

FOREWORD

The sign language curriculum at school: reflections, propositions and challenges

Since 2018, four Brazilian cities (Canoas - RS, Guarulhos - SP, Sao Paulo - SP and Rio Grande - RS) have organized and published curricular proposals of the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) that reflect differentiated public policies at the municipal level. In fact, these curricula were published before the publication of the Law 14,191 in August 3, 2021, which establishes the deaf bilingual education in the country. These documents present Libras as the first language to be taught to deaf children from Early Childhood Education to the final years of Elementary Education and in Youth and Adult Education. Moreover, these are works that resulted from initial reflections in classroom practices and academic discussions, and converged to the elaboration of official public documents at a regional level.

Several previous works were organized locally in curricular proposals and subject programs in schools and institutes for the deaf in several Brazilian states. However, what differentiates the proposed curricula from 2018 onwards is the fact that they achieve the status and visibility of public education policies. The documents that were (and are being) proposed, consolidate Libras as a school subject, as a curricular component with specific and progressive objectives that deaf children need to acquire and develop, in the same way that hearing children learn Portuguese as their first language.

These documents followed international educational paradigms for deaf bilingual education and the sign language curricula of the following countries: the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, France, Greece and Sweden. Since the early 2000s, these countries have been building specific curricula for teaching the sign languages of their deaf communities as first languages. Hence, for example, the Libras Curriculum of Rio Grande is based on the 2004 Greek Sign Language Curriculum, which, in turn, was based on the 2002 American Sign Language (ASL) Curriculum.

Sign language curricula exist within the international context of bilingual education for deaf children, and this is a matter that requires further research and discussion. There are countries that have officially recognized their sign languages as the language of deaf children and as a language of instruction in schools, yet they do not treat sign language in the same way as modern spoken languages (e.g., English, Portuguese), nor do they view them as a subject of

acquisition, development and study by the deaf child. Furthermore, international research clearly demonstrates the positive impact of sign language on the general academic progress of deaf children at school.

This volume entitled “The sign language curriculum at school: reflections, propositions and challenges”, brings this discussion to a prominent place by inviting contributions from national researchers, representatives from the south, southeast and north of Brazil, and international researchers, deaf and hearing, with long experience in building the curriculum of sign languages as a first language or as a second/additional language, and with examples of existing educational practice.

The discussions in this volume begin with the paper of Professor Jim Kyle, “**Sign and school: a journey**”, in which an in-depth historical analysis is carried out on the teaching of sign language as a first language for deaf children, as well as important projections about the future of the education for the deaf and their sign language, considering, in particular, the impact of the growing number of deaf children with cochlear implants. In the same fashion, two articles follow. Firstly, the paper of Helena Carmo and Paulo Vaz de Carvalho, who write about “**The Portuguese sign language curriculum: past, present and future**”, reflecting on Portugal's path towards the regulation of deaf bilingual education and the propositions of deaf teachers of Portuguese Sign Language for curricular reformulations. In the same line, the article by Adriane Menezes and Vânia Chiella, now referring to Brazil, presents a discussion on “**Public policies, the BNCC [Base Nacional Comum Curricular] and the curriculum in the bilingual school for the deaf**” and the Brazilian context in which the bilingual education for the deaf is integrated. The authors reflect on the curricular implementation processes, considering the regional specificities of the States of Brazil where deaf communities and schools coexist. Furthermore, through an analysis of the implementation of educational programs for deaf students in Chile, the paper by Maribel González Moraga and Karina Muñoz Vilugrón, “**Experiences of teaching sign language in the education of the Chilean deaf: an unofficial curriculum**”, takes a critical look at the country's reality.

Next, we have four articles that explore different nuances in the construction of sign language curricula. The work by Maria Tagarelli de Monte “**Using the Common European Framework of Reference for Teaching Italian Sign Language: Lessons from Research and**

Practice” presents the use of the CEFR in the teaching of Italian Sign Language with the joint participation of deaf and hearing people in its construction, and the political and cultural changes that have taken place in Italy since 2011. The work by Breda Carty, Karen Bontempo and Louise de Beuzeville entitled **“Learning Signs: Developing a National Curriculum for Auslan Students as a First and Second Language in Australian Schools”**, outlines the structure of the Australian Sign Language curriculum and the opportunities and challenges arising in its development.

The paper by Maria Mertzani, soon after, presents an important discussion about **“Sign Language Literacy in the Sign Language Curriculum”**, specifying the concept of sign language literacy and emphasizing the relevance of metalanguage in this process. Felipe Venâncio Barbosa also discusses this cognitive skill, metalanguage, in the article **“Metalinguistic skills and language use in the propositions of four Brazilian sign language curricula”**, in which, through a reflection on their structures, he presents a description of the first four Libras curricula in Brazil that are based on the BNCC, and analyzes their approaches to sign language use and metalinguistic skills.

The research team at Boston University's Center for Communication and Deaf Studies is continually working on developing the ASL curriculum, as was the case with the publication of the recent curriculum entitled: *ASL Content Standards: Kindergarten - Grade 12*. Professor Robert Hoffmeister with the researchers Kristin DiPerri and Todd Czubeck were involved in co-authoring the curriculum and accompanying educational material. Their work marked the construction of the Greek Sign Language Curriculum in 2004, in which they acted as co-authors with Vassilis Kourbetis and his team at the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Pedagogical Institute (now Institute of Educational Policy) in Greece. The development of this last work is presented by Robert Hoffmeister, Vassilis Kourbetis and Spiridoula Karipi in the paper **“Bilingual Curriculum Materials that Support Sign Language as a First Language for Deaf Students: The Integration of Technology, Learning and Teaching”**. In this, the authors discuss the materials available for teaching the Greek Sign Language, describing in particular innovative bilingual multimedia material that can be applied in the learning of any sign language.

The paper by Cristiane Lima Terra Fernandes “**Libras in Law and school practice: what we have and what we need**”, presents a discussion on how Libras is presented in Brazil’s political documents while portraying the implementation of these laws, and continues by reporting the situation of the bilingual school in Rio Grande/RS and the constitution of its Libras Curriculum as L1, referring to existing difficulties and possibilities for its implementation. The last part presents the “**Interview with Robert Hoffmeister: A Discussion of the Sign Language Curriculum**”, carried out by the organizers of this volume. On this occasion we were able to connect with and understand even more the important work of Robert Hoffmeister on Sign Language as a first language, as well as the work of new and well-known colleagues in this field.

This volume provides examples of sign language curricula from Australia, Brazil, Chile, the United States, Greece, England and Italy, representing a total of three continents and seven countries. The sign language curricula were developed through a close collaboration between deaf and hearing researchers and academics, whom this volume also brings together, with the scope to theorize such developments over the past, present and future, and to present practical overviews.

The topic of the volume and the set of papers - produced by internationally acclaimed authors for their studies and research in sign languages - is of paramount importance for the field of bilingual education of deaf students. In fact, its relevance is seen in the need to conduct further research in this area in Brazil, especially in the teaching and acquisition of Libras as a first language. We believe that the presentation of these experiences exposed in the following pages will help to leverage the discussions, expand the theoretical spectrum, and enrich the dialogue about what has been produced in different countries.

We also present all paper contributions in Portuguese and in English, so that the volume can reach readers in the countries involved and stimulate discussion globally among scholars in the field.

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MOMENTO

Diálogos em Educação

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