

PAPER

Deaf Literacy in the National Literacy Policy (2019-2022)

*A alfabetização de surdos na Política Nacional de Alfabetização (2019-2022)*Ednalva Gutierrez Rodrigues^a 

ednalva.rodrigues@ufes.br

Cláudia Maria Mendes Gontijo^a 

claudia.gontijo@ufes.br

Ericler Oliveira Gutierrez^a 

ericler.ouedraogo@ufes.br

ABSTRACT

The article is the result of a research aimed at understanding the conception of literacy for deaf children, as evidenced in the Bolsonaro government's education proposals (2019-2022), through the analysis of the National Literacy Policy (PNA) established by Decree No. 9.765, of April 11, 2019. It takes a qualitative documentary research approach. The theoretical framework is based on the historical-cultural conception of knowledge production. It discusses the literacy conception adopted in the Bolsonaro government, based on the analysis of the PNA in dialogue with other governmental and non-governmental actors. It is concluded that the discourse of public managers responsible for deaf education and policy implementation in the Bolsonaro government is contradictory because, while advocating the historic fight for bilingual education, it assumes the proposal of literacy based on the phonic-based method — a hallmark of the Bolsonaro government — for both hearing and deaf children.

Keywords: National Literacy Policy. Literacy. Deaf Children.

RESUMO

O artigo resulta de uma pesquisa cuja finalidade foi compreender a concepção de alfabetização de crianças surdas evidenciada nas propostas de educação do Governo Bolsonaro (2019-2022), a partir da análise da Política Nacional de Alfabetização (PNA) instituída pelo Decreto nº 9.765, de 11 de abril de 2019. Adota uma perspectiva de natureza qualitativa do tipo documental. Toma como referência teórica a concepção histórico-cultural da produção do conhecimento. Discute, assim, a concepção de alfabetização assumida no governo Bolsonaro a partir da análise da PNA em diálogo com outros atores governamentais e não-governamentais. Conclui que o discurso dos gestores públicos responsáveis pela educação de surdos e pela implementação das políticas no governo Bolsonaro é contraditório, pois, ao mesmo tempo que defende a histórica bandeira de luta pela educação bilíngue, assume a proposta de alfabetização com base no *paradigma fônico* — bandeira do governo Bolsonaro — para crianças ouvintes e igualmente para crianças surdas.

Palavras-chave: Política Nacional de Alfabetização. Alfabetização. Criança Surda.

^a Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brasil.

Introduction

This article is an offshoot of the research *Política Nacional de Educação Especial: proposta pedagógica para alfabetização de surdos* aims to understand the conception of literacy for deaf children evidenced in the Bolsonaro government's education proposals (2019-2022). We analyzed the National Policy for Special Education: Equitable, Inclusive and Lifelong Learning (PNEE 2020), established by Decree nº.10.502, of September 30, 2020 (Brasil, 2020), and the National Literacy Policy (PNA 2019), established by Decree nº.9.765, of April 11, 2019 (Brasil, 2019b), the focus of this article. In general, we can say that the PNA document outlines the general guidelines for literacy without detailing the methodologies and materials specific to the needs and characteristics of children who are part of the special education target group.

For theoretical support, we adopted the cultural-historical conception of knowledge production, in which the main source of data is the text. For Bakhtin (2003), what constitutes texts are the discourses produced by concrete subjects and articulated with their time. Thus, discourses or enunciations - oral, written, visual, imagery, etc. - cannot be seen outside their social context. Based on this discursive notion, we understand that in all fields of human activity, texts are produced in a historical and socially situated way. As Bakhtin (2003, p. 319) points out, "[...] everywhere there is the real or possible text and its understanding. Investigation becomes questioning and response, in other words, dialog".

As a methodology, we adopted qualitative research of the documentary type, which is characterized, according to Moreira and Caleffe (2008), by the selection, analysis and dialogue with the documents/texts listed, requiring the researchers to critically reflect on the data.

Considering that the current legislation (Brasil, 2002; 2005), has already produced important effects on the inclusion of deaf students in schooling processes and the appropriation of knowledge, it is important to understand to what extent the proposal for change is progressing and how it dialogues with the concrete reality we live in.

Although the PNA, the document used for this analysis, was produced in a recent political context, it is possible to find authors who have already been focusing on the concept of literacy and the impacts of the proposals presented in it, such as Frade (2019), Mortatti (2019), Maciel (2019) and Bernardino (2023). In general, there is strong criticism of the recommendation of the phonic-based method as the only efficient/scientific method for teaching reading and writing, given that this system disregards advances towards discursive literacy, the result of intense research work in Brazil (Frade, 2019). Proof of this is the tiny number of Brazilian researchers listed in the bibliography compared to researchers from other countries.

Mortatti (2019b, p. 45), in a careful analysis of the PNA, infers that the attempt to propose a literacy policy that has scientism as its motto, based on international research, leads us to a profound "[...] historical and political setback, postulated with a salvationist purpose and in an intentional, programmatic and self-boasting way". For the author, the discussion about the teaching method or, in this case, the imposition of the phonic-based method, serves to hide a neoliberal and conservative project.

Science, by presenting itself as truth, refutes contradictions and counter-words, making the discourse authoritarian and monological. In the field of literacy, this thinking serves the formation of uncritical and passive subjects. Perovano (2019), when analyzing the non-governmental literacy program produced by the *Alfa Educativa* publishing house entitled *Alfa e Beto*, argues that the adoption of the phonic-based method does not consider students as critical, dialogic and responsive subjects, capable of thinking, opining, reflecting and expanding their knowledge of the world through language.

Assuming that the phonic-based method presupposes a process of decoding the sounds of letters, we believe that this process will be more difficult for deaf children who use sign language, since understanding that words are made up of sound units is one of the fundamental dimensions of the literacy process (Gontijo, 2008).

Lage, Begrow and Oliveira (2020), when discussing the place of the deaf child in the PNA, state that the proposal has a medicalizing character to the extent that it does not consider the diversity that inhabits the school, both in relation to deaf and hearing children. In the case of deaf children, this is exacerbated by the fact that "[...] the connection between phonological awareness that has been well documented in hearing children is not so evident in deaf children" (Cruz, 2017).

Like Mortatti (2019b), the authors state that by disregarding the numerous studies in the field of literacy in Brazil, the new policy takes on an authoritarian and anti-democratic character. In this scenario, they denounce the Bolsonaro government's disrespect for the historical struggles of the deaf community, since the proposed policy advocates the adoption of a literacy method also based on orality, contrary to the linguistic right of deaf children to a bilingual education, in which sign language should be the language of instruction.

In order to move forward in this discussion, we believe it is important to understand the historical context in which educational policies aimed at deaf children were created and the concept of literacy on which they were based.

Literacy proposals for deaf children

Throughout history, the main objective of deaf literacy has been to teach children the oral language as a prerequisite for access to another knowledge. In this regard, Rodrigues (2014), in recent research, took a historical path, taking as a time frame the decentralization of deaf education, promoted in the 1950s by the National Institute of Deaf Education (INES), the first public institution for teaching deaf people, created in the imperial period. According to the documents mobilized, the entire school culture, for over a hundred years, went hand in hand with what was proposed for hearing children, obviously considering that deafness also imposed some particularities, i.e. teaching the official language of the country through oralization¹.

In the 1950s, the director of INES, Ana Rimoli de Faria Dória, implemented the Método Oral Puro (Pure Oral Method) in literacy for the deaf, which consists of teaching the deaf to speak oral

¹ Teaching Portuguese in the oral modality.

Portuguese and to read the lips of their interlocutor. In his books, still following the principles of the intuitive method, Dória (1961) argued that the analytical/global method, which starts from the larger units of the language, i.e. texts and words, would be the most suitable, as learning to speak words or phrases would make more sense to the deaf child. Only after this understanding would teaching focus on learning phonemes, towards oral language. In her manual, entitled *Manual de educação da criança surda* (Manual for the education of deaf children), the author advocated a methodology in which the teaching of phonemes would only be introduced after deaf children had undergone a period of contact with the oral language, through oral activities. This manual has become an important material for teachers in literacy for the deaf.

Along with analytical methods, synthetic methods, which start from letters, phonemes or syllables, were also widely used in the literacy of deaf children, showing the difficulty of breaking with mechanical and decontextualized proposals in their methodologies. For example, in the 1980s, the methodology in oralist schools was based on the phonic and syllabic methods, adapting the primer and the materials produced by the teachers to the pure oral method (Rodrigues, 2014).

With the arrival of constructivism, the relationship between teacher and student, previously based on the asymmetry of one who teaches and the other who learns, changed. The student, now an active subject in the process, is now able to construct knowledge based on methodologies that consider development from a biological and universal perspective. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1984), when investigating reading and writing, showed how children construct different levels/hypotheses, very logical and curious, in relation to writing before they are literate (Bittencourt, 2017). In this way, all children would go through the pre-syllabic, syllabic, syllabic-alphabetic and alphabetic hypotheses. During this period, a large part of the Brazilian teaching staff found themselves forced to renounce literacy knowledge and practices in the name of a new vision of literacy. Andrade (2011, p. 201) explains that it was a moment of strong impact: "In teaching memories, it is quite common to find, marked in the training experience, the strong memory of a speech in which they were told to throw away everything they knew previously, as it would no longer serve them".

With regard to the deaf, in 1997, the Secretariat for Special Education (SEESP/MEC) created an editorial line containing four series with the aim of disseminating teaching suggestions and information on pedagogical practice with special education students. In the series entitled *Atualidades pedagógicas* (Pedagogical News), nº.4, in Issue 5, with the theme *Alfabetização: aquisição do português escrito, por surdo* (Literacy: acquisition of written Portuguese, by deaf people), SEESP presents the methodological assumptions for literacy deaf people, anchored in the global and analytical synthetic methods, both of which have an experiential constructivist basis. In the wake of this "innovation", authors such as Machado (2000) and Peixoto (2004), when studying the literacy of deaf children based on constructivism, showed that, in general, deaf children, although they don't make a sound and letter relationship, also develop hypotheses to understand how writing works, showing some similarities with hearing children. Despite the differences between the learning of hearing and deaf children, in our opinion, deaf education has, to a certain extent, been influenced by the hegemonic discourse of constructivism, even if it is difficult for the deaf to make the relationship between sound and letter, a fundamental dimension in this perspective.

In national politics, the constructivism proposal lasted for about a decade, until a new revision of the concept of literacy emerged, proposing a new reflection, starting from the dichotomy between literacy (code) and literacy (use of the code). In this sense, it wasn't enough just to teach literacy, it was necessary, in other words, to include students in reading and writing practices (Soares, 2003).

During this period, through the enactment of Law nº.10,436/2002 (Brasil, 2002), a proposal based on bilingualism began to be implemented in the education of the deaf, which considers that deaf children have the right to appropriate sign language as a constitutive language of subjectivity from a very early age, as well as Portuguese in written form, configuring the need for deaf students to be immersed in the use of these two languages throughout the educational process. This linguistic recognition began to be strengthened in the 1980s by the deaf movements, led by the National Federation for the Education and Integration of the Deaf (FENEIS), which advocated for this public to have the same right to learn as hearing students, while respecting their linguistic diversity.

In this scenario, important material produced by the Ministry of Education and published in 2006 has been widely used as a reference in deaf literacy. Entitled *Ideias para ensinar português para surdos* (Ideas for teaching Portuguese to the deaf), the book is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, Quadros and Schmiedt (2006) discuss the entire theoretical basis for deaf education from the perspective of bilingualism, i.e. sign language as the first language and Portuguese as the second language. On this issue, the authors draw on Chomsky (1986, 1995) to say that language have two levels:

[...] the biological level, as part of the human language faculty, and (2) the social level, as it interferes with the final human expression. At the first level, essential issues such as language acquisition are discussed. The second level discusses aspects related to discursive and social representations permeated by cultural representations. The issue of bilingualism can be discussed on these two levels of language (Quadros; Schmiedt, 2006, p. 15).

In this way, the authors assume that the discussion of bilingual education will be based on social and cultural issues, placing the learning of the Portuguese language in the field of literacy, since "[...] literacy in deaf children as a process makes sense if it is signified through Brazilian sign language, the language used at school to acquire languages, to learn through this language and to learn about languages" (Quadros; Schmiedt, 2006, p. 17).

Chapters 2 and 3 present suggestions for literacy activities. The authors go on to argue that sign language should be the mediator of the entire teaching and learning process, as well as including activities with texts. However, the mechanical nature still prevails in writing activities that are decontextualized and far removed from children's ordinary lives, such as in *Trabalhando com produção escrita* (Working with written production), where the proposals start with producing stories based on sequential pictures and writing essays.

In the same vein, Freitas (2016), in his research entitled *A multimodalidade no ensino de língua portuguesa para alunos surdos nos anos iniciais: uma proposta de material didático* (Multimodality in Portuguese language teaching for deaf students in the early years: a proposal for teaching materials), set out to investigate the creation of literacy materials for deaf children from the perspective of literacy, arguing that sign language would be the mediator of the whole process. The author presents teaching materials based on the use of texts that circulate socially and on the

concept of multimodality, in which it is possible to use more than one language modality in the same teaching activity, such as writing, images, colors, etc. However, the proposal is not concerned with literacy as a critical and discursive process, since the writing activities are aimed at learning how to spell words and the reading activities are aimed at locating information, recognizing words and phrases or, as Geraldi (2010, p. 111) already warned us, "[...] it's not just about reading), "[...] from literacy onwards, reading ends up being treated as deciphering and not as the production of meanings by the reader".

Based on this short review, despite the need to think about other possibilities, especially regarding the discursive and political dimension of literacy for the deaf, it is possible to observe that deaf education has come a long way in recent decades, especially in terms of guaranteeing the use and dissemination of sign language as a mother tongue.

In order to understand how the bilingual policy was conceived in the Bolsonaro government, we dialogued with documents that guided the pedagogical proposal for teaching deaf children, thus constituting another link in the historical chain of discursive communication about deaf literacy in Brazil (Bakhtin, 2003).

Bolsonaro government's National Literacy Policy (PNA) and deaf literacy

The election of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022) has caused quite a stir in the deaf community. Until then little known, his popularity was raised to stratospheric heights by the fact that his wife, the first lady, gave a speech in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) at his inauguration ceremony. If, on the one hand, the almost mystical relationship of part of the deaf community dedicated to him and his wife was consolidated, on the other hand, the expectations of many faded with the constant attacks on the historical achievements of the deaf community, such as the extinction of the position of Sign Language Translator and Interpreter², through Decree nº.10.185 of December 20, 2019(Brasil, 2019a), and a massive campaign for voluntary work³.

We have observed that the contradiction between inclusion and exclusion in government actions has challenged various sectors of society to reflect and engage in defending significant achievements towards the social and political, individual and collective emancipation of the deaf community. In the field of education historiography, Rodrigues (2014) and Strobel (2009) reveal the political clash over the linguistic right to use and disseminate sign language, ratified by Law 10.436/2002 (Brasil, 2002), and dating back to the 1980s, through the work of Feneis. From this historical moment on, the deaf community in Brazil secured rights in the field of education, which until then had been marginalized by a biologically based conception of deafness and the deaf subject. For the deaf, the *status* of oralized was desirable, since the language of the majority of hearing people is the oral language.

² Note from the Brazilian Federation of Associations of Professional Translators and Interpreters and Sign Language Guide-Interpreters (FEBRAPILS) on decree No. 10,185/2019 (FEBRAPILS, 2019).

³ Note of Repudiation: the precariousness of the work and remuneration of Professional Translators, Interpreters and Libras Guide-Interpreters (FEBRAPILS, s.d.).

In the wake of the implementation of the Libras Law and its regulation by Decree nº.5.626 of December 22, 2005 (Brasil, 2005), other legal documents have been added, making the language right strong and consistent⁴ and imposing urgent and necessary changes in the educational design for deaf students.

Pinto (2008, p. 31) uses the model adopted by Kingdon (1984) to discuss the clashes that precede changes in political agendas and, ultimately, the creation of new laws. According to the author, the participation of the actors involved, classified as "a) governmental actors (representatives of the executive and legislative branches and civil servants) and b) non-governmental actors (experts, interest groups, the media and public opinion)", can help us understand this process. In our case, the creation of the new laws by the federal government was a response to the insistent work of the deaf community.

Our interest focuses on literacy proposals for deaf children. We know that the political agenda around literacy is an old one.

More than a hundred years after the implementation of the republican school model in our country, we can observe that, since that time, what we now call "school failure in literacy" has been imposing itself as a strategic problem demanding urgent solutions and has been mobilizing public administrators, education legislators, intellectuals from different areas of knowledge, educators and teachers (Mortatti, 2019a, p. 30).

In our view, Pinto (2008) and Mortatti (2019a) converge in the sense of warning us that, in order to understand the political changes around an issue, the actions of various subjects with greater or lesser influence on decisions come into play, turning the space for discussion and decision-making into a battle arena (Bakhtin, 1992). So, in order to understand the place of literacy for deaf children in the Bolsonaro government, we set out to dialog with the discourses that preceded us, while at the same time launching ourselves as a bridge to other dialogues, agreements and disagreements.

Although it is part of a recent policy, the PNA has mobilized researchers and scholars in Brazil, both because of its heralded innovative and "messianic" character, and because it is part of a government that, since its inception, has tried to deconstruct the country's cultural and educational foundations. The fact is that we still need to look at its conceptual foundations and listen to the voices that are enunciated there.

To serve the target audience of special education, during the Bolsonaro government, the Secretariat of Specialized Modalities (SEMESP) was created within the scope of the MEC (Ministry of Education and Culture), replacing the former Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI). According to the PNA, the aim of the secretariat would be to launch an inclusive agenda in conjunction with other government bodies and civil society. Apparently, SEMESP didn't differ much from the old secretariat, as it kept special education, indigenous school education, quilombola school education and rural education students as the target audience for its guidelines. However, with the extinction of SECADI and the creation of SEMESP, literacy policies for young people

⁴ Law No. 12.319, of September 1, 2010 (regulates the profession of Libras Interpreter), Law No. 13.005, of June 25, 2014 (National Education Plan) and Law No. 13.146, of July 6, 2015 (Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities) (Brasil, 2010; 2014; 2015).

and adults (EJA) left SECADI and became part of the Literacy Secretariat (SEALF). Another significant change was the extinction of education policies on ethnic-racial relations and policies for human rights education, revealing a major setback in the struggles of minority groups in search of the rights to racial equality and full citizenship.

This neglect was also evident in relation to the documents/texts. In 2022, when this text was written, when accessing old SECADI publications, we found that most of the published materials had been deleted from the MEC website, including all publications related to the topic of Special Education; that is, the work of several years around the construction of a plural and inclusive education was no longer accessible for consultation, weakening documentary research projects, such as ours, but also indicating that the “new” policy did not take into account the possible advances achieved in previous administrations.

In this scenario, the creation of "[...] other educational policies, programs and government actions under development in Brazil, with the aim of replacing them, but without presenting the proper diagnostic evaluation of their results [...]" gave rise, among others, to the PNA, in which the concept of literacy for children in special education is no different from what is proposed for hearing children, i.e. "[...] in the same logic of the primacy of scientific knowledge that governs the PNA, the development of indicators of reading fluency, writing proficiency and proficiency in Libras will be proposed for special education" (Brasil, 2019b, p. 37).

Among the essential components of literacy are reading fluency, vocabulary development and writing production. In numeracy, the ability to read and write numbers, understand functions and the meaning of the four mathematical operations is of fundamental importance (Brasil, 2019b, p. 36).

We note that the components described show a concept of literacy based on learning the linguistic system, without concern for the specific characteristics of deaf children. Nor is there any concern with literacy based on the production of meanings and discursivity, fundamental dimensions in the formation of critical and participatory subjects.

In summary, the text of the PNA mentions that the target audience of special education will have specific and specialized actions, from teacher training to the production of materials. Regarding deaf students, it defines that schooling will take place in bilingual classes and schools, using sign language, respecting the linguistic diversity of this group. It is important to emphasize that the struggle for linguistic recognition of deaf students through bilingual education has been going on for a long time, reaching its peak, as pointed out, with the enactment of Law nº.10.436/2002 (Brasil, 2002) and its regulation through Decree nº.5626/2005 (Brasil, 2005). So, the document ratifies that bilingual education is ideal for the schooling of deaf people.

In one of the sections that make up the document, entitled *O que dizem os especialistas* (What the experts say), located in the right-hand corner of the page, some professionals, mainly from the field of Linguistics, comment on issues related to literacy. In the case of deaf students, Professor Fernando César Capovilla fulfills this task by defending the adaptation of curricular content in Libras, as well as "[...] the acquisition and development of literacy and orofacial reading in Portuguese as cross-feedback processes in a virtuous circle of increasing comprehensiveness" (Brasil, 2019b, p. 37).

As a reference, he points to the experiences of the United States and Canada. It should be noted that the valorization of international research is a hallmark of the PNA to the detriment of national production in the field of literacy and deaf education.

The defense of the literacy process for deaf children through orofacial reading is in line with what was once the hegemonic practice in deaf education: oralization. This practice, which lasted for almost the entire history of deaf education in Brazil, was marked by a concept of literacy based on the possibility of teaching the Portuguese language in the oral modality as synonymous with teaching the country's official language. According to Rodrigues (2014), literacy and oralization were two sides of the same coin. Although our historical analysis must take into account the dialogues and interlocutors of a given historical context, we cannot shy away from saying that the oralist conception was part of a past that did not bring positive results in the educational field for the deaf.

With the aim of implementing “[...] specific actions for the different audiences of specialized modalities” (Brasil, 2019, p. 36), the MEC presented, at the *Fórum Permanente de Discussão sobre Políticas Públicas para Pessoas com Deficiência* (Permanent Discussion Forum on Public Policies for People with Disabilities), on September 26, 2019 (Fórum..., 2019), National Day of the Deaf, the defense for the phonic-based method approach in the literacy of deaf children (Fórum..., 2019), with a lecture given by the then Director of Accessibility, Mobility, Inclusion and Support for People with Disabilities, Nídia Limeira de Sá. Even though she assumed that sign language is deaf children's first language and Portuguese is their second language, configuring a bilingual education, the speaker, when explaining how children learn to read and write, defended the phonic approach for the deaf:

The individual must understand the relationship between speech and writing. Even though the individual is not listening to speech, he or she is writing what is being said, too. So there is a relationship between what is being written and what is being said. And the phonic-based method works on this relationship. Portuguese written is alphabetically. We use letters to write. So, the method will work on the relationship between writing and Portuguese. The use of letters maps speech (Fórum..., 2019, n.p).

By stating that letters map speech, an essential condition for children to develop phonological awareness, i.e. the ability to analyze the phonemic structure of words that belong to the alphabetic system and thus learn to read and write, she also defended the phonemic approach for deaf children, going against the proposal for bilingual education that has been implemented - including by specific law - and the need to think up methodologies for the literacy of deaf children, which includes teaching Libras as the mother tongue of deaf people.

In the same vein, Maria Regina Maluf, one of the authors of the PNA, states in an article published in 2018, entitled *Linguagem, cognição e Educação Infantil: contribuições da psicologia cognitiva e das neurociências* (Language, cognition and Early Childhood Education: contributions from cognitive psychology and neurosciences):

Although learning written language is based on the foundations of linguistic and cognitive development, children actually need to be taught how writing maps onto speech and how to read and write. Once the basic mechanism has been learned, children progress by expanding and modifying their knowledge; in this sense, they begin to develop reading and writing skills (Sargiani; Maluf, 2018, p. 481).

As we discussed in the introduction, the concept of literacy for deaf children has always been linked to that proposed for hearing children. In this respect, we have identified in the PNA an attempt to reconcile a national political agenda, i.e. to impose the phonic method on deaf children as well, without considering the linguistic specificities of this public, as referenced, for example, in research by Bernardino (2000), Fernandes (2006), Santana (2007), Quadros and Schmiedt (2006), Rodrigues (2009), among others. As an example, the research entitled *Consciência Fonológica na Língua de Sinais Brasileira (Libras) em crianças e adolescentes surdos com início da aquisição da primeira língua (Libras) precoce ou tardio* (Phonological awareness in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) in deaf children and adolescents with early or late onset of first language acquisition (Libras))(Cruz (2016) is used as the only bibliographic reference in the PNA.

Although her aim is not to teach literacy to deaf people, the author dialogues with research that defends the importance of phonological awareness for successfully learning to read and write in an alphabetic system. In the context of deaf education, the author proposes:

To verify the level of phonological awareness in Libras in bilingual deaf children and adolescents, aged between 9 and 14 years old, with the beginning of language acquisition at different periods of life (between 0-4 years old and after 4 years old), and in bilingual deaf adults, with the beginning of language acquisition up to 4 years old, through a Libras Phonological Awareness Test that includes the parameters hand configuration (CM), location/ point of articulation (L) and movement (M), analyzing the possible effects of the beginning of language acquisition in deaf children and adolescents (Cruz, 2016, p. 80)

In his study, Cruz (2016) makes it clear that the terms "phoneme" and "phonology" are applicable to any language, including sign language. Based on the studies of Klima and Bellugi (1979), Hulst (1993) and Karnopp (1994, 1999), even though the sign modality is spatial-visual, the author states that: "Sign languages present a phonological level, that is, signs are formed by a set of meaningless elements that when recombined (according to phonological rules and restrictions) have the potential to form an extensive lexicon" (Cruz, 2016, p. 56).

Returning to the studies of William Stokoe (1960), an American linguist who inaugurated linguistic research into sign languages, Cruz (2016, p. 56), on the phonology of sign language, recognizes: "Despite their iconic and gestural origins, signs are not holistic gestures, but made up of a small and finite set of meaningless components." Stokoe (1960) called these components or minimum units parameters, namely, handshape (CM), location (L) and movement (M). Thus, the study introduces the concept of phonological awareness for deaf students, even though it does not refer to the awareness of sound units, but visual ones. From this perspective, we understand the inclusion of Cruz's (2016) study as a theoretical foundation for deaf literacy in the PNA. However, the author's position needs to be problematized, because the *phonic-based method* she intends to adopt to think about literacy for the deaf and which underlies the use of the phonic method in the PNA is based, according to Cardoso-Martins and Corrêa (2008, p. 279),

[...] on the assumption that the child's main task when learning to read and write is to understand that letters represent sounds in the pronunciation of words. As a result, this paradigm has stimulated studies into the relationship between the development of knowledge

of letter-sound correspondences and phonological awareness, on the one hand, and the development of writing, on the other.

Thus, even if hearing children, in the process of appropriating written language, understand that oral language is made up of units called phonemes, deaf children, because they can't hear, that is, for sensory reasons, won't reach this understanding. Thus, the adoption of a phonic-based method in deaf literacy does not seem appropriate for obvious reasons. In our opinion, the use of abstractly constructed concepts to think about the languages used by listeners also seems meaningless, because it starts from a conception of language that is ready and finished, disregarding the life of language in verbal interaction and the life of the human beings who produce it and, at the same time, constitute themselves in this process.

As Bakhtin (2010) explains, in the world of abstractions thought up by certain theoretical strands and, therefore, by the current of philosophical thought called, by this author, abstract objectivism, the actual existence of human beings and language is not included. Just like language, human beings often appear in this type of theorizing as "non-living". In reality, according to the author, people who act, feel, live, love and produce language have no place in these theorizations. In this specific case, the so-called phonic-based method abstracts deaf people when thinking about their language, showing an almost absurd attempt to universalize a theory that is currently being questioned. It should also be noted that this paradigm is also being questioned in order to guide the literacy of hearing children because, as has been reiterated, it strips language of its discursive, dialogical and political character.

From our perspective, the defense of the phonic-based method stems from the need to adjust the PNA's recommendation to adopt the phonic method for all children, including deaf children.

The negative impact of indicating the phonic-based method for the deaf in the PNA document was enormous. Lage, Begrow and Oliveira (2020, p. 79), for example, stated that the adoption of this method in deaf literacy would be "[...] medicalizing because it reduces the complexity of the literacy process and disregards the heterogeneity that marks the different ways of learning of both hearing and deaf children". For the authors, the document does not respect the deaf child's bilingual condition, as it imposes learning based on a relationship that is difficult for them to make, which is the relationship between sound and letter.

Among the institutions that have expressed their opposition to the guidelines of the literacy policy, we mention the Libras Working Group (GT) of the National Postgraduate and Research Association in Letters and Linguistics (Anpoll), which, through its representatives, stated in an open letter:

We strongly disagree with the proposal for Literacy for deaf children using the Phonic Method, as defended by the Director of Accessibility, Mobility, Inclusion and Support for People with Disabilities, during the Public Policy Forum for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People held on September 26, 2019, as we understand, through science and practice, that the Phonic Method violates the rights of accessibility for deaf people to a bilingual education, in which written Portuguese is the focus of teaching, from literacy onwards. This proposal does not guarantee access to the visually-based reading and writing needed by deaf people, precisely because they do not have the hearing to access this information (Campello; Rossi, 2019, p. 1).

The letter, supported by a significant group of professors from Brazilian public universities, the National Institute for the Education of the Deaf (INES) and Feneis, concludes with a request for the creation of a working group to

[...] discuss existing data and define in order to systematize methodological principles for teaching literacy to deaf, deafblind and hearing impaired students, with cohesive, coherent, appropriate proposals based on scientific evidence, as well as plan their implementation with training of sign language teachers, bilingual teachers (fluent in Libras) for basic education and teachers of Portuguese as a second language for the deaf, to implement what is foreseen in the aforementioned report, supported by the Directorate of Bilingual Education Policies for the Deaf (Campello; Rossi, 2019, p. 4).

In the same direction, the Brazilian Society of Speech Therapy, an entity that historically has as its scope the teaching of oral and written language to deaf children, through a letter posted on its website, recognized the proposal of the phonic-based method in the PNA, but positioned itself against the adoption of the phonic method for deaf children, based on the following argument:

Although the Phonic Method is a literacy proposal provided for by Decree nº.9,765, of April 11, 2019, we repudiate the adoption of this method **for the education of deaf children** because it presents as its base concept phonemic awareness, that is, the conscious knowledge of the "smallest phonological units **of speech**" and the ability to manipulate them intentionally. This means that the deaf child, due to their hearing condition, would have clear difficulties in accessing these phonological units of speech (Trenche, [2019], p. 1, author's emphasis).

This movement leads us back to Pinto (2008, p. 30), who points out that non-governmental actors, i.e. social groups or institutions interested in implementing changes in public policy, can act actively to influence government decisions: "Interested groups can press for the recognition of problems and the adoption of their solutions or proposals. And in these processes, various factors can operate as a force that drives or restricts (blocks) a particular item on the agenda."

In this scenario, the strong rejection by the deaf community of the suitability of the phonic approach in the literacy for deaf children, similar to what is proposed for hearing children, led to changes in the government's official discourse, postponing any discussion in this direction. The deaf community, always attentive, refuted the government's agenda, decontextualized from the history of struggles and achievements and disconnected from dialogue and social life.

Final considerations

Given the data that the documents/voices show us, it is possible to see that the discourse of the public managers responsible for deaf education and the implementation of policies in the Bolsonaro government was contradictory. The project, which was presented as "new", materialized in the PNA (Brasil, 2019b), only ratified the continuity of old policies that have been sustained to this day with regard to bilingual education for the deaf. As some research has shown, deaf education has made great strides in recent decades, guaranteeing deaf students the use and dissemination of sign language in school spaces.

For the time being, the analysis of the document listed in this text indicated a more political than pedagogical alignment, since the literacy proposal based on the phonic-based method was a banner of the Bolsonaro government and was also assumed for deaf children. In this context, the negative impact provoked action from non-governmental actors, represented by associations and institutions linked to the deaf community movement, demanding that the historic achievements in bilingual education for the deaf be guaranteed and respected.

For now, with the assumption of the new government installed on January 1, 2023 and the consequent extinction of Semesp, the new PNA also ceases to produce its effects, but points to several challenges for the new government, among which is the need to deepen the concept of literacy for deaf children from a bilingual perspective as a basis for advancing in the construction of other public policies.

We believe that literacy for the deaf in the field of bilingual education should be based on polyphony, which enables the construction of subjects of speech and utterances, through an approach based on human rights, the social practices of the subjects involved and the authorship of their discourses. Thus, opposing a method that does not recognize the diversity and linguistic uniqueness of deaf children is a premise for strengthening Bilingual Education for the deaf.

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EDNALVA GUTIERREZ RODRIGUES

PhD in Education, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil; Retired professor, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil.

CLÁUDIA MARIA MENDES GONTIJO

PhD in Education, Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil; Full professor, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil.

ERICLER OLIVEIRA GUTIERREZ

PhD in Education, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil; Adjunct professor Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1 Conception and design of the research; construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data; writing and critical review of the final text.

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