horizontally, allowing researchers to explore life and themselves.

Lesson Five: Research is Built in Dialogue with Other People

*Those who pass by us do not go alone, and do not leave us alone. They leave a bit of themselves; they take a little of us.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

Graduate education, especially during the dissertation or thesis writing thesis—after the completion of coursework and other institutional demands, such as the defense of the research proposal—can become a very solitary experience. The idea that "writing a dissertation or a thesis is living in solitude" is frequently encountered and experienced. Such solitude is not only of a physical nature but also manifests as a feeling of isolation in the pursuit of producing original and unprecedented knowledge, accompanied by feelings of uncertainty regarding what is being done (Eco, 2010). Questions often arise: is this work producing something that makes sense? Is what is accomplished and written scientifically sound? Is science, in fact, being produced?

If universities, science, or research cannot exist without sharing (Nóvoa, 2014), then, today, more than ever, research training in graduate education and scientific practice itself require a collaborative dimension. It is an exercise that is simultaneously individual and collective (Kincheloe; Berry, 2007). In this sense, the advice offered is that research be built in dialogue with other people.

To this end, it is fundamental to participate in study and research groups, participate in academic events in the field of education—as well as those more specific to the theme of the dissertation or thesis—engage in dialogue with classmates, fellow graduate students, and the broader academic community, participate in activities promoted by the program to which one is enrolled, and maintain a dialogue with the advisor whenever necessary. Dialogue, according to Freire (2017), constitutes an existential necessity in the educational process.

Through dialogue, based on what was previously pointed out, the research problem and investigative objectives are mapped out with greater consistency, aspects related to the theoretical framework of the study are defined with greater clarity, the research methodology is better designed, and approaches to data analysis are more carefully planned.

Furthermore, the experience with other researchers at scientific events, for example, broadens the understanding of the field of knowledge in which the research is conducted, broadens one's perspective on the object under investigation, and enables direct contact with more experienced researchers who have been studying the topic longer, drawing on experiences in different cultures and social and institutional contexts. A common mistake among novice

researchers is to believe that graduate education is restricted to completing courses, developing research, and writing the final text.

In our understanding, it is impossible to conduct research without the collaboration of other people, from those closest to us to those geographically distant. The absence of dialogue in graduate education constitutes a trap and a limitation for the novice researcher who, by remaining confined to their immediate surroundings, weakens their training process, since they fail to confront ideas and revise theoretical-epistemological, methodological, and ethical-political assumptions, thus compromising the construction of an investigative identity grounded in a more holistic perspective.

Lesson Six: Make Your Writing a Formative Device and, Furthermore, An "Identity" Marker of Your Condition as a Researcher

*We only write eternal things.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

Making writing a formative tool and, furthermore, a marker of one's identity as a researcher implies understanding that writing in graduate studies is not restricted to a technical or instrumental exercise aimed solely at communicating research findings (Soares, 2021). Rather, it refers to a formative exercise through which researchers build, recognize, and situate their own epistemic, ethical, and political standpoint within the scientific sphere. In this sense, writing ceases to be simply the final product of research and becomes a fertile space for reflection, learning, and transformation.

However, Soares (2021) states that there have been several difficulties in graduate education, mainly of an ethical nature regarding academic writing. Plagiarism and self-plagiarism, for instance, are frequently identified by journal editors during the screening stages that follow a manuscript submission. One aspect that drives this reality relates to certain researchers who, in addition to lacking training in the ethical principles of scientific research, believe that writing a text happens overnight; in fact, it requires time and rest. Textual work requires maturation and the feedback from other readers—from the advisor, for example, to early-career researchers.

The writing process ought not to be postponed until the dissertation or thesis defense is near. In research training, writing acts as a tool that organizes thought, challenges so-called certainties, and provides opportunities for researchers to critically assess their theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices. When writing, researchers are continuously questioned by their interrogations, by the limits of what they know, and by the possibilities of what remains to be known. This formative exercise is also dialogical, since all academic writing is constructed in dialogue with authors, with prior studies, and with other epistemological frameworks (Garcia, 2021; Soares, 2021).

Conceiving writing as a formative device means recognizing that it actively plays a constitutive role in shaping the researcher. It is through the writing process that researchers learn to argue, to sustain positions, and to grapple with doubt, partiality, and the complexity of academic knowledge. Writing reveals

weaknesses but also foster advances, allowing researchers to perceive shifts in their patterns of reasoning and knowledge construction throughout their graduate studies (Soares, 2021).

As guidelines that can support the writing process in graduate education, it is recommended that early-career researchers seek to develop a coherent text, providing a coherent and logical flow to the text. To achieve this, paragraphs should be neither excessively long nor overly brief; clarity and precision in communication should be prioritized as the work will be read by others who will assess its quality. One should recall that the text is the component of the research that will remain publicly accessible upon publication. One should write in accordance with academic standards, citing sources accurately—particularly by accurately representing the author's arguments—while maintaining an authorial voice. Prior to submitting the text for supervisory review one should read, set aside for maturation, and then revise the text; premature submission undermines scholarly rigor.

It is also advisable to avoid colloquial register. There is no perfect or definitive text; however, one should strive sufficiently to demonstrate the study's relevance to educational research. This is an academic text.

It should be noted that proficiency in academic writing is not acquired quickly. Reading is an essential resource for every researcher. According to Nóvoa (2014), if one does not cultivate a genuine engagement with reading and knowledge acquisition, one may become proficient in designing questionnaires and conducting interviews, but they will not effectively communicate their findings.

Nevertheless, writing constitutes a marker of the researcher's identity. Each text reflects traces of a specific lens for approaching reality, engaging in dialogue with the theoretical framework, and positioning oneself in relation to the objects of study. Even when subject to standards, textual genres, and academic conventions, writing is never neutral or entirely homogeneous (Nóvoa, 2014). It expresses choices, priorities, sensibilities, and commitments that reveal the researcher's identity.

In this sense, the researcher's identity is also constituted by the way they write, argue, and construct meaning. Writing thus becomes a locus of authorial agency, where researchers inscribe their voice within the academic community, assuming responsibility for what they say and how they say it. Research training implies, therefore, learning to write consciously and authorially, understanding writing as a situated social practice that is historically shaped by one's social positioning (Soares, 2021).

By understanding writing as a formative device and as an identity marker, one expands its function beyond the production of definitive accounts of research findings. Writing, from this perspective, constituting oneself as a researcher—with doubts, setbacks, and advances; it means positioning oneself distinctively and authorially within educational scholarship. As Nóvoa (2014) argues, one may affirm that writing is what ultimately distinguishes researchers from one another.

Lesson Seven: Conduct Research with Social and Ethical Commitment

You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.



(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).

The *Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa* defines research as "a thorough search for the verification of reality; investigation, inquiry to know something" (Dicionário Aurélio, 2026). In the educational context, according to Esteban (2010), research in the educational context can be conceived as a systematic process to generate knowledge about them. Whether as a thorough search or a systematic process, research constitutes a means of producing knowledge about empirical reality. In the field of education, this knowledge can support the formulation of educational policies, school curricula, and teacher training. Thus, social and ethical commitment is not to be understood as a secondary element of research, but as one of its core principles.

Social commitment entails awareness of the impacts that the knowledge produced can generate on society at large, on the social community involved in the study, and on the research participants. It must be recognized that one does not conduct research solely to pursue a graduate-level education or an academic degree, as noted earlier.

Furthermore, research in the field of education has broadened the debate on various topics. Thus, conducting research with social commitment means questioning whom a given body of knowledge serves, who benefits from its results, and who might also be adversely affected by those results. The researcher in the field of educational conducts research because there is a need to advance/produce knowledge on certain subjects. When I conduct research exclusively for personal interests, I disregard the fact that all scientific knowledge is also social (Gatti, 2012).

From an ethical standpoint, research demands responsibility for the subjects involved (when the research involves human beings), the data produced, and the interpretations constructed. This includes respect for the dignity and autonomy of the participants, scientific integrity, and avoid practices such as the manipulation of results or the misuse of information. Mainardes (2017, p. 165) states:

Na verdade, a ética na pesquisa necessita ser entendida como um 'problema de formação'. Isso significa que precisa ser trabalhada com os alunos na graduação e na pós-graduação, ser debatida e problematizada nos Grupos de Pesquisa, nas sessões de orientação, nas defesas de mestrado e doutorado e em outros espaços, bem como na divulgação de resultados de pesquisa. A ideia da ética na pesquisa como o preenchimento de um formulário é totalmente insuficiente no que se refere ao emprego de uma ética reflexiva.

Research ethics is not limited to compliance with institutional regulations or formal protocols; rather, it entails a commitment to integrity on the part of researchers in relation to the the research they undertake. In this regard, when research involves human participants, it is recommended that researchers consider ethical guidelines, especially those set forth in Resolution CNS No. 510 of April 7, 2016 (Conselho Nacional de Saúde, 2016), which establishes the norms applicable to research in the Human and Social Sciences. This commitment involves respecting participants and the contexts in which research is conducted, cultivating attentive and sensitive listening to study participants, and, whenever



possible, returning to the research setting—even if only to express gratitude for participants' collaboration. Regardless of whether the research is conducted by a single researcher, it should not be overlooked that knowledge production is made possible through the involvement and contribution of others.

Therefore, researching with social and ethical commitment means understanding that science carries responsibilities that extend beyond academic validation. It is about embracing an investigative practice guided by ethical principles and by a concern for the social effects of the knowledge produced. In the field of education, this commitment becomes even more vital, as it deals directly with formative processes and with human beings, who are often situated within contexts of social inequality.

Lesson Eight: Becoming a Researcher is a Long Process

*All grown-ups were once children—although few of them remember it.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

In a class of the Research in Education course, during doctoral studies, the following statement was heard from an experienced professor: "*stricto sensu* graduate education is an initial moment of literacy and lettered practice for research." Today, this statement allows the inference, once again, that *stricto sensu* graduate education constitutes a moment of intense immersion in conducting research within a student's formative trajectory in the context of Higher Education, while simultaneously inaugurating a continuous process in their history within the research field. Becoming a researcher, therefore, is a movement built over time, marked by a progressive maturation with respect to the production of scientific knowledge (Freitas, 2022).

No one is born a researcher; one becomes a researcher through a process of self-constitution. This process demands, as previously noted, continuous involvement and dedication. In this sense, it should be clarified that there are no idealized models of researchers or research. Thus, there is no such thing as a superior or an inferior research. Due to a limited research experience, some early-career researchers become overly enthusiastic while developing their dissertations and theses. A mistaken perception is then formed that their research is superior to all previous studies on the topic, as if it could even "save humanity"—which, evidently, will not occur.

It is further necessary to signal the need for caution against constructing a dissertation or thesis sustained by a narrative that is speculative, normatively prescriptive, or overly descriptive. Becoming Paulo Freire, Edgar Morin, Lev Vygotsky, or Karl Marx is left for another lifetime—this is not a realistic expectation within the scope of graduate training. Such excesses constitute academic shortcomings that should be avoided throughout graduate training.

The more knowledge the researchers develop, the greater maturity researchers attain—a maturity accompanied by discernment in methodological choices and serenity in conducting research, especially when navigating unforeseen events, which are quite common, and challenges inherent in the research process. Mistakes during research are also a possibility, especially when there is a lack of adequate supervision.

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the research developed is, metaphorically, only one of the tips of an extensive iceberg, namely science. It is also advisable the importance of moderating one's pace throughout the process. As advisors, one frequently notes that graduate students are often highly committed at the outset of their master's and doctoral programs; however, over time, this dedication diminishes and, at times, may prove discouraging to those supervising them. Another relevant aspect is that each research project has its own characteristics, as does the field in which it is conducted (Nóvoa, 2014; Soares, 2021).

It should be noted that a researcher's training does not end with the dissertation or thesis defense. Instead, these milestones represent moments of provisional synthesis in a journey that continues indefinitely. The researcher continues to be challenged by new problems and social demands, which requires an ongoing refinement of their knowledge and research practices.

In conclusion, it is advisable to always make public one's academic production, whenever feasible. It is problematic, both for the advisor and for the academic community, when there is no dialogue with the supervisor and institutional peers regarding ongoing research. Some graduate students, upon completing their required coursework, withdraw entirely from scholarly engagement. Research training does not end at that point. Furthermore, recognizing research as an unfinished process enables researchers to conceive scientific knowledge not as final answers, but as a body of knowledge that is continually under construction.

Lesson Nine: Investigate What Resonates with You, Without Neglecting its Social Grounding

*What is essential is invisible to the eye.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).*

This ninth recommendation begins by recalling an experience from a period of master's level training. Within a given cohort, and more specifically within the same research line, members shared common concerns, uncertainties, and intellectual growth, along with the achievements and challenges characteristic of graduate education and beyond. One of these experiences was particularly noteworthy.

Among the cohort, there was a fellow student who, upon entering the master's program, significantly revised her research object and thematic focus. It is common for a research object to be redefined. Owing to inexperience, researchers often begin with a research plan marked by various limitations; this plan is then refined, the object is delimited, the approach evolves, and other research realignments are made (Kincheloe; Berry, 2007; Nóvoa, 2014). Every research project needs to be feasible. All of this is entirely typical and part of the natural evolution of research.

However, for this graduate student, the experience was deeply unsettling—to the extent that her return to a doctoral program took over five years. She did not simply redesign the research object, study objectives, and research problem. She made a complete pivot in her research focus. From a study about youth social representations on teacher identity, she shifted to investigating the

history of a school institution, within a defined period, grounded in a social theory that diverged significantly from her earlier theoretical perspective. For two years during the master's program during which the study seemed to tear her apart. Notably, the decision to change did not arise from her personal interest; it occurred as an external imposition, to advance a broader research project coordinated by her advisor.

This memorable experience prompts the following conclusion: one should pursue pressing research questions, while also recognizing that inquiry must be responsive to social needs. The researchers construct throughout graduate training will have a lasting presence; even if researchers do not continue to investigate or further develop the topic after graduation, researchers will be remembered, in part, for their graduate research. The imprints of the formative process with the research object will persist throughout a researcher's career. Furthermore, that master's or doctoral research will occupy a significant portion of researchers' daily lives during this phase of training. It will permeate all aspects of daily life during this phase. It will impose constraints on other areas of life. According to Freitas (2022), the research presence begins subtly and, suddenly, abruptly comes to pervade daily life.

Researching what does not resonate with you can be a tedious endeavor. Something that lacks vitality is not simply what is new or trendy, but rather that which stirs emotions, conflicts, curiosity, desires, and tensions—both within the researchers and in the social realm. Thus, investigating what is truly vital—without losing sight of social needs—means balancing sensitivity and responsibility toward social practice and, above all, toward science, without yielding, as researchers, to subjects that fail to ignite the desire to know.

Lesson Ten: On the Importance of Scholarly Humility in Research Practice

I thought I was very rich for having a flower that was unique in the world, and after all, I only have a rose. [...] This situation does not allow me to be an important prince.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).

Within the university environment—considering it should be a space genuinely dedicated to professional and personal growth—welcoming attitudes and sensitivity toward the human being should be more frequently present. Graduate education, as a space of excellence in the production of academic knowledge, could be a channel for the exercise of alterity, empathy, and processes focused on the human development of those who experience it.

Contrary to what has been contextualized, environments that are hostile from a relational standpoint are sometimes found. Academic vanity, marked by inflated egos and even humiliations and harassment, is unfortunately not uncommon in the university environment. Thus, in line with Nóvoa (2014) and Corazza (2022), it is advised that researchers practice humility. In an academic context so often marked by symbolic disputes and institutional hierarchies, humility is a founding principle of research training in *stricto sensu* graduate

education. It should be practiced: mistakes in the formative process should be considered as references for learning and for intellectual and human growth.

Humility presents itself not only as a moral virtue, but as an epistemological requirement. Morin (2024) wisely taught that a well-formed head is better than a head full of information. To cultivate humility, researchers need to learn to listen much more than to speak in graduate studies. They need to understand that no research or theory will fully answer social problems. It is important to highlight that, in educational research, the researcher will not find absolute and static truths. According to Esteban (2010), through the investigative process, the researcher will produce partial understandings, considering specific theories and viewpoints as well as spatial, cultural, and political conditions, among others.

It is worth emphasizing that, by practicing humility, the researcher will also understand that, at some point in the investigation, their research will need to be concluded so that, perhaps, it may be continued by someone else. Early-career researchers sometimes—whether out of academic vanity or inexperience,—tend to be reluctant to finalize their studies, or they treat them as a possession, which is unthinkable considering that knowledge is constructed collectively.

These considerations are offered with the conviction, never the certainty, that they may serve as inspiration so that the journey through graduate studies may be less complex, lighter, and more prosperous in terms of growth.

Final Considerations

Because I would not like this text to be read carelessly. It is so difficult to remember these things.

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2023).

Through ten lessons, this essay offers reflections on research training in *stricto sensu* graduate education. The text emphasizes that these lessons should not be understood as a prescriptive guide for navigating the graduate education journey. Rather, they emerge from professional experience within this context, which is shaped by specificity and by the singular trajectories constructed by researchers in the field of education. Nevertheless, these reflections may contribute to the formative processes of master's and doctoral students, who often find themselves uncertain about the paths to pursue throughout this stage of their professional development.

In general, the lessons indicate that *stricto sensu* graduate education constitutes a stage in one's professional trajectory marked by profound growth not only when experienced creatively and actively, but also when accompanied by critical reflection on the formative process. Research training should be conceived as a lifelong project in which the researcher's authorial dimension is continuously developed and redefined. Furthermore, this process is strengthened through the exercise of intellectual autonomy and sustained by social and ethical commitment to research. Such training is not confined to university coursework or to the final thesis or dissertation produced at the end of a master's or doctoral program.

Ultimately, *stricto sensu* graduate education fulfills its formative purpose when it enables researchers not only to acquire fundamental knowledge for conducting research but also to pursue their own self-formation (*autoformação*) through the continuous cultivation of humility and the development of social, collective, and individual consciousness. In this sense, graduate education provides opportunities not only to produce scientific knowledge but for the holistic development of the researcher.

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