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Deaf Education Beyond the Western World: Context, Challenges, and Prospects

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Deaf Education in Brazil: Contexts, Challenges, and Perspectives

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Abstract and Keywords

Changes in the past two decades have improved the position of the deaf in Brazil: Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is an officially recognized language, deaf children can go to school, and bilingual education is available to deaf students. However, many deaf children do not attend school, and enrollment rates in high school and higher education are low. Moreover, the language policy views of the Brazilian deaf movement and the Brazilian Ministry of Education do not align. The deaf movement pleads for bilingual deaf schools, whereas the Brazilian government follows an inclusion policy. This chapter presents an overview of the position of the deaf in Brazil and their participation in education, considering national deaf policy and its implications for and impact on deaf education. Teaching practices in bilingual education are discussed, and recommendations and challenges for Brazilian deaf education are considered.

Keywords: Brazil, deaf education, bilingual education, Libras, inclusion

Historically, deaf schools have been the cradle of the constitution of Deaf culture and sign languages in Brazil. Deaf schools have strengthened Deaf communities and have promoted deaf leaders' development. This central role of deaf schools is mentioned by Gerner de García and Karnopp (2016, p. 1) as well, when referring to the foundation of the first deaf school in Brazil, which can be considered a milestone in Brazilian deaf history.

A French deaf educator, E. Huet, initiated the establishment of the first deaf school in Brazil, the second in South America. He presented a report to Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil, which resulted in Law 839 in 1857. This law established the Institute Imperial dos Sordos-Mudos (Imperial Institute of the Deaf and Dumb [IISM]) in Rio de Janeiro. The school offered basic literacy instruction and vocational education for boys aged 7 to 14 (Soares, 1999). The purpose of the IISM was to provide deaf boys with training that would result in gainful employment. The institute was founded at a time when the royal court was extending education throughout Brazil in order to unify the national language (Portuguese), propagate the Catholic faith, and teach reading and writing (Pinto, 2007).

A second milestone in Brazilian deaf education occurred in the 1990s. By that time, new perspectives on deaf education were being initiated by research, mainly in the fields of linguistics and education. Concrete changes occurred after the introduction of new legislation, the implementation of educational policies, and struggles of Deaf communities' political movements to confer and retain their rights. In essence, the deaf requested equal rights and good education. They demanded the recognition of Deaf culture and sign language (Libras), the acknowledgment of visual experience, the availability of translators and interpreters, the use of new technologies, the formation of Deaf communities, and the integration of deaf people in hearing society. This all led to a broadened **(p.344)** discussion on bilingual education of the deaf, and new educational proposals and initiatives were implemented and monitored.

This chapter discusses deaf education in Brazil and focuses on the developments that have occurred in the past two decades. Developments in related fields, such as discussions concerning bilingual education and the position of sign language and the Brazilian deaf movement, are included as well to offer the bigger picture. The first section presents a general overview of the position of the deaf in Brazil, focusing on their participation in education. In addition, particular attention will be given to deaf education in one Brazilian state: Rio Grande do Sul. The second section concerns national deaf policy and its implications for and impact on deaf education. The third section discusses teaching practices in bilingual education, both at the national level and in Rio Grande do Sul. Our chapter concludes with recommendations and challenges for Brazilian deaf education.

The Position of the Deaf in Brazil: Healthcare Facilities and Education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes sign language and states that everyone has the right to have access to it. The Convention promulgates the acceptance of and respect for linguistic and cultural identity, bilingual education, the provision of sign language interpreters, and accessibility technology, according to Hualand and Allen (2009). Their report “Deaf People and Human Rights” (Hualand & Allen, 2009) shows that relatively few countries deny the deaf equal access to education, public services, or the acquisition of citizenship. However, the lack of recognition of sign language, the weak position of bilingual education, the limited availability of translation and interpretation services, and widespread misinformation about deaf people and deafness deprive the deaf of access to cultural goods and various services and sectors of society.

One example showing the challenges Brazil faces concerns newborn auditory screening. For its implementation, Brazil has the Triagem Auditiva Neonatal (TAN, Neonatal Auditory Screening), which was proposed by the Joint Committee on Infant Hearing in 2007 and the Directives of Attention to Neonatal Hearing Screening (Brazil, 2012). TAN is intended for all children and covers the integral care of the auditory function: (1) screening procedures performed in the maternity ward; (2) monitoring of the development of the hearing function of infants by primary care teams, especially for those presenting risk indicators for hearing loss; (3) audiological diagnosis, hearing aid adaptation, rehabilitation, guidance, and support to families, performed by speech therapists in specialized rehabilitation centers or hearing health services.

(p.345) The first TAN screening takes place preferably after the first 48 hours of the baby’s life and can be performed during the first 3 months of life. For neonates without risk indicators for hearing impairment, the most commonly used test is the evoked otoacoustic emission test (EOE), which consists of a wide-spectrum sound of a click and covers frequencies from 800 to 4,000 Hz, thus stimulating the entire cochlea. The test is considered fast, easy to use, and noninvasive. When a child fails the TAN test, one of the specialized rehabilitation centers or high-complexity auditory health services should be consulted to diagnose the type and degree of hearing loss.

In newborns with risk factors for hearing impairment, the auditory evoked potential of the brain trunk (PEATE) is generally used, since the EOE tends to classify irregularities as nonidentifiable retrocochlear hearing loss and is therefore unspecific. The PEATE is an electrophysiological examination that obtains information about the functioning of the auditory system up to the brainstem portion without the active participation of the subject.

Despite the relevance of an early diagnosis for communication development, the availability of neonatal hearing screening is limited in Brazil. Cavalcanti et al. (2014) stated that there were 267 hearing screening services in thirty cities and thirteen Brazilian states. This means that TAN services screen approximately 10% of neonates in the country. At present, the hearing screening services are only available in regions where there are hospitals and professionals who carry out such evaluations. These numbers show that the newborn hearing screening remains a challenge for Brazil, especially because the socioeconomic situation and resources vary considerably across the different regions.

In Brazil, the Unified Health System has provided a unilateral cochlear implant service since 1999. This service is available free of charge, and demand for implants has been increasing: 2,800 people were implanted up until 2012, and 644 surgeries were performed in 2012 alone (Brazil, 2013).

In spite of the abovementioned challenges regarding neonatal hearing screening and cochlear implants, considerable achievements have been made in Brazil. Sign language was recognized as an official language in Brazil in 2002. The Brazilian deaf movement, which consists mainly of deaf people (Brito, 1986) and emerged in the 1980s (in a period of general re-democratization after military dictatorship), played a decisive role in the recognition of Libras by the official authorities and Brazilian people in general. Events and marches were held and petitions for a nationwide recognition of Libras were sent to public authorities. At the same time, the deaf movement was involved in a profitable interaction with a group of academics, mainly linguists and pedagogues, which initiated a discourse that has affirmed the linguistic status of Libras and the recognition of deaf people as a linguistic **(p.346)** minority. Both issues were decisive for the deaf movement to support federal law No. 10,436/2002,¹ which recognizes Libras as a national language and as a legal means of expression and communication of Deaf communities in Brazil.

Another achievement is that deaf people can go to school. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010), Brazil has 4.6 million hard-of-hearing and 1.1 million deaf individuals. A total of 74,547 deaf students are enrolled in basic education, according to the National Institute of Pedagogical Studies Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2012).

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this INEP report. First, school enrollment numbers differ between the available school levels (Table 18.1). The largest number of deaf students is found in elementary schools. A relatively low number of students are enrolled in high school and in professional education compared to the total number of deaf students. On the other hand, an increasing number of deaf students have enrolled in Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA), programs for young adolescents and adults who were not able to finish basic education when they were younger (the schools they attended in their childhood could not provide suitable education, or they did not go to school at all). EJA can be considered “second chance” education for these students. It provides educational opportunities that match these learners’ characteristics, interests, and living and working conditions. Through courses and exams, EJA prepares these students to take elementary- and high school-level exams. By aiming at integral formation and literacy proficiency and adopting the idea of lifelong learning, EJA is guided by inclusion and social equality. Its pedagogical model is based on the National Curricular Guidelines.²

Table 18.1. School Attendance of Deaf Learners in Brazil

School level	Number of Students
Infant education	4,485
Elementary education	51,330
EJA	9,611
High school	8,751
Professional education	370
Total	74,547

Source: INEP, 2012.

Second, comparing the number of Brazilian deaf people and the number of school enrollments of deaf learners reveals that relatively few Brazilian deaf children go to school. What type of education best suits deaf learners is much debated in Brazil (see the section on policy). The Brazilian Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação e Cultura **(p.347)** [MEC]) promotes inclusive education and considers regular schools to be the best place for the education of deaf learners. In regular schools, deaf students follow the same curriculum as their hearing classmates. The teachers are monolingual (i.e., they speak Portuguese); linguistic support comes from interpreters who are available for a restricted number of hours per week. Few teachers have undertaken specialized teacher training concerning deaf students and Libras. The MEC intended to close the National Institute of Education for the Deaf in 2011, which provoked a protest march in the capital, Brasília. This protest demanded the maintenance of this institute, the right to bilingual education, and the retention of the institute as the main stakeholder for deaf education (Perlin & Rezende, 2016).

Contrary to the MEC's perspective, the deaf movement believes that deaf people should be taught in specialized, bilingual schools for the deaf (Thoma, 2016). In these schools, deaf students follow the regular national school curriculum but in classes with deaf peers. Teachers are generally bilingual and must have finished undergraduate or specialized courses on deafness. In addition, teachers participate in in-service teacher training, regularly attending courses and meetings regarding this special-needs group. Deaf schools generally offer sign language courses for parents and family members to promote communication between deaf and hearing family members. Schools also provide parental care before children enter school. This includes workshops and professionals monitoring the process of deaf children adapting to school.

These specialized institutions would enable the formation of a linguistic and cultural community, which in turn would foster the process of language acquisition and development, provide a tailor-made curriculum, work with bilingual teachers, and adopt educational concepts aiming at the construction of a cultural identity. Studies such as the one by Karnopp and Lopes (2014) confirm such positive effects on the students' educational and pedagogical experiences in bilingual schools. However, no quantitative data are available on student outcomes, dropout rates, and employment, which would probably fuel the actual debate on deaf education in Brazil.

A positive position toward bilingual education is affirmed in the report on the Linguistic Policy of Bilingual Education—Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language (MEC, 2014), which presents guidelines for deaf education and constitutes an important document for the field. This report, prepared by representatives of the deaf movement in Brazil and by researchers and specialists in the area of deaf education, argues that bilingual education for the deaf is not compatible with the services offered by special education, to which it has been linked historically. The document also states the basic policy for the schooling of deaf learners urgently needs a revision. The dissociation **(p.348)** of schooling for deaf learners from special education is crucial “for a new formal and public educational architecture to be consolidated in the perspective of bilingual education of the deaf” (MEC, 2014, p. 3) [translation CdAF].

Information about deaf education at the state level is available through research performed by local institutions. Lopes (2012), for instance, pointed out that research by the Interinstitutional Research Group on Deaf Education (GIPES) identified 248 public and private schools that have deaf students, spread over seventy-six municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Karnopp, Pokorski, and Millette (2016) investigated formal education of the deaf and the linguistic and educational conditions in basic education for deaf students in state, municipal, and private schools in Rio Grande do Sul, on the basis of Lopes (2009). This study is organized in two phases. The first phase consists of a quantitative analysis of deaf students’ enrollment at different levels of basic education, based on information provided by municipal and state departments of education and education coordinators. Karnopp et al. (2016) observed that 2,559 deaf students were enrolled in school: 1,583 (62%) in elementary education, 417 (16%) in high school, 250 (10%) in EJA, 226 (9%) in infant education, and 83 (3%) students without a school level identification. These numbers show an imbalance between deaf students enrolled in elementary education and deaf students who continue their studies in high school, similar to the quantitative difference mentioned earlier on the basis of INEP (2012). In other words, both at the national and at the state level, there were relatively few deaf students in high school. In reflecting on this, Lopes (2012) attributed this school dropout by deaf students before starting high school mainly to the lack of communication between hearing teachers and deaf students in inclusive schools.

In the second phase of the research by Karnopp et al. (2016), three questionnaires concerning linguistic and general schooling conditions in schools with deaf students were distributed among school administrators, teachers, and students. The study included 445 students and 86 teachers at 30 schools, including both bilingual and inclusion schools. In each school, the principal also filled out a questionnaire.

The researchers found that bilingual schools foster linguistic identity through their language policy and questioned the effectiveness of inclusive education for deaf students under the given, inappropriate conditions. The researchers tended to attribute the large number of transfers to deaf schools and school dropouts in inclusive schools to these unfavorable conditions. When the researchers asked about transfers to deaf schools, more than 80% of the deaf students (356/445) said that they had at least one transfer during their school life; the reasons were mainly the absence of Libras and deaf partners in school (Karnopp et al., 2016, p. 98). These researchers' findings confirmed the **(p.349)** conclusions of Lopes (2012) about deaf students' mobility. In essence, these students were seeking the best place for suitable educational experiences and one that allowed them to belong to a certain language and school community. Karnopp et al. (2016) showed that such conditions were met in bilingual schools. In summary, these studies provide empirical support for bilingual education and argue that bilingual schools constitute a learning environment that fosters the social, psychological, and linguistic development of deaf students.

Quiles (2015) presented an overview of education for deaf and hard-of-hearing students from 2007 to 2010 in the central-west region of Brazil and in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, based on INEP (2007–2010). The results showed an increasing number of deaf students in regular education, which Quiles attributed to Brazilian educational policy (i.e., promoting inclusive education for deaf students). Similar to Karnopp et al. (2016), Quiles (2015) questioned the inclusion conditions for the deaf and hard-of-hearing students and defended bilingual education, which respects the linguistic individual differences among deaf students. In so doing, she criticized the Brazilian central educational policy.

Other studies that have investigated deaf education at the state level in Brazil include those by Fernandes (2006), Lodi and Lacerda (2009), Pereira (2007, 2011), Lodi (2013), Lacerda, Albres, and Drago (2013), and Lacerda (2016). The interested reader is referred to these individual studies.

At Brazilian universities, accessibility programs have been launched to guarantee access to higher education for people with disabilities. INEP (2012) reports that 5,660 students with disabilities are enrolled in different courses: 1,582 deaf students, 4,078 hard-of-hearing students, and 148 deafblind students. Santana (2016) investigated the integration of deaf students in higher education. Six deaf students, three of them from the Letras-Libras courses,³ and six university professors participated in this study. Interviews showed that generally unfavorable factors include the teachers' lack of pedagogical skills, difficulties in reading and writing academic texts, and the lack of Libras interpreters during classes. Students in the Letras-Libras courses were an exception: their classes and assessments are conducted in Libras, guaranteeing access to sign language in class. Nevertheless, these students also indicated difficulties in reading and writing texts in Portuguese and reported that the teachers do not display the skills necessary when working with deaf students.

Deaf Education Policy and Its Effects

After the recognition and positioning of Libras in Decree 5,626/2005, the MEC, through the Department for Continuing Education, Literacy, **(p.350)** Diversity, and Inclusion initiated a new policy on deaf education in 2008. In formulating this National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education, the MEC followed a worldwide trend of student inclusion in regular schools. As a result, regular schools have started offering special services for deaf students, such as providing interpreters of Libras and Portuguese and teaching Libras to hearing students.

Lodi (2013, p. 50) discussed the disparity between Decree 5,626/2005 and the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education. On the one hand, government policy advocates the inclusion of deaf students in the regular school system. In essence, national policy reduces bilingual education to the presence of two languages within the school, without taking into account that both Libras and Portuguese have their own role and relevance for the deaf users. This policy thereby retains the hegemony of Portuguese in the educational process. In so doing, it limits the transformation proposed for deaf education to the discursive level, restricts real inclusion in school, and prevents an extension of the concept of bilingual education to all social spheres. On the other hand, considering the sociolinguistic characteristics of the deaf and referring to Decree 5,626/2005, Deaf communities and researchers in the field argue that deaf education is a specific field of knowledge, distancing it from special education. Decree 5,626/2005 regards bilingual education as a social issue that involves Libras and Portuguese, including the cultural aspects provided by each language. According to Lodi (2013), this discrepancy between the two documents concerning the conceptualization of bilingual and inclusive education has fueled old tensions and has created a barrier to dialogues between the proponents of the Special Education Policy and those of Decree 5,626/2005.

The report of representatives of the deaf movement, researchers, and specialists in deaf education (MEC, 2014) considers bilingual schools as places where Libras is the language of instruction and where Portuguese is regarded a second language that must be learned in the written mode. In such a context, the acquisition of Libras has highest priority. The group therefore proposes the installation of architectural spaces suitable for the performance of bilingual teachers, without the mediation of interpreters in the teacher-student relationship and without the use of signed Portuguese. Such a situation creates “bimodal bilinguals”—people who use a sign language and a spoken language. (Importantly, “bimodal” is not be interpreted as sign-supported Portuguese but refers to using two languages that present themselves in different modalities.) Lucas and Valli (1992) analyzed interactions with bimodal bilingual adults and noted that the American deaf people mixed spoken English words with signs and produced mixtures of languages in interactions with bilingual listeners. They observed word (p.351) productions of the spoken language being articulated simultaneously with the production in signs. This code-blending—the simultaneous production of aspects of a message in both speech and sign—is a new bilingual phenomenon (Lillo-Martin, Quadros, & Pichler, 2016).

In 2015, new national legislation affirmed the relevance of bilingual education. The Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Law 13,146/2015) promotes bilingual education for the deaf and charges school authorities with the task of ensuring bilingual education in bilingual schools, bilingual classes, and inclusive schools alike. The intended form of bilingual education is outlined in Art. 28. IV: “It is entrusted upon the public authorities to ensure, create, develop, implement, encourage, monitor and evaluate [bilingual education and to] offer bilingual education, in Libras as the first language and in the written form of Portuguese as a second language, in schools and bilingual classes and in inclusive schools.” [translation CdAF]

The above statements indicate that the position of deaf people, including their education, has improved in recent years. First, laws and decrees have strengthened their legal position. These include the recognition of Libras (Law 10,436/2002, regulated by Decree 5,626/2005), the right of the deaf and their families to decide upon the school type they consider most appropriate in their situation, the right to have professional interpreters, and the right to have qualified bilingual teachers in school from kindergarten to higher education. Related to the last issue is the obligation of universities to introduce Libras as a discipline in all teaching education programs and to support training activities for bilingual Libras-Portuguese teachers in basic education (MEC, 2014).

Second, the level of education among deaf has increased and so has their influence. Deaf people are being educated in different courses in Brazilian universities and participate actively in Brazilian society. Vieira-Machado and Lopes (2016) listed the following achievements: Deaf individuals take part in public service admission competitions, they teach their language to those interested in learning it, they advise researchers who are beginning their academic lives in the universities, they participate actively in the production of literature related to deaf people, they demonstrate in the streets, they make policies, they define educational practices, and they demand qualified interpreters in institutions.

Teaching Practices in Brazilian Bilingual Education

As stated in the previous section, the Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Law 13,146/2015) requires bilingual education that considers Libras and Portuguese as the first and second language of the deaf, respectively. The two languages are very different. First, they are based on different communication modalities—that is, **(p.352)** on visual-gestural and oral-auditory communication, respectively. Second, Libras and Portuguese have their own linguistic characteristics in the domains of phonology, morphology, and syntax (see, e.g., Brito, 1995; Quadros & Karnopp, 2004). These differences pose potential learning challenges for deaf students. Eulália Fernandes (1999, 2003), Pereira (2000, 2005), and Sueli Fernandes (2004, 2006) indicate that the difficulties that deaf students usually encounter in reading and writing do not stem from deafness but from their knowledge of the Portuguese language. They argue that these problems can mainly be ascribed to the education provided to the deaf students. Moreover, they state that when exposed to discursive activities and not to isolated vocabulary and decontextualized phrases, deaf students can become competent readers and writers.

This situation concerning teaching reading and writing to the deaf has been confirmed in several studies. Muck (2009), Muck and Fronza (2008), and Didó (2012) report that writing activities of deaf children in the initial years of elementary school basically involve word copy and memorization of letter order, without reflecting on children's understanding of the information they are dealing with. Additionally, literacy knowledge of deaf students does not seem to be a concern in the teaching of reading and writing since teachers hardly mention the potential of the deaf students regarding Libras and written Portuguese in their descriptive learning evaluation reports, which present learner progression to parents or guardians (Didó, 2012). As Didó (2012, p. 124) pointed out, the analyzed reports reveal “an evaluation system focused on vocabulary, which displays a concern for orthographic norms and which generates artificial, meaningless writing as well as fragmented and meaningless reading” [translation CdAF].

The literature provides various suggestions for good practices in the teaching of reading and writing to deaf students (see e.g., Lacerda, 2016; Lacerda et al. 2013; Lodi, 2013; Lodi & Lacerda, 2009; Pereira, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2011; Sueli Fernandes, 2004, 2006). Since schools should be preparing students for society, the objective of teaching deaf students written Portuguese should be the understanding and production of texts and not of isolated words and phrases, which holds true for both hearing and deaf students. The task of the teacher is to enable deaf students to access the universe of texts that are available in their social context, favoring an educational and linguistic environment focused on reading-writing-translation practices and emphasizing bilingualism (i.e., using Brazilian sign language and Portuguese) (e.g., Chiella, 2015). As a consequence, the students will be able both to learn the system of the language and to extend their literacy knowledge (Pereira, 2007). Therefore, children, hearing and deaf alike, should be exposed to a variety of written materials of different textual genres and types, which **(p.353)** will enable them to formulate their hypotheses on the functioning of written Portuguese (Pereira, 2011).

Examples of concrete teaching practices in a bilingual education context are presented in three recent studies concerning the Brazilian state Rio Grande do Sul. Chiella (2015) investigated bilingual education in the initial grades of elementary school in three public deaf schools in Rio Grande do Sul. The schools visited have low enrollment rates and small classes, in which a few deaf professionals work with deaf students and students with other disabilities that are sometimes related to deafness. Some students use cochlear implants. Chiella (2015) analyzed the school context, which she classified as bilingual, bicultural, and bimodal, through teacher reports, classroom observations, videos, and student output. She observed that the presence of sign language ensures substantial pedagogical practices to provide meaning to the students' education. In these schools, Libras is undoubtedly the important link that enables social encounters and promotes interaction among the deaf. However, despite adopting a bilingual approach, the schools do not implement it in a way that prioritizes the bilingual living conditions. In other words, bilingual teaching in these schools is not entirely based on the linguistic and social characteristics of the deaf and, therefore, cannot be regarded a bilingual educational project. Chiella (2015) stresses the importance of conducting more research and facilitating a dialogue with schools to change and redefine bilingual pedagogical concepts that take into account deaf society, Deaf culture, and Libras. In addition, deaf people must have access to reading and writing Portuguese both inside and outside their schools. This would help to value, discover, and promote the potential of deaf students not only in an educational context, according to Chiella (2015).

Gurgel (2016) studied how literature is taught to deaf students in school. Six teachers in a bilingual school in Rio Grande do Sul were interviewed about their teaching practice and beliefs. They mentioned that they intended to develop the students' proficiency in both Libras and written Portuguese in their classrooms, taking into account the level and needs of their students. Libras and written Portuguese are given different roles and meanings in their teaching: Libras is the students' first language and Portuguese is considered a second language. The curriculum includes literature in both languages, and some texts have deaf protagonists. The teachers adopt the following teaching principles in their literature classes: (1) the importance of reading for pleasure, which arises through literature teaching; (2) the importance of reading images in Libras as a visual experience and the subsequent discovery of reading in Portuguese; (3) the use of two languages of different modalities and meanings to students in the literacy phase (when 6- to 8-year-old children are learning to read and write); and (4) the use of literature for young children, such as fairy tales, in the classroom. **(p.354)** Gurgel (2016) stresses the possibilities of literature in deaf education; for example, as art, as a cultural and linguistic experience, and as a means to become proficient readers. The teacher functions as a mediator in this process.

Müller (2016) investigated discursive practices of teaching Portuguese to deaf students in bilingual schools in Rio Grande do Sul. She visited schools, accessed documents of the institutions, interviewed Portuguese language teachers, and organized conversation workshops with the participating teachers. Müller notes that some of the teachers' attitudes and beliefs are influenced by traditional concepts of language teaching and by ideas from the field of special education. In addition, deaf students continue to be represented as subjects who cannot learn. As Müller (2016) points out, Decree 5,626/2005 has not led to pedagogical changes in deaf schools.

The obstacles and challenges Müller (2016) identified for such changes are mainly linguistic-cultural (related to the use and status of languages in contact), socioeconomic (e.g., family participation and school investments), and political-pedagogical (e.g., the influence of teaching methodologies, the interference of the institutions that economically and administratively support schools, and pedagogical concepts that permeate deaf education and teacher training) in nature. She argued that changes are necessary when relating the failures of deaf students to learn Portuguese to ineffective language teaching. Deaf students in the participating school are eager to learn this language for its relevance in social interaction in Brazilian society but this requires, according to Müller (2016), a bilingual approach to language teaching. More precisely, teaching of written Portuguese should be in addition to and on the basis of the learners' first language (i.e., Libras), taking into account the students' preexisting linguistic knowledge. To realize such teaching, Müller (2016) advocates concrete curricular changes, the production of didactic resources, and a debate including contributions from both bilingual education and language teaching methodology.

To summarize, these studies display somewhat promising local implementations of bilingual education and propose suggestions for improvement.

Recommendations concerning bilingual education will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Challenges and Perspectives

In 2013, the Department for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion initiated a workgroup⁴ that contributed to the Linguistic Policy of Bilingual Education, Brazilian Sign Language, and Portuguese Language defined in 2015. The workgroup's recommendations that are related to the issues in this chapter are summarized here. They concern **(p.355)** both bilingual education in general and the use of languages in this particular teaching context.

Bilingual Education

For the consolidation of bilingual education (Libras-Portuguese), it is fundamental to untie the education of the deaf from the area of special education in order to enhance a new educational and public architecture in educational practices.

Research regarding curriculum organization in deaf schools is needed, which will lead to rethinking the status of Libras and Portuguese and to analyzing what is prioritized in teaching. The curriculum should promote both linguistic and cultural experiences in education. Integration of Deaf culture in bilingual education is essential to promote and enable education of the deaf (see also Lopes & Veiga-Neto, 2006). Bilingual education (Libras-Portuguese) respects the experience of deaf persons and promotes the acquisition of Libras without, however, disregarding the need to learn Portuguese. Therefore, language policy must define and explicate the participation of both languages in school throughout the educational process. In addition, it must confirm the legitimacy and prestige of Libras as the language of communication for the deaf (see also MEC, 2014).

Bilingual education should target the learning of and access to Libras and Deaf culture even before school enrollment. This is in line with Müller's plea that bilingual education must be "(re)invented" (Müller, 2016, p. 238) and the need to invest even more in teacher training, in immersion in sign language before schooling, and in textbooks and resources. Commissions of scientific and technical experts and deaf professionals must participate in and contribute to the production, distribution, and consumption of didactic and informative materials on bilingual education.

The Use of Languages in Deaf Education

In Brazil, bilingual education involves the provision of adequate linguistic environments for the acquisition of Libras and Portuguese as the first language and the second language of deaf children, respectively. According to the studies described in this chapter, Libras must play a prominent role in the education of the deaf children in Brazil, since it is fundamental in the development of identity, allowing students to recognize themselves as deaf citizens and to acquire other languages and writing systems. From this perspective, sign language must be used by relatives of deaf children and professionals involved in education who, in addition to mastering Libras, must be familiar with Deaf culture and history. Without mastery of Libras, access to written Portuguese becomes difficult and sometimes does not occur. At the same time, the relevance of Portuguese should not be underestimated. Bilingual **(p.356)** education must prepare deaf students to use written Portuguese in various social and cultural contexts. The bilingual curriculum and the adopted language teaching methodology must focus on the visual characteristics of the learners' first language and Deaf culture.

Effective bilingual education requires, among other aspects, the training of teachers of Libras and Portuguese, translators, and interpreters (see MEC, 2014, pp. 17–18). These training courses must be provided at a higher level: baccalaureate for translators and interpreters of Libras and Portuguese and undergraduate for teachers of Libras and Portuguese. These courses should be offered as continuing in-service training to experienced professionals who already work in basic and higher education.

Educational evaluation and assessment should take into account Deaf culture and language. Hence, tests and exams must be available in both Libras and Portuguese. Access to education must be guaranteed through selection tests translated into Libras, recorded in electronic means, made available in sign writing, or filmed in Libras and through tests of Portuguese as a second language. Moreover, translators and interpreters of Libras must be present in entrance examination exams, institutional examinations, and other selection processes (see also MEC, 2014, p.18).

Conclusion

Our review of Brazilian deaf education has revealed that the position of deaf students has improved significantly over the past two decades. New legislation in the form of laws and decrees has resulted in the establishment of bilingual education that is in line with the view of the Brazilian deaf movement. Deaf students are being educated in an environment that provides a linguistically and culturally diverse and rich context that prepares them to function in both deaf and hearing society. Recent studies describe sometimes inspiring and challenging local initiatives in bilingual education. They show that present-day deaf education in Brazil would benefit from more research and debate to reach effective intercultural and bilingual teaching, and in so doing, could elevate the education of a vulnerable linguistic and cultural minority in Brazilian society.

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Notes:

(1.) This law was regulated by Federal Decree 5,626/2005, which is a reference for public policy regarding deafness (Brito, 2016).

(2.) For more details, access the website <http://portal.mec.gov.br/expansao-da-rede-federal/323-secretarias-112877938/orgaos-vinculados-82187207/12992-diretrizes-para-a-educacao-basica>

(3.) The Language-Libras course focuses on the language, literature, and culture of the Deaf community of Brazil and other countries. Graduates are qualified to teach Libras for the deaf in elementary and high school, or for deaf and hearing students from elementary to higher education. The Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) created the first Language-Libras course in Brazil in 2006. This course was offered as an e-learning course and aimed at deaf students.

(4.) The work group initiation has been regulated by decrees no. 91/2013 and 1,060/2013.

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