

Bilingual education for the deaf

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Abstract

The present article aims to reflect on the quality of education for deaf children in our country. First, we will raise some theories that prove to us how the use of Brazilian Sign Language is essential for the teaching and learning process of deaf students. After this, we will present, briefly, how some historical verifications show us that deaf individuals need to master the processes of reading and writing of portuguese language in order to fully exercise their rights as citizens. Once this is understood, we move on to propose the majestic bilingual education for the deaf. We conclude with a synthesis of the main theories discussed and with a reflection on how important it is for teachers to become bilingual so that they can use the Brazilian Sign Language to significantly teach their students to master the processes of reading and writing and thus prepare them to exercise their citizenship.

Keywords: Education. Bilingual. Deaf.

A educação bilíngue para surdos

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo realizar uma reflexão sobre como está a qualidade do ensino de crianças surdas em nosso país. Inicialmente vamos levantar algumas teorias que nos comprovam como a utilização da língua brasileira de sinais é essencial para que o processo de ensino e aprendizagem de alunos surdos. Feito isso, vamos brevemente, mostrar como algumas constatações históricas nos mostram que os indivíduos surdos precisam dominar os processos de leitura e escrita do português para poder exercer plenamente seus direitos de cidadãos. Entendido isso, passamos a propor a majestosa educação bilíngue para surdos. Conclui-se com uma síntese das principais teorias abordadas e com uma reflexão sobre como é importante que os professores sejam bilíngues para que possam utilizar-se da língua brasileira de sinais para ensinar significativamente seus alunos a dominarem os processos de leitura e escrita e dessa forma torna-los preparados para exercerem sua cidadania.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Bilíngue. Surdos.



1 Introduction

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When we address the issue of successful deaf education, it is already a consensus that the old oralization practices have proven unsuccessful. Several areas of knowledge such as education, linguistics, psychology and neurology have proven that there is no way to have educational success without considering the learning and use of sign language. However, it is noted that every deaf person is inserted in an oral social context. Through these findings comes bilingual education for the deaf.

The deaf individual needs to be seen as part of both a family of people who communicate through speech, and a social system of other deaf people who use sign language. Thus, the understanding of bilingualism of the deaf requires accepting that he or she is part of realities of two languages at the same time, and because of this, needs to master the basic principles of both.

Sign language was rejected for a long time, but fortunately, it has come to be recognized as the main basis and means for the deaf to acquire specific knowledge even about the oral language of their surroundings.

Even during the periods in which sign language came to be prohibited in practice during the oralization processes, it never ceased to be used among the social reality of the deaf. Under a socio-anthropological and interactionist vision, the practice of the language taken as forbidden provided that education could be adapted, reorganized, discussed to meet the needs of deaf students.

However, when we talk about the deaf learning the skills of the oral language that surrounds them, we come up against the abyss that separates an oral language and a visual language. There is no claim that the deaf will be able to communicate satisfactorily through speech. However, the reading and writing skills of oral language can be developed through interactions through sign language, and thus allow access to the body of knowledge available through the written text.





Below is a brief approach to bilingualism of the deaf and how it can contribute to the acquisition of skills necessary for their intellectual development.

2 Methodology

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This article is descriptive and bibliographical in nature. To produce it, resources were used such as: articles, monographs, official documents in force, approved works available in full, government sites, books published by renowned authors.

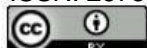
Furthermore, a qualitative approach was used, characterized by measurable approaches, descriptions, opinions, and behaviors. The comparison of data and consensus was also used to reach empirical and at the same time practical conclusions.

3 Results and Discussion

What has been established is that languages as a whole are the means used by human beings to express the entire social reality of a given cultural group. In the context of the deaf, the language that contemplates the above statement is sign language with all its spatial and visual characteristics. It is used in the social contexts in which the deaf is inserted, such as school, associations or specific events for the deaf, homes and so on, even if these environments are sometimes permeated by oral languages.

As most of the realities in which the deaf is inserted is characterized by the coexistence of Portuguese and Brazilian sign language, it can be said that the linguistic context in which he is bilingual. It is still early to say that another language can become part of Brazilian social reality, but at the present time the bilingual context referred to is already a palpable reality.

From now on, we will address some assumptions that, when briefly analyzed, may help establish some principles to be followed considering the above-mentioned observation.



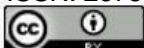


Skliar (1998) states that the studies on deaf education have already materialized as an area of knowledge that has been of interest to several theorists. Deaf studies come from an old inclusive demand, from a desire that people with special needs be accepted and have their needs met within the educational environment. The most recent studies reinforce the right to have a specific language and the right to receive education through sign language. One advance that this area has achieved over time is the simultaneous translation of various television programs.

The identity of the deaf, as well as their culture is another demand for recognition of the class that is characterized, as Silva (2000) tells us, as a set of characteristics that differentiate between them the various cultural and social groups. So far it is necessary to recognize that this culture can only be fully recognized through the diffusion of a strong social discourse.

Recognizing Brazilian sign language (LIBRAS) as a full language or language is another issue to be addressed. Lyons (1987) defines language as a system for communicating that can be natural or not and that can be human or not. In this simple definition one can already see the primary purpose of language, namely to establish communication. However, some use these two terms more specifically, such as Chomsky (1986) who differentiates them as language being a restricted system based on another linguistic system, and language as a complete system independent of others. Considering this aspect, LIBRAS has long been understood as an organized linguistic system independent of the Portuguese language with ample possibilities for creative communication.

Sign languages can also be classified as natural languages since they possess the characteristics that distinguish other layers of communication, such as the arbitrariness between signifier and signified, and also between sign and referent. Furthermore, sign languages also possess the use of creativity independent of stimuli; unlimited production for the creation of communicative structures; multiplicity of functions in expressing feelings, cognitions, interactions, and so on, all of which characterize them more strongly as natural languages.





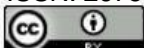
Sign languages can no longer be seen as pathological because they arise from a human disability. Rather, it is a complex, organized and independent system of communication, just like any other language. Quadros and Karnopp (2004) were able to prove that in 1906 sign language already had all the characteristics to be considered as a language, either by the ability to create infinite sentences, either by its own grammatical structure.

Several associations of the deaf have fought for language policies to include LIBRAS among the languages recognized within the national territory. This should help in the preservation of the language, as well as in the recognition and cultivation of its variants in several areas of our continental country. One measure of recognition and preservation of LIBRAS is the implementation of simultaneous translation in the school reality, instead of separating the deaf students with an independent teacher who teaches her classes in LIBRAS.

Since 2002 a language policy was implemented for the Brazilian sign language through Law 10.436/2002 that recognized the linguistic status of sign language. However, for LIBRAS to be recognized as another official language of Brazil there is still a long way to go. After all, Portuguese has been the official language of the country since the implementation of the 1988 Federal Constitution and is recommended by the Ministry of Education and Culture to be used for classes in schools in the country.

This reality imposes on the deaf the learning of Portuguese as a second language, based on the assumption that the deaf are Brazilians and need to use the official language of their country to fully exercise their rights as citizens. In 2005, Decree 5.626 was signed, guaranteeing bilingual education for the deaf, with Brazilian sign language as their mother tongue and Portuguese as a second language.

In this panorama we still face the challenge of literacy of the deaf bilingual so that he can have broad access to knowledge and knowledge acquired during the history of literate humanity. For this it is necessary that education recognizes that sign language needs to acquire the character of instruction while the Portuguese language a means of understanding the world from the perspective of the deaf.





When we talk about bilingual education, we understand an education that occurs through two languages during the whole process of teaching and learning. Whenever a school chooses to offer a bilingual education, it commits to a linguistic policy that at least two languages coexist in the school environment, as well as being able to rank them as first and second languages with different functionalities.

It is up to each educational institution to determine how, when, where and in what way each language will be used to maximize positive pedagogical results. It may be that one is used more than the other or that one is restricted to specific moments or contexts.

The definition of these pedagogical processes will guide the work of teachers and dictate the practical functions that each language will play in the lives of these students.

Specifically addressing the bilingual education of deaf students the social contexts of use of each language must always be well defined and social actions must be linked to actions of the state, municipality and the federation.

There are already specific schools for the deaf in Brazil that teach their students through the Brazilian sign language and that the Portuguese language is taught as a second language.

What has happened is that in the early years of elementary school students have received their instruction through LIBRAS and learned Portuguese as a second language. However, when they go to the final years of elementary school, the classes are taught in Portuguese and there is an interpreter present to do the simultaneous translation. Many times this has led to a break in the deaf educational process and has taken them several times to resource rooms. Unfortunately, this reality has hindered the guarantee of the right to information, education, and communication for the deaf.

Thus, it is essential that there are enough bilingual teachers in the classroom for a full bilingual education to occur in the education of deaf Brazilians. It is necessary that the teacher master both languages to be able to think about the teaching of a second language through the mother tongue. Thus, the Brazilian sign language should be learned by as many Brazilian teachers as possible so that they can satisfactorily exercise their role.





4 Final considerations

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It is known that the central axis of Brazilian education is the understanding and learning of reading and writing the Portuguese language. From the very beginning, the child that enters school already has contact with a series of grammatical rules that may sometimes be disconnected from the speech modality used by the child. The child starts to learn to adapt his language to a more standardized, formal and new language in order to master the processes of reading and writing.

The deaf child who enters the same school context does not have any linguistic grammatical structure of spoken Portuguese, even in the popular modality. Thus, this process of linguistic adequacy becomes extremely deficient.

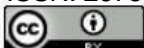
Deaf students have great difficulty in accessing knowledge that is written in Portuguese or in interacting with their hearing peers. The same happens with children who use hearing aids, because often the acquired sounds are distorted and dissonant.

Every student who does not master writing and reading finds it difficult to structure the standard modality of the language. Because the deaf student does not have feedback through hearing, it becomes complicated to learn the mechanisms that make up the Portuguese language.

Within education, the biggest pedagogical problem that the deaf student encounters is professional unpreparedness. A significant portion of educators do not know or do not master the Brazilian sign language, which makes a quality education difficult or impossible.

The deaf student is inserted into a social reality that is built on social interactions that occur in the Portuguese language. Thus, he needs to learn and master this language as a second language in order to fully exercise their citizenship and establish social relations.

What is established is that for a bilingual education to really become effective in our country it is necessary that a significant portion of educators master the Brazilian sign





language so that it is used in the classroom as an object of instruction and the basis for a full learning of the Portuguese language for deaf students.

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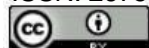
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