


## **A pesquisa como experiência formativa: percepções e reflexões de um coordenador de pós-graduação em Educação. Uma entrevista**

Research as a formative experience: perceptions and reflections of a postgraduate coordinator in Education. An interview

La investigación como experiencia formativa: percepciones y reflexiones de una coordinadora de posgrado en Educación. Una entrevista

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### **RESUMO**

O espaço-tempo de coordenação de um programa de pós-graduação constitui-se em um *locus* privilegiado, uma espécie de *belvedere* de observação da dinâmica formativa de mestres e doutores, da influência dos órgãos de avaliação e financiamento e do protagonismo daqueles que assumem a incumbência da gestão. Conseguir avançar e aprofundar os debates acadêmico-pedagógicos no contexto formativo da PG *stricto sensu*, para além das imposições burocrático-administrativas, é um desafio para aqueles que se dispõem a assumir essa função. É nesse contexto que se insere a entrevista a seguir realizada com o professor Altair Fávero, coordenador do PPGEdU/UPF tendo como mote a pesquisa: *Mal-estar na pós-graduação. O tensionamento entre o protagonismo e a invisibilidade dos doutorandos*. A entrevista está estruturada a partir de dois aspectos: a) principais desafios e dificuldades enfrentadas pelos doutorandos no desenvolvimento e conclusão do seu curso; e b) ações/estratégias desencadeadas pelo Programa para assegurar a afiliação intelectual e institucional (pertencimento) dos doutorandos para que concluam com êxito seu doutorado.

**Palavras-chave:** Pós-graduação *stricto sensu* em educação; Coordenação de PG; Pertencimento; Pesquisa.

## ABSTRACT

The space-time of coordinating a graduate program is a privileged locus, a kind of belvedere from which to observe the formative dynamics of master's and doctoral students, the influence of evaluation and funding bodies, and the protagonism of those who take on management responsibilities. Being able to advance and deepen academic-pedagogical debates within the formative context of master's and doctoral programs, beyond bureaucratic-administrative impositions, is a challenge for those who are willing to undertake this role. It is within this context that the following interview is situated, conducted with Professor Altair Fávero, coordinator of the Graduate Program in Education at the University of Passo Fundo (PPGEdu/UPF), taking as its guiding theme the research project: *Discontent in postgraduate education. The tension between the protagonism and invisibility of doctoral students*. The interview is structured around two aspects: a) the main challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students in the development and completion of their program; and b) actions/strategies implemented by the Program to ensure the intellectual and institutional affiliation (sense of belonging) of doctoral students so that they can successfully complete their doctorate.

**Keywords:** Master's and doctoral programs in Education; Graduate program coordination; Belonging; Research.

## RESUMEN

El espacio-tiempo de coordinación de un programa de posgrado constituye un locus privilegiado, una especie de mirador para observar la dinámica formativa de maestros y doctores, la influencia de los organismos de evaluación y financiamiento y el protagonismo de quienes asumen la responsabilidad de la gestión. Poder avanzar y profundizar debates académico-pedagógicos en el contexto formativo del PG *stricto sensu*, más allá de imposiciones burocrático-administrativas, es un desafío para quienes estén dispuestos a asumir ese rol. Es en este contexto que se inserta la siguiente entrevista al profesor Altair Fávero, coordinador del Programa de Posgrado en Educación de la Universidad de Passo Fundo, RS, con el tema de investigación: malestar en el posgrado. La tensión entre el protagonismo y la invisibilidad de los doctorandos. La entrevista se estructura en base a dos aspectos: a) principales retos y dificultades que enfrentan los estudiantes de doctorado en el desarrollo y culminación de su curso; y b) acciones/estrategias impulsadas por el Programa para asegurar la afiliación intelectual e institucional (pertenencia) de los doctorandos para que puedan culminar exitosamente su doctorado.

**Palabras clave:** Posgrado *stricto sensu* en educación; Coordinación de PG; Pertenencia; Investigación.

## Interview Context

On March 23, 2021, Altair A. Fávero granted us an interview, largely reproduced below. It was the first in a series of 20 interviews conducted as part of the research project *Discontent in postgraduate education. The tension between the protagonism and invisibility of doctoral students*, carried out between 2019 and 2024, with funding from the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq). In addition to the interviews with 20 coordinators and 20 secretaries of Graduate Programs in Education (PPGEs) – from the 94 Programs evaluated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* – CAPES) at the time –, 786 doctoral students in Education, out of the 7,040 enrolled in doctoral programs at the time, participated by responding to a questionnaire<sup>1</sup>.

In the “interview script”, previously sent to the interviewees – together with the Free and Informed Consent Form (Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido – TCLE), to be read, signed, and returned to the researcher – elements related to the theme, justification, research problem, objectives, and the questions guiding the interviews were specified. Regarding the **research problem**, it was formulated as follows: “What aspects have been gradually making visible a growing discontent in the postgraduate environment, rendering evident the invisibility of postgraduate students in the process, leading them to encounter difficulties in becoming protagonists and in promoting their institutional and intellectual affiliation?”. The **general objective** was also stated as follows: “To investigate the strategic forms of institutional and intellectual affiliation adopted by doctoral students in Graduate Programs in Education and their connection with the difficulties of completing the program with quality and within the expected timeframe”.

The **justification** for the interview, within the context of the research, was aimed at collecting data related to the institutional and intellectual affiliation of doctoral students in the Program, based on the theorization and research of the French scholar Alain Coulon<sup>2</sup>. The **questions** to which the interviewee was asked to respond concerned perceptions regarding: 1. What are the main challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students in the development and completion of their program? 2. What actions/strategies are implemented by the Program to ensure the intellectual and institutional affiliation (sense of belonging) of doctoral students so that they successfully complete their doctorate?

The interview took place in an amicable atmosphere, given that interviewer and

<sup>1</sup> For those interested in accessing the process and results of this research, we recommend reading the report available on the CNPq website, or contacting us directly via email at [lucidiob@gmail.com](mailto:lucidiob@gmail.com), and we will send it, as well as indicate other texts resulting from the research, in the form of journal articles, edited volumes, and papers presented at academic events.

<sup>2</sup> Among the main works by this author, translated and available in Brazil, we highlight: COULON, A. *A condição de estudante. A entrada na vida universitária*. Salvador/BA: EDUFBA, 2008. \_\_\_\_\_. *Etnometodologia e educação*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2017a. \_\_\_\_\_. *O ofício de estudante: a entrada na vida universitária*. *Educ. Pesqui.*, São Paulo, v. 43, n. 4, p. 1239-1250, Oct./Dec., 2017b.

interviewee had known each other for a long time; it lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes and was conducted via Google Meet<sup>3</sup>, since the country was under isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the course of the interview, following a brief presentation of the interviewee – related to his academic background and the context of his assumption of the coordinator role – he was asked to address the two central questions of the research: the challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students, and the actions/strategies implemented by the Program to ensure the intellectual and institutional affiliation of doctoral students, with a view to the successful completion of the doctorate.

In summary, in terms of challenges and difficulties, the interviewee highlighted funding issues and the need for doctoral students to reconcile their doctoral studies with their condition as workers and as parents. He also expanded on the analysis of the situation of the University of Passo Fundo, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as a community university, further aggravated by the emergence of the pandemic. In the specific context of 2021, he emphasized the discontent caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which added to and intensified other forms of discontent that commonly affect postgraduate students, as noted in the literature and in some specific cases within the Program he was coordinating at the time of the interview.

With regard to initiatives and strategies aimed at supporting doctoral students, in order to create conditions for them to enter, develop, and successfully complete their doctoral studies with quality, he highlighted the welcoming environment provided by the Institution and the Program, the Program's democratic governance, the existence of and participation in research groups, the importance of a strong advisor–advisee relationship, incentives and support for participation in academic events, as well as the organization of events by doctoral students themselves, an aspect that “gives students this sense of belonging to a field of knowledge, but also to a Program that identifies them”. He also emphasized the importance of doctoral students' engagement in knowledge production and its dissemination through conferences, journals, and edited volumes, in co-authorship with advisors and/or research group peers, as well as the pedagogical potential of teaching internships in the formation of the professor. In highlighting the importance of the Program's internationalization, he gave particular emphasis to doctoral sandwich programs and postdoctoral internships undertaken by faculty, both in Brazil and in universities abroad, especially in Europe and Latin America.

Finally, he mentioned the importance of sustaining doctoral students' sense of belonging to the Program through strengthening ties with alumni, particularly through their continued participation in research groups and in activities developed by the Program.

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<sup>3</sup> The interviews were recorded. After transcription, the printed version was returned to the interviewees in order to obtain their review and approval for use by the researchers. The transcription was carried out by the master's student Morgana Dreón, to whom we express our gratitude for the high-quality work she performed.

## The interviewee's statement

Lucídio Bianchetti (LB): *Good morning, Altair! I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your willingness to participate in our research, particularly because you are the first of the 20 program coordinators I will be interviewing within the context of the research on discontent in postgraduate education, with a focus on the tension between the protagonism and invisibility of doctoral students in postgraduate education. I would like to ask you to begin by briefly discussing your academic background and professional trajectory, highlighting your role as coordinator of the Graduate Program in Education (PPGEdu), including how long you have been serving in this position, so that we can then move on to the issue of the intellectual and institutional affiliation of doctoral students from the perspective of Alain Coulon's theorization. In this first part, I would also like you to emphasize the main challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students in entering, developing, and completing the program, as well as the strategies used by the Program to receive postgraduate students in order to ensure their institutional and intellectual affiliation.*

Altair Alberto Fávero (AF): First of all, an official good morning, Lucídio! I would like to express my satisfaction and joy in being able to contribute in some way to your research, to the group you coordinate, and to say from the outset that I deeply believe in the idea of research not as a solitary activity, but as a collective space, built together with peers, with the people who join along the investigative trajectory. Briefly addressing my academic background, I hold undergraduate degrees in Philosophy (1986–1989) and in History (1990–1993) from the University of Passo Fundo (UPF). I worked as a teacher of History, Religious Education, Sociology, and Philosophy in both secondary and primary education, in public state schools as well as private schools. I then completed a specialization at the University of Passo Fundo (UPF) in Epistemology of the Social Sciences (1992–1993). I pursued my master's degree at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUC-RS) in Philosophy of Knowledge (1996–1998), where I defended a dissertation on the problem of causality in David Hume<sup>4</sup>, mainly because I had been invited to work at UPF teaching the course Philosophy of Science, and I began working at UPF in 1992. Therefore, I have been affiliated with UPF as a faculty member since 1992, initially for four years as a contracted professor and, in 1996, after passing a public examination, I became a

<sup>4</sup> O problema da causalidade em David Hume. A modified version of the dissertation was published as a single-authored book by Editora UPF (FÁVERO, Altair Alberto. *Conhecimento e experiência: o problema da causalidade em David Hume*. Passo Fundo: Editora UPF, 2002).

tenured faculty member at the institution. This examination took place precisely during the period when I was beginning my master's studies (1996–1998) in Porto Alegre, at PUC. Still during my master's, shortly after the examination at UPF, I submitted a research project and became a researcher at the institution, with dedicated research hours since 1997. In 2003, I began my doctoral studies at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in Porto Alegre, at the Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Nadja Hermann, and I defended my thesis slightly before the expected four-year period, more precisely in three years and ten months (2003–2007), with research on Richard Rorty, entitled *Redescription of the world and Education (Redescricao de mundo e Educao)*<sup>5</sup>. Shortly after completing my doctorate, in the following year, two positions opened for accreditation in the Graduate Program in Education: one in the Educational Policy line and another in the Foundations of Education line here at PPGEdu/UPF. I applied for the Educational Policy position and was accredited as a permanent faculty member of the Program. I have been part of PPGEdu/UPF since August 2008 and have been teaching courses, conducting research, and supervising students in this Program ever since. Already in 2008, I had my first two master's advisees. I have not made an exact count, but I believe I have supervised around 26 master's dissertations and eight doctoral theses defended during this period up to the present moment. Currently, I supervise six doctoral students, four master's students, as well as undergraduate research supervision, among others.

LB: *And how did you come to take on this role as coordinator, which I refer to as a (co)ordinator of processes?*

AF: Our Program is relatively small in numerical terms, from the perspective of its faculty body. We currently have 11 permanent professors and one collaborating professor. Since 2014–2015, the Program began to consider that it was important for its coordination to undergo a process of planning. In 2016, Professor Cláudio Dalbosco

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<sup>5</sup> Part of the thesis was published in three chapters in an edited volume released by Mercado de Letras (FÁVERO, Altair Alberto; TONIETO, Carina. *Leituras sobre Richard Rorty e a educação*. Campinas/SP: Mercado de Letras, 2013).

assumed the coordination and conducted the Program masterfully during those three years, and at that time there was no formal position of vice-coordinator. From the Program's perspective, we believed it was important to prepare a future coordinator. In this sense, I tacitly assumed the role of vice-coordinator during Cláudio Dalbosco's administration, with the expectation of becoming the coordinator in the subsequent term. In the most recent institutional bylaws and in the Program's regulations, the position of vice-coordinator was formally established. We agreed that the vice-coordinator would become the next coordinator, as a way of ensuring continuity and avoiding unnecessary disruptions; at least, there is a shared understanding within the faculty committee to proceed in this way. Thus, my transition into the coordination of the Program occurred quite naturally, as I served for three years as vice-coordinator, albeit informally, and at the beginning of 2019 I became the Program coordinator, with Professor Cleci Werner da Rosa now serving as vice-coordinator. We have sought, whenever possible, to establish a certain rotation among the three research lines in the coordination. Professor Cláudio belonged to line 1 (Foundations of Education), I belong to line 3 (Educational Policy), and Professor Cleci belongs to line 2 (Educational Processes and Languages). The Program currently operates with these three research lines, since 2007, if I am not mistaken. When I joined, these three lines were already established, and we have maintained them, with a relatively balanced distribution of permanent faculty members. Only line 2 has three permanent professors, while the other two have four permanent professors each.

*LB: So, between your role as vice-coordinator and coordinator, you have been involved in the Program's coordination for six years. I will now pose the central question of the research: in your opinion, what are the main challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students in entering, developing, and completing (the thesis) their program? I emphasize that our research focuses only on doctoral students, given the longer duration and the more demanding requirement of producing work that is presumed to be authored with autonomy. So, what are the main difficulties faced by doctoral students from the moment they enter until the completion of their program?*

AF: The list of challenges and difficulties could be enormous, but in an effort to organize my perception, I will outline five points that I consider to be central difficulties and, at the same time, challenges for our doctoral students – this is, of course, my perspective.

These five points do not imply a hierarchy among them, so I will begin with one and proceed to the others. The first, I would identify it as a difficulty and, at the same time, a challenge of an economic and financial nature. I say this because we know our doctoral students well. Currently, we have more than 50 doctoral students in the Program, which is a high number given the number of faculty members. We have had significant demand in our selection processes; of course, in proportion to public universities, but for our condition as a community university it is a considerable number, averaging between three and five applicants per position, depending on the year. Within our university, no other Program has as many applicants as Education. I have followed the last three doctoral selection processes, and in candidate interviews this difficulty is almost unanimous, nearly all point to it. Many come with the expectation of a scholarship or at least some form of tuition reduction, but this is not always possible, since there are not enough scholarships for everyone, nor are there institutional tuition waivers available for all. Thus, the financial difficulty faced by our doctoral and master's students becomes a very significant challenge. Who are they? Some of our doctoral students are already working in higher education. It is not a large number, but there is a reasonable portion affiliated with Federal Institutes, newer Federal Universities, or private higher education institutions. They have already completed a master's degree and have now come to pursue the doctorate. We also have some students from basic education, but these face much more precarious conditions, as many are teachers in the state system, for example, and their salaries would often not even cover the Program's tuition. We also have students who move directly from the master's into the doctorate – those who were engaged in postgraduate studies, completed a master's with a scholarship, and became interested in research/postgraduate education, thus entering directly. Some even complete their master's and immediately apply for the doctoral program. These students almost always expect a scholarship. The Program has a reasonable number of scholarships, given our context, but not enough to meet the demand of all students in need. Therefore, I would highlight this first challenge, this first difficulty of an economic/financial nature. From 2012 to 2016, when UPF assumed a regional leadership role in investing in postgraduate education, there were many institutional scholarships. There was even a very interesting policy implemented during

that administration, which granted full tuition exemption to students who had completed both their undergraduate and master's degrees at the institution. As a result, in 2017-2018 we had some doctoral students who benefited from full tuition exemption due to this policy; however, this has now become a major problem because, as there is no incoming revenue and as there have been changes in the Program's budget management due to the institution's financial crisis, we now face a significant issue: we have several students with tuition exemption but no corresponding revenue, creating a deficit in the Program's budget. We undertook a major effort in the past year to present a budget for 2021 that could be approved by the governing board, precisely because of this policy, which was initially very beneficial but has now become problematic due to changes in the rules. One point I would emphasize within this first challenge is the significant difference between doctoral students who enter with scholarships and those who do not, in terms of their dedication to the Program. Students with scholarships, especially PROSUC scholarships, which provide stipends, are students who, in fact – also because the scholarship committee and coordination are very demanding, given that these are public funds –, dedicate themselves fully to the Program. I consider this important to highlight because having students with stipends, students with tuition-only scholarships, students with minimal discounts, and others with no financial support at all translates into differences in their level of engagement with the courses, the thesis, research, Program activities, and so on.

I could elaborate much further on this point, but I would like to move on to the second point, which is, in a certain way, connected to the first: the time available for dedication to the Program. As I mentioned earlier regarding the financial issue, it determines, to some extent – although not absolutely for everyone – noticeable differences. Students, especially those who must pay tuition, need to reconcile work and study, work and research. The difficulty faced by those who must work – often with demanding and lengthy work schedules – in meeting the expectations placed on doctoral students is evident, whether in terms of reading requirements for courses, supervision meetings, participation in research groups, Program activities, and so forth. Another element related to time and dedication concerns students who come from distant locations. We have students from the state of Santa Catarina, from regions such as Joaçaba, Videira,

and Chapecó. These students, especially during the coursework phase, must travel weekly; some cover 250 to 300 kilometers to attend classes in Passo Fundo. This travel requires considerable time on the road. Some students would wake up at four in the morning, travel, arrive at eight in Passo Fundo, attend classes throughout the day, and then return to their cities, traveling another 250 to 300 kilometers, because they had commitments there. At the same time, these are extremely dedicated students. Recently, in December, I had an advisee who came from Joaçaba and defended his thesis even ahead of schedule. This is recorded in the defense: he gave a statement that was quite moving, describing his entire journey and emphasizing that he chose the Program because of its quality; he said he would do it all again for the education he received here. Such testimonies, in a certain way, show how students identify with the Program. Are all students like this? No, not all. There are “students” and “students”. There are many contingencies in this process: how they were supervised, how they engaged in research groups, but also whether they had a scholarship, whether they were integrated into the Program, and so on. Another factor related to time and dedication concerns the fact that some students are young, especially those who transitioned directly from the master’s degree, but others are in their 40s or 45s and are already parents. The time factor is also important in reconciling doctoral studies with family responsibilities, caring for children, and so on, and this ultimately becomes decisive in how they are able – or not – to engage with the Program.

Third, which I frame in a very general way because it relates to challenges and difficulties, concerns perspectives for the future after completing the doctorate. I believe this is also an important point to be discussed and would open space, so to speak, for a more panoramic analysis of postgraduate education in Brazil, in our case, postgraduation in Education. If we look at the growth of postgraduate education, which was evident as the numbers show, it was also a quantitative expansion. There was also another movement that I consider extremely important, namely the issue of the interiorization<sup>6</sup> of doctoral programs. My generation could only pursue a doctorate by

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<sup>6</sup> Translator’s note: In this context, “interiorization” (*interiorização*) refers to the expansion of higher education into inland, non-capital regions in Brazil. In this text, it denotes the establishment of doctoral programs outside major metropolitan centers, contributing to broader regional access to postgraduate education.

moving to capital cities. Here, the closest doctoral program in education was in Porto Alegre or Santa Maria, which are at similar distances in terms of kilometers. This interiorization of postgraduate education, induced by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES*), was very significant, because I often tell my students, especially during their initial reception into the Program, that it is now possible to pursue a high-quality doctorate in Passo Fundo. This is reflected in our rating of 5<sup>7</sup>. It is not a rating granted out of benevolence: it is a rating of 5 achieved through hard work, through the dedication of the institution, but above all of the faculty, students, and the criteria that constitute CAPES evaluation. On the other hand, this growth was also tied to the expansion of higher education more broadly, and today we clearly observe a reversed process, so to speak. There is a visible process of contraction in higher education and, consequently, this will also resonate in postgraduate education. I raise this as a background panorama to say that many doctoral students have this concern: “what will I do after I complete the doctorate?”. This is because those who have followed a trajectory of greater dedication to postgraduate education, who completed a master’s degree and then immediately pursued a doctorate, are very pleased to be furthering their qualifications. We have some young students, around 27 or 28 years old, which is relatively young for doctoral study, but this concern is already on their horizon. Thus, I would highlight three groups of doctoral students, and I believe that outside these groups there would be more specific situations, but overall they would encompass around 80% of our doctoral students. The first group consists of those who are already higher education professors, as I have previously mentioned. I recently conducted a survey for the Sucupira Report (*Relatório Sucupira*), the four-year evaluation: the Graduate Program in Education at UPF began operating in 2012, we have already had 48 doctoral theses defended, and we currently have more than 50 doctoral students in progress. In 2021, there will be approximately 12 thesis defenses. This is a high number considering the size of the Program’s faculty. Today,

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<sup>7</sup> Translator’s note: In Brazil, postgraduate programs are evaluated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES). The evaluation uses a scale from 1 to 7, with 3 as the minimum required for accreditation. A score of 5 indicates a high level of national quality, while scores of 6 and 7 are reserved for programs with recognized international excellence.

almost all professors supervise an average of 9 to 11 students, combining master's and doctoral levels. Doctoral students who are already professors and hold positions in federal institutions constitute a more stable group, as their careers are already well established. Those working in private institutions are, for the most part, contracted professors and are somewhat more anxious, because what has been happening – and the pandemic has further accelerated this – is a reduction in the size of institutions. That supposed infinite growth that some believed would occur is now clearly slowing down. Institutions are losing students each semester, which means a reduction in employment opportunities for these professors already working in higher education. The second group consists of teachers from basic education. Here, I believe there is an important element that needs to be addressed as educational policy. Many of these teachers who come from basic education – in our case, in our Program, not many – arrive with the expectation that after completing the doctorate they will be able to work in higher education. However, when they look ahead and realize that higher education is contracting, they say, “well, I will remain in basic education”. But the major question is: “what is the point of having completed a doctorate if it does not represent any change in terms of career progression?”. I have spoken with some advisees, or even some students in the coordination, who note that the doctorate does not change their position in the career ladder, whereas a specialization would. This is highly contradictory, because many municipal career plans are outdated. In the past, advancement was linked to completing a specialization, and master's degrees, even less so doctorates, were not included. Therefore, perhaps an important effort that should and needs to be undertaken is for municipalities to update their career plans, because doing so could make them more attractive. I have no doubt that the additional training acquired by basic education teachers who complete a master's degree, and especially a doctorate, enables the presence of a different kind of professional within the school. However, this necessarily depends on policies established in this direction. The third group of students, which I mentioned earlier, consists of those who have dedicated themselves to being postgraduate students, who completed a master's degree and then continued directly into the doctorate. Perhaps these are the most concerned, because the central question is: “what will I do after I complete the

doctorate?”. Some of them have no school experience, having moved directly from undergraduate to master’s and then to doctoral studies. Some of them have exceptionally strong curricula, because they have dedicated themselves – many of them due to having scholarships and having completed strong master’s and doctoral work. There are even students whose production surpasses that of some postgraduate faculty. I myself supervise students in this situation, with articles accepted in A1 journals, with books, with strong research, and strong dissertations. I present this as a major underlying challenge regarding future prospects after completing the doctorate. I will now move on to the fourth point. I have separated these five points didactically, but it is possible to see that they intersect, so to speak. The fourth point concerns what I would call the publicization of research. Once again, I would say that things are, to some extent, interconnected, because there is the following situation: we have doctoral students who have already managed to make significant progress in the publicization of their research – some of them already during their master’s. They have published articles; some have even published their master’s dissertation as a book. However, these are mainly those doctoral students who have a greater level of dedication to the Program. They are students with scholarships, who are able to engage more intensely with postgraduate education. It is interesting because perhaps one of the effects of CAPES’s induction policies was precisely this. If we compare graduates from the Program I currently coordinate ten years ago with those of today, we see a striking difference. Ten years ago, one would examine students’ curricula and find almost nothing, at most presentations at academic events. Recently, while reviewing curricula for the Sucupira Report, I was impressed by the number of articles published by students, especially doctoral students, and by graduates from the last two or three years. This shows that the Program has taken very seriously the issue of research publicization, and I believe this is not unique to the Program I coordinate but applies to others as well. At the same time, this is something to be highlighted, but it is also a challenge, especially for those who have difficulty dedicating time of sufficient quality. The basic question is: are all students publishing? No. Obviously not. It would also be necessary to consider another characteristic – and I think this would even merit a specific study, which your research, Lucídio, helps to understand from within this

dynamic – namely, the type of advisor students have. Because when one examines students' curricula, it is evident that even some without scholarships, but who were involved, to some extent, in research groups, have good production (articles, book chapters, conference papers). Others, who have scholarships but were not strongly involved in research groups, sometimes due to the way the advisor organizes their work, have curricula that are almost empty in terms of academic production. Thus, Lucídio, I would emphasize that supervision makes a difference in this regard of doctoral students' scientific production. For this reason, I see that supervision is not merely a detail, but a foundational element in how students feel, or do not feel, institutionally connected to research, to postgraduate education, and to the Program itself. Another aspect that draws my attention, and which is both a challenge and a difficulty, is the idea of joint publication between advisor and advisee. If we look again at production ten years ago, it was very rare for advisors and advisees to publish together. In fact, some faculty members in the Program were quite resistant to the idea that advisors and advisees should publish jointly. I believe that CAPES has, to some extent, encouraged joint production. Today, it cannot be said that this is fully established, it is not yet at 100% in our Program, but we have made significant progress in this direction. We now see many works – and I say this because I am preparing the Sucupira Report, and there are evaluation criteria related to this aspect – that still do not involve joint production between advisor and advisee; thus, it remains a challenge for some faculty to advance further in this direction. Nevertheless, there has been considerable progress, and I believe this is a positive development. The statement by the coordinator of the Education Area at CAPES, Bob (Robert Evan Verhine) – if I am not mistaken, at a seminar in Belo Horizonte in 2018, when Cláudio was still coordinator and I attended representing him at the coordinators' meeting – was that perhaps, in the near future, the scientific production most evaluated in Programs would be that of students rather than faculty, because faculty, in order to be part of Programs, should already be established researchers; otherwise, they should not be in the Program. Students, on the other hand, must demonstrate, and the Program will demonstrate, whether it is effectively training new researchers through

their production. In this sense, I believe the Program has already advanced significantly, but it remains a challenge.

Finally, so as not to extend too much and to allow space for the next question, I would identify a general difficulty and challenge as follows: how to confront the institutional crisis of the university? I believe this may be the greatest underlying challenge and difficulty. Why do I say this? Because of several elements I have already mentioned in the previous points. The question that arises is: what is the future of the university in a time of dismantling of important policies that were implemented over the past 20 years and are now being systematically undone? This applies both to the issue of university funding and to the deterioration of infrastructure, as well as to this predatory incursion of an entrepreneurial spirit into the university. I would add, more specifically in relation to our Program and our university, the question: what is the future of the community university? I believe this is one of the greatest challenges and difficulties we will face in the coming years. Today, the community university finds itself at a critical crossroads, including in maintaining its identity as a community institution. So, internally, I believe this is no longer clear because today, perhaps due to the crisis or the extreme situation in which the institution finds itself, there is a strong group that no longer holds back, even to the point of saying that the university must indeed become a company and that there is no other alternative. Thus, the voices that still echo ideas such as “we need to remain a community institution”, regarding what it was constituted as an institution and how it must be updated, are certainly becoming fewer and fewer. This is concerning because those who will most likely suffer from the destabilization or destruction of a community identity are, in fact, the humanities. Education itself, although it is currently the Program with the largest number of students and the highest rating among all Programs, will also be weakened as this idea of a community university is dismantled. Thus, it becomes a challenge in this sense. And perhaps I frame it as a challenge because it is necessary to mobilize efforts so that the community understands what a community university is. Of course, this discourse is not new; it has always been present. I am approaching 30 years at UPF as a professor, and I remember that this has always been a topic of discussion and concern. However, I assess that it has not yet been taken seriously enough to ensure that the regional

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community truly embraces the university as a community institution. The idea of a community university is highly distorted because, when observing the business sector, for example, it insists on stating that the university is community-based, but only insofar as it benefits from it. The same does not occur when it could contribute to ensuring that this institution remains community-based. Similarly, I would say this about regional political authorities, such as mayors. Today, I see with great concern, for example, some mayors of small municipalities in the region occasionally establishing agreements with questionable institutions from various parts of Brazil, opening distance education centers (*Educação a Distância* – EaD) merely for political promotion, leading many of these students to be, quite literally, misled into enrolling in very low-quality programs that will certainly not place them in the labor market. This has direct impacts on future doctoral students because, as the idea of the university as an important space for education is destabilized, the importance of having strong doctoral programs, such as the doctoral program in Education that I currently coordinate, is also undermined.

LB: *Very well, Altair. An excellent exposition, with many details regarding the main challenges and difficulties faced by doctoral students. Shall we now move on to the second question?*

AF: Sure.

LB: *What actions and strategies are implemented by the Program to ensure intellectual and institutional affiliation? That is, what is done to guarantee doctoral students' sense of belonging to the Program so that they enter, feel engaged, and complete their doctorate?*

AF: Here I will be somewhat more concise, although I will address more aspects. I have identified nine points that I would like to discuss in response to your question. Of course, I would again emphasize that these points are not hierarchical and that they complement one another.

LB: *It is interesting that in the previous question you identified five, whereas here you point to nine aspects. In fact, the weight of the interview—or its anchor—is this issue*

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*of constructing the student's sense of belonging to the Program. But evidently, this issue is interconnected with that of the obstacles and difficulties that doctoral students face in entering, developing, and completing the doctorate.*

AF: I will begin with the first point, which I would call the welcoming of students, and I believe this is an element that stands out from the Program's coordination. Now, due to the pandemic and the need for isolation, I deeply miss being at UPF, being there and moving through the corridors. In times of in-person activity, I was at the university every day; I never worked from home. It was from Monday to Friday and, at times, even on Saturday mornings. The Program operates mainly on Thursdays and Fridays, but on the other days, for example, on Wednesdays there are faculty meetings, on Mondays and Tuesdays I had undergraduate classes, so I practically lived within the university. Generally, I would dedicate mornings at home, but in the afternoons and evenings I was constantly at the university. Starting with the coordination, moving through the academic office, and including the faculty, every year we conduct a kind of anonymous evaluation with the students, and it is remarkable how positively they evaluate the work of the Program's administrative staff. They truly feel well informed. The pandemic has somewhat disrupted this for various reasons, but this welcoming approach has always been one of our key characteristics. It begins with the selection process. We always emphasize within the Program that students need to feel comfortable in it. We were fortunate to secure funding from the Funding Authority for Studies and Projects (*Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos – FINEP*) to build a new facility – I am not sure whether you have seen the new facilities –, but it resulted in a very good building that we were able to construct with limited resources, creating high-quality infrastructure, with two good classrooms, offices for supervision, rooms for research lines, and spaces where students can rest. The project is not yet fully completed, because the original plan included using the ground floor to create facilities for student use, especially for those coming from other regions. This, whether we like it or not, plays a determining role in making students feel welcome here. I feel that, in general, students are very satisfied with how they are welcomed and supported within the Program. Can I say that this applies to 100% of students? I do not believe so, because if a student does not truly engage with the Program, they do not fully perceive

it. If a student comes only to fulfill requirements, complete coursework, and so on. And here we could once again enter into a broader discussion about the difference between students who genuinely seek education and those who seek only a credential. I believe there are very few who seek only a credential, perhaps one or two, but, in general, no. I think that the vast majority of students are concerned with pursuing education in the broad and integral sense of the term.

A second aspect, which I consider to be a very powerful action and strategy, is what I would call collective work and democratic management. I see that the Program, from the outset, reflects this idea of commitment, of embracing the Program as a space of belonging. For example, to this day, since I joined the Program in 2008, we have never had an election; I cannot speak about the period before that because I was not administratively affiliated with the School of Education, but rather with the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (*Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas – IFCH*). However, since I joined the permanent faculty of the Program, now 13 years ago, we have never needed to hold an election for coordinator. This is an important element because it indicates a kind of collective agreement that the person who assumes coordination does so as someone willing to provide a “service to the group”. Thus, when I speak of collective work and democratic management, I refer to a committed group of faculty members. Although we are a small group, the professors are highly committed. It is rare, for example, for a professor to miss a faculty meeting.

LB: *Always a full faculty meeting?*

AF: Always a full faculty meeting. In terms of management, we have the Program coordination, the Graduate Council, which is composed of the coordinator, the coordinators of the three research lines, and student representatives. Thus, on a monthly basis, we always hold one full faculty meeting, two Graduate Council (*conselho de pós-graduação – CPG*) meetings, and one meeting of the professors within each research line. In practice, there is a meeting almost every week; the coordinator is involved in four weekly meetings, so to speak, related to management. The faculty are highly committed to the Program, and new members who join quickly

adapt to our profile. It is a faculty body marked by mutual respect. This does not mean that there are no disagreements or occasional tensions, these also occur within the Program, but, overall, I believe that the collective spirit prevails over an individualistic one, so to speak. I consider that faculty meetings are, in fact, spaces of democratic decision-making because everything is decided within the faculty body or within the CPG; we follow the Program's regulations. The CPG is more deliberative, dealing with processes and so on. It is within the CPG that major policies are shaped, and in this sense, policy does not belong to the coordinator but to the CPG, to the Graduate Council. It is noteworthy, moreover, the level of student participation, as they are present at all meetings. According to the regulations, students participate both in the CPG and in the faculty meetings. It is interesting because their representatives are chosen by the students themselves, including through assemblies. Last year, the students themselves drafted a kind of regulatory proposal for selecting their representatives. Thus, we have very active student participation in the Program's management. There are several student committees, and I believe this is an important element in the training of doctoral students because, beyond student representation, there is one representative for doctoral students and one for master's students, with their respective alternates, who participate in both faculty and Graduate Council meetings. Student representation on the scholarship committee is also very active; they take part in discussions whenever there are changes in scholarship recipients or during selection processes. The committee works diligently to allocate scholarships, apply selection criteria, and draft calls for applications. There is also Program representation on the Unit Council, chosen by peers. Four or five years ago, when the new targets for the last four-year evaluation period were established – if I am not mistaken, in 2016 – a committee was created, called the student production committee. What does this committee do? It is renewed annually, with a group of master's and doctoral students who remain to preserve its institutional memory, while new members join each year. The committee monitors student production and periodically presents reports on what students have produced. It also organizes workshops on how to write articles and how to submit them to journals. It is a highly active committee. There is also a communication committee within the Program, responsible, for example, for

disseminating Program news on the institution's website. We always seek representation from all three research lines, so these are master's or doctoral students who are renewed annually. In fact, I received information from the undergraduate division last year indicating that the Education Program had the highest number of features on UPF's official website, largely due to the work of this committee, which has been very effective in promoting the Program's activities. Within this framework of collective work and democratic management, which, to some extent, is also linked to the first point of welcoming students, I would like to highlight the required doctoral courses, which students consider very important. There are four required courses that the entire cohort takes: two with a more theoretical focus and two oriented toward research. Two are offered in the first semester and two in the second semester of the program. This is quite significant because students develop a cohort identity and, in fact, they express some dissatisfaction that after the third semester there is no longer a course that includes all of them. Of course, this is not feasible because they must focus on their theses and dissertations, but it is meaningful in terms of fostering identification. It is also interesting because there is a considerable difference between the first and second semesters: we receive students who completed their master's degrees in other institutions, some of whom did so a long time ago, so these courses function, although I do not particularly like the term, as a kind of leveling process. In this sense, they are very important; I myself teach one of these courses. They are co-taught by two professors to address the range of research lines. Thus, these required courses help establish what I would call a sense of collectivity among doctoral students.

Moving to the third point, which I consider to be of great value to the Program, are the research groups. I believe that if you were to interview the 11 professors, at least eight would say that the soul of the Program lies in its research groups. And why? I cannot speak for all groups, as I do not participate in all of them, but I can speak about the research group I coordinate and some others with which we occasionally collaborate. There is very active participation of doctoral students in research groups; they almost function as a kind of sacred space of engagement. It is interesting because this varies considerably from advisor to advisor. Some advisors organize these

activities very systematically. There are groups composed of several professors; for example, the Foundations of Education line holds biweekly meetings with all advisees from the line, partly due to the nature of Research Line 1, where there is a certain thematic convergence. In other lines, such as my own, this is less straightforward because, although the research is grouped under a line, individual faculty members' research does not necessarily converge as much as in Line 1. In my case, for instance, I run a group with my advisees, and students supervised by other professors in the same line also participate. In my group, there are doctoral students, master's students, undergraduate research assistants, alumni, and basic education teachers, as well as some from higher education. My group typically includes between 25 and 30 participants, and we meet biweekly on Friday afternoons, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. The group truly becomes a laboratory for writing, study, discussion, and thematic development. These groups are very stable; my group has been meeting for ten years, and each year it produces a collected volume. This year, we are celebrating the group's 10th anniversary, and some advisees are organizing a series of videos to recount our history through these publications. In this sense, I consider research groups – speaking from my own experience, but this applies to others in the Program as well – to be one of the strongest mechanisms for providing students with a sense of Program identity. This is how we view them. Participation in research groups even counts for academic credit toward degree completion because it represents engagement with research in its most rigorous form. It is interesting because it is within research groups that many individuals become motivated to pursue a master's or doctoral degree. Thus, when we receive inquiries about the Program and how to apply, the first question I ask, as coordinator, is whether the person has time to engage in a research group, because the research group functions almost as a preamble, an entry point into the Program.

LB: *A kind of antechamber to the space-time of entry into the Program.*

AF: Exactly. A fourth point concerns participation in events, and I would like to speak, in particular, about an event organized by the students. Of course, due to the pandemic, most events have become virtual, online, or almost entirely virtual, but the

events organized by the Program have always had very strong and intense student participation. We consider that events play a very important formative role for doctoral students, because the event... It is unfortunate that, for various reasons, CAPES itself has somewhat devalued events, so I am not sure whether the transformation of conference presentations and the publication of event proceedings into technical outputs will end up undermining a significant portion of these events. It is still unclear what will happen in the post-pandemic period, or even when that will be, but, in any case, I have always viewed events positively because our students have always been strongly encouraged to participate not only in events held within the institution but also in others, such as ANPEd, ANPAE, and EDUCERE. We have always had many students attending EDUCERE. The ANPEd Sul meetings, for example, the Program even finances transportation, providing buses for students to attend this event. We have participated in virtually all of them; only the most recent one, due to the pandemic, was an exception. If it had been held in person, the Program would have funded transportation for students to attend, because we consider these events to be extremely important for students to develop a sense of belonging to a field of knowledge. I have received feedback from many students who said that events, especially the larger and more established ones in education, were turning points, in the sense that "it was at the event that I was able to better define my thesis, or my dissertation project", and so on. Therefore, I consider that events have a very important formative character and provide students with a sense of belonging not only to a field of knowledge but also to a Program that identifies them. But I would like to speak specifically, still within this point, about what we affectionately call MEDUC, an abbreviation for the Education Showcase (*Mostra da Educação*). It is an event created in 2015, held every two years; this year will mark its fourth edition, and the entire organization of the event is carried out by master's and doctoral students, although doctoral students take the lead. It was designed within the Program as an event that should differ from others because students are the protagonists, from conceptualizing the theme to organizing all aspects of its operation. We establish a general committee, elected by the students themselves, and then subcommittees are formed, also by the students, who are responsible for the entire process: conceptualizing the event,

designing its format, assembling scientific committees to review submissions, and carrying it through to execution. They are currently preparing the fourth edition, which will take place in November; the dates have already been set, from November 10 to 12. It is impressive how deeply they engage in this event, perhaps because they are the protagonists of the entire process. The last edition, in 2019, was something that impressed everyone due to the seriousness with which they assumed the proposal, from the opening session to the organization of panels, the presentation of papers, reports, and finally the presentation of the final report at the faculty meeting. The professors were very impressed by how the students conducted the event. We truly believe that this event is of very high formative value. Moving on to the fifth point, which I had previously identified as a challenge but which I also frame here as a strategy, is the issue of scientific production. Of course, this is closely related to the model or the kind of induction promoted by CAPES in recent years, but I see that this desire, the willingness of students not only to write but also to see their work published, has become a strong element of belonging to the Program. I have followed many of my own advisees, as well as those of other professors, and there is a strong commitment among doctoral students, particularly regarding their ability to produce high-quality work during their doctoral studies and to submit it to reputable journals. This has led to a significant volume of article production and has also advanced in the direction I mentioned earlier regarding the advisor–advisee relationship. Scientific production, when viewed more broadly across doctoral students, has been a defining element of students’ sense of belonging to the Program. It seems that most students do not feel satisfied, or that their mission is accomplished, if they complete the Program without having produced at least one strong article. I believe this is an important point to emphasize. Perhaps we could even say that this is largely due to CAPES’s influence in this direction, or something similar. However, regarding scientific production, I would also like to highlight another important aspect, which I consider both a strategy and an action to ensure affiliation: the involvement of doctoral students in the work of the journal *Espaço Pedagógico*. You are very familiar with this journal; you have published several articles in it. It has advanced considerably; we have even improved its ranking, but in recent years we have lost institutional technical support, and currently there is

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virtually no one within the institution dedicated to this work. There were periods when staff members devoted 20 hours per week to it, but that is no longer the case. This work has gradually been taken on by doctoral students. Today, there is a team of doctoral students, most of them scholarship holders, who help Telmo, the current editor-in-chief. There are also three associate editors, myself included, because we are so few that we must take on multiple roles. The team working with Telmo, which began with the previous editor, Professor Flávia, who did excellent work in improving the journal, has also contributed to the training of these doctoral students who were involved in the team. So much so that the students who go through this experience leave highly qualified, even able to take on good-quality journals. We have one doctoral student (Regiano Bregalda), one of those who was most involved before going on a sandwich doctorate, who, if he does not find space in higher education, any journal that hires him will be making a very strong choice, because he knows the system from the inside like few others do. I have spoken with him many times – he is now finishing his doctorate and will defend in July; he completed a sandwich doctorate in France. He has accumulated a great deal of knowledge about how journals function, because he studied them; he has a deep command of the system, both in its technical aspects and in its academic dimension. I often say to the journal team: “I wish I had gone through this process during my doctorate, to have all this expertise in journals”. The sixth point, then, is involvement with undergraduate education, and here I see the role of the teaching internship. We were already talking a bit about this yesterday in the faculty meeting, because I think that this work of the teaching internship, since it is also the coordinator’s role to read the internship reports, and I have read all the reports that students produce after completing it, represents an element of great value in terms of affiliation with the Program. When well conducted, this work makes students feel much closer to this idea of training for higher education. So, I consider involvement with undergraduate education very important and central in the formative process. This occurs through research groups, through the presence of undergraduate research students. For example, I now see undergraduate research students writing together with doctoral students. There are some advisors who are even working with the strategy of pairing an undergraduate research student with a doctoral student, which I

see as extremely important, because this is what you discussed in your texts, if I am not mistaken, around 2011–2012, about how advisors are formed. I think the best way to train advisors is precisely to carry out this exercise of pairing a doctoral student, who helps with undergraduate research, reviewing reports, helping revise texts. In the seventh point, I highlight social engagement, which I believe is included in the Program's strategic plan. Social engagement has also been an important element that points in several directions, but I will highlight some of them. Just last week, for example, the entire Program was deeply involved in the training of teachers from the municipal school system here in Passo Fundo. This involvement occurred at various levels, from a keynote lecture that Cláudio and I gave to all teachers, to thematic panels in which research on basic education conducted within the Program was presented, to workshops that doctoral students led across the three research lines. Thus, this social engagement takes place through advisory work with municipal education departments, through teacher training in school systems, and through work with teachers' unions. Shortly before the pandemic, we already had a fully developed project, but we ended up interrupting it. We are going to resume it this year, because we had been waiting for the pandemic to be over in order to begin implementing the project; however, since it will not end soon, we will have to rethink it in another format. The president of the municipal teachers' union approached us to design a teacher education project through the union. So, I issued a call to the students, and in the first call, 22 students showed up to contribute voluntarily to this training. We launched it in March of last year, and two weeks later the pandemic shut everything down. Everything we had planned came to nothing, but now, at the beginning of this year, we will try to resume it. The eighth point concerns internationalization. I see that, since the approval of the doctoral program and the fact that the Program has had sandwich doctorate scholarships, this has been very enriching, because the students who were able to have this experience – we have had, in almost every year, one student who went to undertake a sandwich doctorate; we have had students who went to Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, and now there is one preparing to go to Spain, I do not know whether the scholarship will be approved, the proposal was submitted this week – when they return, they have the commitment to give back to the Program, to the colleagues who did not go, their

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experience. So, we always organize an event in which students share their experiences; this is very enriching in that sense. We have also recently hosted international students here. Last year, we had two students from Mexico who came to undertake a sandwich doctorate, and now we have three regular students from Africa. We have a doctoral student from Angola who is enrolled; he would have come to Brazil if it were not for the pandemic, but for that reason he has not yet arrived. As soon as in-person activities resume, he will come to Brazil and stay here for a period. We also have two master's students from Guinea-Bissau, who are regular students enrolled in the program. Thus, this experience with internationalization also contributes to what we consider important. I am speaking about students, but I could also speak about the projects in which everyone is involved; all research lines have international engagement through partnerships, publications, and so on. Finally, I would mention the connection with alumni. I see that the Program maintains a very positive relationship with its alumni. For example, among the first cohort to complete the doctorate, the first doctoral graduate was one of my advisees, who defended in 2015, even somewhat ahead of schedule. These are students who continue in the research groups; in my research group, there are five doctoral alumni who remain active in the group. Two of them were not even my advisees, but since there are professors who do not have research groups, or perhaps because they feel more aligned with the themes discussed in this group, they continued with us. However, this is not only the case in my group; it also occurs in the groups of Professor Cláudio, Professor Angelo, and other professors. We have a number of faculty members in the Program who are alumni of the Program itself. At the doctoral level, we have only one so far; in the most recent accreditation process, we had the first doctoral graduate from the Program who was accredited – he was already a faculty member at the institution and was accredited here as a permanent faculty member. But I can say that alumni participation is very significant across all Program activities. Well, Lucídio, regarding this question, that is what I think.

*LB: Very good, Altair. I made only a few interruptions because your presentation flowed well. You stayed on script, which I attribute to the fact that you had prior access to the questions and took care to organize your thoughts beforehand. As we move toward*

*concluding the interview, I would like you to focus a bit on the issue of doctoral completion; that is, whether you register cases of withdrawal, dropout, or dismissal from the Program, an aspect that touches on the issue of belonging. Do you register situations of discontent, distress, or cases of depression? As I mentioned, the literature has been reporting dramatic situations that, at the extreme, include cases of suicide among doctoral students. You drew attention to and described a way of working with graduate students, especially doctoral students, so that they feel welcomed, engaged, and that they belong to the Program, an aspect that fosters intellectual and institutional affiliation. Certainly, a Program with such a small faculty and such an engaged student body, these issues of support, assistance, and the feeling of being welcomed – which, now during the pandemic, is being referred to as “remote welcoming” – are very important. While you were speaking, at one point you referred to the various spaces of welcoming, even describing the institution as a “sacred space”... I found myself thinking about how, let us say, Elli Benincá<sup>8</sup> is omnipresent in this way of working on the part of both faculty and students, as well as in his influence on the very emergence of the master’s and doctoral programs, and how he continues to be that anima that animates this collective. In short, there are several sub-questions within one question that, in a way, summarize the reflections on the difficulties, obstacles, and strategies implemented in the day-to-day of the PPGEdu.*

AF: Certainly. I will begin with the last point, which I think it was very important that you mentioned, because everything I have said, from the first point onward, this spirit of welcoming, this systematic dimension of the research groups, which I referred to as the “soul of the Program”, has an inspiration, and this inspiration is clearly visible in all of us, namely Professor Elli Benincá. I am deeply grateful to this great master, who was our major intellectual mentor. Even today, I see myself following, though not with the same mastery, because it is impossible to match the qualities that Benincá possessed, but much of what I do with my advisees, in the research group, and it is not only me: my colleagues who were Benincá’s students (Professors Cláudio, Ângelo, Eldon, Telmo), and even other professors who are not from Philosophy, Flávia Caimi

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<sup>8</sup> Reference to the educator, philosopher, and theologian Elli Benincá (1936–2020), an engaged intellectual who shaped the education of generations of teachers who were trained, worked, and continue to work at the Faculty of Education at UPF and in many other spheres, including higher education institutions, primary and secondary schools, municipal and state departments of education, and social movements, among others. For those interested in learning about Benincá’s contributions, we recommend: 1. MARCON, Telmo (Ed.). *Educação e universidade. Práxis e emancipação*. Uma homenagem a Elli Benincá. Passo Fundo: EDUPF, 1998. 2. MUHL, Eldon H.; MARCON, Telmo (Eds.). *Formação de educadores-pesquisadores: contribuições de Elli Benincá*. Passo Fundo: UPF Editora, 2022. Coleção Práxis Benincaniana. The first dissertation on Benincá’s legacy was presented in the Graduate Program in Education at UPF (PPGEdu/UPF) in 2023: SCARTEZINI, Angela Trombini. *Exercícios formativos da práxis benincaniana: diálogo e memória em sala de aula*. Master’s Dissertation in Education. Universidade de Passo Fundo. Passo Fundo, 2023.

and Adriana Dickel, who have now retired, were part of Benincá's group. I would say that Benincá's spirit is present in this Program. He was a professor here and a great mentor to a large portion of the faculty currently in the Program. Thus, I would like, in this interview, to make this fundamental acknowledgment of the presence of Benincá's spirit in our formation as professors, as a faculty body, and as a structuring force of the Program itself. We have few cases of withdrawal from the doctorate. In fact, recently we had the dismissal of one student, who is a faculty member at the institution; he comes from the field of Physiotherapy. He had considerable difficulty from the outset, from the moment of admission, partly due to his disciplinary background. He completed the required coursework, but he struggled to engage deeply with his thesis. He suspended his enrollment for one semester, then for a second semester, and therefore, according to the Program's regulations, he was in a situation that led to dismissal. We made every effort to contact him, and due also to his personal financial situation, he ultimately chose to withdraw from the Program. Perhaps he may return in the future and apply again through the selection process. We also had, in the second cohort if I am not mistaken, a student from the field of Psychology who developed depression at the time and eventually also requested withdrawal, but for very personal reasons: she went through a separation and various personal difficulties. Again, there was also that issue – if I recall correctly, she was from Santa Rosa – of the difficulty of distance in becoming more involved in Program activities, which may also have contributed to her lack of sufficient motivation to continue the doctorate. More recently, we had a student who experienced serious health problems and had to request a temporary leave, but she is now returning. In her case, it was due to health issues, she had a heart condition, and her doctor recommended that she suspend her doctoral studies for one semester. Apart from these cases, we have not had withdrawals from the doctorate. This is something important, something positive. Now, regarding this other aspect – perhaps at the master's level there may be more cases, even because the duration is shorter – there is no doubt that this distress, the distress of writing, the distress of not being able to dedicate oneself to research as one should and as is required to produce a thesis, to conduct solid thesis research, occurs among several students. In this sense, the important role of the advisor emerges again: the ability to

accompany these students. However, the fact that we have few withdrawals indicates that we do not have major problems of this nature. I cannot say that they do not exist; they do exist, to a greater or lesser extent, for some students, especially during the decisive phase of thesis writing. Some students end up postponing their defense because the text is not yet sufficiently strong; this also happens. We do have cases of extension, though not many. Some due to health issues, others due to excessive involvement with work, so the thesis did not progress as it should have. But it is not something very explicit, so to speak. Now, I really appreciate this term “*mal-estar*” (both “malaise” and “discontent” in Portuguese); I once wrote a text about it and revisited Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents<sup>9</sup>, and it is interesting because the very concept of *mal-estar* is somewhat ambiguous. It is ambiguous in the sense that it is not the same as illness; it is an indication that something is not going well, but without knowing exactly why, or not yet knowing sufficiently why. I think there could not be a more fitting term for your research than this one. I see that everything discussed in the first part may be indicative of a malaise, but they are not sufficient indicators to definitively state that malaise exists. And yet, it does exist within this broader climate, the pandemic has caused and will continue to cause many forms of malaise, not only in graduate education, but among doctoral students, faculty, and in Brazilian society as a whole. To use an expression by Eliane Brum, “we are sick of Brazil”, sick of Brazil in these difficult times.

LB: *Altair, in our research we have been working with the concept of discontent (mal-estar) as a mismatch between expectations and the realization of those expectations within the graduate education environment.*

AF: Perfect.

LB: *Thank you very much, Altair, for your availability and for the time you devoted to our research. The challenge and commitment remain to disseminate these contributions from the interviewees, as well as the results of the questionnaires administered to the doctoral students.*

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<sup>9</sup> Translator’s note: In Portuguese, the term “discontents” in Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents is commonly translated as *mal-estar* (malaise), which carries a broader semantic range, encompassing not only discontent but also a sense of unease, discomfort, or even physical indisposition (e.g., nausea or malaise).



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