

**RECOGNITION OF THE DIVERSITIES AND RIGHTS OF YAE PARTICIPANTS**

**RECONHECIMENTO DAS DIVERSIDADES E DOS DIREITOS DOS SUJEITOS DE EJA**

**RECONOCIMIENTO DE LAS DIVERSIDADES Y DE LOS DERECHOS DE LOS SUJETOS DE LA EJA**



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**ABSTRACT:** The article aims to discuss diversity in Youth and Adult Education (YAE) and the need to recognize the rights of its subjects. It is a bibliographic study, drawing on the contributions of Freire (2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), Charlot (2000), Di Pierro (2005), Laffin (2016), and Oliveira (2004), among others. YAE students are subjects of rights who express diversities that transcend age, being marked by sociocultural specificities such as social class, origin, gender, and race/ethnicity, subjects often inserted in historical contexts of inequality. It can be concluded that enrollment in YAE represents an act of resistance against social exclusion. The non-homogenization of pedagogical processes in YAE and the need to recognize the trajectories and diversity of individuals for the realization of social equality and their human rights are reaffirmed.

**KEYWORDS:** Concept of subjects. Students in youth and adult education (YAE). Rights. Diversity.

**RESUMO:** *O artigo tem como objetivo debater a diversidade na Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA) e a necessidade de reconhecimento dos direitos de seus sujeitos. Trata-se de um estudo bibliográfico, tomando as contribuições de Freire (2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) Charlot (2000), Di Pierro (2005), Laffin (2016), Oliveira (2004), entre outros. Os e as estudantes da EJA são sujeitos de direitos que manifestam diversidades que transcendem a perspectiva etária, sendo marcadas principalmente por especificidades socioculturais como classe social, origem, gênero e raça/etnia, sujeitos muitas vezes inseridos em contextos históricos de desigualdade. Conclui-se que a inserção na EJA representa um ato de resistência contra a exclusão social. Reafirma-se a não homogeneização dos processos pedagógicos na EJA e a necessidade do reconhecimento das trajetórias e das diversidades dos sujeitos para a efetivação da igualdade social e de seus direitos humanos.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Concepção de sujeitos. Estudantes da educação de jovens e adultos (EJA). Direitos. Diversidade.*

**RESUMEN:** *El artículo tiene como objetivo debatir la diversidad en la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos (EJA) y la necesidad de reconocer los derechos de sus sujetos. Se trata de un estudio bibliográfico que recoge las contribuciones de Freire (2018, 2021a, 2021 b, 2021c), Charlot (2000), Di Pierro (2005), Laffin (2016) y Oliveira (2004), entre otros. Los estudiantes de la EJA son sujetos de derechos que manifiestan diversidades que trascienden la perspectiva de edad, marcadas principalmente por especificidades socioculturales como la clase social, el origen, el género y la raza/etnia, sujetos que a menudo se insertan en contextos históricos de desigualdad. Se concluye que la inserción en la EJA representa un acto de resistencia contra la exclusión social. Se reafirma la no homogeneización de los procesos pedagógicos en la EJA y la necesidad de reconocer las trayectorias y las diversidades de los sujetos para la efectividad de la igualdad social y de sus derechos humanos.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Concepción de sujetos. Estudiantes de educación de jóvenes y adultos (EJA). Derechos. Diversidad.*

## Introduction

With the aim of discussing the issue of diversity in Youth and Adult Education (YAE), this text presents a study on the specificities of the subjects who comprise it, as well as the need to recognize their subjective rights. Being a subject of rights is part of the democratic condition, which encompasses within its historical processes the struggle for and achievement of equality in human rights. Moreover, the text highlights that these subjects reveal forms of diversity that are not limited to age, but are marked above all by sociocultural specificities that permeate the lived experiences that define them. The study is bibliographical in nature and presents the main theoretical references based on Freire (2021a, 2021b, 2021c), Charlot (2000), Di Pierro (2005), Laffin (2016), and Oliveira (2004). Drawing on these introductory elements, the text is organized around considerations regarding the epistemological conception of “subject,” the recognition of subjects as rights-bearers, followed by an analysis of the diversity of subjects in YAE and the study’s concluding remarks.

## Notes on the Epistemological Conception of the Subject

Before advancing toward identifying traits that may outline the diversity of YAE subjects, it is essential to briefly discuss the concept of “subject.” To this end, the perspective of Bernard Charlot (2000) serves as a starting point:

[...] when speaking of subjects, one refers to a human being, open to the world, bearer of desires, driven by these desires, in relation with other human beings (also subjects); a social being who is born and grows within a family (or a substitute family), who occupies a position in a social space, who is inscribed in social relations; and also a singular being, a unique exemplar of the human species, who has a history, interprets the world, and gives meaning to that world, to the position they occupy within it, to their relations with others, to their own history, and to their singularity (Charlot, 2000, p. 33, our translation).

Even while experiencing collectivity, all subjects preserve their singularity (not to be confused with individualism), because:

Sociocultural subjects are also concrete and plural beings. They are living and real persons, existing through their corporeality and social location, through their condition as women, men, Black, White. They belong to different races and ethnicities. They are children, youth, or elders, adherents of diverse beliefs and customs. They have desires and projects and attribute distinct meanings to their experiences and to the world. To understand them, it is necessary to

consider these attributes, whether ascribed or acquired, for all of this shapes their existence and condition (Teixeira, 1996, p. 185, our translation).

Furthermore, because they seek to construct their own perceptions, meanings, and understandings, subjects may be considered subjects of knowledge, as highlighted by Paulo Freire (2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

This subject of knowledge, aware of their desire and incompleteness, stems from the conception of the human being as dynamically “becoming,” continuously constructing themselves and the society around them through the development of critical consciousness. Freire (2021b, p. 101–102, our translation), in his problematizing conception of human incompleteness, “[...] recognizes human beings as those who are becoming, unfinished, incomplete, in and with a reality which, being historical as well, is just as unfinished as they are.”

In *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, Freire (2021d) presents a rich diversity of subject profiles and recognizes in them a series of characteristics, among which the following are emphasized in this text: bearers of knowledge; speakers and listeners; capable; committed; reflective; engaged in the process; ethical; producers of knowledge; critical; autonomous; decision-makers; protagonists of events; integrated into their socio-historical-cultural context; seekers; historical beings; agents of transformation; in formation; creative; builders; unfinished; participants in history; dialogical; and open learners. This positive view underscores Freire’s emphasis (2021f) on the multiplicity of dimensions that constitute the human being in educational processes, highlighting the importance of recognizing and valuing these facets in the pursuit of autonomy and critical development. In this conception, one assumes that:

[...] the epistemic subject is the affective and relational subject, defined by feelings and emotions in situation and in action; that is—without resorting to the ungraspable—the subject as systems of relational conduct, as a set of psychic processes implemented in relationships with others and with oneself (Charlot, 2000, p. 70, our translation).

Thus, it is emphasized that this subject, in dealing with knowledge, constructs perceptions of their potentialities, capacities, and difficulties, and learns how to navigate them. It is a subject situated within their relationship with knowledge, and therefore, it is essential to “[...] study this subject when confronted with the need to learn and with the presence of ‘knowledge’ in the world” (Charlot, 2000, p. 34, our translation).

Charlot (2000) contributes yet another fundamental concept by asserting that the human subject is not, but “[...] must become; to do so, they must be educated by those who compensate

for their initial fragility, and must educate themselves, ‘becoming by themselves’” (Charlot, 2000, p. 52, our translation), referring to the notion of the human subject’s duty to become.

This perspective resonates with Paulo Freire’s ontological notion of the human subject’s becoming and his insistence that pedagogical action must recognize YAE subjects as capable of “right thinking,” of transitioning from naïve curiosity to epistemological curiosity, through educational action conducted *with* them and not *for* them.

### **YAE Students as Subjects of Rights**

For these subjects to exercise their specificities fully, it is essential to recognize and guarantee their right to enjoy the inherent Rights of the Human Person<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, it is possible to agree with Bobbio (2004, p. 16, our translation) when he states that “[...] the fundamental problem concerning human rights today is not so much justifying them, but protecting them. This is not a philosophical issue, but a political one.” Thus, it is not the lack of legal frameworks in Brazil that results in the denial of rights, but the negligence of governmental bodies that conceal from individuals the knowledge of their rights and of the mechanisms to enforce them—for example, the limited number of school systems that effectively conduct public outreach campaigns in various media to expand enrollment opportunities in YAE.

Being a subject of rights is part of the democratic condition, whose historical processes involve the struggle for and achievement of equality among human beings. Throughout its trajectory, YAE has faced tensions that threaten the exercise of these rights. Paiva (2006) emphasizes that:

[...] in the field of education, the right and the democratic exercise have been permanent subjects of dispute. Specifically in youth and adult education, history not only records the movements of denial and exclusion affecting these subjects but also reveals that such exclusion originates in a right violated long before, during childhood, which was denied as a time for schooling and as a time for being a child to millions of Brazilians (Paiva, 2006, p. 30, our translation).

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<sup>3</sup> The debate on human rights in Brazil and Latin America is historically very recent when compared to the rest of the world. According to Ireland (2016), it has spread more widely, as contradictory as it may seem, during the period of civil and military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, with the participation of organized social movements that began to fight for their rights, initially in defense of civil and political rights, which were gradually expanded in the legal framework to consolidate social, cultural, ethnic, and environmental rights.

YAE students must recognize and assert their subjective rights, for, as stated in the Guidelines for YAE (2000):

[...] subjective rights are those through which the holder may immediately demand the fulfillment of a duty and an obligation. These are positive, constitutionalized rights endowed with enforceability. The holder of this right is any person of any age group who did not have access to compulsory schooling. For this reason, it is a subjective right, meaning that being the bearer of such a prerogative is inherent to the individual. The subject responsible for guaranteeing this right is the State at the level at which this stage of schooling is situated. Failure or omission by the competent authorities implies accountability on the part of the responsible official (art. 208, §2) (Brasil, 2000, p. 22–23, our translation).

In defense of access to these rights, Bastos, Laffin, and Paim (2015) argue that the most contemporary expression of public subjective rights is fundamental rights. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that these rights are manifestations of Subjective Rights inherent to the human condition, which are, in turn, formalized in constitutional documents. “They are subjective rights of the individual, constituted on legal foundations that allow them to assert what previously existed only in the realm of ideas” (Bastos; Laffin; Paim, 2015, p. 45, our translation).

Article 6 of the 1988 Federal Constitution, as amended in 2015, establishes that “social rights include education, health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, protection of motherhood and childhood, and assistance to the destitute, as set forth in this Constitution” (Brasil, 1988, art. 6, our translation). This legislation became a milestone in Brazilian constitutional history by defining the Right to Education as a Social Right, included among the basic rights of citizenship. Still within the 1988 Federal Constitution, it is stated that

[...] education, the right of all and the duty of the State and the family, shall be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and qualification for work (Brasil, 1988, art. 205, our translation).

The reference to education as a right of all encompasses—or at least should encompass in practice—the generational, sociocultural, gender, and racial plurality of the Brazilian population, considering YAE subjects in their entirety. To clarify this Human Rights dimension within YAE, Silva (2020) notes that

[...] YAE is [...] a Human Right. It is a human right because, when it is denied to the subject, other rights are also denied, and the enjoyment of education enhances and enables the exercise of other rights [...]. Knowing how to read,

write, and interpret texts and contexts is a right, since without these tools, the right to health is not realized (if I cannot read a prescription, I may take the wrong medication), or the right to food (if I cannot read expiration dates, I may consume spoiled food)... In short, without literacy in both word and world, none of the other social rights are fully realized—such as housing, transportation, leisure, social security, maternity protection, childhood protection, and social assistance (Silva, 2020, s/p, author's emphasis, our translation).

Thus, the denial of the right to education tends to result in the non-fulfillment of other rights, as education constitutes a fundamental condition in people's lives; therein lies its meaning and relevance as something that must be valued. Quality education can serve as a driver of transformation, individual and collective empowerment<sup>4</sup>, and the strengthening of democracy, since it can support young, adult, and elderly learners in “moving from the condition of tutored subjects to becoming autonomous subjects, protagonists and builders of their own projects and of the societal project in which they are inserted,” as argued by Costa and Silva (2016, p. 172).

YAE subjects, at some point in their lives, had their access to these rights denied and, for reasons that pushed them out of school, followed other paths, such as early entry into the workforce—often in informal sectors—and the pursuit of minimum survival conditions. According to Haddad (2002), YAE learners are not poor because they did not attend school as children; rather, they did not attend school as children because they are poor. However, ensuring access to income is fundamental, but it is not the only dimension that must be considered in intersectoral actions.

Piovesan (2005) explains that the universality of rights unfolds in two dimensions: the formal, referring to equality before the law; and the substantive, which is materialized in State-led actions that ensure their realization. According to the author, the interdependence of human rights is expressed through their positive interface, which implies the full satisfaction of all rights to ensure individual fulfillment, and through their inverse expression, represented by the chain of violations triggered by the denial of any single right. Thus, the denial of one right tends to negatively affect others. In other words, if the State denies the right to education, it is simultaneously denying access to health, housing, work, and so forth; likewise, the denial of the right to housing negatively impacts health and education. Therefore, in addition to educational rights, other social rights—housing, food, health, culture—must be preserved,

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<sup>4</sup> In the humanities, empowerment is the process of strengthening individuals in spaces of social participation and political democratization.

considering the full cultural, territorial, racial, gender, and generational diversity of YAE learners.

### **The Diversity of YAE Subjects**

Recognizing the existence of fundamental rights entails reflecting on who YAE subjects are, acknowledging their diversity so that rights can be effectively promoted to those to whom they belong. YAE subjects are rights-bearing individuals whose diversity is revealed not only through age, but especially through sociocultural specificities that shape their lived experiences. These varied experiences are marked by generational aspects, but above all by factors such as social class, origin (urban or rural), race/ethnicity, gender, and by historical, social, cultural, economic, and/or political contexts—all converging into a common space: the YAE classroom. According to Laffin (2016) and the *Base Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education of the Santa Catarina Territory* (Santa Catarina, 2019), these subjects include young, adult, and elderly individuals from the working class (formal and informal), living in urban and rural areas; they also include the unemployed, retirees, Black populations, immigrants, *caboclos*, *quilombolas*, Indigenous peoples, gay men, lesbians, transgender men and women, individuals experiencing homelessness, riverine communities, fishers, landless workers, and incarcerated individuals deprived of liberty. All are marginalized groups who, in the majority, have life trajectories shaped within capitalist logics marked by inequality.

It is important to note that:

[...] equality is not opposed to difference, but rather to inequality. Thus, we can all be equal and different. What we cannot be is equal and unequal, superior and inferior. And this is precisely what Paulo Freire seems to affirm. Moreover, he situates difference as a condition of equality, which may be understood as follows: if we were not different, there would be no need for equality. Consequently, we may assert that the concept of difference is logically a condition of the concept of equality; that is, without difference, equality would be superfluous. And what about the reverse? We see that equality is not logically necessary for difference—we could be different and unequal. However, equality is a political condition of difference. Only among equals is a politically desirable affirmation of difference possible. This also seems to be suggested by Paulo Freire: only those who consider the other as an equal can affirm them as different. Paulo Freire relates this assertion to the differentiated treatment of others; thus, we may understand respect for the other as a value present in considering the other as an equal (Kohan, 2019 p.4–5, emphases added, our translation).

Belonging to the most disadvantaged social classes, as Oliveira (2012) notes, the profiles of workers enrolled in YAE are predominantly linked to construction work, while women are more commonly directed toward domestic labor, such as childcare, housekeeping, and cleaning services. Furthermore, studies by Menezes (2005), which examine women's participation in YAE classes and the intersections of gender relations in their schooling processes, identify factors contributing to the educational exclusion of the women surveyed, including economic pressures leading to domestic employment; adolescent labor; discouragement or lack of interest in school (due to other adolescent experiences such as romantic relationships, peer groups, parties, anticipation of marriage); marriage as a life goal; and childcare responsibilities. In addition to these factors, Laffin (2016), drawing on her own research, notes that cultural issues significantly shape the trajectories of YAE learners: femininity is often associated with manual labor and the private sphere, while masculinity is directed toward construction and public labor—yet both are marked by experiences of social exclusion.

Given their status as workers, YAE students—who largely work during the day and study at night—require that the right to access education be aligned with the right to remain in school. Flexible class schedules and days, ease of transportation from work to school, curricular content connected to the realities of the labor market, pedagogical dynamics that problematize the social issues inherent to the nature of work, differentiated assessment formats, and even school meals at more suitable times (considering that many have neither the time nor the means to eat) are all factors that demand attention to ensure the rights of working YAE students. This worker–student interface reveals individuals who resist the challenges of surviving in a society marked by unequal distribution of income and cultural capital. In this regard, and in an effort to better understand working subjects within YAE, Arroyo (2017, p. 45, our translation) notes that “[...] when the starting point is to recognize them as workers, any proposal to guarantee their right to education must take as its reference the work through which they survive.”

From this standpoint, education has an ethical duty to expose labor relations and to foreground the development of critical consciousness within the capitalist system, enabling students to analyze social reality in order to question and transform it.

The recognition of diversity among YAE students, as examined by Di Pierro (2005), underscores a concern not only with the pedagogical dimensions of the student's profile but also with understanding the student through the lens of human dignity, considering the right to ethnic, racial, and gender specificities as fundamental to their characterization. The

strengthening of collectives and civil society organizations has also exerted pressure to expand the conceptualization of the working subject within YAE, thereby incorporating additional demands emerging in the educational landscape. In other words,

[...] the emergence of movements that claim political and cultural recognition of singular social identities (women, Black populations, youth, Indigenous peoples, landless workers) [...] have brought about the introduction of gender-based perspectives and the recognition of rural specificities, though studies addressing ethnic-racial conditions remain rare and recent—even as diagnostic data indicate that Black populations are the majority among young and adult individuals who are illiterate or have low educational attainment (Di Pierro, 2005, p. 22, our translation).

Freire, in several of his works, including *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, reinforces his critique of the lack of respect, dialogue, and integration with subjects of distinct cultural identities. He denounces cultural imposition as a form of invasion in which colonizers act upon the colonized; men dominate women; white individuals assert superiority over those of other races; and the educated elite consider themselves above those from working-class backgrounds. This lack of interaction—challenged by intercultural and decolonial frameworks<sup>5</sup>—reveals how distant a nation can remain from achieving a democracy that robustly defends the rights of all individuals, regardless of culture, gender, social class, or economic status.

Continuing the discussion on the diversity of oppressed subjects within YAE and their right to recognition, Di Pierro (2005) also identifies people with disabilities (physical and/or cognitive) as part of the YAE demographic, emphasizing that “[...] even more notable is the scarcity of knowledge about people with special educational needs, as well as about the religious identities and practices of young people and adults engaged in schooling processes” (Di Pierro, 2005, p. 1121, our translation).

Due to an oppressive, superficial, and exclusionary gaze from segments of society and from governmental authorities, young people, adults, and older adults with physical or mental disabilities face daily invisibility—both in educational practice and within public policy. Only beginning in 2016, with the implementation of the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law nº 13.146/2015)<sup>6</sup> did Inclusive Education gradually begin to be incorporated into public school

<sup>5</sup> Interculturality, as highlighted by Walsh (2009), emerges within the context of struggles carried out by social groups and movements that, through a decolonial approach aimed at dismantling dominant structures inherited from European colonialism, seek to confront discrimination and prejudice while recognizing the cultural identity of each group in order to foster interaction among these cultures.

<sup>6</sup> The Brazilian Inclusion Law, also known as the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, is a set of regulations designed to ensure and promote, on equal terms, the exercise of rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, with the objective of advancing their social inclusion and citizenship. Although enacted on July 6,

systems. The law mandated that the government ensure “[...] an inclusive educational system at all levels and modalities, as well as lifelong learning” (Brasil, 2015, art. 28, item I, our emphasis, our translation). Despite these legal frameworks, people with disabilities continue to experience violations of their rights and often rely on private initiatives, NGOs, and individual legal action to secure access to their rights, including within the school context, where accessibility to learning materials and to the physical school environment remains insufficient.

In this broader dialogue on YAE subjects, Santiago, Musial, and Pereira (2021, p. 63, our translation) state that “[...] YAE students present important social markers such as class, race and ethnicity, generation, region, among others.” Therefore, it is essential to consider, historically, not only who the students entering YAE are, but also who remains outside it; what their expectations are regarding the possibility of returning to school; and what knowledge they have about the external world, about themselves, and about others. Only by doing so can one avoid the risk of defining them by what they are not and, in the name of a supposed egalitarian education, offering a homogeneous instruction that favors a particular cultural group. To conceptualize YAE subjects is necessarily to work with—and within—diversity, considering, as articulated in the VI Confinteia document (2008), that

[...] diversity consists of the differences that distinguish subjects from one another—women, men, adolescents, young adults, older persons [elderly individuals], people with special needs, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, descendants of Portuguese and other Europeans, Asians, among others. The diversity that shapes Brazilian society encompasses ways of being, living, and thinking—which come into conflict. Amid tensions and among distinct modes of constructing social and ethnic-racial identities and citizenship, subjects of diversity attempt to engage in dialogue or, at the very least, seek to negotiate political proposals from their differences. Proposals that include all individuals in their specificities without compromising national cohesion or the constitutional right to be different (Brasil, 2008, p. 01, our translation).

Debating YAE subjects from the perspective of diversity is, above all, to challenge the notion of their homogenization. Recognizing their diverse identities and specificities is indispensable to interrogating who the individuals composing this educational modality are and which educational project may become transformative—one capable of breaking with the dominant ideology and fostering a more liberating education. Thus,

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2015, the Law entered into force only on January 3, 2016. The Brazilian Inclusion Law was established to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, both signed by Brazil in New York on March 30, 2007. For additional information, see: [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2015-2018/2015/lei/113146.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2015/lei/113146.htm) .

Diversity alludes to the condition of subjects being different (something that, in a tolerant, liberal, and democratic society, warrants respect). It also points to the fact that difference—far from neutral—often becomes inequality when the singularities of individuals or groups lead them to achieve goals within and beyond school in unequal ways. Difference is not merely an expression of each person's uniqueness; in many cases, it is an expression of power—of having, or not having, the possibilities of being and of participating in social, economic, and cultural goods (Gimeno Sacristán, 2002, p. 14, our translation).

It is therefore important to underscore that YAE participants, even while carrying their own subjectivities, may reveal collective trajectories by presenting foundational elements in common that result from the neoliberal system of exclusion and oppression. Reflection on their trajectories—highlighting the need to consider their identities as constitutive of the very field of YAE—can be better understood through the discussions proposed by Arroyo (2017), who argues:

[...] the trajectories of these young and adult individuals as trajectories of collectives. Since YAE has been YAE, these young people and adults have remained the same: poor, unemployed, working in the informal economy, Black, living at the limits of survival. They are young and adult members of popular classes. They belong to the same social, racial, ethnic, and cultural collectives. The generic name 'youth and adult education' conceals these collective identities. Attempting to reconfigure YAE implies assuming these collective identities (Arroyo, 2017, p. 29, our translation).

Arroyo (2017) further asserts that these collective actors within YAE seek explanations for their condition as segregated subjects, *excluded from the right to have rights*. It is within the consciousness built inside social collectives that young, adult, and older individuals—sometimes in silence, sometimes in revolt—aspire to dismantle the paradigms constructed by hegemonic structures of domination that work to perpetuate their exclusion.

In parallel with these collective paths, YAE participants carry specificities and experiences inherent to their stage of life—youth, adulthood, or old age—and, as a result of these accumulated experiences and life trajectories, they are configured differently from other educational publics. According to Laffin (2016):

[...] it is necessary to consider historicity in the understanding of sociocultural elements in human development; that is, to understand the contextualized path of this development, given that the different social spheres are organized based on the notion of age, with pre-established social behaviors linked to expectations of human biological age (Laffin, 2016, p. 160, our translation).

Oliveira (2004) recognizes that, even in considering the historicity of the developmental process, one refers to life cycles associated with being identified as a child, youth, adult, or

older person. However, according to the author, what is essential is to give meaning to these cycles by understanding them in articulation with “[...] the concrete modes of insertion of subjects into their social world, within specific historical-cultural situations” (Oliveira, 2004, p. 215, our translation). Thus, understanding YAE participants is not limited to biological life cycles but incorporates all relations articulated between work, school, and other social groups.

Durand (2001), in turn, highlights the importance of considering intergenerational relations in studies of YAE participants, arguing that diversity is shaped by interfaces of interaction but also of tension. This brings forth reflection on collective trajectories while preserving individuality, since:

[...] the constitution of subjects occurs through diversity within intergenerational relational spaces, between continuity and discontinuity, interactions and conflicts, bringing into the classroom coexistence of different trajectories, lived experiences, and accumulated knowledge, shaped by their cultures and diversities. [...], although this relational dimension is a factor of recognition of these subjects, it is important to emphasize that they also value their individualities, the preservation of their autonomy, and the desire for social participation (Durand, 2001, p. 164–165, our translation).

Accordingly, it is essential to defend the need to understand them as subjects whose life histories are marked by social contexts of struggle and resistance, expressed through a political identity grounded in rights—not only the right to education, but also the rights specific to their stage of life (Gadotti, 2013). Consequently, a renewed perspective on YAE participants must recognize young, adult, and older individuals as persons situated in social times and trajectories that reveal both the limits and the possibilities of being legitimized as subjects of human rights.

Even young, adult, and older individuals without schooling who are not enrolled in YAE constitute the universe of potential demand for this modality, since they share many characteristics of collective trajectories. Thus, whether enrolled in YAE or not, all possess the right to education and social participation, enabling them to shape society as protagonists of their own histories. Moving away from the authoritarian and hegemonic conception that only the visibly literate have the right to social interaction, it is necessary to adjust our analytical lenses so as not to disqualify the strategies that potential YAE subjects employ in their daily lives. Under this perspective, Andrade (2004) contributes to the demystification of stereotypes surrounding unschooled individuals by noting:

[...] in general, YAE participants are treated as a mass of students without identity, labeled under different names directly associated with the so-called ‘school failure.’ Arroyo further draws attention to the school discourse that

treats them, a priori, as repeaters, dropouts, underachievers, and accelerated students, excluding fundamental dimensions of their human condition. In other words, conceptions and proposals for YAE committed to human development necessarily require understanding who these subjects are and what pedagogical processes must be developed to address their needs and aspirations (Andrade, 2004, p. 1, our translation).

According to Oliveira (2012), non-literate individuals are not “blind people searching for light,” nor do they require pity or commiseration. They develop strategies to navigate the literate world for survival, using numerous abilities and resources that go beyond reading and writing, such as extra-verbal communication, symbolic and sound-based strategies, support from others, and experiential learning. YAE participants, despite class-based limitations, sustain daily responsibilities, maintain family and romantic relationships, devise affordable leisure strategies, and participate in various groups—sporting, religious, and artistic. These knowledges deserve recognition in public policies and YAE pedagogical practices, valuing their prior knowledge as a starting point for expanding other forms of learning, as argued by Freire (2021e).

From this perspective, it is pertinent to affirm that the purpose of education is not to combat non-literate individuals, but rather the conditions that lead to illiteracy. Thus, when considering young, adult, and older YAE participants, the focus must not be on their shortcomings but on their potentialities and, above all, the promotion of access to the right to education. These individuals, even those not yet enrolled, cannot be regarded as “grown-up children,” devoid of diverse knowledge and incapable of learning. In this regard, Pinto (2010) warns against the infantilization of YAE, which occurs when students—especially those in the literacy stage—are treated as children, thereby ridiculing and limiting them, ignoring their development and accumulated knowledge. Infantilization also appears, according to Di Pierro, in an interview with *Folha na Sala* (2022), when, instead of asking what a young, adult, or older student needs and wants to learn today, with a view to the future, educators ask what they failed to learn when they were a child in school. When proposed activities do not match the profile of young, adult, or older students, learning becomes unengaging, as it prevents meaningful connections between content and their lived realities.

Regarding potential learner profiles in YAE, Oliveira’s (2004) studies help clarify the specificities of younger participants, noting that young people tend to be more connected to urban environments and engaged in work and leisure activities linked to a literate, technological, and schooled society. Young people excluded from the educational system often find in cultural and social movements opportunities to express opinions, preferences, and

ideologies, but they also encounter exposure to violence and drugs in the streets. These are the young individuals who arrive in YAE—particularly in the latter years of lower and upper secondary education—immersed in diverse cultures, eager to be heard and to challenge social paradigms. Thus, it becomes necessary to revise YAE planning to account for this process of juvenilization. From this standpoint, Dantas (2016) notes the need to rethink YAE provision:

[...] to address the increasingly intense demands of popular groups, now characterized by a larger contingent of younger individuals alongside the declining participation of adult learners. The characteristic of ‘juvenilization’ stands out in Brazil and in some Latin American countries, requiring curricular reorganization, the sharing of knowledge, and the recovery of learners’ lived experiences (Dantas, 2016, p. 134, our translation).

Beyond juvenilization, YAE also encompasses a significant presence of older adults, who establish their social relations based on the experiences accumulated throughout life (work, family, religious participation, friendships). This body of knowledge shapes the identity of individuals who are no longer young, since:

[...] they carry with them a longer (and likely more complex) history of experiences, accumulated knowledge, and reflections about the external world, themselves, and others. Regarding participation in learning situations, these particularities of adult life lead them to bring different abilities and difficulties (in comparison to children), and likely a greater capacity for reflection on knowledge and on their own learning processes (Oliveira, 2004, p. 18, our translation).

Therefore, if on the one hand there is a trend toward the “youthification” of YAE, there is, in parallel, another movement marked by the increased participation of older adults in this modality, particularly in the early years of primary education, which are associated with literacy processes. As life expectancy continues to rise<sup>7</sup> resulting in a larger aging population<sup>8</sup>, and as older generations become more critically aware of their rights, YAE literacy classes have increasingly incorporated this student profile.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Globo website (2021), the increase in life expectancy is mainly attributed to technological and scientific developments, particularly in the field of health research. However, due to the pandemic that ravaged the world between 2020 and 2022, Brazilians lost almost two years of life expectancy. On average, babies born in Brazil in 2020 will live 1.94 years less than would be expected without the health situation in Brazil, i.e., 74.8 years instead of the 76.7 years previously projected.

<sup>8</sup> In 2019, the number of elderly people in Brazil reached 32.9 million. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020) show that the trend of population aging has continued, and the number of people over 60 in the country already exceeds that of children up to 9 years of age. The 7.5 million new elderly people gained between 2012 and 2019 represent a 29.5% increase in this age group. Thus, Brazil will have more elderly people than young people in 2060.

However, as reported by Machado, Laffin, and Martins (2021), older adults face numerous challenges. Despite the Federal Constitution of 1988, the National Policy for Older Persons<sup>9</sup>, and the Statute of Older Persons establishing rights and guarantees for this population, prejudice based on age—referred to as ageism—remains widespread in Brazilian society. Such prejudice typically stems from oppressive beliefs that diminish the value of older adults. Examples include the assumption that they can no longer learn new skills, that they are incapable of studying, or that all older adults are the same. These beliefs undermine the recognition of older adults in educational contexts. Combined with political and economic vulnerabilities—housing, education, employment—these prejudices constitute significant barriers for older adult students in YAE, who, within a hegemonic social model, require greater respect and recognition from policymakers, educators, school managers, and society at large. Acknowledging these challenges rooted in the oppression of older adults, Bosi (2010) notes that by oppressing:

[...] the elderly through visible institutional mechanisms (such as the bureaucracy of retirement and care homes), and through subtle, almost invisible psychological mechanisms (the refusal of dialogue and reciprocity that forces the elderly into repetitive and monotonous behaviors), society fosters intolerance and violence (Bosi, 2010, p. 18, our translation).

Any individual aged 60 or older holds the same right to education as any younger person. Even when attempting to identify the profiles of YAE participants, Paiva and Sales (2014) argue that such profiles cannot be reduced to fixed categories. Instead, they emphasize the need to pose further questions to better understand these subjects: Who are they? Where are they? Why do they want to continue studying? For what purpose? At the same time, Paiva and Sales (2014, p. 05, our translation) recognize that “belonging to the most impoverished segments of society seems to be a strong marker in the constitution of the identity of YAE subjects; in other words, YAE subjects are the excluded of society.”

## Final Considerations

The participation of individuals in YAE reflects their resistance to social exclusion and their commitment to showcasing their experiences and learning potential. This characteristic is

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<sup>9</sup> Law No. 14,423, dated July 22, 2022, amended Law No. 10,741, dated October 1, 2003, to replace, in all legislation and documents, the expressions “*idoso*” and “*idosos*” with the expressions “*pessoa idosa*” and “*pessoas idosas*,” respectively.

also highlighted by Oliveira (2004), who, in describing these individuals as socially excluded, underscores their identities as members of specific cultural groups. This reinforces the centrality of diversity as a key element in designing less standardized educational practices in YAE.

Consequently, the very subjects who have been marginalized—and who insist on reintegrating themselves into the educational sphere—are the protagonists who narrate their histories, articulate their struggles, and resist not as passive objects reacting only to external stimuli, but as thinking subjects who critically process their circumstances. As Freire (2018) asserts, the condition of being a subject—and not an object—is grounded in the ontological vocation of men and women, who, by reflecting on their sociohistorical conditions, can assume an active, transformative role.

This analysis does not refute the State's responsibility to ensure the infrastructure and conditions necessary for the access and retention of young people, adults, and older adults in education. Rather, anchored in Freire (2018, 2021a), it underscores the centrality of human agency in shaping personal and collective histories—even in the face of obstacles and limiting beliefs imposed by a sectarian society. These subjects recognize their rights and persist in exercising them, asserting themselves as rights-bearing individuals.

Conceiving the right to education for YAE learners, as an outcome of social struggle, requires revisiting the urgent debate concerning the historical and socially constructed knowledge produced by humanity—knowledge that is shaped not only within educational institutions, but also in the diverse social spaces these subjects inhabit. These spaces are permeated by movements of resistance against dominant powers that insist on treating unequal individuals as though they were equal.

Addressing cultural diversity within the school context may generate value conflicts that require the simultaneous understanding of two perspectives: how it feels to be the other and how it feels to be oneself when viewed from that other's perspective. In other words, seeing the difference as equal. This requires mutual understanding, recognition, and engagement within pedagogical practices. Affirming diversity as a formative principle thus aligns education with the dual goals of promoting equality and respecting differences.

From this perspective, YAE subjects are agents of resistance who, within the constraints of neoliberal logic, construct strategies for human emancipation. It is essential to affirm that YAE learners are builders of culture and designers of societal projects. Through the cultivation of critical consciousness, they develop learning processes that enable them to assert their rights and aspirations. This understanding narrows the gap between what is proclaimed—the right of

all to education—and what is realized—access, retention, and learning opportunities characterized by more humane and higher-quality educational practices. Such practices empower learners to exercise autonomy and fully claim their citizenship within a literate society.

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