

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18764/2178-2229v33n2e26352>

Echoes of the past: deaf education from the perspectives of Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite in the Report 26th Question

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Abstract: In preparation for the Rio de Janeiro Education Congress, which would be held in 1883, two opinions on deaf education were written. Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite, teachers affiliated with the Imperial Institute for the Deaf-Mute of Brazil, each recorded, from theoretical and practical guidelines, aspects that they considered essential in the recent art of educating the deaf. The objective of this study is to analyze the document 26th Question and reflect on possible impacts of the perspectives of those educators up to the present day. This is documentary research that uses the reports as works from the past that allow for the establishment of a dialogue on pedagogical concepts. Using a Foucauldian approach, the analysis of the discourse seeks elements that contribute to the problematization of an educable ideal for the deaf. Among the results, it is considered that the resumption of such documents points to the complexity of deaf education in Brazil in the context immediately after the Milan Congress (1880); that the popularization of Vieira and Leite's texts exemplify challenges that remain current, such as bilingual education; that the panorama proposed by the reports is a provocative historical source and that there is a fertile field of the history of education in Brazil to be further explored. It is concluded that echoes of the past still resonate in the education of the deaf, challenging educators to reconsider the discourses and regularities to be problematized.

Keywords: 26th Question of the Education Congress; Education of the Deaf; Menezes Vieira; Tobias Leite.

1 Introduction

In recent years in Brazil, there has been a movement to return the history of deaf education, expressed in research output of various graduate programs (Lage, 2019; Souza; Rodrigues, 2021; Vieira-Machado *et al.*, 2024; Silva, 2015). The past, with its written records, offers a fertile ground for investigative forays. Breaking away from a single history, canonized by a series of bibliographies, other possibilities for



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reinterpreting the history of deaf education have enabled access, analysis and problematization of documents that are little known at the national level.

This article aims to analyze the document 26th Question which contains two opinions from professionals involved in the education of deaf people in 19th-century Brazil. The analysis of the document seeks to examine the possible implications of the perspectives of Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite up to the present day. The texts were written for a conference that was never held – the Education Congress, scheduled for 1883. However, the previously submitted papers were compiled and published in 1884, allowing us to learn about the views of those educators who worked directly at the *Instituto de Surdos-Mudos do Brazil* [Brazil's Institute for the Deaf-Mutes], now known as the *Instituto Nacional de Educação de Surdos* (INES) [National Institute for Deaf Education].

After this introduction, which already provides elements of the methodological approach, the article is organized into three complementary sections before the final considerations. We begin with a contextualization that helps to situate the document under analysis within a broader framework, based on a framework of intelligibility that considers the practices in deaf education as influenced by the Enlightenment and Empiricism. In the second section, we examine the biographies of Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite and their pedagogical perspectives. The third section focuses specifically on the 19th-century document, 26th Question. We conclude with considerations that challenge us to continue exploring this legacy in the history of deaf education in Brazil and its echoes in the present day.

From a Foucauldian perspective, our engagement with historical documents - whose spelling has been preserved as in the original - takes the form of an archaeo-genealogy of the present. The document does not present itself as something dead or an artifact from which we will seek evidence to attest to truths. The document reveals itself as something that provokes us and suggests a deeper inquiry into the roots of the perceived problems. Castro (2009) helps us understand this perspective proposed by Foucault:

Archaeology is, more precisely, an analysis of the historical conditions of possibility (of the historical a priori) that made certain statements possible and others not [...]. Therefore, Foucault distinguishes the discursive formation from the unit of analysis [...] from the object of formalization and interpretation. The object maintains that the unity of a set of statements, different in their dispersed form and temperament, is grounded in the fact that they all refer to

one and the same object. Consequently, what allows us to differentiate them is the referent and the correlate (Castro, 2009, p. 177).

Formative rules can be understood as certain “truths” that are repeated or reformulated, revealing an apparent rupture in practice within institutional policies (Foucault, 2011). They do not belong solely to this academic knowledge, or other legitimized field (such as religion through its designations and followers), but rather they permeate and diffuse, forming metastases that extend from medicine through the legal sphere, educational institutions, hospitals, prisons, religious institutions, and families – which, despite their distinct differences, do not alter the core of the institutional principles.

Discursive formation, legitimized in a given era, to a certain extent, subjects a social group to a set of rules. According to Foucault (1998, p. 74), “[...] in the face of local power policies, local reprisals are made [...]”. This is what allows ruptures to be widened, counterpowers to emerge, forms of struggle to be organized, that is, the agency of forces contrary to what is considered “true” (Foucault, 2001). Social regulation also gives rise to its own tensions.

To focus on our objectives, we make use of documentary research (Foucault, 1995), that utilizes opinions as works from the past, enabling us to establish a dialogue on pedagogical conceptions. The documentary research, from a Foucauldian perspective, does not take the source as an absolute truth; rather, we examine the source as a provocation to numerous problematizations.

Gil (2002) points out that the difference between bibliographic research and documentary research lies in the nature of the sources. According to the author, bibliographic research is developed “[...] based on already elaborated material, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles [...]” (Gil, 2022, p. 44) and “[...] documentary research makes use of material that has not yet undergone analytical treatment, or that can still be reworked according to the research objectives” (Gil, 2022, p. 45).

With this in mind, we took the text of the debate on 26th Question and sought out other information that would complement it. We selected research on the works by Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite and on the Education Congress. Regarding the event, we drew upon the work of Therezinha Collichio (1987), the Minutes and

Opinions of the event¹, and the book *Instrução e o império* [Education and the Empire] by Moacyr Primitivo (1937). We consider the importance of bringing together complementary sources in order to better understand the central documents that are the subject of our analysis.

Verônica Souza's thesis on the education of deaf people in Aracaju devotes an entire chapter to Tobias Leite, recognizing his pioneering role in proposing, in the context of Sergipe, the need for education for the deaf. Keila Gonzalez's thesis analyzes the *Manual para os Jardins da Infância* [Manual for Kindergartens] compiled by Menezes Vieira in 1882. Publications by Verônica Souza (2007) and, later, co-authored with Josineide Santana (2013) discussed the education for the deaf in the 19th century and compared them to the practices of the two specialists.

Cássia Sofiato and Lúcia Reily (2011), reflecting on Flausino da Gama, focus on the figure of Tobias Leite and his role in the publication of the *Iconografia dos Signaes dos Surdos-Mudos* [Iconography of Signs for the Deaf-Mutes] in 1875. The same research, in a 2012 article, draw parallels between Flausino's translation and the original French text and comment, once again, on the relevance of Tobias Leite.

Eliane Vieira (2022), in her thesis about Pedagogical Practices in Deaf Education, regarding the influence of the decisions made at the Milan Congress on INES, reflects on Tobias Leite's role as a defender of the education for the deaf and points to Menezes Vieira as a key figure in the translation of Milan in the national context. The publication by Tiago Santos and Mônica Savedra (2024) focuses specifically on the relevance of the work *Compêndio para o Ensino dos surdos-mudos* [Compendium for the Education of the Deaf-Mute], translated by Tobias Leite, highlighting its linguistic, phonological, syntactic and semantic aspects.

The collection of publications allows us to conclude that the 26th Question was not the specific focus of their analyses, prompting us to understand how, in those opinions, Tobias Leite and Menezes Vieira defended their perspectives, likely based on a common desire characteristic of the time: to educate the deaf. We consider it necessary to examine certain aspects of the biographies of these two doctors and their correlation to what they advocate for the deaf. Another issue that indirectly concerns us is the fact that this article proposes to broaden the scope of understanding of

¹ We thank the INES Library team for their location and access.

practices aimed at the deaf, understanding them within an episteme and thereby with their approximations and distances in relation to current pedagogical practices.

2 Echoes of the past: Enlightenment, Empiricism and Deaf education

It is well known that there is an argument that deaf people learn faster and more effectively if sign languages - or simply gestures, as advocated by Abbot Charles-Michel de l'Épée (1712-1789) - are combined with the teacher's speech. It is worth recalling that the Abbot created a sign language system that we now call French sign language and which, in his time, he called methodical signs. His primary goal was for the deaf to be able to read, write and be instructed in religion, demonstrating comprehension of the Bible and classical texts, receiving moral formation and, consequently, achieving salvation – the healing of the soul. Therefore, deafness was understood as an obstacle to accessing the Word, causing the impossibility of confessing sins. Note that in Catholic Christian dogma, the Word is not synonymous only of sacred books, but with Jesus Christ. The education proposed by Abbot l'Épée was opposed by the physician Samuel Heinecke (1727-1790).

Heinecke advocated for sound articulation (speaking) and lip-reading. L'Épée and Heinecke exchanged letters, defending the principles that guided their approaches. Regina Souza (1998) provides a more detailed analysis, from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives, of both positions. For Heinecke, a deaf person should be able to speak and communicate like a hearing person, that is, preferably, like everyone else. Years later, Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) argued that deaf people should attend schools and that teachers should have the assistance of a co-teacher, like any other American citizen.

Regarding studies on which language would be the “most appropriate” for the deaf, it should be remembered here that, as far back as two centuries ago, eminent scientists, such as Graham Bell, in 1883, even while advocating for oralism, recognized that deaf communities could, through sign language, form their own civilized culture and society, according to Itard, as one based solely on speech. Graham Bell was so certain of this in 1883 that he did everything in his power to propose eugenic measures to the U.S government that would prevent the creation of a deaf, sign-language race (Lane, 1989; Souza, 1998).

At the heart of this premise is the notion that a nation belongs to everyone and that everyone identifies with it in a patriotic way. Based on this premise, the government had to ensure that a sovereign nation would have a territory, a common language and its citizens subject to the same rights and duties. This was an effort undertaken by Napoleon Bonaparte when he secured the approval of the Napoleonic Code, which, among other aspects, established consensual marriage and the right to vote for the deaf (Souza, 2021).

The political-philosophical movement that established principles – such as the secular nature of the state and the right of all to an education in their native language – was appropriated by the movement that established the First French Republic, which was strongly guided by Enlightenment ideals. Conceptions of man and society have undergone a profound redefinition and have impacted various social sectors, affecting education and, particularly, that offered to the deaf as a mechanism for correcting deafness.

If the Enlightenment provided one of the foundations for all individuals to be considered “citizens” or “part of the same country”, guaranteeing them legal rights such as the right to vote, another epistemological perspective also supported it, one of a more pedagogical nature: empiricism, which found in Abbot Sicard (1742-1822) and the physician-educator Itard distinct ways of understanding how the deaf should be educated to acquire the same knowledge as their hearing counterparts.

The vision that Abbot Sicard, successor to Abbot l'Épée, at the National Institute for Deaf Youth in Paris, held of the deaf student was Rousseauian: that of the “noble savage” preserved from the vices of society in his natural state. His idea of sign language was no less romantic. He understood it as a pure product of the rational functioning of the senses and representation of themselves. Thus constituted, it was preserved from the “corrosive effects of time” and could become a universal language that would unite “[...] all peoples into one great family [...]” (Sicard, 1803, p. XXII). In a book published in 1803, comparing the acquisition of language and ideas by hearing children with that of deaf children, he stated:

In fact, the first group [hearing people] learn [the language] out of habit, to make themselves understood; the second group [deaf people] learn through analysis. The first group spends a great deal of time uttering words without connecting any idea of them and often continue this habit throughout their lives; The second group use a sign only when they have an idea to express. The first group has only vague notions derived from initial impressions, often

erroneous; the second group are incapable of acquiring any notions from those around them and present themselves to their instructors with a mind that is always new, known as *tabula rasa*, without any mixture of heterogeneous ideas previously communicated. He [the teacher] can conveniently trace in his mind the characters he wishes to imprint upon it [...]. The first ones [hearing people] have little understanding of the correctness or rules of the language they speak, or even of any law of logic. The second ones [the deaf], with their signs, become good grammarians and precise logicians (Sicard, 1803, p. XXII-XXIII, emphasis added).

The empiricists, such as Sicard, strove to thoroughly analyze the functions and capabilities of each human sense and how they might be combined to compensate for a sense that was absent or functioned poorly, for example, the subject's limited possibility to hear. For Sicard, vision could be combined with the motor system, and through them, gestures could be easily analyzed visually. Now, this perspective had already been demonstrated by Abbot l'Épée, less through his methodical signs and much more through the astute observation of one of Sicard's godsons, the young Auguste Bébien, who studied at the National Institute for Deaf Youth in Paris (Bertin, 2019). Furthermore, the physician Jean Itard was also an empiricist, but he started from a different didactic or teaching methodology: his goal was to seek treatment for hearing – through painful experiments (his medical identity) – and to develop an articulatory method where deaf people would learn to speak (assuming the role of educator). Since then, medicine and school education have joined forces in policies for the education of the deaf (Rezende, 2012), stimulating the remaining senses so that the vocals could be transformed into a kind of stringed musical instruments from which the musicality of comprehensible speech could be produced.

However, an event marked a turning point in the history of deaf education. Due to a lack of family resources, Sicard allowed Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien (1789-1939) to study at the school for the deaf. This was a residential school, which allowed Bébien to learn the French sign language of the time during informal moments, outside the confines of the classroom, in the hallways, during games, in informal situations. Analyzing the signs, he proposed a type of writing that he called mimography (Lage; Kelman, 2019). Bébien, after graduating, became a teacher at the school, having extremely important deaf students, due to their erudition, such as Ferdinand Bethier (1803-1886).

Berthier, through his political connections, sensitivity and resources emerged as a central figure in what we now call the deaf movement. During the monarchy,

following the collapse of the first French republic, political discussions were banned. The strategy employed by the French deaf resistance was to hold banquets, where issues such as confronting managers and hearing people who imposed oralism were discussed (Lage; Kelman, 2021). Berthier traveled throughout the country, circulating through European countries seeking deaf leaders, and kept a notebook which he recorded each new deaf school he conquered. His desire was for the group to form a kind of world federation, where the suffering experienced, the struggles won, and the strategies of confrontation would be organized in order to spread throughout the world.

While these two Brazilian educators delved into the issue of deaf education, in Europe, a new concept emerged during this period that would gain prominence relatively quickly, even influencing Brazil in the first decades of the 20th century. Eugenics, a term coined by its founder, Francis Galton (1822-1911), in 1883, meaning “well-born” in Latin, based on the theory of degeneration, was included in the Brazilian Constitution of 1934, and its article 138 (Silva; Souza, 2018).

Reflecting on the relationship between “laws” and “change in social practices”, Souza and Skliar argued that institutional practices tend to maintain the normative pattern and the interpretation of laws tends to maintain them (Skliar; Souza, 2000):

[...] the legal order and its expressions [of each era] – the Constitution, decrees, etc. – are not neutral but reflect and refract tensions between the various human groups within a given society at a particular historical moment. Crystallized in texts, they constitute normalizing tools for human actions. [...] It should be noted here that it is [also] the lack of transparency in language and its symbolic nature that prevents us from understanding equally what we call “reality”; it prevents us from knowing who we really are except through a game of opposing relationships with other alterities. A multiple game, always open, mobile – one that engenders different identities. Alterity thus results from a historical and linguistic production, from the invention of these others who are not, in appearance, ourselves, yet whom we used to be ourselves. This means that a black person can only narrate themselves as black by presupposing the white, yellow, and/or red of the political and symbolic order (Skliar; Souza, 2000, p. 262-264).

In fact, medicine has turned deafness into a field of pathology to be studied and the deaf person into a subject requiring interventions on their body (Rezende, 2012). From Itard's arrival at the Paris Institute, with aggressive experiments aimed at restoring hearing, resulting in the demotion of deaf teachers through countless other instances of epistemicide against the deaf (Rezende, 2022), up to the present day where cochlear implants and rehabilitation are conceived, the deaf body is considered by many to be a territory to be operated on from a clinical perspective that breaks with

the cultural perspective of the deaf community as a linguistic minority. This mechanism brings together: Medicine and Education, fields where formal education for the deaf should take place. An example of this was the resolution of the Paris Congress – Hearing Section, which proposed: “That medical science and pedagogy, doctors and professors of institutes, provide mutual support to continue the studies of improvement to which education may be susceptible” (Lacharrière *et al.*, 2013, p. 204).

Based on the premises above, as long as a significant portion of clinical discourses – both normative and normalizing – about deaf people continue to influence education, it will be very difficult to break away from practices that tend toward corrective or rehabilitative measures in inclusive educational policies. The inclusion of *Libras* (Brazilian Sign Language) as a facilitating instrument for deaf people to speak and/or write in Portuguese has the effect of portraying the deaf person as hearing people with disabilities, but Brazilian ones, placing them within the apparent homogeneity of normal societal life. In other words, we are navigating the same sea – the sea of normalization founded on identification, classification, and assessment that sets in motion an articulated machinery of correction, habilitation, and rehabilitation, so that the subject conforms to what is “considered normal for human beings” (Brazil, 1999, Art. 3). The question to be asked is who decides this standard, and against whom.

Since the 1970s, the concept conceived by Itard has been enhanced by medicine and its technologies, seeking to enable the deaf to hear, to activate hearing as a supposed cure. Some might think that such ideas did not carry over into our millennium, but they did. In 2003, Ítalo Carvalho, a physician, published the article “*Hearing Aids*” in the *Scientific Update Journal of the Federal Council of Medicine*. The article states:

Suspicious and sensitive, this is the character [deaf] the doctor faces as he tries to restore what nature has taken away – the sense of hearing, without which truly human contact is impossible. Sympathetic or unsympathetic, this is a person who suffers deeply from such a humiliating condition.

Clinically and surgically, there is nothing I can do; try a hearing aid. This is the only recourse that will perhaps allow you to escape your prison,” the doctor suggests.

Rules for building trust are lacking. Deafness is accompanied by changes in character. The public laughs at the disabled person, who unconsciously lost their acoustic connection with the outside world – what is conventionally called Primitive-Level. Each person has their own pathology; consequently, no hearing aid is universal. The difficulty in fitting a prosthesis does not depend on the percentage and degree of hearing loss but rather on its anatomical

location. It would be presumptuous to propose an "ideal type" prosthetic solution for each category of deafness, as there are multiple types for which the ideal corrections are equally diverse (Carvalho, 2003, n.p.).

The idea that deafness constitutes a disease to be treated is still present in statements such as that of Albernaz (2015, p. 125): "Profound deafness is the most disabling of human conditions, so anything we can do to alleviate it is a great help. That is why, often, patients who have relatively poor results with the implant can feel greatly benefited."

We believe that this historical review sought to address issues related to the methods used for the education of the deaf and their links with dominant perspectives that understood the necessary adaptation of deaf people to the condition of hearing people. Initiatives to make deaf people able to speak considered deafness as something to be corrected. Thus, the entire retrospective carried out becomes relevant to situate ourselves in relation to the object of our study, namely a Brazilian document prepared for the 1883 Education Congress.

This path suggests how much the discussions about the education of deaf people, as experienced in Brazil at that time, are highly intelligible, forming part of a discursive pattern that has spread since the rise of the Modern Age. This understanding breaks with a widely naturalized linearity that credits historical progress without acknowledging the incidences and recurrences of the past in the present:

In studying the history of the emergence of the life sciences, Foucault based his analysis on the notion of episteme, examining certain recurring patterns or a certain confluence in the truths legitimized in a given era. Foucault (1992), the French philosopher, focused on analyzing the ruptures that occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries, which made possible the emergence of what we call scientific thought or practice, with the creation of MAN and LANGUAGE as entities external to man and language themselves. In his study of these ruptures, Foucault elucidates the epistemes, or conceptual structures, of each of the historical substrates he examines. Epistemes that function as dense nuclei of discourses that not only define and relate "words and things" but, consequently, define the objects of knowledge and guide the practices of philosophical or scientific investigation of a given era (Souza, 1998, p. 150).

For Foucault, it is practices that demand legal discourses that legitimize them and that cut across institutions vertically at a given historical moment – intersecting from the family to churches, supported by psychological or clinical knowledge – distinguishing the true from the false (Foucault, 1996). It will be demonstrated that,

anchored in discourse analysis as proposed by Foucault, the text 26th Question which deals with the Education of Deaf-mutes, written by two distinct authors, both physicians, Joaquim Menezes Vieira (1848-1897) and Tobias Rabello Leite (1827-1896), belong to the same discursive formation.

3 Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite: biographies and pedagogical conceptions

Tobias Rabelo Leite was born in Sergipe in 1827 and died in Rio de Janeiro in 1896. His initial concern was to reduce deaths resulting from a lack of knowledge and commitment on the part of government agencies in reducing contamination due to inadequate sanitation. He became a public health specialist, deeply concerned with hygiene aspects. In 1844, he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine of Bahia and then requested a transfer to the Medical Course in Rio de Janeiro. Working at the Military Hospital of Misericórdia, he was the first physician to detect the first case of yellow fever. In the political field, Tobias Leite was a monarchist during the transition of Brazil's regime to a republican system. However, despite his political leanings, he remained widely admired (Souza; Santana, 2013).

In the course of routine administrative duties in 1868, seeking information about the work being done by the Institute for the Deaf-Mutes and failing to find any, Fernando Torres, then Minister of the Empire, appointed him head of the State Secretariat Section to prepare a report on the conditions at the institution. He found that there was no education being provided, but only a house that served as an asylum for the deaf, a situation aggravated by a crisis involving the students:

[...], Director Manoel de Magalhães Couto was dismissed and Dr. Tobias, who was already working at the Institution, took over on an interim basis. This interim period lasted until 1872, when he was appointed permanent director, remaining in the position until his death in 1896 (Rocha, 2018, p. 22).

In addition to implementing a sanitation program at the Institute, where filth was visible, he worked to establish a vocational school so that, upon graduation, deaf students could have the tools to support themselves financially, without relying on the charity of others. He argued that the school's objective was not to produce scholars, but to provide workshops, such as the horticulture workshop he established to teach the stages involved in planting and harvesting crops. In Tobias Leite's view, in a predominantly rural country with subsistence agriculture, it would be important to learn

skills that would allow deaf people to find employment. This was also because many deaf people worked in these fields and, upon completing their training, would return to the economic activities of their region and/or their families who owned small properties. Therefore, in the 26th Question, he will advocate horticulture as the most suitable form of vocational training for deaf people. However, this conviction did not prevent him from implementing vocational workshops at the Institute, which, according to an INES administrative report from 1876, the movement “covered the cost, allowed the accumulation of financial resources for the graduating students who had worked in them and, on several occasions, gave a return to the state treasury”; Tobias Leite stated that this positive result was due “to the abilities of the deaf and the skill of the teachers” (Lage; Silva; Santana, 2023, p. 376).

Tobias Leite (1871) was also concerned with the aspect of communication between deaf people and with their surroundings, which was predominantly hearing and speaking. Furthermore, he was also aware of the fact that a person becomes deaf for different reasons and at different stages of development. Tobias Leite's stance suggests the relevance of communication in the social life of the deaf. Thus, the education of the deaf could not be limited to basic knowledge, needing to reach a depth that would allow deaf people to participate fully in society.

For this reason, he considered two possibilities for language: written and artificial vocal language. According to Tobias Leite:

The preference between these two languages reflects, on a national level, the debate between the two European schools of thought: the German and the French. It is not relevant to present the arguments that have been presented by both sides: it suffices to say that written language is easy for both the congenitally and accidentally deaf-mute, and that artificial articulated language, while possible for the latter, is only exceptionally possible for the former, and always so imperfectly that it is only tolerable out of curiosity (Leite, 1869, p. 5).

Concerned with teacher training, Tobias Leite translated French books and published a call for applications to implement a Normal Course at INES, which did not happen, because “[...] there were no applicants seeking qualification” (Lage; Cruz, 2022, pp. 219-220). Among the translated books, we highlight two. The work of Jean-Jacques Vallade Gabel (Rocha, 2018, p. 47), translated as *Compêndio para o ensino dos mudos* [Compendium for the teaching of the deaf] (1863), of which 500 copies were sent to the provinces of MG, SP, PR, and GO. The book *Iconographie des signes*

faisant partie de l'Enseignement primaire des sourds-muets, published in 1856 by the deaf teacher Pierre Pélissier, whose translation was attributed to Flausino da Gama (Sofiato; Reily, 2011).

Regarding his first work, in *Ao Leitor* [To the Reader] Tobias Leite presents the following argument:

Since there was no book in Portuguese for the education of the deaf and mute, I published in 1871 the Lessons in Written Language, extracted from the *Methode pour enseigner aux surds-muets*, by the venerable Professor J.J. Vallade Gabel.

[...] To better correspond to the particular solicitude that Your Excellency has shown, through various acts, for the education of the deaf and mute, I deemed it appropriate to combine the practical part, which was published in the first two editions under the title *Lições de Linguagem Escripita* - with the theoretical part, which I also published at my own expense in 1874 under the title *Guide for Primary School Teachers*, and I added to it the lessons in arithmetic and metrology from the respective professor of the Institute, thus forming a compendium (Leite, 1881, p. iv).

Having taken a brief look at the life of one of the characters, we move on to Joaquim Menezes Vieira (1848-1897). Born in Maranhão, he moved to the capital in 1868 with the intention of studying medicine, but from an early age revealed a preference for teaching, supporting charitable institutions such as the Association for the Promotion of Education in Rio de Janeiro (Souza; Santana, 2013).

When conducting a bibliographic survey of this author, almost all sources emphasize his commitment to the creation and expansion of kindergartens for children, both at the Menezes Vieira School and in other spaces initially occupied more by the Rio de Janeiro elite, guided by the pedagogical principles of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). Menezes Vieira maintained a school for the deaf for a short period, between 1875 and 1887. In addition, he was a professor of Articulated Language in 1883 at the Imperial Institute for the Deaf-Mutes in Rio de Janeiro, directed by Tobias Leite. While in Europe on official business, the Brazilian professor was asked to study "articulated speech" with a view to assuming that position upon his return to Brazil. His participation in the First International Congress of the Deaf, held in Paris (1889), is recorded. However, Menezes Vieira was dismissed in 1890. The reason:

Tobias Leite and Menezes Vieira disagreed about the best approach to the education of the deaf, which ultimately led to Dr. Menezes Vieira's dismissal from the Institute for the Deaf. One of Menezes Vieira's arguments regarding the oral education of the deaf was that in a country with illiterate people, literacy for the deaf would be of little use (Souza; Santana, 2013, p. 211).

The Intuitive Method emerged in Germany at the end of the 18th century, promoted by Pestalozzi's disciples and was also adopted in Brazil, where it found an advocate in Rui Barbosa. The method valued the use of objects and the engagement of all the senses in the production of ideas, providing a process that moved from the concrete to the abstract.

The philosophical foundations of the intuitive method, inspired by the ideas of Bacon, Locke, and Hume, presupposed that the subject is born as a *tabula rasa* upon which, through sensory experience and the knowledge it awakens (pain, pleasure, justice, comfort, civility, etc.) are composed through the articulation of the senses among themselves. In this context, “[...] language will be, for the Enlightenment thinkers, nothing more than a particular case of representation (and for us, of signification). For them, the senses, and not language, were the source of all knowledge” (Souza, 1998, p. 133).

Having examined the biographies, we will now consider the analysis of the text of the 26th Question in the context of the Education Congress. To that end, we bring to the debate some specific points from the two opinions. We have chosen to highlight how the two opinions suggest tensions uniquely linked to the biographies and pedagogical concepts of the two experts.

4 The tensions surrounding the 26th Question based on two opinions

Throughout the 19th century, congresses in various fields became common events, characterized by the desire to unite national and, preferably, international experts to address what was considered the most advanced developments in their practices and theoretical frameworks. At times, they became forums for consensus, as, generally, at the end, an opinion or deliberations were issued that, within that context, were considered unquestionable until different results could be presented at another event. Congresses were scheduled in conjunction with world expositions, a common practice that sought to disseminate technological and cultural innovations.

It is evident from these events that a call for proposals was issued in advance, as can be seen in the publication of the *Gazeta de Notícias*, from Rio de Janeiro, on December 21st, 1882, announcing the event for June 1883. The program was divided into two main sections: 1st — Primary, secondary, and vocational education; 2nd —

Higher education. Those interested could register to discuss a topic, almost always based on questions also established by the organizing committee.

According to the Minutes and Opinions of the Education Congress, several factors led to the cancellation of the event and its replacement by a Pedagogical Exhibition held in the city of Rio de Janeiro, from July 29th to September 30th. According to Therezinha Collichio (1987, p. 7):

A few days before the opening of the Education Congress, the Conservative Cabinet fell, and the Minister of the Empire, Pedro Leão Velloso, was replaced by Francisco Antunes Maciel, a liberal representative of the Province of Rio Grande do Sul. The newly sworn-in Minister Maciel considered the event inopportune, given the extraordinary expenses it would entail, as the budget allocated by his predecessor was insufficient, and, to the astonishment of the Congress Presidium and the Brazilian and foreign guests, he suspended the event until the Legislature granted the requested funds — which had not yet been legally approved — and authorized the opening of the Congress, which Dom Pedro II would bring forward ahead of the legal deadline.

Prior to the dissolution of the congress, it was decided to publish the Minutes and Opinions. This document was published in 1884, and we have drawn specifically from the section concerning the 26th Question – Education of the Deaf and Mute. Therefore, the opinions of Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite were neither presented orally nor discussed in public, as the focus of the Pedagogical Exhibition lay elsewhere. The opinions differ in format; the first presents a series of reflections, while Tobias Leite attempts to answer each of the questions regarding the education of the deaf.

Menezes Vieira begins by noting that the deaf spent centuries without being recognized as individuals capable of education, it was only in the second half of the 16th century — a relatively recent development — that the approach pioneered by Pedro Ponce de Leon spread to various regions: rehabilitation of deaf people through learning to write. Considering that the deaf person was received “[...] into the communion of speakers and elevated to the level of a true social agent. If this is so, the obligation to develop them, to prepare them, to utilize them for their respective functions, that is, the obligation to educate them, becomes undeniable” (Vieira, 1884, p. 2).

The influence of the Enlightenment is evident when Menezes Vieira (1883) emphasizes Baron de Gérando, an ardent advocate of articulation and speech training, arguing that sign language was impoverished in relation to spoken language:

Since the time when (he says) through a remarkable and essential progress to civilization, our societies acquired the use of alphabetic writing employed exclusively to represent the word, spoken languages became the sole direct means of communication between men and of instruction for each of them, a means to which all others are subordinated" (Vieira, 1884, p. 2).

However, for Menezes Vieira, the education offered at the Institute up to that point generated unproductivity and burdened the country.

It is therefore not an imperial whim to want the education of these fellow compatriots; it is a duty imposed by the national pact, it is the payment of a debt that is all the more sacred the less fortunate the creditor is. The education of the deaf and mute results in the transformation of unproductive and perhaps dangerous labor into instruments of national wealth. It is precisely from an economic standpoint that this issue is viewed in the United States. Calculating what the nation would spend if the deaf-mutes were abandoned and what it could gain, after deducting the expenses for their education, the result is encouraging. In Brazil, the education of deaf-mutes suffers from the systemic flaws of education in general (Vieira, 1884, p. 2).

Menezes Vieira recalls the financial dependence of the School founded by Huet, the institution's takeover by the Empire, and highlights the reform carried out in 1873, when it broke with its charitable focus and embraced its educational mission more resolutely, raising the level of its teachers, establishing vocational education, and beginning to generate its own funds (Vieira, 1884). After praising the administration of Tobias Leite, Menezes Vieira, who had visited institutes for the deaf in several countries, states that the Brazilian institution remained in a backward position by following the 1868 teaching plan of the Paris Institute, which adopted writing as the general form of communication and reserved access to speech for only a few students. Regarding the number of deaf Brazilians, Menezes highlights: a) an ironic questioning — marked by the use of italics — on public funds spending for a few compared to the majority of Brazilians: "Let us see what has been done in the only Institute in Rio de Janeiro in favor of ten thousand deaf-mutes, which statistics so often claim exist throughout the country [...]" (Menezes, 1843, p. 2). b) the establishment of vocational workshops can generate income for the government and improve the teachers' condition.

He then moves on to his argument that it would not be necessary to offer spoken language to all deaf people, a resource spent without return:

To restore a few deaf-mutes to a society of illiterates by teaching them to read and write — what is the point and purpose? It only produces in the country the

displeasure of seeing their precious time wasted, and to give the students a language that few understand. Of the students educated at the Rio de Janeiro Institute, how many still retain written language? Three or four. Why have the others abandoned it? Because, in the society in which they live, few know how to read and write. It is clear, therefore, that the only way to reintegrate the deaf-mutes to society is to give them a language that everyone understands, to give them spoken language, the supreme aspiration of the venerable l'Epée (Vieira, 1884, p. 4).

To the argument that links the impossibility of rehabilitation for the deaf to the nation's illiteracy, Menezes Vieira adds a medical argument recalling the functions of the auditory system and its dispensable nature to learning to speak, since it is based on sight and touch. The reviewer enumerates the advantages of the oral method, acknowledging that it is an arduous but possible task. At this point in the report, Menezes Vieira makes a confession, acknowledging his conversion to the oral method. This stance was also consistent with the practices of presenting memories at 19th-century congresses, where the specialist juxtaposes theoretical questions and presents his practice as a successful experience to be followed:

If the arguments, if the words of a convert like myself are worthless; if you still believe that enlightenment must come to you from old Europe, consult, through the legations, the resources that exist there on this matter. What is not convenient is for us to continue in this state of hesitation, of belief and disbelief at the same time. The lip-reading and articulated speech classes, as was recently inaugurated at the institute in Rio de Janeiro, will produce no serious results. It is just another of our phantasmagorias for show (Vieira, 1884, p. 5).

Menezes points to the indecisiveness regarding the use of the pure oral method recommended at the Milan Congress (1880), which was not immediately adopted uniformly across all countries, as exemplified by Tobias Leite's 1886 report, which highlights the coexistence of methods in the education of the deaf. This experience was also felt by Menezes Vieira, who was a professor of Articulated Language at the Institute, leading him to resign from the institution when, in 1889, it was internally decided that only deaf students who had effectively benefited from articulation would be enrolled in the subjects that taught it (Rocha, 2010). The effects of this decision were detrimental, and the application of the articulatory method was filled with flaws. Finally, Vieira concludes his report by affirming the educability of the deaf, recommending that the State provide them primary education and suggesting a change at the Rio de Janeiro Institute:

The Brazilian institute for the deaf-mutes will fulfill the purpose for which it was founded, educating through spoken word. To ensure that education proceeds more rapidly and effectively, it will be necessary to make it clear: That spoken word can be acquired through sight and touch; That lip reading should be taught from the earliest years (Vieira, 1884, p. 6).

Aware of the potential public impact of a conference, Menezes further suggests: that the ideas he proposes be disseminated by the vicars; that the method used in the institute also be adopted by primary schools; and that primary schools address the first education that the deaf person should receive within the family context (Vieira, 1884). A desire for a movement to expand the pedagogical practice of an institute recognized as a model is noted. Thus, the discussion about the ideal education for the deaf was gaining greater public attention.

Eliane Vieira, reflecting on the pedagogical practices inspired by Milan and their implementation at the Institute for the Deaf and Mute, states that:

Analyzing the trajectory of deaf education implemented at the ISM before and after the Milan Congress (1880), or even during Tobias Leite's administration, I realize that, despite Professor Menezes Vieira's efforts to implementing the discipline of Articulated Language and bringing speech to all deaf-mute students enrolled at the Institute, the oral method was not instituted at that time (Vieira, 2022, p. 174).

Tobias Leite begins his opinion by recalling that the education of the deaf has shifted from a matter of charity to the link between education and employability for the deaf. Given his knowledge of what was being done in other countries, Tobias Leite suggests evaluating the viability of deaf education based on statistical data, pointing to the challenge of obtaining reliable information on the continental size of the country, despite the efforts made with the annual sending of the institute's report to the dioceses where, at that time, there was a greater likelihood of personal data being recorded. The then-director of the Institute for the Deaf-Mutes lists several letters to religious leaders, politicians, and doctors in which the challenges to maintaining the schooling of deaf people at the national level due to a lack of accurate information were noted. He therefore suggests that the first step in considering the education of these individuals in the country would be a reliable census (Leite, 1884).

The director reflects on five questions:

1st question - To what extent should instruction for deaf-mutes be given in Brazil? [...] 2nd question - Which vocational training is most suitable - artistic or agricultural? [...] 3rd question - In which locations should institutions for the education of deaf-mutes be established? [...] 4th question - Should institutes

for the education of deaf-mutes be maintained by the State, the provinces, or the municipalities? [...] 5th question - Since deaf-mute women should not be excluded from the benefits of education, what is the practical way to educate them in institutes, mixed with other deaf-mutes, or in special institutions? (Leite, 1884, p. 3-5).

The reviewer does not inform us of the reasons for formulating these questions. It seems they were not part of a program, as Menezes Vieira does not mention them. After each question, Tobias Leite demonstrates his knowledge of the subject and, in the style of oratory of the time, seeks to present elements contextualizing the Brazilian reality. Thus, he recalls how almost all deaf Brazilians were children of impoverished people from the countryside, farmers, or from the city, laborers; that life in the countryside would be healthier for the deaf; that learning artistic trades almost always led the deaf to exploitation; that the ideal would be for municipalities to take on the education of the deaf, taking into account what was peculiar to each local government and their mutual obligations; he notes the difficulties in envisioning institutes intended for deaf people (Leite, 1884). We are therefore interested in the conclusions of Tobias Leite:

- 1st) That it is essential to compile statistics on the deaf-mute population in Brazil immediately, distinguishing between the two categories – congenital and acquired – and providing as much detail as possible – regarding the former, on the geographical conditions of the localities, the degree of kinship of the parents, and their occupations; regarding the latter, the nature of the accidents and the age at which deaf-mutism manifested itself.
- 2nd) That the education of deaf-mutes should be limited to primary education.
- 3rd) That agricultural education should be preferred for their vocational training.
- 4th) That the Court Institute should be maintained for the education of deaf-mutes from the provinces of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo, and should train teachers for the institutes that would be opened in the provinces.
- 5th) That the education of deaf-mutes should be a municipal responsibility, assisted by the State and the provinces.
- 6th) That the education of deaf-mute girls, since it cannot be given in boarding schools at this time, should be facilitated by the dissemination of elementary books and by their admission to girls' schools (Leite, 1884, p. 6).

The hygienist's medical perspective appears immediately in suggesting that a useful census should consider classifying deaf people into two groups: congenital and acquired. He adds to this the concern about the causes of deafness, both external and genetic factors. This understanding of the rehabilitation of the deaf through education, based on stages or levels of deafness, found support in the literature of the time and

was part of the debate about whether or not to use the pure oral method for some deaf people. This debate was also present among deaf leaders in Europe, pointing to a necessary characterization of the deaf person with regard to choosing the best educational method. This discussion was present at congresses organized by the deaf community at the end of the 19th century (Rodrigues, 2023).

In an agricultural country where illiteracy was widespread, as we have seen, Tobias Leite believed that the education of the deaf should be limited to primary school and be professionally oriented towards agriculture. Regarding subsidies, Tobias Leite envisioned the Institute, located in Rio de Janeiro, as intended to serve that state and Espírito Santo; therefore, he suggested the training of professionals and the expansion of deaf education in other institutes to be founded. In this sense, the Teacher Training Course was developed and announced, but it never took place because it did not attract any interested parties. Finally, he restricted the education of the deaf to access to elementary textbooks for admission to specific schools.

Tobias Leite, therefore, did not advocate for the purely oral method, as he considered it important to adopt more than one method, according to the needs of the deaf person. Furthermore, he considered it relevant that educators of the deaf could learn through interaction with deaf students. Within the perspective of the time and for that specific event, Tobias Leite did not envision the education of deaf people as a process that could extend to levels beyond the elementary one.

It is also worth noting that, with regard to methods, in *Salva-Guarda do Surdo-Mudo Brasileiro* (A Guide for the Deaf-Mutes in Brazil), a German work translated and published by Tobias Leite in 1876, we find that communication with the deaf could be written, oral, or through signs (Leite, 1876). The footnote accompanying this statement is particularly thought-provoking:

Writing is the best and most general means of communicating with the deaf and mute. The few who manage to learn spoken language avoid using it whenever possible, due to the effort required and the embarrassment caused by the unpleasant sensation it inevitably produces in their guttural voices. The Germans do not think this way: they consider spoken language as the goal of the education of the deaf-mute, and in accordance with this conviction they will write the little book of which this is an imitation. We, and with us the Americans and English, who do not have the reasons on which the Germans base their stance, seek to take advantage of writing and spoken language, since our goal is that the unfortunate deaf-mutes may communicate with their fellow citizens by the means that is most convenient for him (Leite, 1876, p. 11).

The note highlights an appreciation for learning the language in its written form, with no mention of the use of signs at the institute, and the explicit recognition that the classification process had been explicitly in place for nearly a decade. As a document that the deaf person would carry during travels throughout Brazil, the *Salva-guarda* would also function as an element for disseminating the guiding principles of education designed for the deaf.

5 Final Considerations

Questioning the discursive regularities that permeate our lives and tend to normalize certain practices is a thought-provoking and challenging exercise, and archaeo-genealogy offers the possibility of making us reconsider current practices. This article has brought to light a series of pieces of information little known to those working in deaf education, even though the specific material of the *26th Question* has already been the subject of analysis and studies. We consider that our contribution in revisiting a text from Brazil's past constitutes a movement that retrospectively questions the present. Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite remain figures whose lives deserve to be further explored by other studies, and the texts of the opinion of the *Education Congress*, despite their small volume, can serve as a trigger for other reflections that we have not addressed here, such as the right to education, vocational teaching and education, public funding of deaf education, a survey of the population of deaf and deafblind people in Brazil in their different profiles and whether and where they are enrolled in educational networks, and expectations regarding the employability of educated deaf individuals. Threads that allow for many other reflections in this tangled web that is the history of deaf education as a field of inquiry.

We believe that both reviewers share the same perspective, which is the necessary rehabilitation of deaf people for adequate social interaction. Therefore, they share the same discursive formation, although in practice they disagree on what should be prioritized: comprehensive education or speech-only instruction. Both attest to the conditions of subordination experienced by deaf people in Brazil. Tobias Leite recognized the complexity of an education that should involve linguistic peers and the

participation of deaf people in the education of others. Elements of a concern regarding public education are also evident, one that engages more broadly with it.

Although they do not focus on specific issues in the field of health, both Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite seem to be guided by the same discourse that sees the deaf person as a subject to whom, beyond the old charitable practice, it is their responsibility to offer an essential element for their integration into the normality of the nation: mastery of the language. For Menezes Vieira, this would occur through articulation; For Tobias Leite, writing and the understanding of signs were also important.

Explicitly, the congressmen were concerned about the increase and spread of deafness, and therefore, hygiene, in addition to maintaining sanitary cleanliness, would lead to a gradual eradication of one of its effects: the increase in the number of deaf people, considered to be transmitted mainly through heredity.

Based on the two perspectives there appears to be no possibility of breaking away from the prevailing discourse. The deaf person would be destined to a condition of subjectivity, which, according to Menezes Vieira, would allow them, through education, to break free from social isolation; while, according to Tobias Leite, would allow them to acquire means of subsistence and employability. It is necessary to recall here that we are dealing with a Brazil that did not yet have compulsory public education for all, even while attempting to offer education for the deaf and blind. However, Menezes Vieira and Tobias Leite share the same feeling, translated into their pedagogical conceptions regarding deafness, not as a linguistic difference, but as a condition to be corrected, drawing inspiration from the intuitive method. This perspective was also not foreign to the French deaf elite of the late 19th century, despite their strong consideration of the importance of sign language in the education of the deaf. Thus, we see that the professor and the director of the Institute started from the same Enlightenment and empiricist assumptions that considered the necessary civilization of all.

The study of these texts seems to raise certain questions about the present that we do not intend to answer; rather, we hope they will foster further reflection. What philosophical principles have guided our approaches to the education of the deaf? How do we understand this subject theoretically, and how do we address them in our educational practices? Have the advances of recent decades brought about significant

changes in the lives of deaf Brazilians, or only for a small group? Do we continue to repeat exclusionary practices in what we outline as possible bilingual education? How many possibilities for bilingual education does a country like ours, with such a diverse deaf population, need? What methodologies have been practiced in our schools? Do they allow deaf people access to knowledge or only to the written form of the Portuguese language? Do we have updated statistical data to help us work with deaf students who are still illiterate? What perspectives on Youth and Adult Education can we build for deaf people? How have current policies engaged with the deaf community in the countryside of Brazil? And what about deaf women? Do they still remain a group that experiences, more so than deaf men, processes of invisibilization and the impossibility of entering the labor market? What exchanges have we had with practices from other countries regarding what can provide deaf people with a dignified life in a Brazil so marked by inequalities? Do figures like "Menezes Vieiras" and "Tobias Leites" still inhabit our communities, desiring the rehabilitation of the deaf? How does a eugenic ideology still emerge today? How can we conceive of deaf education without rethinking schooling in general?

History does not present itself as a source of answers for our time, nor as a repository to be consulted; however, it allows us to glimpse the deep waters upon which we live, waters that did not form as momentary waves. On the contrary, sometimes what emerges is precisely the deepest part that has inhabited us and materialized in our pedagogical practices. We look to this past to move beyond it, exploring the possibilities that present themselves as escape routes from a tragic repetition of certain discourses. Reading documents from the past on the education of deaf people opens up to us like an immense ocean of powerful reflections.

The fact that the opinions are intended for a general educational event reinforces the importance of reflecting on the education of deaf people from a broader perspective that also takes education in general into account. The desire for the deaf person's integration into society takes on different forms over the years and can, currently, even be expressed in the form of a search for an intervention that generates "deaf people who hear." From the past of the *26th Question*, we also receive the issue concerning the application of public education funds and the mechanisms that still allow the appropriation of a considerable portion of benefits by private initiatives, which tend to reveal a failure of public education. The deaf body remains a territory violated

by a series of pedagogical practices that still consider Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) a language geared towards learning content conceived and organized from the logic of the language predominantly spoken in Brazil.

In short, we haven't moved beyond the epistemology of representation: when it comes to deaf people, we are stuck in the 19th century. The more a deaf person speaks and writes like a hearing person, the more inclusive and invisible they become, and the more they are treated as a medical case, driving an industry of hearing aids and prosthetics that generates billions for business owners. In schools, they are identified by their peers as needing help from professionals linked to specialized educational services – another market segment that opens up and expands more and more (there are not enough translators and interpreters of Libras-Portuguese) and places the responsible teacher in the position of making it work amidst 20, 30, 40 or 60 hearing students.

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Received in december 2025 | Approved in march 2026

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