

## **The Constitution of a Bilingual Education and the Training of Teachers for Deaf Students**

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**ABSTRACT – The Constitution of a Bilingual Education and the Training of Teachers for Deaf Students.** This article aims to discuss the constitution of a bilingual education based on the training of teachers for deaf students. Based on an idea of a training path, it defends teachers for deaf students as specific intellectuals, hence their ethical and aesthetic commitment with teaching the deaf community. Thus, the text initially deals with the historical location of speech constructions for the notion of bilingual education, to track the emergence of these professionals and the implications from these changes in their training. And finally, based on accounts from teachers for deaf students, it discusses the experience as a trigger for the exercise of such attitude in the teacher's role of a specific intellectual.

**Keywords: Bilingual Education. Training. Teacher for Deaf Students. Specific Intellectual.**

**RESUMO – A Constituição de uma Educação Bilíngue e a Formação dos Professores de Surdos.** Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir a constituição de uma educação bilíngue a partir da formação de professores de surdos. Partindo de uma ideia de percurso formativo, defende o professor de surdos como intelectual específico, daí seu compromisso ético e estético com o saber da comunidade surda. O texto inicialmente aborda a localização histórica das construções discursivas da noção de educação bilíngue a fim de situar a emergência desse profissional e as implicações dessas mudanças na sua formação. Por fim, a partir das narrativas dos professores de surdos, discute a experiência como grande disparador do exercício da atitude na função-educador como intelectual específico.

**Palavras-chave: Educação Bilíngue. Formação. Professor de Surdos. Intelectual Específico.**

## Introduction

[...] what needs to disappear for society to be able to exist is the union between power and knowledge. From that moment on, the powerful man might be the ignorant man (Foucault, 2003, p. 31).

From the deaf militancy's perspective, audist<sup>1</sup> practices are the villains in the modern history of deaf people. Since the clinical normalization perspective, these practices have invested efforts to create better life conditions to those who cannot hear. Subverting extremist analyses – both the ones that defend practices that would compose a *deaf world*, which are guided by the principle that being deaf is normal, and the ones that defend deaf normalization practices, which are guided by the premise that hearing is normal – requires seeing the relationships between power and knowledge from different perspectives.

That means, among other things, inverting the forms that are commonly argued by authors in the context of production regarding the education of deaf people. Instead of starting from one place or another to speak within the dyadic scheme of being pro or against teachers for deaf students being trained or taking initiatives regarding the conduction of student's behaviors, we assume the practices of present time that enable what we have been calling bilingual school and, within it, teachers for deaf students as intellectuals.

We understand that adopting radical stances would not lead us to the construction of different ways to live the difference, whichever it is. We also understand that being radically in favor or against it would constrain the dialogue, the negotiation, and the political understanding in deaf people's struggles.

Besides that, radical positions limit the role we play as intellectuals, which is: the one of generating one's own thoughts and truths we create to guide ourselves and other people. In the modern rationality that defines us, we know that by turning our backs to extreme points of view, we start walking on Ariadne's thread<sup>2</sup>. Any imbalance may cost us our lives within one group or another; however, what can we do when we are ethically committed to the truths that mobilize us as intellectuals and activists of other ways of living?

Based on education – and more specifically, on pedagogy – we have proposed to raise questions about the training of teachers for deaf students. In line with that, considering the already mentioned discussions about knowledge and power, we propose to raise questions about the figure of this professional as an intellectual who is capable, by thinking about what they know, of recreating themselves and the other beyond their identities. To do that, we know it is costly for militants to think beyond their identities, but our concern is more focused on ethical training – the one of being with oneself – than on moral and identity. We will get back to this topic later.

To reach the objective we mentioned before, we searched for teachers' accounts through a research conducted on the training of teachers for deaf students. To analyze and raise questions about the topic we proposed, we sought theoretical and methodological inspiration in Michel Foucault - more specifically in the courses the philosopher developed in the 1980s and in the set of lectures he gave at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Janeiro, in the 1970s, which were published in the compilation *A verdade e as formas jurídicas* (Truth and juridical forms). In the set of these works, Foucault dedicated himself to analyze the ways power is exercised and self-exercised on the individuals. His investigations culminated in him raising questions about truth. He restates truth as the mobilizer of his work, but does not grant it a prominent place, as he was more interested in practices that state a specific truth is true. Thus, in the 1980s, Foucault developed even more fundamental concepts in the context of his work and for us, in the context of works analyzed here, which are: *knowledge, power, and governmentality*.

### **A Start: from the narratives of teachers for deaf students to tool-concepts**

Start... What could be the starting point of work among researchers who have, for so long, discussed other possibilities to think the education of deaf people, the deaf people themselves, and the truths forged about such individuals since the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil? Why making a reference to the 18<sup>th</sup> century rather than before that, and why making a reference to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil?

The answers to the questions above are seemingly simple. We understand the *argumentative inversion* (Foucault, 1999) is a start to show truths that make it difficult to understand deafness as a surface where distinct experiences are observed. That means we do not start from the supposed side of audiologization of deafness experiences, nor from the side of cultural essentialization of deaf experiences, to develop the focus of our discussion, which is: the bilingual school and the training of teachers for deaf students as specific intellectuals.

To answer to the second question previously asked, we resort to the literature and to investigations in the field of deafness studies, and to the courses taught by Michel Foucault, named *Security, Territory, Population* (1978) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), both given at *Collège de France*.

According to what Davis (1995) proposed, deafness could only be seen as a cultural activity in Europe after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, deafness was not included as a collective activity, which is a fundamental category to characterize it as a cultural activity. It emerged as an

anomaly understood under the same logic employed to characterize a person who does not have a leg or arm.

It was during the Enlightenment that deafness called the attention of professionals. Religious, medical, educational, political arguments, among others, were being given in a way that increasingly called attention to something that had not yet been highlighted: deafness.

According to Lopes (2007), deafness starts being invented by speeches of distinct orders. With that, it strengthens its appearance among the population and specialists who tried to find out how to treat those who could not communicate normally. Non-normality, which is based on most people's ability to hear, became a parameter for analysis and evaluation of deaf individuals; in turn, deafness became a surface where different truths found their reasons to restate both the normality of some and the abnormality of others.

By stating that deafness emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we are not erasing the history of deaf people, considering more isolated and observable events before such century. We are calling attention to the importance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the invention of deafness as we understand it today. Davis (1995) states that we may find references to deafness in the Old and the New Testaments and in texts by Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Descartes, among many others. Nonetheless, in the Century of Enlightenment, it is possible to notice something different happening. There is a concern with the education of physically challenged people. There were no schools for deaf people before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Davis (1995, p. 52),

[...] until the end of the century, schools for the deaf had been established in the cities of Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, Karlsruhe, Prague, Munich, Waitzen, Freising, Lenz, Rome, Naples, Malta, Goningen, Tarente, Madrid, and Zurich, and in Portugal, Poland, Denmark, and Switzerland. In 1789, a dozen schools had been founded in Europe, and circa 1822, there were sixty schools.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was permeated with a set of events that turned the population into a focus of attention and the target of several initiatives from the government. The need for educating the population based on the education of each individual in particular gained momentum and founded the school as an equipment focusing on discipline. Education in that century consisted of a pastoral conduction that invested in an individual education, once this power is not exercised in a territory, but rather in the *moving multiplicity* (Foucault, 2008, p. 168); i.e., in all and in each one at once. Around 1760, in a context in which the education of deaf individuals was guided by a religious direction, abbot L'Épée founded the first free school for deaf people, and thus the bases for bilingual teaching of deaf people were established. Written French became fundamental in them. According to Benvenuto (2006, p. 233),

[...] To make an effort to take deaf people out from their 'dark fog', thus giving them their human condition back, and, especially, to conduct deaf people to their baptism are the objectives religion and mankind gave to the priests.

During the enlightenment modernity, we saw, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the institutionalization of education and thus the constitution of school spaces. The mandatory schooling as the form of education in that period makes the school from our time a fundamental practice in the education of everyone.

Deaf individuals, as argued by Benvenuto (2006), benefit from educational establishments that were created once a new statute was given to deafness when it is understood in its educable nature. Thus, these establishments also became “[...] spaces for seclusion and invention of techniques to subject the body, in which the aim was to [...] correct what cannot be corrected” (Benvenuto, 2006, p. 236).

Therefore, a concern with the education of deaf people rises along with the concern with the education of other physically challenged people. In the same line, the first conditions of possibility to emerge what we call today special education have appeared. Obviously, the emergence of a great deal of schools gets one thinking that education started becoming a fundamental investment from the government, along with the education of physically challenged people. Thus, the focus was not on the education of physically challenged people, but rather in the education of the population. The population started constituting itself in a focus or in a species-set of many heads.

Understanding school as an equipment that acts in the production of individuals and social identities that are proper to the places that are destined to them, special schools for deaf people are articulated towards linking deafness to medical issues.

[...] In such conjugation that has been established between special education and social medicine, since the early days of the institutionalization of 'physically challenged people', scientific evidence was found to better classify these individuals based on supposed normality parameters, thus creating and maintaining a wicked ritual as the supporter of this subjection cycle (Lopes; Guedes, 2008, p. 4).

This process of subjectification and subjection hearing impaired people to the hearing norm starts with special education and goes on until nowadays, instituting the so-called school inclusion. School inclusion, as a government practice in our present times, aims at including deaf people in the discussion, without masking their deafness. A specific identity is created and is brought into the social circle to erase any kind of estrangement in regards to sign language, by democratizing its

use so the pedagogical policy that is conducted in this group is capable of creating conditions to manage it through erasing the difference between the deaf and the others.

[...] The most recent discourse, which introduces deaf people as members of a linguistic and cultural community, was born as a counter-discourse and as a new look on what deafness may produce as a constitution of itself and in its relationship with the world. This discourse has produced effects that are radically opposite to those in the abnormality discourse. Some of these are the triggering of bilingual education programs with deaf teachers in the classroom, the promulgation of laws that protect the parents' right to choose the education of their children, or the sociological, anthropological, educational, and linguistic investigations around language and the deaf community (Benvenuto, 2006, p. 242).

Inclusion policies in our time enable different looks on deafness and deaf people, placing the discussion now in the regular school and taking special schools off the circuit, and calling attention to the sign language itself and its users. From the moment schools commit to educating these individuals onwards, they then become places that are desired by the deaf people themselves – no longer as special schools, but as bilingual schools, which are capable of absorbing the discussion about the difference in a powerful way. To believe bilingual school is, before anything else, a school space, is part of one of the strategies for getting further away from the fine line that separates the idea of special schools for deaf people/hearing impaired people.

The deaf movement is often accused of forming ghettos when it fights for exchange spaces and social negotiations that it is provided by the use of sign languages. School is one of these spaces where the community can fight to have its collective cultural production valued and disseminated.

Notwithstanding, the failure to understand the cultural and linguistic workings of this groups produces policies that place it in specific identity groups. Thus, the deaf individuals' fight for the school space becomes a legitimate one when they understand the paramount function of school in society and seek this place for themselves, for dissemination of their culture and language.

Thus, considering these issues, another educator is invited to occupy a different position, now as a teacher in this school space. This educator starts having a great responsibility in questioning the deeply rooted relationships that only disseminate one kind of perspective on its own social condition. Otherwise, instead of this bilingual school's creating practices of mediation and conduction in human training, it may rearrange the same discourses, the same types of forces in the same perspective.

The training of teachers for deaf students is currently being discussed in the education of these individuals, as there is a constant search for these professionals to meet the demand that is created by nowadays' policies. As training is under discussion, there is a tension in the construction of decrees and laws that seek to ensure a bilingual education in which sign language is given a first-language status and written Portuguese is considered a second language. The deaf movements have been achieving significant victories in this regard, with the passing of very important laws. Among others, Act no. 10436/2002 and Decree no. 5626/2005 may be mentioned.

Besides historical and political movements, this article intends to show other important elements in the training of these professionals. To discuss the results of a search that was conducted in a PhD dissertation, the article will be didactically divided as follows: discussion of the constitution of the notion of bilingual education as a political process of deaf community movements; relationships between this process and the discourses developed in the training of teachers for deaf students to understand how bilingual practices take shape; and a discussion on how initial and continued training constitute teachers for deaf students, through teachers' accounts.

The choice of this methodology as a way to deal with this text attempts to show that the training of these bilingual teachers as specific intellectuals has an important role in the education of deaf people, as it is part of the deaf movements' political struggle for bilingual education.

### **Political Location of what is Called Bilingual: the Latin American and Brazilian cases**

To understand the training of teachers for deaf students it is necessary to understand that bilingual education, as a notion, has not always meant the same thing. It is an invention from our time; because of that, it is important to discuss again the political and historical locations that serve as base for the movements in this direction, to understand that training within the knowledge about the education of deaf people is given in a context of political movements.

Even being familiar with the notion that the bilingual perspective (not necessarily *bilingual education*) of the education of deaf people may be dated by its first defenders back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in Brazil, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century), it is worth making it clear that, in this text, the chosen period is the one of the movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (late 1990s) and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that became stronger in another way, and that constitutes a contemporary perspective.

Thus, it is important to make it clear that the richness in deaf people's social movements goes beyond a passive translation of a bilingual education as merely two languages in school. To support this idea,



we will use the discussion Skliar (1999) organizes in some texts, which we will call *political location of bilingualism* for now.

Nowadays, bilingual education is linked to Brazil's national inclusion policy. In this context, we may notice a trend to reduce the notion of inclusion to the existence of interpreters at schools, mandatory hiring of deaf teachers and bilingual listeners, as well as the extended admission of deaf people in those spaces. Such trend tends to rule out the possibility of creating bilingual school spaces that are capable of including powerful discussions towards a policy of respect to the deaf difference and its history.

A speech that disregards these movements is valued, without it presenting a *radical critique*. To take here the notion of radical criticism does not mean, in any way, to be against the national inclusion policy or to be against the deaf movement. It does not mean either to ignore or to underestimate any of these movements. The attempt here is to include these movements in the order of the social system in this contemporaneity. Thus, Veiga-Neto and Lopes (2011), who borrowed the concept of *radical critique* from Foucault, allow us to understand that, to do it, it is necessary to seek the different conditions of possibilities of what a certain event determines. Thus, to make a radical critique to the inclusion policies and to the emergence of bilingual education as a resistance movement means to raise questions about the several practices that determine the truths about the inclusion and bilingual education concepts and the productivity of these movements in the space of the training of teachers for deaf students.

Seeing bilingual education as the materialization of a speech practice, it is worth discussing how this idea has been constituted in several spaces, in several societies, and how there is no consensus on this concept.

To discuss the emergence of the notion of bilingual education, we – briefly, due to the nature of this text – refer to a compilation organized by Skliar (1999), a discussion on recent events regarding bilingual education for deaf people. It should be said that the texts in this compilation resulted from the conferences from the 5<sup>th</sup> Latin American Congress of Bilingual Education for Deaf People, which took place in Brazil, in Porto Alegre, RS, in 1999. We mention this compilation because, from then on, several movements towards bilingual education are started in Brazil.

To Skliar (1999), to think of a perspective of bilingual education without taking into account its political aspects is to turn the rich possibility of translating deaf movements into policies that are merely methodological and systematic. Because of that, the author gathers texts with different bilingual possibilities in some Latin American countries. In some cases, from Scandinavian countries as references for several productions and bilingual possibilities from international models.

Analyzing the different ways through which bilingualism (the term used in the compilation) is seen in different countries, we may



notice some points of tension due to the oralist tradition<sup>3</sup> and to the weakening of deaf movements, which are common in several of those. Among these points of tension, we may list: a) late learning of sign language as L1 of deaf children; b) learning of the language at school and oftentimes through non-natural means (environment); c) the decisions of families depend on medical guidance, and they never favor sign language. There is an emphasis in stating that sign language precludes the learning of oral language.

Despite these three points being common, different ways to constitute bilingual proposals are configured in Latin America. In the 1990s, Venezuela can be highlighted for having a pedagogical bilingual proposal that was considered revolutionary. The initiative from the managers at that time was very relevant and triggered other movements towards a bilingual proposal and an anthropological look on deafness.

Still on that line of discussion, we may take the case of Colombia, which, such as most Latin American countries, has experienced oralism in official policies since the late 1970s, seeing the birth of deaf movements for the Colombian sign language (LSC). Nonetheless, in 1992, a private bilingual school for deaf people was created, with Colombian sign language and Spanish being defined as teaching languages. According to Ramirez (1999, p. 47), “[...] this educational experience included deaf people as assistants in classes and hearing teachers who had a good level of LSC use”. It was the first project for recognition of Colombian sign language that was enrolled with the Ministry of National Education (MEN). Later on the government created the National Institute for the Deaf (INSOR), in Bogotá, and contact was established with researchers from other institutes, for exchange of knowledge and bilingual education models.

Considering the main tensions reported in bilingual education, INSOR focuses on deaf children who are younger than 5 years old. Such strategy intends that no deaf children be enrolled in formal school without them learning a language. The program teaches deaf children and their families the Colombian sign language through deaf tutors, since they are very young. In a nutshell, the program defines the attention required by these people as a linguistic attention; the Colombian sign language is considered as the first language, and the deaf children are entitled to learn it from early ages. Such teaching applies to both deaf adults as linguistic models and to deaf children (Ramirez, 1999).

There are reports from work groups and bilingual schools from other countries, such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, which are always searching for programs that ensure sign language as L1 and the country's language as L2. The tensions that are observed in these countries are very similar, and different solutions are sought. Thus we verified that the 1990s were extremely productive for the bilingual perspective on the education of deaf people in Latin America.

In Brazil, in the context of education, in Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro, and some states in Brazil's Northeast Region, we saw a movement that was very similar to the one in Latin America. Brazil's current movement towards bilingual education is a movement for discussion among deaf and hearing people fighting for the cause by proposing changes; the question behind all that is: *what do we want as inclusive education?* Thus, there is a constant movement to ensure bilingual schools are somehow maintained as yet another educational option. It is in this context that the training of teachers for deaf students is discussed here.

### **The Training of Teachers for Deaf Students: the emergence of other professionals**

The deaf movements and the emergence of bilingual education change the paths of training in the field of education of deaf people in Brazil, and new professionals enter the scenario from Decree no. 5626/2005: the BSL (Brazilian sign language, or *Libras*) teacher and the BSL interpreter.

Due to the fact the notion of bilingual education is constituted in different ways, the discourse practices and the experiences from the professionals involved with the education of deaf people take different paths. Both the practices and the deaf movements develop the idea of bilingual education discursively. So a question still lingers: how has the training of these individuals been configured, considering the path bilingual education has been leaning towards?

According to Machado and Lunardi-Lazzarin (2010), the training of teachers for deaf students in the field of inclusion is a governmentality device of teaching individuals, as it produces specific truth effects in the discourses. In nowadays' situation, the teacher training is outlined with an accurate strategy in the constitution of a body of teachers who are engaged and sensitized in this policy, to respond to a historical urgency.

It is important to mention, at this time, the urgent need for forming a set of political and pedagogical knowledge to build a body of expertise so that practices related to the propagation of the established policy are ensured. According to Machado and Lunardi-Lazzarin (2010, p. 23),

[...] the knowledge that is made legitimate by the teacher training refines the investment of power that is operated by school institutions, thus being constituted in this mechanism as a strategy to produce docile, tame, and manageable students and teachers. In this landscape, in which it is essential to form a certain body of experts and to put certain practices to work, special education is constituted as an expertise, a pedagogical knowledge device that emerges in the context of modernity to equate and

keep producing strangers – among those, the deaf – that are required for the dynamics of sorting such rationality.

As of the institutionalization of bilingual education with the emergence of the specific legislation on BSL (Act no. 10436/2002 and Decree no. 5626/2005), education systems started occupying teaching spaces at schools with people who understand BSL, and these were generally interpreters in religious communities or family members in associations. Thus, the individuals who are the main target of training processes are family members of Christian deaf people, who become the new experts composing the scenario in the education of deaf people through bilingual education. They assume this new place with a specific knowledge and the truths that are instituted by the discourse practices that are experienced with deaf people.

[...] I was a freelancer 16 years ago [...], but in the church I was cited to work as a children's teacher, and there I learned to like teaching and to love this profession. [...] a deaf woman joined my congregation. She started teaching me signs on a Sunday. Her interpreter, said... she called me to interpret [...] Because I had already fallen in love with deaf education, I then met an angel, one of those people God sends to help us [...]. And she constantly asked me to help her in the supporting room. So, I desperately started taking on courses and being with deaf people (Teacher Carla).

[...] My story with deaf people started on a summer day in 1969, when my brother was born deaf. For some years in my life I fought an ignorant and wicked society. I was even misjudged by some people from my family in regards to some of my brother's (deaf person) needs and postures. Since the 1960s, I have been committed to helping deaf people with my heart and mind, which led me, in the 1970s, to look for a course to work with deaf people. Sheer oral language was what we had; we were living in a dictatorship. In 1985, I started living a new moment in history. A new idea rose in the hearing/speaking respect, for working with deaf people. Those were times when I was becoming radical. Between 1994 and 1998, I started getting in touch with LIBRAS, but I did not believe in the person who defended it. The time went by, and my convictions matured in the process, despite my thinking LIBRAS was a fragmented language. A new resolution happened in history, in 2002, thanks to the struggle of people who think, study, and are sure that LIBRAS is a living language as any other, and that it makes a difference to structure deaf people's lives (Teacher Rosana).

Following in those individuals' footsteps, we may find, in the accounts from teachers that are described below, the different spaces for training and how they are built by distinct motivations as well. The intention of bringing these accounts is to explicit how conceptual and historical changes of the notion of bilingual education and the influence from deaf movements can directly affect both the practices and the training of these teachers we bring here. New knowledge is required.

In the accounts below, we found that, whereas the first teacher described the family pressure she underwent to contribute to the educa-

tion and care of her deaf brothers, the second one explains her Christian motivation when she felt she was summoned to do God's work by saving deaf people and then became a teacher in the process. The third one, in turn, talks about how she got involved with inclusion and describes how she met this deaf person who put her in that place:

[...] My family was traditionally involved with teaching, so I could not be the odd one out. I finished my Teaching Course and started working in a daycare center in Viana. That was when a cousin of mine – she had a deaf son and worked at Escola Oral e Auditiva in Vitória – invited me to take a course funded by the state government. In the beginning I was reluctant, but my mother insisted I change my mind, as she said she was the only one who took my brothers to school and was in need of help. It was partly because of the pressure I took the decision to take the course along with my cousin (Teacher Janaína).

[...] I started as an interpreter in the church. It was not easy because they always compared me with other interpreters, and I got a lot of criticism at each session. The deaf people were not easy. I did not give up, though, because I felt God had called me to do that. Being a teacher of deaf people happened in my life because the existing teachers could not learn LIBRAS when they started needing LIBRAS-speaking people (Teacher Márcia).

[...] Because I wanted to study further, in 2008, I quit my regular classes and started working with Specialized Educational Services [...]. Each day I fall deeper in love with working with deaf students, and I see how much I still have to learn, and that knowledge gap leads me to always look for more information. I still have a lot to learn, and it is a good thing we have a group to discuss the practices and theories we use as a basis for our work (Teacher Liana).

In the individuals' testimonials, we noticed traces of practices that have been instituting the deaf movement for years, feeding it, constituting new knowledge, a truth that is related to experience. However, there is a risk for this knowledge to become a dogmatic truth<sup>4</sup> rather than one based on experience, when the social conditions at the historical moment that are instituted make it legitimate (such as BSL-related laws and decrees, for example). Notwithstanding, there is also a risk for the backgrounds to take such knowledge and deem it unique and exclusive, such as the truth of the moment, the current one.

Before that context, we find it relevant to include in the discussion the viability of seeing teachers for deaf students as specific intellectuals, once they take on a leading position in the role of teachers in regular schools. Consequently, it admits a certain degree of responsibility in the discussion of a bilingual education.

## **Teachers for Deaf Students as Specific Intellectuals**

From the movement that has been produced regarding school education of deaf people over the last decades, other kinds of knowledge

constitute themselves, and that is why other professionals are required in different spaces considering the need for discussion regarding the training of these individuals and, more properly, the objective of this training. The exercise we intend to propose is the one of thinking of teachers for deaf students as specific intellectuals

According to Carvalho (2014, p. 80), thinking about a teacher's role is to understand that "[...] the one who occupies the place of someone who trains and guides somebody gets themselves surrounded by conditions to do it". Because of that, the responsibility a teacher must take over in a teacher's role perspective must be the one of deconstructing rigid structures that define actions, postures, truths, and, thus, specific subjectivities. The position must be another one, "[...] a teacher is the one who deals with the case a individual has of themselves, and who finds, in the love they have for their pupil, the possibility to deal with the care their pupil has for themselves" (Foucault, 2006a, p. 74).

Teachers, by assuming their roles, are essentially responsible for engaging in a direction that is opposite to instituted truths. They are responsible for establishing other ways for veridiction, and, thus, for contributing to the subjectification of their disciples.

Taking into account the relationship of teachers for deaf students with the teacher's role they take over, away from the care towards Christianity, one may defend that every educator (including here all educators of deaf people) may take over the position of specific intellectual, as they belong to a field they supposedly master (Carvalho, 2014). According to Foucault (1988, p. 14), in this perspective, the role of an intellectual is not the one of "changing people's consciences or what they have in their heads, but the political, economic, institutional regime of truth production". The role of an intellectual is not merely to tell others what should be done:

[...] What would give me the right to do it? Remember all prophecies, injunctions, and programs intellectuals could formulate over the last two centuries, whose effects can now be seen. The work of an intellectual does not mean to mold other people's political wills; it means, through the analyses they do in fields which are theirs, to interrogate again the evidence and findings, to shake up habits, the ways to do and to think, to dissipate familiar notions, to take back the evaluation of rules and institutions, and, from this new analysis (in which they play their specific role of intellectual), to take part in the formation of a political will (in which he has an active role) (Foucault, 2006b, p. 249).

Foucault resumes his defense of a political stance from intellectuals, stating that a political regime is not consistent when it disregards the truth and it is dangerous when it intends to prescribe it. An intellectual, for having to tell the truth, needs to treat their role with care. Their

role is not constituted as a prescriptive discourse, but rather as one that is analytical of the relationships the thinking systems build. Their role consists of criticizing.

Carvalho (2014) argues that a teacher's role, for being strictly linked to the production of truths in their relationship with their students, may operate in the record of a specific intellectual. The *Intellectual* entry in Foucault's dictionary gives us more clues for us to think and raise questions on the role of this subject in nowadays' society:

[...] Traditionally, the politicization of an intellectual, according to Foucault, was carried out according to two axes: their position as an intellectual in the bourgeois society and the truth they surfaced in their speech. An intellectual would tell the truth to the ones who could not see it and on behalf of those who could not tell it. Thus, a 'left-wing' intellectual would take the floor and, as a universal representative, they were recognized as entitled to speak as the master of truth and justice. [...] Foucault contrasts this figure of the 'universal intellectual' with the one of the 'specific intellectual'. While the universal intellectual derives from the 'notable jurist' (the man who claimed the universality of the fair law), the specific intellectual derives from the 'wise expert' (Castro, 2009, p. 228).

Foucault's differentiation between universal and specific intellectual, as mentioned in the vocabulary entry itself, is highlighted by Francesco Adorno (2004) in the production of truths. The universal one is the bearer of truth and justice, society's conscience. This view of *universal* allowed him to tell right from wrong, true from false, and leads this intellectual not to act on practical and local issues, which makes him keep a generalist speech.

To Foucault, in our times, this figure should be replaced by the specific intellectual, who acts according to another relationship between theory and practice. They act on practical, local issues. Due to their relationship with the knowledge of a specific field, they operate according to a determined critique. Their political role is not only the one of criticizing ideological contents in search of a fair ideology: "it is rather to know if it is possible to constitute a new, real policy" (Adorno, 2004, p. 43).

From that assumption, we may conclude this intellectual's role is to destructure present time – not from a simple critique of the present, "[...] but rather in the tenacity to demonstrate the contingency of present time, in deconstructing it as a result from a historical process" (Adorno, 2004, p. 43). Any possibility of predicting the future is excluded. An intellectual must say how it is today, making it look as though it actually is not and how it could not be. Thus:

[...] As long as they waive considering themselves as society's universal conscience and dedicate themselves to

discussing some specific issues, the question is to know which the real impact of his critique will be on society, and what kind of relationship will be established between their theoretical work and their practical life (Adorno, 2004, p. 44).

Adorno (2004), then, calls attention to the 'modesty principle', which takes from intellectuals the need to perform a hegemonic role in society. Each one is responsible for engaging in wide social and deeply critical change. "The role of an intellectual is to help properly formulate problems" (Adorno, 2004, p. 45). An intellectual is not in charge of pointing towards a correct or incorrect system, but to show how it happens, to thoroughly analyze processes, to say how a certain regime works. It is up to people to make their choices.

[...] It is from oneself that one can make technical and local questions work, which represent an array of other points of view that lead to a vision of the whole society and its workings. An intellectual must be capable of interrogating themselves as citizens who are concerned with technical and everyday issues. They themselves may be the driver of theoretical analyses based on their very personal questions. Said otherwise: they must be capable of exchanging their position as an intellectual with the one of citizen (Adorno, 2004, p. 46).

Finally, the work of an intellectual, beyond their political role, but because of their connection between practical life and theoretical issues defended, are also connected to an ethical and aesthetic existence.

When an educator of deaf people assumes his/hers teacher's role in that record, their responsibility with the ways through which truths are constituted becomes a political one in regards to the education of deaf people.

In several courses given at the Collège de France, Foucault deals with the issue of the art of governing, by analyzing the meanings and devices that constitute this art historically in exercising power and knowledge. He states that the idea behind that art is directly connected to the discovery and to the knowledge of a truth, and "[...] that implies the constitution of a specialized knowledge, the formation of a category of individuals who are also specialized in the knowledge of this truth" (Foucault, 2010b, p. 46).

When we take the scenario of the education of deaf people as a thought system, we find that truths that start constituting themselves start changing; the specialized knowledge, in turn, also starts taking other paths and creating specialists on this knowledge.

In our case, *the knowledge of BSL*, as a specialized knowledge, starts occupying a space in an institutionalized way, by opening other paths and possibilities for bilingual education to exist for deaf people



nowadays, by replacing the specialist in deafness and producing a new expertise. We have at least four new specialists in this current framework: bilingual teachers, BSL interpreters, BSL instructors, and teachers of Portuguese as a second language.

In his class on January 5, 1983, in his course named “The Government of Self and Others”, Foucault read the response Kant gave to the question “What is the *Enlightenment?*”: “a man’s exit from his smallness, of which he himself is responsible” (Foucault, 2010c, p. 25). When, in this same class, Foucault goes on talking about what Kant said about this matter, the author deals with the subject of a man’s capacity of creating his own subjectivity, of governing himself. That is called ATTITUDE. It is not only political work, but also aesthetic.

Considering what has been exposed, is it possible to think of the new teacher of deaf students as a specific intellectual? Why is that questioned in our present time?

To think of a teacher for deaf students when they acknowledge their role and responsibility in the changes of perspectives on the education of deaf people, one may resort here to the discussion Foucault conducts on what Baudelaire calls attitude of modernity. He does it when he discusses the PRESENT (the place where the critique is operated), by analyzing Kant’s response to the following question: *Was ist Aufklärung?*<sup>5</sup>.

To Foucault (2005), Kant raises a new problem, by analyzing the present as sheer currentness, as, when he analyzes it, he does not do it from one result of an action that would be future or from a totality. “He seeks a difference: what is the difference he introduces today as compared to yesterday?” (Foucault, 2005, p. 337).

The hypothesis raised by Foucault is that this text by Kant is a reflection on the currentness of his work, which is already between critical and a historical analysis. This reflection on the “currentness” of the related work, to Foucault, is a draft of what could be called “attitude of modernity”. Foucault (2005), based on this text by Kant, proposes to look at modernity as an attitude:

[...] By attitude, I mean a way of relationship concerning currentness; a volunteer choice that is made by some; all in all, a way to think and to feel, also a way to act and conduct that, all at the same time, marks a pertinence and presents itself as a task (Foucault, 2005, p. 342).

The attitude of modernity takes the high value present has, but without dismissing itself from imagining it differently from what is, transforming it without destroying it, but rather capturing it. “Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a freedom that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (Foucault, 2005, p. 344).

However, another one of the characteristics of modernity, which goes beyond the relationship with the present, is the relationship with itself. “Being modern is not accepting oneself as they are in the flow of moments that pass; it is to turn oneself the object of a complex and harsh elaboration” (Foucault, 2005, p. 344). This volunteer attitude of modernity requires, as Foucault says (2005, p. 344), an indispensable ascetism.

[...] The modern man, to Baudelaire, is not the one who sets off to discover himself, his secrets and hidden truth; he is the one who tries to reinvent himself. Such modernity does not free man in his own being; it imposes him the task of elaborating himself.

If we think about the historical path of educators of deaf people *only* as interpreters in churches or even in specific associations with practices towards Christianity, in which family relationships have always been present, or even when non-family members are sympathizers of the deaf cause because of a call from God for some special mission, one cannot turn their back on the possibility of subjectification these professionals from these elements that conducts them to the search for a political and moral cause of defending deaf people.

If before the role of these individuals in their community was to conduct deaf individuals from the “dark side” of the silent world to the light of the “hearing” world, a kind of exercise of pastoral power was applied on such subject. The conduct is understood “[...] as indeed, the activity that consists of conducting, the conduction, [...] but it is also the way through which one allows himself/herself to be conducted, the way through which it is conducted and how, after all, it behaves under the effect of a conduct [...]” (Foucault, 2008, p. 255).

Nonetheless, the set of specific knowledge on sign languages and consequently on the education of deaf people has required a different posture from this *family member/Christian individual* from the challenge of being included in the order to specific intellectuals.

When the teachers for deaf students take over that direction, they are capable of conducting themselves differently, from an exercise of attitude of modernity. They also do not assume training only as the acquisition of specific knowledge of a field. Formation is introduced when, by thinking about themselves, they take another attitude before the constitution of a bilingual education.

[...] Nowadays I consider myself a reasonable professional, but I do not despise or feel ashamed of my professional past; I do not disdain it. I quit being radical and started being reasonable, I look for balance in different directions and that is why I am here trying to listen, to generate a new moment in my life and in the education of deaf people (Teacher Rosana).

[...] Deafness and I have always walked side by side, as I have two deaf brothers, and this brother-sister relationship may have given me a different look

on deafness, even though my mother reinforced situations such as, “Do not make signs to your brothers, they can speak, you have to talk to them. [...] Nowadays I am working in the following capacities: bilingual teacher and pedagogue supervising the bilingual classroom; that is, I am contaminated with this militancy for a more dignified education for deaf students and to follow the policies that have been proposed. And with each day I feel more involved and committed to this work (Teacher Janaína).

From the displacement from a relationship towards Christianity to assuming the technical and ethical place in the exercise of a teacher’s role, the conceptions on bilingual education are being constituted in other ways, and the struggles of deaf individuals take on a critical posture in the discussion of the present.

## Final Considerations

Throughout this text, it is possible to notice that the training of teachers for deaf students is intrinsically related to the constitution of the concept of bilingual education, and that both one (training) as the other (bilingual education) are conceptually juxtaposed.

Also throughout the text, it could be noticed that the discourse constitution of deafness subjectifies the practices of teachers, who are constituted as these professionals from different directions. The modern constitution of deafness, in an anthropological perspective, brings other implications in the training of these teachers, as sign language gains another proportion legally.

If dealing with another knowledge or with another way to be a teacher for deaf students requires another responsibility with this group, assuming the posture of a specific intellectual in fulfilling one’s role starts being an attitude and a great challenge. After all, even those who are somehow involved with deaf people according to different experiences are called to take over this place.

Thus, we agree with Masschelein and Simons (2014) about the need of a *poor pedagogy* that

[...] does not require a rich methodology, but implies a poor pedagogy that can help us to be aware and provides us with the practice of an ethos or attitude, instead of the rules of a profession, the standards of codes from an institution, the laws of a kingdom [...] (Masschelein; Simons, 2014, p. 49).

A poor pedagogy, in these authors’ terms, invites one to wander the world, to expose themselves, and produces means for the experience (instead of justifications or explanations for it). In summary, it creates means for one to be aware.

To think, in these terms, of the training space of these teachers does not require looking at the term *teacher training* as something

granted, finished, which can change its contents according to the *pedagogical fad*, and this is the bilingual education for deaf people nowadays. It requires proposing the training of these teachers as something productive in an individual's formative sense which, coupled with the experience produced, is capable of leading to one's own transformation, to the transformation of the other and the very concept of bilingual education. All in all, training and transformation walk side by side. Training, in the perspective this article takes, is related to occupying with oneself; that is, an attitude of attention, of being aware of oneself (Masschelein; Simons, 2014). After all, when the teachers tell how they got their starts, the directions their lives take become clear from the distinct training paths that shed light on different experiences that, finally, constitute different concepts of bilingual education for deaf people.

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## Notes

- 1 According to Harlan Lane (1992), *audism* is a term created by Tom Humphries in 1977. In Brazil, *audism* was translated by Carlos Skliar (1998) as *ouvinismo*. Considering the resignifications assigned in translation, both terms are used to make reference to the normalizing practices which assume hearing as principle of normality. Lopes (2007) claims that, when using *audism* instead of *ouvinismo*, her intention is to displace responsibilities from the one who hears to think the production of normality – being this defined from the hearing norm. Beyond the listener (to which the term *ouvinismo* can take), the use of *audism* fosters the displacement from the one who hears the stories of negative discrimination against deaf subjects.
- 2 By Ariadne's thread we want to mark the possibility of walk through different groups, labyrinths that take to different questions.
- 3 Teaching of the oral language in the country without the use of sign language.
- 4 The dogmatic truth is illustrated by Foucault in history in the play Oedipus King, by Sophocles. There, Foucault explains the dogmatic truth as the one that will likely never be questioned, which comes in a strong way. Despite that, Laius's (the king) servant brings a truth from experience; the one that goes, "I saw it, so I can tell".
- 5 Kant's answer to German periodical *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, published in December 1784.

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