

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18764/2178-2229v33n2e26423>

## Education of the Deaf in Brazil: educational policies as shapers of deaf life forms

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**Abstract:** This paper proposes a reflection on deaf ways of life in the context of educational policies. Its objective is to investigate how deaf ways of life are standardized at the national level through educational policies. The methodological approach is based on the selection and analysis of a set of national documents, spanning the period from 1994 to 2023, using a qualitative approach grounded in Foucauldian Studies, from which the concept of the matrix of experience is adopted as a theoretical-methodological tool. The findings show that educational policies constitute a surface that brings together: (a) a set of knowledge encompassing conceptions of and disputes over deafness, deaf experience, and the educational pathways designed for the deaf population, predominantly influenced by the fields of Health and Education; (b) the historical record of regulations that have guided and continue to guide the educational processes of deaf people in Brazil; and (c) projections of characteristics, such as identity traits, directed toward deaf subjects shaped within this interplay of tensions among the fields that compete for discursive hegemony over deaf ways of life. The conclusions indicate the recent strengthening of the bilingual emphasis in Deaf Education, both as an approximation to the historical demands of the deaf movement and as a possibility for the emergence of other ways of life, more affectively connected, considering that this model contributes to the construction of a school life experience deeply marked by peer interaction, in contrast to mainstream schools, which frequently reiterate the principles of Special Education.

**Keywords:** deaf ways of life; educational policies; Deaf Education.

### 1 Introduction

*Deafness is a big invention* (Lopes, 2011, p. 7).

Deafness is the object of study of this research, understood as a set of characteristics that make up a specific portion of the population, based on the collective production of traits that mark their way of life, as a “primordial cultural marker” (Lopes, 2011, p. 9, our translation). By understanding it as an invention, inscribed in a matrix of experience that shapes knowledge and norms that guide the processes of subjectivation linked to deafness, we investigate how these issues mark and guide the ways of experiencing deafness, from the field of Brazilian educational policies. The

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research intended to investigate how educational policies normalize deaf ways of life at the national level.

The investigative path involved selecting and analyzing national documents from the last three decades, grounded in a post-critical epistemology and a qualitative approach, theoretically informed by Foucault Studies, from which we chose the concept of experience matrix as a theoretical-methodological tool for the analytical exercises undertaken. For Michel Foucault (2010, p. 5, our translation), the matrix of experience articulates the “[...] forms of possible knowledge, normative matrices of behavior, virtual modes of existence for possible subjects [...]”. These existences are understood as “virtual because [...] they are expressed in our subjectivity and are subject to change [...]. Possible because they are modes that materialize from the relationship between the subjects, or with oneself” (Gianotto, 2021, p. 191, our translation). In this research we try to understand the deaf ways of life from a matrix of experience of the present, which constitutes inclusion as an imperative of the State that, “[...] due to its character of comprehensiveness and imposition on all, [it means] that no one can fail to comply with it, that no institution or public body can decline it” (Lopes; Rech, 2013, p. 212, our translation).

To outline the methodological path that guided us, we understand, with Veiga-Neto (2007, p. 17, our translation), that method “[...] it is a certain form of interrogation and a set of analytical strategies of description”, which, in this research, question what educational policies assume as truth. The analytical surface was organized based on searches across the Federal Government’s websites, the Legislation Portal, and the Ministry of Education (MEC) Portal. The files were selected because they include guidelines for conducting the schooling processes of the deaf in our country during the period between 1994 and 2023. To select the material, we included documents that contained, in their text body, the terms: auditory, signs, signage, Libras, bilingual, interpreter, and *sur*—the latter was used because it enabled locating words such as deaf, and deafness (*surdo*, *surda*, and *surdez* in Portuguese). The terms were chosen based on their explicit identification in the documents, and those that did not mention them were discarded. After screening, the *corpus* of analysis was composed of 14 documents, described in descending order of year of publication, in the following table.

Chart 1 – Research materials

DOCUMENT	YEAR
Law No. 14,768, of December 22, 2023 – defines hearing impairment and establishes a reference value for hearing limitation.	2023
Law No. 14,704, of October 25, 2023 – amends Law No. 12,319, of September 1, 2010, to provide for the professional practice and working conditions of the professional translator, interpreter, and guide-interpreter of the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).	2023
Law No. 14,191, of August 3, 2021 – amends Law No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996 (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education), to provide for the modality of bilingual education for the deaf.	2021
Report on the Linguistic Policy of Bilingual Education – Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language – guiding document.	2014
Special Education in the Perspective of School Inclusion: Bilingual Approach in the Schooling of People with Deafness – guiding document.	2010
National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education.	2008
Early Childhood Education – Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Communication Difficulties and Signaling-Deafness – guiding document.	2006a
Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Developing Competencies to Meet the Special Educational Needs of Deaf Students – guiding document.	2006b
Decree No. 5,626, of December 22, 2005 – regulates Law No. 10.436, of April 24, 2002, which provides for the Brazilian Sign Language - Libras, and article 18 of Law No. 10.098, of December 19, 2000.	2005
Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Strategies for the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs – guiding document.	2003
Law No. 10.436, of April 24, 2002 – provides for the Brazilian Sign Language - Libras and provides for other provisions.	2002
Decree No. 3,298, of December 20, 1999 – regulates Law No. 7.853, of October 24, 1989, provides for the National Policy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, consolidates the protection standards, and provides for other provisions.	1999
Law No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996 – establishes the guidelines and bases of national education.	1996
National Policy on Special Education.	1994

Source: Prepared by the authors

The analysis of the selected material made it possible to organize three central focuses that allow us to show the matrix of inclusive experience in operation. The first of them describes a set of knowledge that brings together conceptions and disputes about deafness, the deaf experience, and the educational paths aimed at the deaf population, influenced, predominantly, by the fields of Health and Education. The second focus is linked to the norms that guide the experience of deafness, based on the historical record of the norms that conducted/conduct the educational processes of the deaf in Brazil. Finally, the third focus is linked to the processes of subjectivation and describes the projections of characteristics, such as identity traits, directed to the subjects conformed in this game of tensions between the fields that dispute the discursive hegemony over deaf forms of life. Each of these focuses will be discussed

in the next sections. The separation into *foci* fulfills a solely organizational purpose, as these elements are mixed and blurred in the argumentative plot. At the end, we present the moorings to end (provisionally) the discussions.

## **2 The knowledge that guides the schooling of the deaf**

In Contemporaneity, inclusion is an imperative that drives education. As a knowledge strongly constituted in this field, inclusion conforms the rules that guide educational policies, producing effects on students' lives and, more broadly, on the subjects who inhabit the Brazilian territory. As described by Lopes and Morgenstern (2014), inclusion as a matrix of experience is taken as a truth of this time, which produces knowledge, normalizes behaviors, and conducts processes of subjectivation that drive everyone's participation in the economic game (Lopes, 2009).

From this understanding, we began to analyze the materials by the oldest document to compose the analysis, the National Policy on Special Education (PNEE in Portuguese), from 1994. The PNEE had national coverage and served as a basis to guide Special Education until 2008, when it was replaced by the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (PNEEPEI). Since 2008, schooling processes in Brazil have taken inclusion as an emphasis—which remains a guiding principle to this day. It is important to note that the strategies for the school inclusion of deaf students were still incipient in the 1990s, and Special Education continued to be strengthened in the schooling processes of people with disabilities in Brazil, determining educational practices in regular schools. In this field, the deaf were understood as people with disabilities, constituting the target audience of their actions.

In the movement that aimed to boost the “[...] instructional integration process, for people with special needs who are able to follow and develop the programmed curricular activities of regular education, *at the same pace as the so-called normal students*” (Brasil, 1994, p. 19, emphasis added, our translation), the PNEE assumed instructional integration as an emphasis, providing disciplinary normalization practices for deafness, based on knowledge from the clinical field, who consider the deaf body as deviant in relation to those students said to be normal. A “[...] The operation of disciplinary normalization consists of trying to make people, gestures, acts, conform to

this model, being normal precisely those who are capable of conforming to this norm and abnormal those who are not capable” (Foucault, 2008, p 75, our translation). In this register, “it is the imperfect body that does not achieve the objectives set by the school, which is incapable and, therefore, abnormal, therefore does not present conditions for schooling” (Gräff; Pieczkowski, 2023, p. 5, our translation).

In this model of education, the failure of students to achieve the goals set by the school is associated with a supposed body imperfection. Those who do not fit the expected standards are considered abnormal or unable to follow the schooling process, reinforcing the idea that only those who approach the standard model are able to learn. These conceptions are basic for educational normalization practices, which, at that time, already classified deaf students based on a hearing measure, between mild/moderate deafness, severe/profound deafness, and hearing impairment—whose focused more strongly on “[...] correction and development of speech and language” (Brasil, 1994, p 14, our translation). The PNEE describes the “improvement of the teaching of the Portuguese language to the deaf in oral and written forms, through its own methodology” (Brasil, 1994, p. 52, our translation) as one of its objectives. This approach makes it clear that, in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the education of the deaf still took oralization as an objective and as a means. To this end, the document provides for the “offer of [...] collective sound amplification devices for the deaf” (Brasil, 1994, p. 50, our translation). These elements describe a field of knowledge that invests in body correction practices, taking clinical classification as the basis for supporting school processes. For Lopes (2011, p. 9), the intersection of a group of *experts*, strongly influenced by the clinic, created an atmosphere that began to guide the understanding of the deaf “[...] as capable of being ‘treated’, ‘corrected’ and ‘normalized’ through therapies, orofacial training, prosthetics, cochlear implants and other advanced technologies that seek, through the cyborgization of the body, the condition of normality” (our translation).

Even assuming a focus clearly prone to an oral approach, the PNEE emphasizes the “exercise of the right to choose the philosophies of education for the deaf” (Brasil, 1994, p. 51, our translation), which includes approaches between oralism, total communication, and bilingualism—which was beginning to constitute a

possible emphasis for the Education of the Deaf, at that time. We can identify the effects of these philosophies in the document of the Ministry of Education (MEC), entitled *Special Education in the Perspective of School Inclusion: Bilingual Approach in the Schooling of People with Deafness*, published in 2010:

The two approaches—oralist and total communication—triggered a process that did not favor the full development of people with deafness, because it focused on the mastery of oral modalities, denying the natural language of these students and causing considerable losses in cognitive, socio-affective, linguistic, political, cultural and learning aspects (Alvez; Ferreira; Damázio, 2010, p. 7-8, our translation).

We can infer from this scenario that, in 1990, the movement in defense of bilingualism emerged in the country, while oralist practices predominated as the most accepted approach to Deaf Education, supported by the field of Special Education. By substantiating the conception of bilingualism in relation to the education process of the deaf, the PNEE evidences the “development of linguistic skills, particularly of the deaf” (Brasil, 1994, p. 49, our translation) and the “encouragement of the use of Brazilian sign language (Libras), in the teaching-learning process of deaf students” (Brasil, 1994, p. 52, our translation). About this aspect, even though PNEE predominantly focuses on oralization, the document also emphasizes the importance of “encouraging the officialization of LIBRAS” (Brasil, 1994, p. 53, our translation), intending to incorporate it into the legislation.

The conflict present in the PNEE between the oralist approach and the promotion of learning in Libras portrays the scenario of the time when the PNEE was produced. “If at that time the language used by the deaf was not recognized, or was not the norm, then the normal thing would be for the deaf to learn the language that ‘fit’ the norm—Portuguese, spoken and written” (Rodrigues, 2015, p. 81, our translation). In this register, the invisibility of Literature, as a fundamental element in the constitution of deaf subjects, configured a mechanism of exclusion that reinforced knowledge-power relations within the educational structure. By neglecting this language, education systems set in motion normalization strategies, which silenced and marginalized deaf experiences, imposing a regime of truth that disregarded their form of communication. This erasure not only limits the agency of deaf students, but also

produces docile bodies, adjusted to a hegemonic model that does not recognize their specificities and modes of existence.

From Law No. 10.436/2002, Libras is recognized as a means of communication and expression for the deaf (Brasil, 2002). This principle is driven by the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996), which establishes in article 10, item 1, that “all linguistic communities are equal in law” (UNESCO, 1996, item I, our translation) and, as provided for in article 24, that they “have the right to decide what the degree of presence of their language should be, as a vehicular language and as an object of study, at all levels of education within its territory” (UNESCO, 1996, art. 24, our translation). Even with these legal protections, the deaf continue to fight so that they can participate in decision-making spaces about the presence of their language—a debate that gained some notoriety from Law No. 14.191/2021, which establishes Bilingual Education for the Deaf as an educational modality, amending the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB)—Law No. 9.394/1996 (Brazil, 2021). Even documents that guide the Education of the Deaf recognize that,

all Special Education was focused on the rehabilitation of hearing and speech—the latter taken as a synonym for language. The objectives of the education of the deaf were reduced to corrective practices and oral-auditory stimulation, in a methodological approach that is conventionally called *oralism* (Brasil, 2006b, p. 69, our translation).

It was only in the 2000s that research groups gained strength, which created the field of Deaf Studies, with researchers who boosted the bilingual perspective in Brazil. Lopes, in an interview with Menezes and Gräff, states that “the 2000s were of great expansion in research, language policies and Deaf Education. Research groups were born and strengthened in this period” (Lopes; Menezes; Gräff, 2023, p. 233, our translation). This expansion of knowledge in research has enhanced other forms of understanding and relating to deafness. In 2005, Decree No. 5.626 faded the focus on the use of oral language in the education of deaf students, providing for the teaching of Libras and Portuguese, in the written modality, as well as guiding a set of accessibility strategies for communication.

Even with this textual focus, assumed in Decree No. 5.626/2005, a later document, produced by the Ministry of Education, entitled *Early Childhood Education*

– *Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Communication Difficulties and Signaling-Deafness* (Brasil, 2006a, p. 56), went on to state that “the lack of oral language and, sometimes, an overprotective education make it difficult to understand and exercise these qualities, but this can be overcome with the use of sign language” (our translation). Therefore, “speech and orofacial reading skills are valuable, but they are not the measure of success” (Brasil, 2006a, p. 83, our translation). These excerpts show disputes that insert oral language into the practice of transversality, showing negotiations and triggering a series of reconfigurations, in which sign language begins to be activated. For Lodi (2013, p. 56, our translation), at that time, “[...] sign language was subjected to sharing, with oral language, the same discursive spaces, and signs were treated as an instrument for the development of that language”, as shown in the following excerpt:

The greater the hearing loss, the longer the time in which the student will need to receive specialized care for the learning of the oral Portuguese language. Such loss, however, does not pose any linguistic problem for the development and acquisition of the Brazilian Sign Language – LIBRAS (Brasil, 2006a, p. 20, our translation).

This fragment shows that, although sign language is recognized, its function remained subordinate—almost as a compensatory resource in the face of the lack represented by the absence of orality. Thus, a linguistic hierarchy was perpetuated, in which oral language was taken as the ideal parameter of communication and learning, while sign language was tolerated, understood as a complement, without being valued as a legitimate means of access to knowledge, which shows the tensions in the field of Education and the power relations operated in it. For Veiga-Neto and Lopes (2007, p. 952, our translation), “power is understood as an action on possible actions—an action always supported by knowledge—governance manifests itself almost as a result of this action”. Thus, we understand that power does not act directly on people, but on their possibilities of action, guiding subjects’ choices, behaviors, and conduct, from a discursive atmosphere centered on hearing, and influencing the entire educational system, without recognizing deafness as a characteristic that conforms a legitimate human type.

For Vieira-Machado and Lopes (2016),

[...] The process of subjectivation and subjection of the hearing impaired to the hearing norm begins with special education and unfolds to the present day, instituting the so-called school inclusion. School inclusion, as a practice of governance in our present, has the role of placing the deaf on the agenda of the day, but as a deaf person. A specific identity is created, which is brought to the social circle in order to erase any type of strangeness regarding sign language, democratizing its use so that the pedagogical policy carried out in this group creates conditions for the possibility of governing it through the erasure of the deaf difference (Vieira-Machado; Lopes, 2016, p. 243, our translation).

From this knowledge that positions the deaf population socially and educationally, we are interested in understanding how they dictated education strategies for the deaf, understanding that policies establish a complex set of norms and guidelines that not only structure, regulate, and direct the experience of deafness, but also play a fundamental role in constructing subjectivity. It is important to note that this knowledge is incorporated into daily practices and is therefore subject to tension by the subjects who interact with it. So, even if knowledge and norms guide the processes of subjectivation in a given direction, subjects can question and reject them.

### **3 Regulations that lead to deafness in education**

By affirming the right of all students to learn together, without discrimination (Brasil, 2008), inclusive education operates the Specialized Educational Service (SES) as a reference space for inclusive education—a service specifically designed to serve students with disabilities, in the regular school or in the Specialized Service Center. This is what we can observe in the Federal Constitution (1988), in article 208, item III, which emphasizes the right to “specialized educational assistance to people with disabilities, preferably in the regular school system” (Brasil, 1988, item III, our translation), to complement or supplement the training offered by the school. SEA is regulated by Decree No. 7.611/2011, which describes it as a

[...] a set of activities, accessibility and pedagogical resources organized institutionally and continuously [to] complement the training of students with disabilities [...], as permanent and limited support in the time and attendance of students in the multifunctional resource rooms (Brasil, 2011, art. 2, our translation).

For Costa (2014, p. 242, our translation), “[...] the offer of the teaching of Libras [and written Portuguese] in specialized educational services becomes insufficient to guarantee the full development of the language of these children”, constituting a form of symbolic violence, which defines who has access and who is silenced within the educational structure. For Lodi (2013, p. 60, our translation), “[...] thinking about specialized educational services responsible for the learning of students, organized from the difference that constitutes them, rescues the look at special education as a possible substitute for regular education”. The practices undertaken in SEA lead deaf students to experience a type of exclusion, precisely because they deprive these students of collective spaces and marginalize students whose needs challenge the limits of the school system. As a result, the life experience these deaf students have in SEA distances them from integration with their peers, reducing the potential for shared experience, which is one of the bases of the school, and positioning each individual according to a logic of disciplinary control, which establishes their proper place.

Costa (2017, p. 50, our translation) states that, “[...] Educational care for people with ‘disabilities’ seeks normalization, re-education, ‘cure’. In this way, the one who is different is forced to become identical with the others.” Throughout history, “the clinic and education shared institutional spaces and patients/students until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century [...]” (Gräff; Pieczkowski, 2023, p. 4, our translation). The transposition of a clinical model to the educational environment results in practices that aim to correct and normalize behaviors. In this process, the learning subject is reduced to the condition of a patient, being observed and treated according to the criteria of normality. Thus, education takes a more technical and disciplinary approach, positioning the student similarly to a patient, subject to individualized interventions and constant surveillance. This posture restricts the possibility of an approach that is not corrective, reinforcing stigmas that legitimize interventions on deafness, which, in turn, establishes a normative principle aimed at the conformation of their existences. Sign language, fundamental for communication with and between the deaf, is relegated to specific moments of the school day, such as meetings with the SEA teacher or the Translator and Interpreter of Brazilian Sign

Language/Portuguese Language (TILSP). Regarding the latter, Decree No. 5.626/2005 establishes its functions and responsibilities.

Including the TILSP in the regular school was only possible after this profession was regulated, recognized by Law No. 12,319/2010, as amended by Law No. 14.704/2023. We understand the presence of TILSP in education as an accessibility strategy, which delimits the possibilities of the existence of deaf subjects within the school space, from a context in which these professionals are the only human beings in a position to interact with deaf students. This results in a dynamic that, in many moments, constitutes segregation, as it does not promote interaction between deaf students and others. If, on one hand, pedagogical support favors the permanence of deaf students in regular school, functioning as a technology that reduces the risk of social exclusion, on the other, it reinforces the need for specific assistance, keeping deafness within a regime of visibility that positions the deaf as a subject to be constantly accompanied. The need for this professional configures a technology of power that regulates the way deaf people interact and express themselves, but also inserts them in a structure of institutional dependence, restricting their possibilities of direct dialogue, reinforcing power relations and establishing norms that define regimes of visibility in the school environment.

This form of communicational accessibility, while guaranteeing the right of the deaf to education, consolidates a structure in which direct communication, in Libras, is not naturalized, but necessarily mediated. This scenario contrasts with the proposal of Bilingual Education for the Deaf, as an alternative that displaces this logic, promoting bilingual schools and classes as spaces where sign language is the basis of communication and teaching, without the systematic mediation of this professional as a condition for learning. The inclusion of a set of knowledge that respects the specificities of deaf subjects in the formulation of inclusive educational policies can be seen as a practice of counter-power. The possibility of access to an education that embraces deafness as a legitimate form of existence is not only a variation of the dominant norm, but an important fissure in an educational model that makes linguistic and cultural differences invisible, as it calls into question what is considered normal

within educational spaces, reconfiguring power relations in education, producing other forms of subjectivity and visibility for deaf subjects.

So far, we have discussed inclusive education, addressing the strategies of the integrationist model since the PNEE was implemented, in 1994, with a focus on oralization practices in regular schools. In contrast, the inclusive approach, which emerged from the PNEEPEI in 2008, changed this focus, no longer prioritizing oralization in the school context and starting to value sign language. From here, we will look at the bilingual emphasis given by the documents that lead to Education.

The Education of the Deaf in specific spaces was already provided for in the National Policy of Special Education (PNEE), of 1994, based on special schools and classes. The policy defined the school and special class for students with disabilities but did not specify the guidelines to meet their educational needs, leaving the process undetailed. In the same direction, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB)—Law No. 9.394/1996—in its article 58, second paragraph, determines that “educational services will be provided in classes, schools or specialized services, whenever, due to the specific conditions of the students, it is not possible for them to be integrated into the common classes of regular education” (Brasil, 1996, par. II, our translation). In the same vein, Decree No. 3.298/1999, in its article 25, provides for the option for specialized schools “[...] exclusively when the education of the common schools cannot satisfy the educational or social needs of the student or when necessary for the well-being of the student” (Brasil, 1999, art. 25, our translation).

For Resolution No. 2/2001, the school and the special class are recommended for students with disabilities whose special needs are not met frequently and continuously in the regular school (Brasil, 2001), leaving room for the responsibility for the learning processes to be directed to the student’s bodily conditions. The Resolution also opens the possibility for families, together with the pedagogical teams, to decide on the most appropriate space for the education of students with disabilities—a decision that is not allowed for families of students without disabilities—as described in article 10, third paragraph: “based on the development presented by the student, the pedagogical team of the special school and the family must decide jointly on the

transfer of the student to the school of the network regular education [...]” (Brasil, 2001, p. 3, our translation). The idea of reintegrating deaf students into regular schools produces the bilingual school as a marginal, devalued or even undesirable space. This reintegration replaces the common school as the only standard of education in our country.

Resolution No. 2/2001 also defines, in its article 10, first paragraph, that “special schools, public and private, must comply with legal requirements similar to those of any school regarding their accreditation process and authorization to operate courses and subsequent recognition” (Brasil, 2001, par. I, our translation). The document, *—Early Childhood Education – Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Communication Difficulties and Signaling-Deafness (2006)* says that “every school (regular or special) must organize itself to offer quality education for all” (Brasil, 2006a, p. 12, our translation). Considering the set of documents that delimits, for special schools, a requirement of quality equivalent to the others, it seems to us that these schools do not characterize a secondary or less relevant alternative, but a possibility, which requires dedication, investments, and public policies.

The *Report on the Linguistic Policy of Bilingual Education – Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language*, produced by a group of researchers in the Education of the Deaf in 2014, reinforces the displacement from special schools to bilingual schools for the deaf and states that these institutions “[...] must offer full-time education” (Brasil, 2014, p. 04, our translation). Also, according to the Report, “municipalities that do not have bilingual schools for the deaf must guarantee bilingual education in bilingual classes in regular schools (which are not bilingual schools for the deaf)” (Brasil, 2014, p. 4, our translation). This education format was already provided for by Decree No. 5.626/2005. According to this document,

- Art. 22 The federal educational institutions responsible for basic education must ensure the inclusion of deaf or hearing-impaired students, through the organization of:
- I – bilingual education schools and classes, open to deaf and hearing students, with bilingual teachers, in early childhood education and in the early years of elementary school;
  - II – bilingual schools or regular schools of the regular education network, open to deaf and hearing students, for the final years of elementary school, high school or professional education, with teachers from different areas of knowledge, aware of the linguistic uniqueness of deaf students, as well

as with the presence of translators and interpreters of Libras – Portuguese Language.

§ 1º - Schools or classes of bilingual education are those in which Libras and the written modality of the Portuguese language are languages of instruction used in the development of the entire educational process (Brasil, 2005, art. 22, emphasis added, our translation).

From this set of guidelines, until the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schools for the deaf were named as special schools, but this nomenclature was changed to bilingual schools for the deaf, as of Decree No. 5.626/2005. The PNEEPEI, as a guiding document for Special Education, implies that inclusive educational policies emphasize that Bilingual Education for the Deaf should be considered as an integral part of Special Education. In this web of knowledge, the *Report on the Linguistic Policy of Bilingual Education – Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language* (2014) establishes that deaf people with other disabilities are often linked to Special Education, being characterized as recipients of the “[...] specialized care [those] who have other impairments (for example, deafblind, deaf autistic, deaf with visual impairment, intellectual disability, with various syndromes or with other singularities)” (Brasil, 2014, p. 6, our translation). However, the document goes on to emphasize that,

Bilingual Education for the deaf is not compatible with the service offered by Special Education, as it is restricted to the issues imposed by the limitations resulting from disabilities in an extremely broad way, as if the deaf person, himself, due to deafness, were an object of it in himself. Considered as part of a linguistic-cultural community, the deaf student requires another space from the MEC to implement a regular bilingual education that meets the different possibilities of being deaf (Brasil, 2014, p. 6-7, our translation).

The concepts of Special Education and Bilingual Education for the Deaf are often placed in opposition, configuring a field of dispute in which they are constructed as distinct educational systems. Instead of being fixed categories, such concepts emerge as effects of discursive regimes that determine what is considered normal or deviant. However, the experience of deaf students is usually captured by the discourse of Special Education. For Foucault (2013, p. 60, our translation), discourses operate as “[...] practices that systematically form the objects they speak of”. This perspective shifts the understanding of discourse as a mere representation of reality to understanding it as constitutive of this reality. In other words, discourses not only

describe objects, but actively participate in their production, delimiting what can be said, thought and socially recognized.

These referrals lead to the understanding of inclusive educational policies as strategic agents to maintain order and governability. As a result, a scenario persists in which Bilingual Education for the Deaf does not become an accessible reality for all, compromising educational equity. As the document *Early Childhood Education – Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Communication Difficulties and Signaling-Deafness* (2006) observes, “it is important to be clear that what makes the difference in the education of the deaf is not whether the school is special or if it is a regular school, but *the excellence* of its work” (Brasil, 2006a, p. 12, our translation). Excellence, we want to emphasize, is achieved through adequate conditions for learning and continuous interaction between peers, practices that challenge normalization strategies and put on stage new possibilities of being in the world, which are forged to the extent that they constitute themselves as ethical subjects, capable of practicing self-care, as Foucault (2009) proposes, establishing relationships that escape the auditory norm.

In 2021, Bilingual Education for the Deaf gained new impetus with the restructuring of the Directorate of Bilingual Education Policies for the Deaf (DIPEBS), linked to the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Youth and Adult Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI) and with the publication of Federal Law No. 14,191/2021, which “amends Law No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996 (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education), to provide for the modality of bilingual education for the deaf” (Brasil, 2021, preamble, our translation). From it, a set of articles was inserted in the LDB, among which we highlight Article 60-A, according to which

For the purposes of this Law, bilingual education for the deaf is understood to be the modality of school education offered in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), as a first language, and in written Portuguese, as a second language, *in bilingual schools for the deaf, bilingual classes for the deaf, regular schools or in bilingual education centers for the deaf*, for students who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, deaf with high abilities or giftedness or with other associated disabilities, opting for the bilingual education modality for the deaf (Brasil, 2021, art. 60-A, emphasis added, our translation).

The recent amendment of the LDB, which now includes the Bilingual Education of the Deaf, guides these individuals towards a type of education that tries to produce

itself as a norm. This new moment, according to the LDB, in its Article 58, third paragraph, “[...] it begins in early childhood education and extends throughout life [...]” (Brazil, 1996, Article 58, our translation) element. Law No. 14.191/2021, in article 60-A, second paragraph, goes in the same direction, stating that “the offer of bilingual education for the deaf will begin at zero year, in early childhood education, and will extend throughout life” (Brasil, 2021, art. 60-A, our translation).

Within the scope of what these norms propose, it seems important to us to question the conditions of possibility of these policies, understanding the power relations that cross them. Bilingual Education for the Deaf, therefore, constitutes an important space for the knowledge and powers that shape deaf life to circulate, providing access to other perspectives and producing a path for deaf people to understand the world, the environment around them, and themselves. It is “a movement that claims the right of the deaf to remain in a school proper to their linguistic difference; a school that, for them, offers conditions for the deaf identity to be constituted and the deaf culture preserved” (Witchs; Lopes, 2015, p. 43, our translation). Thus, it is appropriate to understand the school as “[...] a place invented so that everyone who attends it leaves with deep marks on the way of being and being in the world, the deaf community, when constituted within the school, is also strongly marked by it” (Lopes; Veiga-Neto, 2006, p. 82, our translation). It is the claim for a school that welcomes its differences, which guides the deaf movement. In the next section, this discussion will continue to mobilize us to understand the descriptions of deaf ways of life in educational policies.

#### **4 The possible deaf ways of life in educational policies**

School is an important space for a series of experiences. From Foucault’s perspective, we can understand that the idea of experience also includes a space of resistance and subversion in relation to the structures established by the pedagogical discourse. Experience is not a passive reflection of what happens to us, but an active form of relationship with the norms and practices that produce knowledge and power. Life, as an experience, is a process of continuous relationship with the world, with others, with language, and with ourselves. Thus, the experience involves the process

of learning from the other, but above all from the other deaf person, who shows “the intensification of life produced thanks to the role played by different conceptions of the body and expressiveness of the deaf communities” (Pagni; Martins, 2019, p. 7, our translation).

In the wake of the processes of subjectivation, the last dimension that makes up the matrix of experience, the analysis material enables the reading of the deaf experience from two main fronts: a) hearing/sensory impairment<sup>1</sup>, from a pathological/clinical-therapeutic perspective; and b) deafness, from a sociocultural/socio-anthropological perspective. Both fronts are inscribed in the order of difficulty in listening and speaking. The duality between hearing impairment and linguistic difference is not a recent element in the field of Deaf Studies. This binary division, however, is the result of power relations that delimit what can or cannot be said about deafness. This perspective leads to the reflection on deafness as a matrix of experience, discussed by Witches and Lopes (2015), evidencing how social constructions influence the way deafness is understood and represented, based on the knowledge and norms that make up deaf subjectivity. Thus, hearing impairment is also understood as constitutive of the experience of deafness. However, in the descriptions observed in the documents, both expressions follow different paths; that is, each characterizes a very specific way of understanding and guiding these experiences. In this register, we cannot simply equate deafness and hearing impairment, establishing that “[...] deafness makes the deaf think of themselves as disabled [...]” (Witches; Lopes, 2015, p. 40, our translation). The interpretation of this term depends on the context in which it is used. However, agreeing with Witches and Lopes (2015, p. 35, our translation), “it is possible to think, therefore, that the word deafness acquired negative meanings from the moment it was placed in relation to an auditory norm”. Despite this, “the problem is not in the words, but in the discursive formations that pass through them and that operate in the constitution of subjectivities arising from the experience of deafness” (Witches; Lopes, 2015, p. 35, our translation).

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1 Sensory experience can be described as a condition in which perception is limited, characterized by the absence of sight and hearing.

For Costa (2014), the choice of the term *deaf* rather than *hearing impairment* reflects a shift in how social stereotypes are approached and contested. This terminological choice helps avoid prejudices, offering a perspective that challenges pre-established notions of deafness, which are often reduced to essentialist conceptions. Such views, often influenced by audiocentric and audionormative perspectives, tend to limit and standardize the experience of deafness, without accounting for the diversity of ways of living and expressing oneself within this community.

When addressing the categorization between deafness and hearing impairment, Dias (2017, p. 62, our translation) describes the deaf “[...] as one who assumed deafness from the political and identity point of view, communicating mainly or exclusively through signs; the hearing impaired was the one who communicated orally, being able to use devices and the like”. This classification, which informs different forms of existence, has been incorporated into public policies and has affected the processes of subjectivation that it conducts. For Foucault (2004), subjectivation is the process by which a subject constitutes themselves through social, normative, cultural, and historical elements. With this in mind, we seek to weave a plot that enables an analysis of these ways of naming the bodies that carry the trace of deafness, by grouping these descriptions, which are materialized in the documents and guide the conduction of deaf life forms. In this register, the research material allows us to read about the subject the policies describe, and research involving deaf subjects, talking about themselves, is a challenge we set for ourselves and for whoever else wishes, as a future investigative exercise.

By adopting an approach centered on hearing impairment, public policies are based on a clinical-therapeutic model, putting into play a view that produces the experience of deafness as a pathological condition, as a failure attributed to the body, strongly influenced by normalization processes, which establish hearing as a norm and as a necessity for human existence. Skliar (1998, p. 15, our translation) points out that it is part of the concept of *ouvintism*, which supports “a set of representations of the listeners, from which the deaf person is obliged to look at himself and narrate himself

as if he were a listener. In addition, it is in this look, and in this narration, that the perceptions of being disabled, of not being a listener, occur”.

For Camillo (2008, p. 23-24, our translation), the auditing practices

[...] They are a set of strategies and actions that can be both physical, visible to the deaf person's body, such as hearing aids, for example, and subjective, such as the ways of disciplining the deaf, the norms, customs, ways, and mannerisms of hearing, subjecting these subjects to hearing, and the normalization practices that imprint a way of “being deaf heard”.

The author invites us to think in two directions: in the physical sphere, these strategies include devices and technologies that seek to improve hearing for the deaf, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, which are visible in the body and aim to enhance sound capture and correct hearing. In the subjective field, these strategies emerge in everyday life through social, cultural, and educational practices that impose hearing standards on the deaf. This occurs through the discipline imposed on these subjects, the norms established by society, ingrained customs, and ways of behaving and expressing that lead to the perception of deafness. These processes limit the investment in the deaf body, restricting it to functional adaptation to meet a standard type of communication.

On the other hand, adopting a socio-anthropological model of deafness fosters the creation of other forms of deaf life by understanding their singularities. This perspective “[...] it provides a different way—neither better, nor worse, nor more correct, nor incorrect—of seeing and conceiving the world, giving rise to a different way of constructing and experiencing historical, political and social reality [...]” (Mandelblatt, 2014, p. 25, our translation).

Throughout the history of deafness, especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the way how deaf people have come to be understood has changed (Witch, 2017). This change can be interpreted in light of Wieviorka's (2002) notion of the emergence of difference. For Witch (2017), in this period deafness was no longer seen only from a medical perspective, associated with disability, but began to be recognized mainly for its difference. Even so, this difference can be characterized in different ways, depending on the context in which it is analyzed: sometimes it is considered linguistic and cultural, at other times, it is understood as identity, and, on

certain occasions, it is called a deaf difference. We emphasize the understanding of deafness as a primordial cultural marker (Lopes, 2011, p. 09), beyond dualisms. However, national regulations insist on maintaining the binary.

For what matters in this analysis, Decree No. 5.626/2005, in its article 2, states that:

*considers himself a deaf person* the one who, because he has hearing loss, understands and interacts with the world through visual experiences, manifesting his culture mainly through the use of the Brazilian Sign Language - Libras (Brasil, 2005, Art. 2, emphasis added, our translation).

The sole paragraph of article 2 of the same Decree informs that: “*It is considered hearing impairment* the bilateral loss, partial or total, of forty-one decibels (dB) or more, measured by audiogram at the frequencies of 500Hz, 1,000Hz, 2,000Hz and 3,000Hz” (Brasil, 2005, Art. 2, our emphasis, our translation). The expression *hearing impairment* was introduced into the legislation by Decree No. 3,298/1999, in its article 4, item II. This Decree “regulates Law No. 7.853, of October 24, 1989, provides for the National Policy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, consolidates the protection standards, and provides for other measures” (Brazil, 1999, Preamble, our translation), not to mention the deaf person. That said, it is possible to affirm that hearing impairment first emerges in public policies as an effect of the conventions of the time and is strongly guided by the clinic.

Law No. 14.768/2023 “defines hearing impairment and establishes a reference value for hearing limitation” (Brasil, 2023, preamble, our translation). Provided for in this guideline, in its article 1, “hearing impairment is considered to be the long-term limitation of hearing, *total unilateral* or partial or total bilateral, which, in interaction with one or more barriers, obstructs the full and effective participation of the person in society, on an equal basis with other people” (Brasil, 2023, art. 1, emphasis added, our translation). This Law began to include total unilateral deafness in the recognition of hearing impairment, with a view to guaranteeing equal rights for those with bilateral hearing loss, whether partial or total. Therefore, the Law defines hearing impairment, maintaining the same decibel (dB) and frequency levels established by Decree No. 3,298/1999. Under Law No. 14.768/2023, unilateral deafness became a legally recognized condition. It came to represent not only a sensory aspect but also a unique

way of experiencing diversity and adapting to different life situations. However, this recognition guides practices marked by the pathological conception of deafness.

The document produced by the Ministry of Education in 2003, entitled *Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Strategies for the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs*, contributes to understanding the contours assumed by the definition of hearing impairment, describing it as:

Total or partial loss, congenital or acquired, of the ability to understand speech through the ear. It manifests as:

- mild/moderate deafness: hearing loss of up to 70 decibels, which makes it difficult, but does not prevent the individual from expressing himself orally, as well as from perceiving the human voice, with or without the use of a hearing aid;
- Severe/profound deafness: hearing loss above 70 decibels, which prevents the individual from understanding, with or without hearing aids, the human voice, as well as from naturally acquiring the code of the oral language. This fact makes most deaf people opt for sign language (Brasil, 2003, p. 29, our translation).

In general, hearing impairment is described using specific quantitative measures that assess hearing conditions. Decree No. 5.626/2005 defines the parameters for the assessment and classification of deafness, providing a technical framework that guides the measurement and understanding of deafness in administrative and legal contexts. It is crucial to understand that this definition is not restricted to a technical issue, but refers to a deeply personal experience that, in addition to informing who the subject is, shapes how they see themselves, guides their enrollment in educational systems, and defines the educational practices in which they will participate. This perception of hearing loss is multifaceted and goes beyond numbers and statistics. Regardless of the degree of hearing loss that a person may have, whether unilateral or bilateral, partial or total, this condition is related to the way the deaf person exists in the world. Deafness, as a life experience, goes beyond the diagnosis of hearing loss and is deeply linked to the practices, linguistic and cultural expressions in which the person is inserted, in their daily lives.

In turn, Technical Note No. 15/2015/MEC/SECADI/DPEE describes the classification of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) on mental/intellectual disability, as well as hearing, visual and motor disabilities, subdividing them into three levels: “great difficulty”, “some difficulty” and “cannot do it

at all” (Brasil, 2015, our translation). In this framework, hearing impairment was considered as

hearing impairment (even with the use of a hearing aid, if the person uses it) divided into: *Unable to hear* (person declares himself totally deaf), *Great permanent difficulty hearing* (person declares to have great permanent difficulty hearing, even if wearing a hearing aid) or *Some permanent difficulty hearing* (person declares to have some permanent difficulty hearing, even if using hearing aids) (Brasil, 2015, p. 58, our translation).

These three classifications serve to order different degrees of permanent hearing loss, based on the ability to hear, with or without hearing aids. Regarding the use of these corrective technologies, the document *Knowledge and Practices of Inclusion: Developing Competencies to Meet the Special Educational Needs of Deaf Students* (2006) emphasizes the relevance of maintaining the constant use of the device, considering “[...] it is essential that this device be incorporated into their daily activities” (Brasil, 2006b, p. 22, our translation). In this context, Vieira-Machado and Lopes (2016) emphasize the importance of understanding the mechanisms that perpetuate this logic, emphasizing how society often normalizes these actions under different pretexts. For them, it is important.

subverting extremist analyses—both those that defend practices that would make up a *deaf world*, guided by the principle that being deaf is normal, and those that defend practices of deaf normalization, guided by the principle that hearing is normal—requires thinking about the relations between power and knowledge in other ways (Vieira-Machado; Lopes, 2016, p. 640, our translation).

For the authors, it seems important to critically reflect on these approaches to deafness. Vieira-Machado and Lopes (2016) challenge both the perspective that considers the deaf as completely normal—rejecting any interaction with the idea of hearing—and the view that seeks to normalize deaf people—making hearing the standard. For the authors, both perspectives are problematic and limiting. These analyses suggest questioning polarizations and seeking alternative ways to understand the relationship between knowledge-power and the stigmatization of deaf lives. It also implies problematizing the power dynamics that guide discursive and non-discursive practices on deafness, either to reinforce a view of auditory normality, or to value deafness exclusively as a cultural identity, with a view to producing a more plural

and reflective perspective, not guided exclusively by rigid dichotomies, but that explores alternative ways of understanding these experiences and practices, considering the social, political, and cultural contexts involved.

It is about proposing alternative ways of looking at deafness that avoid the imposition of fixed norms, recognizing the diversity and multiple meanings of this phenomenon. This knowledge, often approached in a generalist and abstract way, loses the complexity of the deafness' experiences. Each deaf subject builds his or her worldview, which is reflected in the forms of interaction with the various daily situations, their desires, the stories they build throughout their lives and the attitudes and behaviors they develop. However, by understanding deafness as a field articulated by knowledge, norms, and social processes, we realize that being deaf emerges from the interaction between subjects in the cultural, linguistic, and political practices that shape deaf experiences. Thus, the matrix that structures this condition is not homogeneous, but crossed by multiple experiences, disputes, and transformations, reaffirming the power of deaf subjectivity as a space of resistance and production of knowledge.

## **5 Final considerations**

This study aimed to understand the conformation of deaf lives, based on educational policies. The materials analyzed show the operation of two notions about deafness, which are not fixed or natural, but rather produced by discursive fields that have moved interests, visions, and patterns of behavior throughout history. The central idea is that, in addition to being useful for organizing the understanding of deafness, these notions conform to specific ways of conducting conduct. For the first notion, deafness, is understood as a cultural identity; that is, deafness is seen as sociocultural. The second, hearing impairment, is associated with the medical discourse, which understands deafness as a clinical condition to be treated, rehabilitated, or corrected. Therefore, these perspectives result in different ways of perceiving and constructing subjectivity: one based on belonging to difference and the other anchored in a look at disability.

The way in which each deaf individual constructs his or her subjectivity is strongly linked to social, normative, cultural, and historical influences, and it is therefore

necessary to investigate the various ways in which these processes happen and manifest themselves over time. As a result, recognizing the challenges faced by the deaf is also recognizing that our view of existence often perpetuates a conception of abnormality, which is widely accepted, without questioning. This view tends to associate the notion of normality strictly with the ability to hear, ignoring the rich and varied experience lived by deaf individuals, which can and does support ways of life that go beyond the dual description, materialized in educational policies. With this in mind, it seems to us that incorporating the deaf subject, narrating their processes of subjectivation, can be an important analytical investment for another research.

As an effect of processes that consider hearing as a standard, society does not consider the efforts and challenges experienced by these individuals to adapt and thrive in a world that was not designed for them, with their needs often neglected or underestimated. Instead of valuing and understanding these unique experiences and abilities, society tends to place excessive emphasis on the hearing difference, as if it were the main defining characteristic of the person, ignoring the richness of their contributions and abilities. This way, deafness constitutes a bipartite of (a)normality; some [...] are placed as *types*, as accepted references, as exponents of normality; others are placed as references to point out *deviations*” (Lopes; Veiga-Neto, 2006, p. 84-85, our translation). Thus, the conditions of deafness and hearing impairment can be seen as a complex phenomenon, guided by normativities, or rather, bipartite normalities, shaped by public policies to direct deaf ways of life, experienced daily by those who carry, in their bodies, the mark of deafness. In other words, the ways of understanding deafness are not absolute, but vary to different degrees and can coexist or mix in different situations. This implies that notions of deafness can vary in intensity and/or form and are not opposed or mutually exclusive.

These questions motivated us to carry out an analysis of the legislation and the guiding documents of inclusive and bilingual educational policies. To this end, we investigated how these norms were established, from which sets of knowledge were organized, and what types of subjects are intended to be produced, especially within the limits given by education. The documents analyzed suggest that the person with hearing impairment, when using oral language, with a communication close to the

hearing norm, can be better educated in the regular school, within a regime of inclusion, supported by the Specialized Educational Service (AEE) and with the support of a Translator and Interpreter of Brazilian Sign Language/Portuguese Language (TILSP), as the case may be. This model, of a generalist nature, is aligned with the documents of Special Education and follows the guidelines of inclusive educational policies. On the other hand, deafness is understood through cultural identity, as a way of life strongly linked to the use of sign language, which fights for the constitution of bilingual education processes, which have not yet been consolidated in the Brazilian educational scenario. Both approaches present us with different ways of living the experience of deafness.

These impasses show the tensions that are placed in the direction of the schooling processes of the deaf, seeking to conduct different ways of being and acting on themselves. Deaf ways of life provoke reflections, challenging the knowledge recognized by the field of education and driving us to rethink the norms that guide educational and social practices. They call us to problematize this knowledge, which historically constitutes us, based on the multiple aspects of human existence, and opening space for other epistemologies, which provide conditions for the existence of difference.

Finally, we highlight that the recent strengthening, in educational policies, of the bilingual emphasis on the Education of the Deaf, expresses the strength of the deaf movement, its resistance in the face of policies that ignored its needs. After decades of struggle, this emphasis materializes one of the movement's historical claims, opening the possibility of constituting other forms of understanding deafness. It seems to us that the bilingual education of the deaf can attenuate the effects of the medical conception on deafness, which marks it under the sign of a flawed body, in addition to guiding a school organization that enhances the fluidity of sign language, favoring approximation, coexistence, and interaction among peers and learning.

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Received in october 2025 | Approved in february 2026

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