

The relationship between knowledge and empowerment of elderly people in schooling processes¹

A relação com o saber e o empoderamento de idosos em processos de escolarização

La relación entre conocimiento y empoderamiento de personas mayores en los procesos de escolarización

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify the relationship between knowledge and elderly people enrolled in the Youth and Adult Education of the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age] of the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*. It was essential to record/highlight the voice of each elderly person because when they talked about themselves and, simultaneously, about others and things, made it possible to the scientific study to point out the dimensions of schooling to the life of the elderly people, especially when seeking to understand which relationships established with learning can contribute to their emancipatory empowerment process. This is a qualitative study with exploratory characteristics that dialogues with theorists such as Freire, Charlot, Bosí, Lisboa, among others; in addition to the support of legal and educational guidance documents. The main results point to the fact that in the life of the elderly education comes as a possibility to perceive themselves

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as people who have knowledge and culture; notably by having a positive attitude towards aging, translating into a desire to share knowledge and feelings, to be the protagonist of their history and to have recognition and be appreciated by their family and the society.

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education. Elderly people. Schooling. Empowerment.

RESUMO

O artigo busca evidenciar a relação com o saber de pessoas idosas matriculadas em turmas da Educação de Jovens e Adultos do Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Foi essencial o registrar/destacar a voz de cada pessoa idosa, que ao falar de si e, simultaneamente, dos outros e das coisas, trouxe ao estudo científico a possibilidade de apontar as dimensões da escolarização para a vida das pessoas idosas, sobretudo ao buscar compreender quais as relações estabelecidas com o aprender podem contribuir para o processo de empoderamento emancipatório desses sujeitos. Trata-se de um estudo de natureza qualitativa com características exploratórias, em que se dialoga com teóricos como: Freire, Charlot, Bosi, Lisboa, entre outros; além do respaldo de documentos legais e de orientação de educação. Como principais resultados aponta-se para o fato de que a escolarização na vida dos participantes idosos vem como possibilidade de se perceberem como pessoas de saberes e de cultura. Notadamente, ao ter uma postura positiva perante a velhice, quanto ao desejo de compartilhar saberes e sentimentos e de serem protagonistas da sua história, elas têm o reconhecimento e a valorização no espaço familiar e social.

Palavras-chave: Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Pessoas idosas. Escolarização. Empoderamento.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es identificar la relación entre el conocimiento y las personas mayores inscritas en la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos del *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Centro de Estudios para la Tercera Edad] de la *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*. Era esencial grabar/resaltar la voz de cada persona mayor porque cuando hablaban de sí mismos y, al mismo tiempo, de los demás y de las cosas, permitía al estudio científico señalar las dimensiones de la escolarización en la vida de las personas mayores, especialmente cuando se trata de comprender qué relaciones establecidas con el aprendizaje pueden contribuir a su proceso de empoderamiento emancipador. Este es un estudio cualitativo con

características exploratorias que dialoga con teóricos como: Freire, Charlot, Bosi, Lisboa, entre otros; además del soporte de documentos de orientación legal y educativa. Los principales resultados apuntan al hecho de que en la vida de los adultos mayores la educación es una posibilidad de percibirse a sí mismos como personas que tienen conocimiento y cultura; especialmente teniendo una actitud positiva hacia el envejecimiento, traduciéndose en un deseo de compartir conocimientos y sentimientos, ser el protagonista de su propia historia y tener reconocimiento y ser apreciados por su familia y por la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos. Personas mayores. Aprendizaje. Empoderamiento.

Introduction

This paper seeks to highlight the relationship with the knowledge of elderly people enrolled in groups² of Youth and Adult Education (YAE) of the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age] (Neti) at the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina* [Federal University of Santa Catarina] (UFSC), in the city of Florianópolis.

For this purpose, the elements and analyzes of the research³ entitled “*O empoderamento de idosos na escolarização da EJA do Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade da Idade/UFSC*” [The empowerment of elderly people in the YAE schooling of the Center of Studies for the Old Age] (MACHADO, 2017), defended in 2017 for the Post-Graduate Program in Education at the UFSC Education Sciences Center, were of the most importance. By taking a close look at the evidence of emancipatory empowerment of elderly people in YAE, the study sought to register/highlight the voice of each one of the students⁴,

2 Since 2009, Neti/UFSC offers elementary school Youth and Adult Education classes in a partnership with the Municipal Education Department. And through the commitment and mobilization of adult and elderly students, YAE teachers and the Neti coordinator, in 2015 High School (Ceja – Centro de Educação de Jovens e Adultos [Youth and Adult Education Center]) was implemented in a partnership with the State Department of Education.

3 The investigation was conducted according to the ethical standards required by the *Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa de Seres Humanos* [Ethics Committee for Research on Human Beings] (CEPSH-UFSC), under the approval protocol: no. 55489116.7.0000.0121 -2016.

4 We refer to the collective of students from lower classes in the basic education school process, who asserted their right to public education.

especially when understanding that each person is simultaneously social and singular and, therefore, it is in the relationship with the knowledge that subjects interact in different ways from the process of social reproduction, in which they give new meaning to experience and transform themselves, that is, in processes of singularization and constitution of identities (CHARLOT, 2000).

The research carried out has qualitative nature with exploratory characteristics; we adopted the bibliographic survey, document analysis and the use of the focus group technique (collective interview instrument focusing on certain questions with eleven participants) and interviews (with three professionals) as the research process.

The Neti was chosen as a locus of research due to several factors, including: a) the commitment to educational processes of social demand and schooling of the elderly public – with the implementation of a Reading and Writing Course for elderly and adult people⁵ (2007); b) the offer of day YAE classes; c) the significant number of enrollments of elderly people in the YAE classes offered at the Neti; d) the privileged location⁶ in the city; and e) having as a goal the incorporation of elderly people into the University, through training courses, projects and activities aimed at gerontology and education, as well as advice and consultancy to the community, in governmental and non-governmental partnerships.

According to the research that guides the study, the presence of elderly people at the university, at Neti and in YAE classes (as an integral part of the Center) is (de)marked beyond the need to occupy their free time (versus solitude), as it is situated in relations of knowledge with emancipatory social consequences, given that the Center brings with it a proposal to promote elderly people as “subjects in transformation and transformers” (MACHADO, 2017, p. 49, our translation).

The dialogue with Paulo Freire and Bernard Charlot became essential. For Freire, the social disparity has always been a matter of great concern, hence its greatest legacy was for the people, in which the oppressed subjects need to have the courage to free and humanize themselves – which is why Freire’s contributions worry the oppressors of society (FREIRE, 2006).

5 The course was necessary after the evidence provided by a survey carried out in 2007 in the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, which detected that many adults and elderly people had little or no education.

6 Privileged location refers to a place that facilitates the movement of these people (for instance, with an intense flow of buses to different neighborhoods and bus stops close to Neti/UFSC).

Bernard Charlot (2000), inferring that every person at birth enters a world in which they will be subject to the obligation to learn, means to say that each one “[...] is born with the need to learn everything. Each does not bring with him/her instincts that teach him/her everything she/he should know about how to feed him/herself, how to defend himself/herself, how to relate to others” (CHARLOT, 2000, p. 54, our translation), but she/he needs these learnings. So to speak, it is understood that at any stage of life it is possible to learn and that each person in their history (at the same time social and singular) establishes a particular form of relationship with knowledge, so this connection is not the merit of some, but it is everyone’s capability, without distinction.

The YAE has a social commitment to youth, adults and elderly people, although there needs to be more visibility to elderly students, both to strengthen the belonging relationship, as well as to make the right to education effective for the elderly.

This paper will seek to weave reflections from the highlights of scientific research, whose problematizing question is: What relationships with knowledge, established by the elderly students of Neti YAE, contribute to the empowerment process?

The research subjects

The study protagonists have different origins, experiences, financial situations, family relationships, health conditions, beliefs, habits and diversified ways of being, thinking and acting. They are people from the lower classes who started/resumed Youth and Adult Education schooling in a stage of life defined as old age.

Table 1 places the profile of the participants within the following characteristics: fictitious name, age, marital status, occupational status, place of birth, neighborhood where they live, number of children and activities they perform.

TABLE 1 – CHARACTERIZATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participants students of YAE	Age	State marital status	Occupational situation	Place of birth	Neighborhood and/or city where they live	Children (no.)	Activities they perform
1. Ana, 2nd segment – YAE	62	Widow	retired	Serro Negro SC ⁷	Trindade Florianópolis	3	Handicraft and Storytelling at Neti
2. Beatriz, 2nd segment – YAE	64	Widow	pensioner	Tubarão SC	Forquilhas - Terra Firme São José	6 (1 dead)	Dressmaker
3. Sandra, 2nd segment – YAE	75	Widow	retired	Ituporanga SC	Itacorubi Florianópolis	6	Water aerobics, gymnastics/ UFSC and handicraft
4. Denise, 2nd segment – YAE	68	Divorced (for 8 years)	retired	Serro Negro SC	Serrinha Florianópolis	8 (2 dead)	Attends Universal Church
5. Flávia, H.S. ⁸ – Ceja ⁹	82	Widow	pensioner	Florianópolis SC	Trindade Florianópolis	10 (3 dead)	Gymnastics and pilates
6. Ilza, H.S. – Ceja	75	Widow	pensioner	Criciúma SC	Antônio Carlos	3	Memory stimulation class /Neti
7. Lia, 2nd segment – YAE	74	Married	pensioner	Florianópolis SC	Trindade Florianópolis	3	Volleyball and ymnastics/UFSC
8. Marcelo, 2nd segment – YAE	80	Single	retired	Venâncio Aires RS ¹⁰	Coqueiros Florianópolis	0	Does not perform activities
9. Nádia, 2nd segment – YAE	75	Widow	pensioner	Florianópolis SC	Centro Florianópolis	5 (2 dead)	Memory stimulation class/Neti and gymnastics/UFSC
10. Olinda, 2nd segment – YAE	81	Widow	retired	Pinheiro Machado RS	Rio Vermelho Florianópolis	11 (2 dead)	Gymnastics/UFSC, participates in the Coexistence Group, theater and <i>Mulheres Mil</i> /IFSC ¹¹
11. Paula, 2nd segment – YAE	73	Married	retired	Guatambú SC	Caeira do Saco dos Limões Florianópolis	4	Gymnastics and hiking

SOURCE: Machado (2017, p. 94-95, our translation).

7 SC - Santa Catarina.

8 H.S. - High School.

9 Ceja is the acronym for the *Centro de Educação de Jovens e Adultos* [Youth and Adult Education Center]. It is a state institution that has a partnership with Neti to offer Secondary Education for the continuation of Elementary School studies.

10 RS - Rio Grande do Sul.

11 IFSC - *Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina*.

Eleven (11) subjects were investigated, being ten (10) females and one (1) male, aged between sixty-two (62) to eighty-two (82) years. There was a higher concentration of elderly people aged between 70 and 79 years, as well as a predominance of women in schooling in this stage of life, thus evidencing the feminization of old age and YAE at Neti/UFSC.

An important fact is that only two (2) people (women) had an official relationship, while the others (women) seem not to have this type of relationship. This encourages us to think that women with an official relationship have been receiving more support from their partners (husbands) to study at this stage of life, which is an achievement in the face of “domestic violence”¹², “gender violence”¹³, in which a relationship of inferiority between women and men is valued, since this

[...] the women’s condition of hypo-sufficiency stems from the historical-cultural development of a patriarchal society, which has always insisted on placing women, seen as the “weaker sex”, submissive to men. Men, on the other hand, were prepared, from childhood, to have aggressive attitudes (SALEH; SALEH, 2013, p. 509, our translation).

The fact that elderly and married women leave the (private) domestic space to enter the public space (Neti/UFSC, YAE, community...) makes count the “right to study” (as well as to think more about themselves, be in the presence of others and act according to their will), and represents a great achievement, given that “disparities in access to education is one of the ways to contribute to inequality between men and women” (LISBOA, 2012, p. 81, our translation).

As for the participants’ birthplace, nine (9) were born in different cities in the state of Santa Catarina and two (2) were born in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), that is, 82% of the survey participants were born in the state of Santa Catarina, and 18% were born in the neighboring state (RS). Only three (3) participants were born in the city of Florianópolis.

12 Domestic violence is caused by the relationship of inequality between men and women, “[...] which imposes on women obedience and submission to men, in an inferiority situation” (SALEH; SALEH, 2013, p. 518, our translation) and, therefore, violates the right to freedom of all (ORGANIZAÇÃO DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS, 1948).

13 Gender violence “[...] is a social phenomenon that affects all Societies, including those that claim to be democratic. However, combating it is imperative, given that it is present in 70% of cases in the battered woman’s home, producing violent behavior and serious psychological damage not only to the victims but to other family members” (SALEH; SALEH, 2013, p. 518, our translation).

Nine (9) participants declared they were retired and two (2) were pensioners; concerning marital status, seven (7) participants declared themselves widows, two (2) were married, one (1) was divorced, and one (1) was single; that is, more than half (64%) of the survey participants faced widowhood¹⁴.

The data gain more meaning when an atypical situation in the Brazilian society is evidenced, in which the only male participant did not constitute a marriage nor had any children, although he had the desire to find someone to share his life with.

Another atypical situation is that, among the ten (10) women in the research, only two (2) were still married, and at this stage of life they were encouraged by their husbands to resume/start their studies, an attitude that had never been adopted in previous stages of life. The widowed participants, on the other hand, point out that the loss of a partner brought huge emptiness to their lives; they sometimes felt disoriented and depressed, unwilling to live; however, when they decided to study, this feeling changed. As reported by one participant:

Well, my coming to YAE was a very delicate situation: I came from Rondônia because of my husband's illness, and when he arrived here, the illness won, and I lost him. And then I was bewildered by the loss, you know? [...] And it was my arrival at YAE, and I'm here until today; I met wonderful teachers. It is something that cannot be recovered, but I felt that I was not alone, that I had people with me, friends, friends I did not think I'd find [...] (ILZA, 75 years old, H.S. – Ceja, our translation).

The fact that Ilza (75 years old, H.S. – Ceja) was “disoriented by the loss” of her husband reveals the social image that is internalized in the female condition, understood in relationships of submission, dependence, generated in possessiveness (power to repress, censor, determine...) of the male figure in the patriarchal society. For Ilza, “the arrival at YAE” made her perceive herself “loaded” with people (no longer perceiving herself alone), so YAE must be thought of as another school, as a socialization space, a space for recognition/strengthening of subjects, for sharing knowledge, for fighting for rights, etc.

¹⁴ It was found that a significant number of participants lived alone, and widows had pets as companions.

The number of participants' children varied from three (3) to eleven (11), and only one (1) male participant did not have children. It is worth remembering that, traditionally, the social representation attributed to the male figure has the "requirement" to have descendants, as well as to be the family provider.

The participants were keen to emphasize their constant concern with household chores, the education of their children and the opinion and decisions of their husbands, so the family zeal took over their lives, while all this dedication made these women abdicate so many things they would have liked to do. This is evident in the following report:

I was also thinking, I studied a little, then I got married very young, and the children came; then they take our time and now they're all married; so I started thinking, I need to improve and go back to the classes to think (NÁDIA, 75 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation).

The influence of the social gender roles of society (which marks a social position) spoke louder in their lives to the point that they were not able at that time to assert their desires, wills, goals, but at this time in life, they sought for achievements. Nonetheless, for a long time, women's education has been devalued by their families, because they historically had other tasks to prioritize. However, this situation has been changing, as an effect of cultural changes, since the way of life and the relationship between men and women have been changed¹⁵, adapting to new social demands. This change in relationships between men and women, of power and women's submission, has been deconstructed over the years.

According to Lisboa (2003), the product of gender domination-oppression has historically been a situation experienced by women in underdeveloped countries. The researcher affirms that "In all societies, citizens organize their lives according to two logics: that of the home (private) and that of the street (public)" (LISBOA, 2003, p. 119, our translation). However, in Brazil, there is no rigid and simple contrast between home and street, because "[...] the home can define a person's intimate and private space [...] as well as a maximum and public social space, as when we refer to Brazil as 'our home'" (DA MATTA, 1991, p. 19, our translation). Therefore, home and street transcend physical places, as they are spaces for people, relationships, judging, deciding, conflicts, etc.

¹⁵ Therefore, home and street transcend physical places, as they are spaces for people, relationships, judging, deciding, conflicts, etc.

In this sense, it is understood that the women's departure from the domestic space to public life was an extremely significant achievement, as this shift made women resist the impositions of this achievement¹⁶ and seek to legitimately demarcate their place, in a struggle that remains today. According to Lisboa (2003, p. 19, our translation),

[...] the gender perspective requires a new attitude towards the conception of the world, the values and the way of life, that is, it puts the legitimacy of the patriarchal world in crisis. This perspective allows us to understand that the inequality and inequality relations between genders are products of a dominant social order and that the multiple oppressions of class, race, ethnicity, generation that are exerted on women are a superposition of dominance.

Interestingly, at this stage of life, the participants reveal with great enthusiasm that they are encouraged, valued and recognized by their families, including those who remain married. Flávia reports that

[...] my daughter-in-law is a math teacher, she helps me too. But this is good, right? They are very happy. Grandma studying! How cool! All happy. [...] But that's it, my children love it, my grandchildren love it, my son-in-law is a teacher and he encourages me a lot, in research work he goes online and helps me research, he loves me! It's because he realizes that I have a lot of strength, that I really want to come here to study (FLÁVIA, 82 years old, H.S. – Ceja, our translation).

The male participant revealed some frustration in being single, as he always had the desire to date someone, but he never managed to do so, since work has always been first in his life. He stressed that his life experiences were not so good, given that, as a child, being raised by his brother and wife, that is, his sister-in-law, being very mistreated, it was an experience that, according to him, will be difficult to overcome, because it was at this time that, through the negligence of his sister-in-law, he became deaf in one ear.

¹⁶ This is a space that was only occupied by men, whose will of power is to make women feel displaced, many are the mechanisms of oppression used, among them, there is bullying, the fact of having children and having to stop studying or working, etc.

Six (6) participants (out of the eleven research participants) performed different activities at the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age] (Neti) and at the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, such as hydrogymnastics, volleyball (UFSC), storytelling (Neti), the memory stimulation (Neti) class, and others. There were two (2) participants who performed physical activities in other spaces and three (3) who did not practice physical activities: one worked as a seamstress; another attended the Universal Church and another who only studied at Neti/UFSC. One (1) research participant declared that she participated in the *Mulheres Sim* [Yes Women]¹⁷ Program at the *Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina* (IFSC), and two (2) participants were at Neti since the implementation of the course¹⁸ entitled “*Reading and Writing*”¹⁹ which aimed at the adult audience and elderly from a diagnosis that pointed to the need for educational processes in the Center. Thus, the implemented course sought to “[...] establish a relationship with the knowledge of the literate world since [...] [we live] in a society that values practices of writing and systematized knowledge” (LAFFIN, 2012, p. 142, our translation). One of the participants revealed her arrival in the educational process at Neti:

I've been here for a long time, eight years; I was one of the first to come here. When I came here, our teachers were all volunteers, they weren't hired. Then they came in and they are all public teachers from the city or the state, they are very good teachers. “So-and-so” was a volunteer and is now a teacher; and then suddenly in the meantime I got sick and I was away [...]. I went to therapy and then I came back here to Neti. [...] This is the wonderful life I have! (LIA, 74 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation)

17 *Mulheres Sim* “[...] is an extension program of IFSC linked to *Pró-reitoria de Extensão* [Pro-Rectorry of Extension] (Proex), which seeks to enhance the women's value, their rights, citizenship and the possibilities of income generation, that is, female empowerment. The program is aimed at women over 15 years old, in social vulnerability and preferably with no schooling” (INSTITUTO FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA, 2018, our translation).

18 As already mentioned in the research, the course “[...] emerges from teaching, research and extension actions, involving schooling work with the elderly and adults in the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, through the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age] – Neti/UFSC and of the Educational Sciences Center” (LAFFIN, 2012, p. 142, our translation).

19 During the research, we will deal with the course in more detail, as YAE came to be constituted in the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age]/UFSC because of this course.

It should be noted that of the eleven (11) research participants, nine (9) studied in YAE classes at Neti/UFSC belonging to the Municipal Secretariat of Florianópolis, and two (2) belonged to the only class of the *Centro de Educação de Jovens e Adultos* [Youth and Adult Education Center] (Ceja) in Florianópolis]²⁰ at Neti/UFSC, from the State Department of Education of Santa Catarina.

The survey participants highlight the affection of YAE teachers and Neti employees towards them, especially the teacher who has the articulator the role in the city's YAE,

I feel very valued here at Neti because here it's just us, seniors [...], all people are of the same age and study and everything, right? It's better. And the teachers are wonderful, so are all the people at Neti. And there is a teacher who, when we don't come, she calls us to find out what is going on, and she gives us a lot of confidence in our studies (PAULA, 73 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation).

They also reported the different snacks provided by the agencies that offer YAE: one agency contemplates various abundant food for snacks, and the other one provides scarce invariable food; they considered this situation unfair as they all study in the same environment, that is, on Neti.

Participants reveal some reasons for choosing the *Núcleo de Estudos da Terceira Idade* [Center of Studies for the Old Age]/UFSC to study at YAE:

- The ease of access to Neti/UFSC, since the Center belongs to a University, and there is an intense flow of public transport to different locations in the city. On the other hand, participants report that they are not always treated well by bus drivers and that the urban space offers access to everyone;
- The identification with the adult and elderly public, the coexistence with people of more or less the same age group make research participants more confident to speak in the group, to expose ideas and difficulties, as they understand they belong to a generation with an oppressive past (the right to study was denied). They were ashamed of not knowing how to read and write, having little education, or not having continued their studies.

²⁰ Ceja is part of the Regional Education Management of Greater Florianópolis, of the State Department of Education.

They also understand that this interaction at the YAE/Ceja strengthens them, improves self-esteem because everyone helps each other, there is respect for the pace of learning of each one and that this space made life make sense for them, as they are more active and participant in society.

- Participating in other activities at the center and at the university, those involved say that after they began to be part of the center, their lives changed for the better, as they were fully involved in activities, which made them feel more valued, as well as bringing them responsibilities towards social changes such as fighting prejudice and social discrimination during old age, leading to the engagement of these subjects;
- The welcoming of Neti/UFSC professionals and YAE teachers, both in Elementary and High Schools, as some research participants were invited by the students themselves, others by recommendations of health professionals, family members and teachers. All participants reveal the great satisfaction of being in a place where they are treated with great affection, respect and dedication.

Through the collected data, it was possible to identify that the elderly students who attend Youth and Adult Education at Neti/UFSC are mostly people who, due to life circumstances, distanced themselves from the school path offered in the regular education system. Thus, the YAE modality came at this stage of life as a possibility to start or resume studying, but mainly it was the time when they were willing to think and act according to their wishes.

The relationship with the knowledge of elderly people at YAE at Neti/UFSC

It is understood that deciding to start/resume studies is loaded with feelings and meanings for the elderly; these were essential to point out the dimensions of schooling in the lives of elderly people, considering that it has been many decades without access to schooling.

By highlighting the dimensions of schooling in the lives of elderly people, it was possible to show that the relationship with the knowledge of these YAE students has striking elements with much richness and detail, that it is not even possible to conceive that the established and limited space of the classroom can be considered the only one capable of encompassing this relationship.

To broaden this view and based on scientific research, four subcategories are pointed out: a) the desire to learn in the senses given by the elderly students; b) feeling recognized and valued; c) feeling conscious to say one's word; and d) being able to fight to transform. These subcategories are interwoven in the relationship with knowledge defended by Charlot (2000, 2001) situated in the relationship of oppression of elderly students and the empowerment process understood by Freire (1980, 2002, 2006).

In these dimensions, it is understood that the "relationship with oneself" emerges in the mobilization for learning, in the desire to be together and to give new meaning to old age. The "relationship with the other" is configured in the interactions between the subjects (students), the mediators (teachers) and the shared knowledge, the contact with the school's knowledge and the references of the "others incorporated in themselves". The "relationship with the world" is situated by the questions of reality and meaning and whether or not we perceive ourselves as being more capable and active in and as a world. Thus, all these dimensions could be seen as aspects of the relationship with the world, as the origin of all is in reality and inscribed in time.

YAE senior students' willingness to learn

It is understood that to explore the relationship with knowledge, in the case in question, we suppose to analyze the subject person/elderly student of YAE given their obligation to learn in a world that is "shared" with others, in which the subject goes on educating him/herself and being educated at the same time. Thus, education is only possible if the subject to be educated personally invests in the process that educates him/her, as he/she must want to be educated in exchange with others and with the world. Thus, education is only possible if the individual finds "[...] in the world what allows him/her to build him/herself" (CHARLOT, 2000, p. 54, our translation).

Olinda, a student aged 81 years (2nd segment – YAE), reveals the need to acquire the knowledge (literate/dominant culture) necessary to validate her culture, her history, that is, the lives of common people.

[...] studying to make a book, it didn't need to be an arsenal of books, a book, two books, to tell the story [(higher intonation)], the family history, my history, my trajectories, to tell my things, what I like to do, what I love to do (OLINDA, 81 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation).

For Charlot (2013), all education presupposes desire, so the desires that mobilized elderly students for school knowledge(s) are directly related to the fact that they need this knowledge to value their existences/experiences, especially by having greater control over their lives and positioning themselves as social actors in the world. This way, the “desire for” corresponds to personal and social fulfillment, as for students, schooling helped them to lead their lives, to implement projects that needed the mastery of systematized knowledge, as well as having more participation in the family, in the community and society.

Feeling recognized and valued

The relationship with knowledge, for the elderly YAE students, only makes sense if what they seek for themselves can also be shared with others. This solidarity mood means that schooled knowledge is not permeated by competitiveness so that certification is not the priority for their lives, but the fact that they are together appropriating knowledge, in a mood of trust, relaxation, respect and commitment to learning.

The acquisition of systematized knowledge (from the dominant culture) enhances actions in/with the world, so that older people start to assume a different posture towards life and society, in which they seek to value their own culture, the existence of their social group, as well as showing a positive image towards old age, of active, capable, aware people who want more social visibility.

They call us old; we are not old. The person who calls us old because we are older, we know what is right and wrong, among the beautiful and the ugly. We are not on the ugly side, we are on the beautiful one. We have to bloom life. And the bloomy life is what we are doing here, discussing and leaping forward (ILZA, 75 years old, H.S. – Ceja, our translation).

Bosi (2010, p. 18, our translation) emphasizes that oppression in old age happens in “[...] multiple ways, some explicitly brutal, others tacitly allowed”. For this author, elderly people are oppressed through multiple mechanisms, such as visible institutional ones (for instance, bureaucracy in retirement, etc.), the subtle and almost invisible psychological mechanisms (for instance, the refusal of dialogue, discrimination, etc.), the technical mechanisms (for instance,

prostheses and the existential precariousness of those who cannot afford them), scientific mechanisms (for instance, people who demonstrate the incapacity and social incompetence of the elderly) (BOSI, 2010).

Through the elderly people's reports, it was evident that the teaching of YAE at Neti/UFSC has contributed so that old age is not seen as a phase of losses, but as possibilities of living together, of accepting oneself, achievement, dedication and learning in every moment/day with others (continuing education). Elderly students also mention that they do not want to be spectators of life and watch the ones who are "connected" **in/with the world**, that is why they fight for more visibility and recognition in different social spaces.

Feeling conscious to say their word

It is understood that people, regardless of age, who do not master reading and writing, face serious obstacles, and the most serious of all among them is the stigma of exclusion. Paulo Freire stresses that mastering reading and writing is a practice of freedom, therefore,

[...] respecting the different discourses and putting into practice the understanding of plurality (which requires as much criticism and creativity in the act of saying the word as in the act of reading the word) requires a social and political transformation. [...] [It is] necessary to have a different society, in which speaking the word is a fundamental right and not simply a habit, in which speaking the word is the right to become a participant in the decision to transform the world (FREIRE; MACEDO, 1990, p. 36, our translation).

Elderly people, in addition to perceiving themselves as people with knowledge and culture, need to understand the ideological mechanisms of oppression that maintain the social "order" in favor of the interests of a minority (of the elite). Thus, it is understood that elderly students, when reflecting on their actions in/with the world, are concomitantly minimizing the effects of the mechanisms of oppression, since the acquisition of a literate culture has personal and social meaning.

We emphasize the importance of schooled knowledge and the social commitment of YAE teachers towards student learning, as it is necessary to have a critical conscience to read the world and speak their word.

To be able to fight to transform

It is understood that the more people from the popular classes can unveil the objective and challenging reality on which the transformative action takes place, the more conditions they will have to critically act in it.

The elderly students bring evidence that YAE at Neti/UFSC assumes a posture of “education for decision, for social and political responsibility” (FREIRE, 2006, p. 96, our translation), which is only possible through dialogue and democratic participation. This attitude can be evidenced in the report of the student Ilza, who reveals a positive attitude towards life, of engagement and persistence towards her ideals: “*I’m studying, I’m healthy, I’m fighting and I won’t stop because this is my great desire and a wish; we fight for it to win in life*” (ILZA, 75 years old, H.S. – Ceja, our translation).

Thus, it is understood that schooled knowledge for elderly students goes far beyond the domain of reading and writing, as they want to master their lives, they want to study to have “*greater enlightenment of things*” (ANA, 62 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation), as well as are willing to fight and demand their rights. They are aware that “*one swallow does not make a summer*” (DENISE, 68 years old, 2nd segment – YAE, our translation), but if everyone unites, they will make a difference.

Considerations

We notice that the tone is differentiated when actions aimed at the elderly population are constituted in the public University and become inherent to it. The emanating connotation is of appreciation and social recognition of a portion of the population that cannot even celebrate their longevity, given the lack of quality of life²¹. Thus, there is a certain “social status” in being an elderly student of YAE at Neti at UFSC, so that the fact of going to University brings another connotation to society and contributes to empowerment, as it is not the lack of knowledge that situates these subjects in the university territory, but the image of knowledge expansion. This difference needs to be portrayed in the face of the social exclusion that surrounds the old age condition, added to the condition of being illiterate or poorly educated.

21 For Neri (1995), “aging well” depends on the individual’s opportunities to enjoy adequate conditions of education, urbanization, health, housing and work throughout their life course.

Another important factor is that the Neti/UFSC YAE brought the possibility for older people to reflect on their realities, while the individual experience becomes collective, conveying a sense of belonging and group (related to age identity or being close to it). This sense of belonging contributed to these people's self-confidence, as well as to reflect on their lives, giving them the courage to make decisions, as they now understand that their future is not predetermined (LISBOA, 2003).

It is possible to see that the schooling in YAE at Neti/UFSC brought contributions to the process of empowerment of the elderly, as Paulo Freire (2002) stated, considering that these subjects, when appropriating the literate culture, are instigated by the pedagogical action to be aware of their actions in/with the world and thus fight for social change (against oppression).

We believe that the "commitment" to social transformation does not end in the classroom space, but in the political engagement with people from the popular classes in social movements (in the act of militancy), that is, going beyond the limits of school life, given that school knowledge only makes sense in each person's life if they can enhance it in their conscious action in/with the world.

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