From theoretical training to epistemic thinking in postgraduate Education in Latin America

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Abstract

The development of skills and capacities for research in educational sciences represents a narrative-reflective environment for the construction of autonomous and self-managed theoretical and epistemic thinking. Narrative processes are the connection between life literature and scientific literature, connecting the postgraduate educational path and the subjective and intersubjective construction project of the students. This paper aims to analyze the difficulties and opportunities that the students in these programs have in constructing their theoretical frameworks in the development of their dissertations in a way that allows them to move from a theorizing exercise to epistemic thinking. The research uses a qualitative participatory methodology with a phenomenological orientation. The main important findings showed the need for more narrative skills to use analytical categories in conceptual construction. The theoretical foundation in the development of their postgraduate studies in educational sciences represents a narrative laboratory for the construction of plural epistemologies, epistemic hospitality, and equity which enables the transition from a theoretical foundation to an epistemic thinking through a hospitable, equitable, and inclusive dialogue.

Keywords: Theoretical foundation; hospitality and epistemic equity; epistemic thinking; educational research; higher education.

De la formación teórica al pensamiento epistémico en los posgrados en Educación en América Latina

Resumen

El desarrollo de habilidades y capacidades para la investigación en los posgrados de Educación en América Latina representa un espacio narrativo-reflexivo para la construcción de un pensamiento teórico y epistémico autónomo. Los procesos narrativos son la conjunción entre literatura de vida y literatura científica, vinculando el trayecto de formación en el posgrado y el proyecto de construcción subjetiva e intersubjetiva de sus estudiantes. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las dificultades y oportunidades que los estudiantes de estos programas poseen en la construcción de sus marcos teóricos en el desarrollo de sus tesis, de suerte que permitan el paso de un ejercicio de teorización a un pensamiento epistémico. La metodología empleada es participativa/crítica y cualitativa, con una orientación fenomenológica. Los hallazgos más importantes evidencian la falta de capacidades para el uso de categorías de análisis en la construcción conceptual. Concluimos que la fundamentación teórica de las tesis en los estudios de posgrado en ciencias de la educación representa un laboratorio narrativo de construcción de epistemologías plurales y de una hospitalidad y equidad epistémicas. Esto promoverá el paso de una fundamentación teórica a un pensamiento epistémico mediante un diálogo hospitalario, equitativo e incluyente.

Palabras clave: fundamentación teórica; hospitalidad y equidad epistémica; pensamiento epistémico; investigación educativa; educación superior.

Da formação teórica ao pensamento epistêmico na pós-graduação em Educação na América Latina

Resumo

O desenvolvimento de habilidades e capacidades de pesquisa em ciências da educação representa um ambiente narrativo-reflexivo para a construção de um pensamento teórico e epistêmico autônomo e autogerenciado. Os processos narrativos são a conexão entre a literatura da vida e a literatura científica, conectando o caminho educacional da pós-graduação e o projeto de construção subjetiva e intersubjetiva dos alunos. Este artigo tem como objetivo, analisar as dificuldades e oportunidades que os alunos desses programas têm na construção de suas estruturas teóricas no desenvolvimento de suas dissertações, de forma a permitir que eles passem de um exercício de teorização para o pensamento epistêmico. A pesquisa utiliza uma metodologia participativa qualitativa com orientação fenomenológica. As principais conclusões importantes mostraram a necessidade de mais habilidades narrativas para usar categorias analíticas na construção conceitual. A base teórica no desenvolvimento de seus estudos de pós-graduação em ciências da educação representa um laboratório narrativo para a construção de epistemologias plurais, hospitalidade epistêmica e equidade, o que permite a transição de uma base teórica para um pensamento epistêmico por meio de um diálogo hospitaleiro, equitativo e inclusivo.

Palavras-chave: fundamentação teórica; hospitalidade e equidade epistêmica; pensamento epistêmico; pesquisa educacional; ensino superior.

Introduction

The theoretical construction that only results from colonial practices, leading to a hegemonic education in educational research, or in opposition to the former, represented in emancipatory practices and inspired by de-colonial turns, cannot represent the totality of epistemic horizons, not only because of the confrontation and replacement or overlapping of one epistemology with another, not only because of the confrontation and replacement or overlapping of one epistemology with another, nor because of the epistemic violence that suggests the defense of an *aeternum* statement against a dominant ideology, but because, on the one hand, it is essentially a human right to construct narratives that can be concretized in autonomous, innovative, situated, and sustainable social projects; and, on the other hand, because theoretical construction is generally insufficient in research training to generate autonomy of thought and freedom of conceptual innovation.

The objective of this work is focused on analyzing the difficulties and opportunities that students of these programs have in the construction of their theoretical frameworks in the development of their theses, in order to allow the passage from an exercise in theorization to the improvement of epistemic thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the decisive formative role that the didactics of teaching educational research plays in the autonomous and ethical-political thinking of new researchers who, at the end of their studies, can be, as a formative horizon, critical citizens with autonomous thinking, participants in just and democratic societies.

The research was carried out in ten postgraduate education programs in Latin America. A participatory/critical methodology was used, with a phenomenological, qualitative orientation and positioned in a socio-cognitive-analytical paradigm. This allowed several reflections on the logical construction of the object of study approached, as well as on the logic of construction in the process of theoretical foundation of the graduate students' theses.

General situation of doctoral studies in Latin America

Grosso modo, we can distinguish, among others, two specific areas of analysis: a) the general structure of postgraduate education in the face of the different challenges and opportunities of the educational and social sector in Latin America; and b) the processes of postgraduate education in this region.

In the publications of the European Higher Education Area (2005), the *European University Association* (2007), Enders (2004) and Cumming (2010), it is stated that, at least in Europe, advanced higher education has undergone four trends that, taken together, have necessitated the implementation of the following urgent transition processes:

➢ The growing number of applicants for postgraduate education, as well as the apparent diversification of this potential population;

➢ The role and function of scientific and applied research in the so-called 'knowledge economy';

➢ The internationalization of academic provision; and,

➢ The State's concern for this level of higher education.

Cruz (2014) identifies the following purposes that underpin doctoral degrees in the European model:

1. The advancement and shifting of the frontiers of knowledge.

2. Intensive training in research.

3. Highly specialized education and training in a professional field, although master's degrees are intended to serve this purpose.

4. General, personal and intellectual training to provide students with the tools to adopt a more open, flexible and critical attitude towards an object of knowledge,

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to communicate better and beyond the boundaries of their own discipline, and to demonstrate intellectual autonomy.

5. Responding to the needs of the labor market. This purpose tends to modify the traditional centralism of the curriculum, oriented only to the needs of the students.

However, barely a decade later, with the emergence of Remote Emergency Education (REE) (Bozkurt et al., 2020), due to the contingencies of the last pandemic and the subsequent digitization of the lifeworld, new horizons of problematization are opening up:

➢ Digitization of higher education, while improving the connectivity of teachers and students to generate greater coverage and diversification of professional training (Correa, 2021).

➢ A fluctuating knowledge economy based on information shared by multiple nodes of digitized and low-cost information. Its applications in systems and ecosystems of demographic information, political opinion, environmental, cultural, etc., have generated technological, social and financial innovations, but also environmental tensions and consumerism (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2020).

➢ Innovations in digital or blended internationalization from virtual learning environments, collaboration and academic and research action.

➢ Linkage and exercise of rights to diversity of students related to the connection and disconnection within the educational processes (Comisión de Rectores de Universidades Españolas, CRUE, 2020).

➢ Co-responsibility of teachers and students in the teaching-learning process.

➢ Promotes transdisciplinary training for teachers and students, based not only on thematic and research lines, but also on research agendas.

UNESCO (2020) has outlined some of the reforms and challenges for education at all levels and around the world:

➢ Select more relevant tools, considering Internet connectivity and digital literacy of students and teachers.

➢ Combine appropriate didactic and curricular approaches and standardize the number of applications and platforms.

➢ Create open and better-connected knowledge communities.

➢ Implement measures to ensure the inclusion of all students in distance learning programs.

➢ Plan study schedules in advance, considering socio-economic, cultural, etc. contexts.

➢ Adapt and improve continuous and distance assessment systems.

➢ Ensure the security, privacy and data protection of students and teachers.

➢ Support teachers and parents in the use of digital tools.

➢ Define the times, forms, and purposes of distance learning as hybrid education.

In general, and at a global level, postgraduate studies maintain a formal structure that includes objectives, specific characteristics in terms of schools of thought, teaching-learning models, duration and intensity of programs, and disciplinary orientation that identifies and socially legitimizes them. However, because of the importance they can have in deepening professional work, social interactions and the construction of ethical-political positions in the face of social realities, it is expected that the graduate program be oriented by a dialogical space through which learning is evidenced beyond the correlations between content and learning experience, highlighting narratives of learning from experience, in the key of life stories and training (Pineau, 2005). This politics of subjectivity (Tedesco, 2012) allows

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us to narrate ourselves in the first person and note the tensions with the models of university education, the performance of teachers, the processes of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity of students, employability and full awareness of the system of the world we inhabit.

For his part, Ardoino (2005) states that education begins with participation, which means transforming knowledge for oneself. Involvement is closely linked to the processes of subjectivation and inter-subjectivation, which represent a different perspective to the canonical method of learning and place the cognitive subjects in a horizon of planetary socio-cognitive co-responsibility and socially sustainable action.

Critical orality and literacy in the construction of epistemic thinking in postgraduate programs in education

Theoretical construction appears as one of the greatest socio-cognitive challenges for Master's and Doctoral students, due to the low acquisition and incorporation of one or more scientific languages and research skills that allow the development of a coherent, argumentative and meaningful theoretical foundation in the elaboration of their theses.

The reading of academic and/or scientific texts appears as the first didactic tool that a thesis director generally uses in the construction of the state of the art and the theoretical foundation.

Rosales (2016) declares that:

First, reading is the reader's encounter with the text, understanding that it is a complex process in which internal and external factors intervene; [...] the reader interacts with the text through prior knowledge and context, which contribute to the reader's construction of meaning in relation to his or her experience, knowledge, and linguistic skills. Reading invites [...] to live a personal and foreign experience that combines all this knowledge, so that it is not only practiced to increase a specific knowledge, but also allows the reader to identify, to engage and to feel.

The critical reading of a text allows us to know the place and the logic from which it was written, the way in which the main ideas and conceptions were constructed, the historical considerations of the subject who produced the text, the way in which this text has been disseminated through the cultural and scientific domain and, above all, how this text has transformed our practice. In this sense, Freire (2004) expresses that

The true act of reading is a dialectical process that synthesizes between the knowledge-transformation of the world and the knowledge-transformation of ourselves. To read is to speak, it is the act that allows men and women to distance themselves from their practice (codify it) in order to know it critically, to return to it to transform it and to transform themselves.

Reading and dialogicity put the issues in context and lead to reflection and action. We read not only to understand, but also to act. Freire (1992) affirms that the word has two inseparable constitutive aspects: action and reflection, since both, in a dialectical key, establish the praxis of the word,

Both, in a dialectical key, constitute the praxis of the transformative process. Reflection without action is reduced to sterile verbalism, and action without reflection is activism. The true word is praxis, because man must act in the world to humanize, transform and liberate it.

The reading of reality leads us to consider it as a tributary of the constitutive processes of literacy and orality in its critical nature, oriented to the generation of socio-cognitive and ethical-political processes in the exercise of scientific work. Cassany (2009) defines literacy as

The mastery and use of the alphabetic code, the receptive and productive construction of texts, the knowledge and use of the functions and purposes of the different discursive genres of each social sphere, the roles assumed by the reader and the author, the social values associated with these roles, which include identity, status

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and social position, and the knowledge that is constructed in these texts and circulated in the community, and the representation of the world that they transmit.

Contrary to the instruction reflected in the subjects that recite quotes from authors, literacy and orality, both of a critical nature, promote in the graduate training process the ability to generate semantic innovation by reading, dialoguing and reconfiguring the texts read, to build an ethical-political stance on an object of interest to the sciences. In this regard, the Ministry of Education of Ontario, Canada (cited in Iñesta, 2016) defines literacy as:

The ability to use meaningful and diverse forms of oral, written, or visual expression to read, write, listen, speak, visualize, represent, and critically reflect on a variety of ideas. This ability enables them to share information, interact with others, and make sense of things. Literacy is a complex process by which a person acquires new knowledge and a better understanding of the world around them based on their culture, experience, and background. These aspects are essential for personal growth and active participation in the life of a democratic society. Literacy helps build bonds between individuals and communities.

The exercise of epistemic hospitality and justice

The role of epistemology as a philosophy of science is to illuminate the conditions of production and validity of the construction of knowledge. This dynamic discipline, far from sanctioning hegemonic ways of apprehending knowledge, allows us to analyze the forms of production and dissemination of knowledge in particular contexts and how they are intertwined to generate processes of understanding and action. In this way, literacy and orality of a critical nature represent a formative path in the displacement of theoretical thinking towards epistemic thinking.

How do we read? Those of us who can read do so. We know how to decipher words, but we do not necessarily know how to read. Behind epistemic thinking is the urgency of knowing how to read the contents that everyone receives through the bibliography of different authors; knowing how to read a text does not mean limiting reading to what we could define as the processing of the sub-content, [...] the processing of its conclusions or the schematization of a set of propositions that the author inherits in order to be able to work with them in the realities that we want. (Zemelman, 2005, p. 13)

This proto-interpretive reading, according to Zemelman (2005), only allows us to know that the parts or fragments of the text exist, but does not represent the meaning of the text as a comprehensive unit loaded with meanings and senses:

In the particular case of the social sciences and humanities [...] an additional effort must be made, and it is none other than to read the texts for what they are: constructions, the construct itself; to read them from what we could define as their constructing logics. [...] to try to recognize, behind the attributive affirmations of a theoretical text, for example, the problems that the author intends to answer with such propositions; that is, to recognize how Mr. X has constructed his problem and how he ends up theorizing it. (p. 13)

We learn to develop epistemic thinking as a need to overcome the impermeability to criticism of those theories fixed by tradition. Through socio-cognitive resources it is possible to understand the context in which these traditions have been built and to analyze the way in which they have been sedimented to become absolute truths or infallible ideological positions. These resources, represented by the active participation in the creation and definition of social categories, require dialogicity to enrich social understanding and consciousness (Freire, 1992), epistemological vigilance (Bourdieu, 1967), the historical conception of the subject (Foucault, 1995; Zemelman, 2005), the small ethic (Ricoeur, 1990). Critical literacy and orality constitute, among other aspects, the substratum

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for the construction of an epistemological hospitality, through the processes of reception in the graduate seminars and the establishment of hospitable pedagogies, as the foundation of an open, inclusive and innovative pedagogical practice.

Thus, students have the opportunity not to remain as heirs of a tradition, as Bourdieu (1967) notes, reproducing the unique perspectives of their teachers, but to have access to a network of conceptual networks that allow them to build an autonomous and critical thinking.

In this sense, Benhabib (2006a), who criticizes Habermas' theory of communicative action as an ideal and universalist proposal, argues, using the concepts of norm and utopia (a matter that allows her to distinguish the community of legitimations and rights from the community of needs and solidarity), that the structure and orientation of the norm corresponds to the space of legitimacy and law, while utopia is linked to a policy of radical transformation or realization of the different forms of life; finally, to solidarity and hospitality. For this philosopher, the community of needs and solidarity precedes the community of legitimacy and rights, since there is no universalization without social participation. Universalization in this sense is not a reproduction of concepts and actions, but a plural social construction; and, she affirms:

> The project of modernity must be reconstituted on the basis of an ongoing dialogue with other voices that give rise to a new universalism. It is an interactive universalism that rationally ventilates normative disputes, accepts that justice and reciprocity are constituents of morality, and maintains that difference is a starting point for reflection and action. (p. 176)

It is through these elements that Benhabib (2006a) supports the need to articulate access to information, procedures of legitimate deliberation, and plurality of modes of belonging or association. It is thus a step from an open public space to the singularity of the plural: "a subject situated to project new ways of being together, of relating to each other and to nature in the future" (p. 175).

The connection that this author makes to thinking about the hospitality of the concrete other with citizenship represents the orientation of human rights toward a cosmopolitan citizenship from a global/private sphere; that is, a radically different cosmopolitanism. Benhabib (2006b) asserts that

> Hospitality is not understood as a virtue of sociability, such as the kindness and generosity one can show to strangers who come to one's country or who are made dependent on one's acts of kindness by natural circumstances or history; hospitality is a right that belongs to all human beings insofar as we see them as potential participants in a world republic. (p. 30)

Thus, it is necessary to exercise an epistemological hospitality that is not limited to the Habermasian contractualism typical of Central European epistemologies, nor to the opposite extreme of particular territorial epistemologies, epistemologies of the South, West or East, but in the very concept, as expressed by Benhabib (2006b), of an interactive universalism. It is a matter of plural epistemologies that take care of a community of needs and solidarity, and therefore of an epistemic hospitality. So, differences complement the other; they do not exclude him or her or make him or her a social or epistemological pariah.

The educational dynamic of graduate students involves more than the acquisition of a scientific tradition, an own socio-cognitive way of doing science that allows them to travel as citizens of the world of science and not as pariahs excluded from possible epistemic territories. That is, all the territories of the objects of study that are of interest to them, as a human and civil right, acquired by the simple fact of being subjects of reception and solidarity, as well as subjects of rights.

Methodology

The study is situated in a socio-cognitive-analytical paradigm. Using a qualitative and participatory methodology, five focus groups

of eight to eleven volunteer students from graduate programs in education were formed in five Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico. In these groups, the questions listed below were discussed and, within the socio-cognitive process, we recovered accounts of the students' experiences in constructing the foundations of their dissertations. Ten workshops were conducted in five doctoral programs and five master's programs in education at universities in these countries, with a total sample of 93 students. Ten in-depth phenomenological interviews were carried out. This method of data collection makes it possible to know the experiences of the subjects in the process of constructing and evaluating their theoretical foundations within the elaboration of their thesis.

The research was guided by the following questions:

a) What are the main narrative difficulties of graduate students in the theoretical foundation of their research?

b) What didactic resources do teachers use to facilitate the theoretical-narrative construction of graduate students in the theoretical foundation of their theses?

c) How did the students manage to identify the main themes, develop and give coherence, unity and integrality to the different chapters of the theoretical foundation?

The answers to these questions were synthesized in the content analysis.

The selection criteria for students were:

1. Have completed the second year of a master's degree or the third year of a doctoral degree at the time of this research.

2. Have completed the theoretical underpinnings of their dissertation.

3. Be a regular student in the graduate program.

4. Have completed all credits by the beginning of the second or third year of the M.A. or Ph.D. program, respectively.

A content analysis was carried out using the Atlas.ti software, which made it possible to define the codes and families of codes of the analysis of the narratives of experience of the students of postgraduate programs in education in these countries, facilitated by the focus groups and in-depth phenomenological interviews. From there, conceptual cartographies were constructed that made it possible to demonstrate the most important categories for their Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which makes it possible to give meaning to the actions mentioned from a socio-cognitive analytical framework. Some numerical values are the result of the use of descriptive statistics, applying measures of central tendency that complement the qualitative analysis. The fieldwork was carried out both virtually and in person.

Results and Discussion

The study of the responses through content analysis using Atlas.ti software allowed the identification and definition of four different families of categories (codes) of analysis in the construction of the theoretical foundation through a participatory analysis of graduate students in education in the five countries mentioned, participants in the workshops. From the interviews, focus groups and field diaries, it was possible to stabilize and synthesize the definitions of each of the categories, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Definitions of categories

Categories	Definition	Kew-Concepts
1. Imagination and narrative creation	Ability to produce texts with a clear, complex, and intelligible structure resulting from a variety of interrelationships of meaning and sense oriented toward the understanding of a subject or object of study.	Differentiation capacity. Complex conceptual relationships.
2. Narrative Identity	Ability to recognize oneself in the logic of construction, structure and mobility of the texts produced.	Ability to make inferences, social recognition.
3. Theoretical autonomy	Ability to combine theoretical concreteness and regulated freedom in constructing a text.	Narrative experience, interpretive skills.
4. Ethical-political positioning	Possibility to test the concepts acquired in the reading in the world of their lives.	Ability of abstraction and conceptual and social correlation.

a. Imagination and narrative creation

This category was defined by the students in the process of construction or theoretical foundation as the ability to create texts with a clear, complex and intelligible structure, the result of a multitude of interrelations of meaning and sense oriented towards the understanding of a thematic field or object of study.

Nussbaum (2005) has affirmed the relevance of reading literary texts for the ability to inhabit intercultural environments, develop cosmopolitan thinking, universal citizenship, self-determination and democracy, through the Aristotelian perspective of telling life as a true fiction or *mythos* (narrative or stories) and the intrigue or plot that underlies the story.

In the analysis of the results, it was found that 89% of the students of the ten graduate programs (five master's and five doctoral) do not recognize any relevant didactic device used by their professors that allows them to categorically order the construction of the theoretical foundation of their thesis. Eighty-four percent of these programs affirm that methodology classes limit the imagination and narrative creation necessary for the elaboration of the theoretical framework or theoretical foundation. The blank paper syndrome and the question of where to begin or how to continue is a common comment among the students analyzed.

> Teachers do not guide us on how to do things, but only correct us without having very clear criteria as to why we need to make changes. They tell us how to do it, but without any awareness of why. In fact, other readers tell me the opposite, and sometimes readers tell us why this section or that section should not go, or what the order should be. But we don't really know how to do the theoretical framework. Just a document or a protocol or the classic, the bibliographic cards... but nothing else. In most cases, the only thing that works is to trust the director (Master student, Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 2020).

Narrative construction is poor, and students concentrate on following the sequences of order that the thesis director or tutor marks for them, without clearly understanding the logic of the order they are making; or, if they perceive it,

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they do not recognize a didactic or methodology that enables them to learn it for themselves. There is little autonomy in their imagination and narrative construction. The students note that they are not allowed, in their words, "to relate the concepts found in our experiences to the community, since the teachers consider them more literature than science" (Master student, Universidad Federal de São Paulo, 2021). The categorical construction is poor and the students, in the workshops and in the answers to the questionnaire, showed a greater richness in the construction of anecdotes than in conceptual concreteness.

Likewise, in a heterogeneous way, thesis directors, tutors or teachers of methodology or research seminars, when it comes to the construction of the theoretical framework, only guide students to carry out readings, but do not propose didactics that allow them to navigate through the theoretical assumptions without losing the thematic horizon of the thesis and the conceptual consistency.

> The construction of the chapters seems to respond more to a series of themes chosen by the tutor than to our own initiative. For example, at this moment, after finishing my studies, I would write my master's thesis in a very different way. I think that a lot of pressure is put on the fulfillment of a protocol and little on the academic and scientific preparation of the student. There is a gap between what some authors tell us, what the tutors say, and what we believe in our practice as students, and this should be discussed in class or with the tutor when constructing the theoretical framework. (Doctoral student, Universidad de Guadalajara, 2020)

b. Narrative identity

The students defined this category as the ability to recognize oneself in the logic of construction, structure, and mobility of the texts produced. It is common in positivist research to emphasize the distance between the object of study and the subject. In social research, however, the object is a manifestation of the subject, and therefore there can be no separation or independent consideration of these two aspects. The subject inhabits a world of life (Schütz, 1972) of which he speaks, both in everyday life and in academic and scientific work of a social nature. Therefore, the relationship is rather between the subject and the narrative that configures and reconfigures reality.

> The story configures the permanent character of a subject, which we can call his or her narrative identity, by constructing the dynamic identity proper to the story told. The identity of the story forges the identity of the character [...]. In fact, in the narrated story, the character, by virtue of the character of unity and completeness conferred by the operation of the elaboration of the plot, retains throughout the story the identity correlative to that of the story itself. (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 344)

When the subject identifies himself as a character of his own life, recognizes himself in the stories of his life-world, and sees himself as a historical subject, he is able to understand the meaning and significance of his actions. This action makes him responsible for his own history. This kind of *copyright* of the text revives the author's relationship with his action, making him responsible for what he has written and not a simple reproducer of texts without orientation and commitment to action.

In this sense, most of the students state that they find it difficult to recognize their own voice when writing the text, taking refuge in the instructions of their directors or tutors and whose conceptual security comes from aligning themselves with this orientation:

> My supervisor tells me that my research is qualitative and not quantitative, but that is a methodology, not a position on the problem I am developing in my thesis. It is not the result of reflection or theoretical analysis, but a directive from the supervisor. But I am neither qualitative nor quantitative; not at all! I am a researcher in training; I have to be able to know how to make a theoretical framework and not just do it. (Master student, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2021).

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The theoretical foundation links four clearly distinguishable capacities: 1) reading culture of academic-scientific texts; 2) theoretical knowledge; 3) acquisition and incorporation of a scientific language; and 4) theoretical and epistemic autonomy. Table 2 shows the average value given by the students to the way they acquired and developed these skills.

Table 2

Levels of acquisition of skills for theoretical background

| | Argentina | Brasil | Colombia | Costa Rica | México |
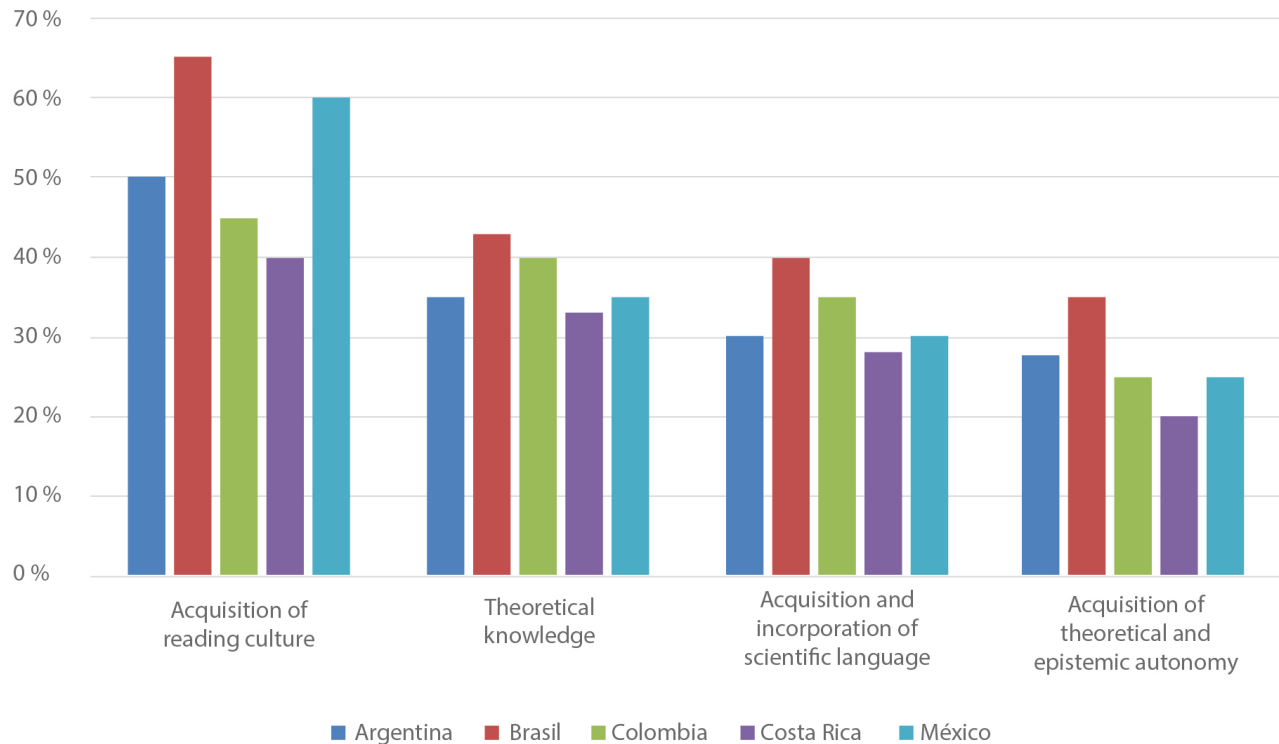
As can be seen in Table 2, on a scale from 1 to 100%, the students of the different universities in the countries mentioned affirmed the development of the four capacities through graduate studies and especially with regard to the theoretical foundations. In a peculiar way, specific didactics for the construction of a theoretical foundation necessary for graduate training in the social sciences and humanities are not common in Latin America. This leads to the following problematic aspects for graduate students: 1) A precarious reading culture of academic-scientific texts, considering that the average value in the five countries barely exceeds 50% of graduate students who have a reading culture in general; 2) A schematic and limited theoretical knowledge; 3) A low acquisition and incorporation of a scientific language; and, 4) A clear lack of theoretical and epistemic autonomy.

Dialogue is a fundamental didactic within the formative process. We dialog essentially to share our experiences, to exchange ideas, contents, experiences about those contents or experiences that do not necessarily belong to a single theoretical, normative or cultural tradition, but to a movement of reflection-action-reconfiguration. Dialogicity represents a capacity for agreement, controversy and argumentative autonomy, as noted by Freire (1992). Dialogicity does not allow for closed or inviolable texts. To dialogize is in itself to open texts to continuous discussion, without the limitations imposed by an academic or scholarly institutional authority, to turn them into pre-texts or texts in transition in order to dialogue about them. It is the dialogue with others that allows the forging of a dialogic and critical narrative identity, but also a critical-epistemic concreteness.

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The theoretical framework is ready if the thesis director decides so, but I think I would add or subtract some elements here and there. It is more a matter of pleasing the supervisor than finding a tool or model to build the theoretical framework. However, there is always the doubt that I could have gone deeper or written differently (Doctoral student, Universidad de Antioquia, 2020).

c. Theoretical autonomy

Students defined this category as the capacity for both theoretical concreteness and regulated freedom in the construction of a text. The sense of regulation comes from the combination of epistemic vigilance, narrative freedom and creativity, and the ability to define sequential paths in theoretical construction. That is, the transitivity between one conceptual category and another. "How and why to move from one concept to another in order to elaborate the chapters of the theoretical framework", as expressed by a Master's student at the Universidad de Guadalajara (2020).

The analysis of this category showed that, on average, 74% of the graduate students from the five countries maintained in the workshops, questionnaires, focus groups and in-depth interviews that the research methodology allowed them to have a conceptual mastery, inherited from the knowledge of the authors and the guidance of the tutor. However, when asked about their particular theoretical position, they responded by quoting authors and little about their position in relation to what the authors were saying. The research revealed that, on average, 30% of the graduate students are able to construct an epistemic way of thinking from theoretical categories, translated into an autonomous way of thinking, detached from the impositions of a particular epistemological tradition:

I am aware that Nussbaum has a liberal position on education and her intertwining with the cultivation of humanity through the arts and the social sciences and the humanities, but if you ask me 'why', I couldn't tell you; or, beyond that, the reality is that my theoretical position, I don't know, I know that education is emancipatory because of what I learned from Freire, but my position I still can't make it concrete; I think that's what the master's and doctorate are for. (Master's student, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2022)

The security of theoretical concreteness and autonomy is expressed in the closeness to their tutor, who usually has a relevant scientific career, with affiliation to research groups, research councils, projects and publications. Students also expressed that "tutors see and hear little about the development of their research" (Master student, Universidad Federal de São Paulo, 2021).

Students feel much closer to what their tutor or director tells them about the theorists they should read than to the problems they study. This means that sometimes, when they meet other students in colloquia or in national or international events, they discover theoretical gaps that have limited their understanding of the problem or problems to be analyzed:

I have discovered many topics that were not covered by the teacher of the research seminars or by my tutor in the congresses I attended. I find them very interesting. They represent a different world of learning, which is absolutely necessary for doctoral training. Sometimes even my tutor doesn't know that I've been to an event and tells me where I found a text or why I'm working on it. Attending national and international congresses should be a requirement for postgraduate training (Doctoral student, Universidad de Antioquia, 2022).

Students identify the different themes when they read the texts, but they recognize that there is no didactic to help them organize the concepts that run through the theoretical foundation.

d. Ethical-political positioning

Finally, the ethical-political positioning in relation to the theoretical construction was defined by the graduate students as the possibility of testing the concepts acquired in the reading in

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the world of their lives. It is related to the way in which the concepts work in the experience of their own existences and whether they have the same meaning in the context in which they were constructed. This disposition of the students is the epistemological principle of the dialog with knowledge. It is precisely an ecology of knowledge (De Souza-Santos, 2013) that seeks "analytical objectivity, but at the same time the development of the ethical-political dimension that considers that there is also a global cognitive crisis" (p. 32), a crisis oriented by a conceptual hegemony without consideration of multiple other epistemologies.

In this case, the political and ethical positioning of the students with respect to the conceptual and categorical construction is quite scarce; only 21% of them can explain what the positioning suggests in ethical-political terms with respect to the theorists they cite in the thesis. Moreover, they do not know the socio-cultural context from which the authors come. Many concepts such as colonialism and epistemic neocolonialism, ecology of knowledge, decolonial turn, and epistemologies of the South are not widely known to them. In a heterogeneous way, the students know the approaches of the cited authors, but they do not achieve a real positioning in front of the categories used and defined by them:

> I am not very familiar with all the works of the authors I cite in the thesis, or with the development of their works. In reality, there is little time, too many tasks in the program, but I think that later I will have more time to delve into the authors that I liked a lot in the Master's program. (Master student, Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 2021)

In general, it can be affirmed that the lack of ethical-political positioning generates a conceptual relativism, a lack of knowledge of the context in which the categories are produced and mobilized, and a lack of critical and autonomous thinking:

> It is necessary to know the origin and the evolution of the authors' thinking; I am afraid of people who read many authors but know nothing about the context, the time, and the way people thought at the time they developed these theories. There are some colleagues who repeat quotes from authors, but when asked for their opinion on an issue, they contradict what they wrote in their projects and the authors with whom they worked on their theoretical framework, or they are ambiguous in any case. (Master student, Universidad de Antioquia, 2022)

By removing the concepts from the socio-cultural construction in which they originated, the subjects lose their historical condition, and thus epistemic violence is generated, which appears as a lack of epistemic hospitality and as an obstacle to the dialogicity necessary for the construction of epistemic thought.

In general, students fail to see the product of the process of constructing the theoretical foundation as a cohesive, inferential and argumentative unit of meaning. The perception of the structuring of the text is provided by the feedback of the tutor or the readers, but not particularly by the learning of a didactic that allows the students to organize a thematic sequence that makes it possible to reach this totality of meaning of the text.

The focus groups revealed that students need a theoretical base that allows them to acquire academic and scientific language, but they note that studies are more oriented towards obtaining a degree and writing a thesis than towards developing epistemic, autonomous and critical thinking. Many students note that, in the end, it is important to graduate, but that they see that "colleagues who have not fully dedicated themselves to graduate studies still graduate" (Doctoral student, Universidad de Guadalajara, 2022).

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Conclusions

Theoretical grounding is a challenge for graduate students in education, especially those who have not had a strong research training prior to entering a graduate program. This research has shown that, in general, students have difficulties of a narrative nature (narrative creation and identity, theoretical concreteness, and ethical-political positioning) at the time of theoretical grounding in the development of their graduate studies.

Likewise, there are few didactic resources that students identify in the teaching of seminars, research courses or research methodology for the theoretical construction and development of epistemic thinking.

The role of literacy and orality in graduate education is significant because it allows for interactive universalism (Benhabib, 2006a) and epistemic hospitality (Correa, 2021) in ways of thinking, speaking, deliberating, and doing. This facilitates the construction of critical-ethical-political thinking within academic and scientific training.

Critical literacy and orality allow for a training oriented to an ethical-political positioning, an aspect that is presented in this research on graduate students as a task still in its infancy. It is necessary to think about practices that affirm a pluralist epistemology and the exercise of hospitable, just and critical pedagogies in the training of educational researchers in Latin America, linking epistemic hospitality as a guarantor of the passage from theoretical thinking to epistemic thinking; more precisely, a bridge of epistemic inclusion and solidarity.

Narrative imagination and creation, the foundation of critical literacy and orality, have been present from bedtime stories to texts used in primary education, where literary genres such as fables or stories allow for a categorical education of young children. However, in the education of students, by displacing the world of narrative creation by the theoretical constructs of positivist thought and a scientism vision, away from social studies and the humanities, they have managed to minimize the didactic-

pedagogical value of narrativity, from high school to undergraduate and graduate studies. The research shows the profound difficulties graduate students have in creative imagination, categorical construction and analysis, and the elaboration of conceptual cartographies from the analysis of academic texts, necessary for textual comprehension and theoretical concretization. It is a fundamental task of teaching in postgraduate education to combine critical literacy and orality with an epistemological pluralism that comes from dialogic didactics and a categorical construction based on the habitation, experience and appropriation of the constructed concepts and thematic sequences.

In the present research, it seems to be a pending task to promote a sense of logical structuring, internal coherence and global vision of the theoretical foundation of graduate students, as well as a transition from theoretical thinking to epistemic thinking. A follow-up of the graduates of these programs is necessary to observe how the practices as junior researchers allow the enrichment and complementation of skills, abilities, and theoretical and epistemological competences that were not developed in their graduate training processes.

Conflict of interest

The author of this article declares that he has no conflicts of interest with the work presented.

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Contribution

César Correa-Arias: sole researcher, author of the text.

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