

# Bilingual Deaf Education in the South of Brazil

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This paper presents an analysis of Bilingual Deaf Education in Brazil, with particular reference to the South of the country. This subject is presented in context, and takes into account research carried out over the last 5–7 years. We consider the spread of bilingual/bicultural models, changes in the representation of Deaf people and Deafness and finally, the epistemological inversion of Deaf and Hearing ‘problems’ as present in the discussion related to Deaf Education in Brazil. The analyses of the experience in Brazil are not simple. In fact, the complexity is related to the different possible readings that ‘Bilingual Deaf Education’ can have, such as for instance, methodological, linguistic and psycholinguistic interpretations, all of which are considered in the present paper. In addition, we describe certain bilingual experiences that we have been engaged in, together with other Deaf researchers and Deaf teachers over the last decade.

**Keywords:** bilingualism, deafness, Deaf Education, Brazil

## Introduction

Over the last 30 years, many changes have taken place in Deaf Education in Brazil, relating to issues such as ideological conceptions, educational organisation, Deaf empowerment, Deaf people in Deaf Education teams, the status of Brazilian Sign Language, and Portuguese as a second language, among others. Skliar (2001) selects three specific contributions of these changes that he maintains need to be considered in detail:

- (1) the spread of a bilingual/bicultural model applied to Deaf Education;
- (2) changes in the representations of Deafness and Deaf people;
- (3) the epistemological inversion of what the Deaf ‘problem’ is in relation to hearing ‘problems’ in Deaf Education.

These three contributions can be seen as part of the bilingual movement in Brazil, considering that bilingualism was and is related to policies, in the sense of action, selected to guide decisions about Deaf Education. Thus, this is far more than just a type of educational proposal for Deaf people.

## Bilingualism in Deaf Education in Brazil

Deaf Bilingual Education can be defined as a complex phenomenon, since it reflects policies, power and knowledge (in Foucault’s (1980) sense). It is not just the presence of two languages, in our case, Brazilian Sign Language and

Brazilian Portuguese, but involves ambiguity and relativity of truth. There is ambiguity, since the concept of Deaf Bilingual Education can be defined in different ways, often revealing antagonisms; and there is relativity of truth (including the minimal definition – two languages), because Deaf Bilingual Education presupposes a negation of more classical conceptions in the history of Deaf Education.

In Brazil three different readings of the bilingual/bicultural model as applied to Deaf Education may be postulated: first, a methodological reading; second, a linguistic reading; and third, a psycholinguistic reading. The first reading involves applying the model as an academic system that has come to replace Total Communication as opposed to Oral Education, without reviewing the rules and the curriculum, or the Deaf person in the educational process. On the other hand, the linguistic and psycholinguistic views of Deaf Bilingual Education are concerned with the acquisition of language and the lexical, semantic and syntactic relations of the different modalities of the languages involved. This much-needed and meaningful discussion is crucial for Deaf Education, although it can also blur other important points such as, academic programmes, literacy, the relation between education/work, Deaf empowerment, the education of new professionals, mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion, and power relations. It is interesting to note that all these readings have kept, and still keep, a focus on the Deaf child and do not consider teenagers and adults.

In fact, bilingual education should only be the starting point of Deaf education, since it is the beginning of policies about Deaf identity, Deaf and hearing knowledge and power, Deaf resistance movements, ideologies, hegemonic discourses, school roles and public policies. We cannot ignore all the aspects involved in Deaf Bilingual Education. This is well-known with respect to spoken languages in various countries in which there are bilingual/multilingual contexts (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1992, 1996; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Grosjean, 1982; Veltman, 1988). The implicit aims of Bilingual Education in the world have to be considered. Aspects such as assimilating individuals or groups into mainstream society, aiming at socialising people into full participation in the community, and unifying a multilingual community, endeavouring to bring unity to a multi-ethnic, or multinational linguistically diverse policy, are examples of what can be considered as the basis of bilingualism.

In this sense, the political has a double value: first, as a historical, cultural and social construction of perspectives on Deafness which are based on discourses, and as power and knowledge relations in the process. Then, we can find Deaf policies with language, identity and body pressures (Davis, 1997). This can be understood as 'hearing' practices (Skliar, 1997, 1998) in which Deaf people are talked to by hearing people, being forced to be talked to and seen as hearing beings; in other words, being colonised (Quadros & Perlin, 2003).

Therefore, a bilingual focus should encompass more than merely educational proposals. There needs to be an investigation into the power mechanisms of the relations inside and outside the Deaf school and Deaf education in general. In this way, bilingual education is a proposal that is related to human

rights. Sign language, in this view, is the language of Deaf people and the language of the school. It is the language in which the Deaf child will formulate hypotheses about the world, criticise, talk about emotions and discuss issues, as his or her right.

The next point considered by Skliar (2001), refers to the changes in the representations of Deafness and Deaf people observed over the last 30 years in Brazil. These ideas are opposed to the oralist conceptions in vogue at the beginning of the '80s, but this is not a simple opposition. The conceptualisation of certain bilingual proposals in Brazil still reflect intrinsic oralist policies. This is the present picture in Brazil. The discourses and practices are like networks with asymmetric power and knowledge relations about Deaf people and Deafness. The meanings and symbolic systems produce representations about Deafness and about Deaf bilingual education that are based on traditional conceptions, which use sign language as a tool for the dissemination of the official culture and language.

Skliar (2001), therefore, proposes to define Deafness according to the following four dimensions: as political difference; as visual experience; as multiple identities; and as located in the discourse of 'handicap'.

In the first dimension, Deafness as political difference, it is very common to find different ways to identify the Deaf by using euphemisms such as 'special needs', 'people with special needs', 'diversity', 'difference'. These terms seem to be examples of meanings that share various similarities. Deaf people are defined by meanings based on normality being invented, reinvented and produced by 'hearing' people. This happens because the norm is implicit and invisible; and, as a consequence of this invisibility, it is considered non-existent. We have found a preference for the term 'diversity' in Brazilian official documents. This reflects a traditional strategy that blurs the meaning of cultural differences. The ambiguity of the term 'diversity' leads, at best, to the acceptance of some degree of pluralism related to the ideal norm. However, all these terms are only ways to minimise conceptions that are still reproducing old frontiers of exclusion. We define Deafness as political difference, not only to replace all the adjectives used up to now, but as a clear option based on several analyses (for instance, those carried out by Bhabha, 1994 and McLaren, 1995). In this sense, difference is politically, historically and socially constructed; differences are always differences, and differences exist even if there is no authorisation, acceptance, respect, or permission from normality.

With respect to the second dimension, understanding Deafness as difference, this implies recognising visual experiences that involve much more than cognitive and linguistic abilities. This leads to all kinds of cultural and community manifestations, including, of course, sign language. For instance, we use the term 'The Deaf Way' to refer to other people with name signs based on visual features; the use of visual metaphors about aesthetic information; the production of visual humour; the resistance movement with visual manifestation; the expression of the meaning of time in a visual way in space, visual mechanisms and didactics, and visual literature. The Deaf Way of understanding and producing knowledge is not the main point of educational discussions. However, it should occupy a space in the proposals and design of

Deaf education, since it plays a crucial role in communication, didactics, curriculum and intellectual processes.

The third dimension, defining Deafness as multiple Deaf identities, forces us to consider the 'Deaf person' not as a person with a unique and complete identity. Over the last few years, we have detected many deep transformations in Deaf identity, reflecting policies, cultural and social movements, and changes in the economy. All these seem to interfere clearly or implicitly in stereotypes of Deafness, especially in Deaf identities that change from time to time, according to different cultures, geographic space, historical times, change in agreement with different people etc. (Moura, 1999; Perlin, 1998). Thus, the Deaf community should be understood not only in its plural forms, but also in its fragments of identity. In this sense, we are moving towards understanding Deafness from a political perspective, that is, focusing on established power relations. The 'movement of identity' takes place in the meeting of Deaf-Deaf, that is, when Deaf people meet other Deaf people, and where space is organised in a different way. Also, this movement happens in discursive environments. Then, Deaf people will start to talk by themselves, to judge, to remember, to recognise and to perceive in different ways and, in so doing, establish new identities. As mentioned by Wrigley (1996), Deaf people invent Deafness by themselves.

The last way to define Deafness is as located in the discourse of 'handicap'. When talking about handicaps, people locate the discussion in a Special Education context that is considered to be a part (or sub area) of Education. Deafness is analysed as a small part of the huge problem that surrounds Education in general. This small part is related to taking care of the people who are not as able as 'normal people' are, since these people are handicapped with *unfortunate* families and *sacrificial* professionals – the specialists. Special Education manifests discontinuity in its theoretical discourses and is related much more to charity, aid and medical practices, and, in doing so, reproduces exclusion based on the binary relation of inclusion/exclusion. Over the last 10 years, the dominant ideology of Deaf Education seems to be dissatisfied with this view, in the light of the Deaf Way. The handicap definition is not the way to think about Deaf people; instead the epistemological way is considered the best to capture Deaf identities.

Even when we are completely against the idea of Special Education, we have to consider that this definition still has a very strong influence on us. Therefore, the impossibility of passing planning proposals, which see the Deaf person as handicapped, and not as a person with visual experiences, as defined earlier, needs to be discussed. This means that if educational professionals continue with their discourses, trying to maintain the notion of Special Education, it is impossible to think of a Deaf Way.

After defining Deafness, the last aspect mentioned by Skliar (2001), is epistemological inversion: the Deaf 'problem' is, in fact, hearing 'problems' in Deaf Education. This involves consideration of the problems that the hearing people suffer in their social, communicative and linguistic interactions with Deaf people. These are problems derived from the invention of the Deaf *alter*. For instance, from the cultural point of view, there is the problem related to the perception of who Deaf people are. Hearing

specialists or teachers have problems when planning their classes to understand 'the other', – the Deaf person. In other words, instead of continuing to try to understand hearing impairment, they need to understand the (political) meaning of *hearing normality*. Instead of thinking that sign language is a problem, they need to analyse the hearing discourse that represents this language as a problem. Instead of thinking that Deaf people are handicapped, they need to understand that the Deaf live a visual experience in the world.

Following this order of ideas, we can also invert the problem of Bilingual Education. Before trying to decide whether Deaf people are bilingual, whether sign language is their first language, whether there is something called 'Deaf culture', whether there should be divisions between children and Deaf adults, whether the school should be special or regular, whether Deaf people should or should not be teachers, whether they are different from hearing people, etc, we should ask: what kind of problems do we, as hearing people, have when we think of Bilingual Education? Which mechanisms have we, as hearing people, invented to understand Deaf bilingualism? What are our representations of Deafness and Deaf people within and beyond educational practices and discourses? And, finally, what are the power and knowledge relations that we maintain or negate in our relations as hearing people with Deaf people?

### **The bilingual experience in the South of Brazil: Educational work from the viewpoint of the Deaf adult, and the establishment of a network of Deaf Education**

We have been thinking and writing since 1996 about the existence of certain variables in Deaf Bilingual Education in the South of Brazil, incorporating Deaf views to make academic projects more complex and significant (Perlin, 1998, 2000; Quadros, 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Skliar, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). These variables follow from the pedagogic pathways in which Deaf people are inserted, established both from a historical and forward-looking bilingual proposal. They are the following:

- (1) the reconstruction of the problems that govern bilingual education for Deaf people by inverting the 'hearing' logic of Deaf education in which the problem would be exactly the Deaf themselves, and heading towards another multi-dimensional analysis of the educational process;
- (2) the circulation of the meanings and representations around Deafness and Deaf people in specific educational contexts;
- (3) the participation of Deaf adults in the planning, development and evaluation of bilingual policies;
- (4) the continuity of the educational project;
- (5) the revision of school architectures and ideologies; and, finally,
- (6) the structure and sequence of pedagogical goals.

This set of variables has opened new doors for Deaf Bilingual Education in the South of Brazil. In the first place, the transformation of the view that

a bilingual education is not only an academic project, but is intimately associated with the politics of linguistics, identity, culture and differences. In the second place, and perhaps one of the most important aspects, bilingual education supposes two pathways for Deaf people. One is a pedagogical pathway with which the Deaf child is engaged until he/she becomes an adult. The second is a pathway that goes from the Deaf adult to the Deaf child. What does it mean to go from the Deaf adult to the Deaf child? It means that we cannot ignore the systematic qualification of Deaf adults as educational professionals and the many generations of Deaf adults who were not able to radically change their historical condition of illiteracy, low academic results and low quality of life: no jobs, sub-jobs, etc. Also, it means that the school should be preparing for the time in which the Deaf child and Deaf adult can meet each other, and that the school should be considering the qualifications of Deaf people to play a role in Deaf Education.

Since 1996, in the South of Brazil, our focus has been specifically on this issue. Nowadays, community, undergraduate and graduate courses and projects are being organised and created to prepare Deaf people to be teachers of Brazilian Sign Language, and specific areas, such as literacy of Deaf teenagers and Deaf adults, arts and cultural manifestations. The main aim of all these initiatives is no other than to significantly transform the situation of the present generations of Deaf people in Brazil, in order to lead to autonomy of the Deaf in the political and education arenas; in other words, in order to facilitate Deaf empowerment. Almost all the Deaf people engaged in the process described here, are from Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina (the two states in the South of Brazil), but some come from the countryside and other large cities.

To offer a picture of Brazilian reality in terms of Deaf Education, we would describe the situation in the following terms. Brazil has a political policy of public (state) education in mainstream schools. The control of this position cuts across the regional administration that puts forward different positions across Brazil. This means that there are different understandings of what the 'inclusion' of Deaf people in mainstream schools really means. In Rio Grande do Sul, there are about ten Deaf Schools that make the difference in terms of Deaf Education. These schools have had systematic discussions about what Deaf people want in terms of education. Some of them have had support from the universities in the understanding of how to implement Deaf Education in a 'Deaf way'.

In Santa Catarina, there is no Deaf school in the entire state. However, there are a group of 32 Deaf people studying Deaf Education on an undergraduate course in a public university – Universidade Estadual de Santa Catarina, UDESC – in order to be able to teach Deaf children. The Deaf students are aware of the state context and they have been discussing the future of Deaf Education in their state and in Brazil as a whole. These future Deaf teachers, together with teachers or future teachers from Rio Grande do Sul, have been meeting to analyse the situation and to make proposals about Deaf Education in systematic forums. There is also a plan developed by these Deaf groups which presents the priorities of Deaf Education

(Documento do I Seminário Nacional de Surdos, 2001) that is partially translated as follows:

## **Ist National Deaf Seminar – Caxias do Sul/Rio Grande Do Sul – 27–29 September, 2001 – The Deaf View on Educational Practices**

### **Group 3 – Deaf education**

#### Infant Education

- (1) How to prepare the Deaf child in the first years of schooling.
- (2) What is the curriculum of Deaf children in their first years at school?
- (3) To offer access to Brazilian Sign Language to Deaf children of hearing families.

#### Primary Education

- (1) What are the best practices of primary education?
- (2) To develop curriculum proposals for Deaf Education in Sign Language.
- (3) To find out about literacy processes, the reading and writing of Portuguese for Deaf people.

#### Secondary Education

- (1) To find out about Education and Work.

#### Adult Education

- (1) To make Deaf Adults literate.

#### Undergraduate Education

- (1) To identify didactic strategies and specific dynamics of classes for the Deaf.

### **Group 4 – Deaf education boundaries**

- (1) To find out about the laws and their implications in Deaf Education.
- (2) To investigate education and the politics of social inclusion and exclusion.
- (3) To have a critical view on the relation between Deaf Education and Special Education.
- (4) To find out about political projects and institutional projects related to Deafness.
- (5) To consider conceptual models of Deafness and Deaf people: the clinical, the anthropological and the difference model.
- (6) To distinguish the discourse and the practice of 'hearing impairment' in Education.
- (7) To find out how 'disability discourse' functions in Education.
- (8) To discover traditional curriculums in Deaf Education: practices and discourses.
- (9) To provide an introduction to the Critical Theory of the Curriculum.
- (10) To study curriculum, ideology, language, power, culture and politics.
- (11) To identify strategies of the Pedagogy of Difference.

These priorities reflect resistance movements from Deaf groups in the country. They have also discussed sign language acquisition, sign language teaching, technology, signwriting, family intervention and mental and physical health.

In Deaf Rights forums in Santa Catarina, Deaf people have proposed certain guidelines for Deaf Education that are partially translated as follows (Diretrizes e Ações para a Educação de Surdos em Santa Catarina, 2000).

### **Reconstruction of the politics of Deaf Education in Santa Catarina**

- (1) The creation of a Reference Centre for Deaf Education in teaching, research and extension to the community: recognition of Visual and Spatial Deaf Experience; production of research about cultures, identities, differences, visual methodologies, linguistics, education; to give support for instruction of the Deaf and hearing professionals; to give support for sign language interpreters; to teach courses open to the community in general about Deaf Education, Deaf Culture and Identities, Sign Language.
- (2) Starting groups of Deaf students in central regular schools at all educational levels with Deaf teachers, bilingual teachers and sign language interpreters, with a visual-based structure and methodology (Pedagogy of Difference).

There is also a National Deaf Association (*Federação Nacional de Educação e Integração de Surdos – FENEIS*) that has been fighting for more than 10 years for the recognition of sign language. Last year, a federal law (*Lei 10.436, 24/04/2002*) recognised Brazilian Sign Language as an official language in the country. This has been reflected directly in Deaf Education. Since then, it seems more appropriate to consider Deaf Education within the context of groups that have different languages from Brazilian Portuguese in Education in general, instead of relating it to the context of Special Education.

To offer a quantitative dimension of the research projects that have been carried out recently across the south of the country, we would say that currently there are about 100 Deaf students studying on different undergraduate courses, four Deaf students working on their Masters theses and three working on their doctoral dissertations in Education, about 95 Deaf teenagers and Deaf adults involved in popular education programmes, in the process of becoming literate, and 40 Deaf teachers of Brazilian Sign Language, among others. Also, there are specific projects being planned to guarantee Deaf people becoming qualified as professionals, particularly in areas of Education. These include an undergraduate major in Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese, a graduate major in Deaf Education and another in the translation and interpretation of Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese. These fields of study are being organised, thanks to the work of several organisations such as: the *Federação Nacional de Educação e Integração de Surdos – FENEIS*, the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC*, the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS*, and the *Centro Federal de Formação Tecnológica – CEFET/SC*. Moreover, as mentioned above, an undergraduate major in Deaf Education is already being offered, in the *Universidade Estadual de Santa Catarina – UDESC* –with 32 Deaf students, and the training of qualified sign language



interpreters and Deaf sign language teachers financed by the *Ministério de Educação e Cultura* (the highest federal educational organisation in Brazil) together with the organisations previously mentioned.

In addition, there are two research groups in Deaf Studies, one from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, and the other from Universidade Federal of Santa Catarina, which are carrying out different investigations. Some of them are briefly described below:

- (1) Policies of the relationships between Deaf Education, Cultural Studies and Deaf Studies, Deaf identity, Deaf culture, the definition of a Deaf person, and Deaf community organisation are some topics that have been studied by Deaf and hearing students in the context of the logical inversion process (Miranda, 2001; Perlin, 2000; Quadros & Perlin, 2003).
- (2) Deaf families are a complex topic. Cenzi (2002) presents a study identifying the representations of hearing parents, of sign language, and identities by their Deaf children.
- (3) Infant Deaf Education, Teenager Deaf Education, Adult Deaf Education. There are different groups from Deaf schools analysing their practices and rethinking how to implement Deaf Education in each specific context. The discussions include Deaf claims, the political situation, teacher qualifications and the pedagogic and philosophical plans of the school. The main questions are: Who are the Deaf adults who have studied in our schools? Who do we want to educate for what? What do we, Deaf and hearing people, think about Deaf Education? It is interesting that the main points from Deaf claims about Deaf Education are related to access to information with quality in their language and Deaf teachers. The schools participating in this process are starting to realise that they are not good schools for Deaf people and, so, they are beginning to make plans and try to work out ways of changing the situation. These depend on each individual case, rather than being general proposals. For instance, in one of the Deaf public schools in Rio Grande do Sul, the group decided that they should have Deaf teachers participating in Deaf Education. They did not have any Deaf teachers with formal qualifications at that time, so they started looking for someone who might be a good Education Professional. They found a Deaf man and he quit his original job to assume a position as a kind of teacher in a special situation, with the mayor's agreement. At the same time, he started to study, in order to be able to regularise his position at the school. Also, in the meantime, the town administration created a position for Deaf teachers with a specific qualification to work in Deaf schools. After about 8 years, he and three more Deaf teachers had normal teaching posts. Nowadays, there is a real possibility of being able to offer more posts for Deaf teachers in the future.
- (4) Distance Deaf Education is a new area in Brazil. There is a huge project planning education at undergraduate and graduate levels through e-learning. This project is justified since the professionals who could become teachers in the programmes are spread over the country (and Brazil is a big country). This also makes sense, since Deaf students from

different regions need to have access to education, which they currently do not have.

- (5) The training and qualification of Deaf professionals is a concern of the Deaf people who have already been educated. They want to keep studying and get qualified. There are some Deaf professionals who have started graduate courses, especially, in the field of Education.
- (6) Translation and interpretation of Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese is very important in the process. Deaf people are aware of the importance of having qualified interpreters. Because of this, some programmes to begin the training of interpreters have been started and currently there is a project to offer a programme for interpreters both at undergraduate and graduate major level. The latest programme to begin, the training of qualified sign language interpreters who already work as interpreters without any specific qualification, was offered to 60 people in the *Ministério de Educação e Cultura*. One or two of these are from each state in the country. We have 27 states with completely different realities in terms of education in general, in terms of Deaf organisations, and in terms of sign language recognition. Although it was eclectic, at the same time, it represented a starting point for sign language interpreter qualification in the country.
- (7) Brazilian Sign Language as part of the definition of the Deaf person has been a subject of recent research (Miranda, 2001; Perlin, 2000; Quadros, 1997a; Quadros & Perlin, 2003; Skliar & Quadros, 2000; Souza, 1998). It is already clear to people working in related areas that sign language is very important for the constitution of Deaf identities and cultures, but it is still unclear what to do with this difference in Education from the public and political point of view. To recognise difference is not difficult, but to plan what to do with difference is much more complex.
- (8) Teaching Brazilian Sign Language as a first language, teaching Brazilian Sign Language as a second language, Brazilian Sign Language acquisition, Brazilian Sign Language grammar are some of the special issues that Deaf people are interested in investigating. They have begun to realise that each of these aspects requires specific research. They are also aware of specific methodologies organised in a Deaf way based on visual experiences.
- (9) Specific technological areas in Deaf education have begun to be considered relevant in Deaf education. There are specific products related to technology which can be used by students in and out of the class, such as, software with lessons planned based on the visual experience and in Brazilian Sign Language (Napoli & Ramirez, 2002). Also, Stumpf (2002) is developing technology with signwriting, together with sign language and conceptual representations.

We would also like to mention a special project involving Deaf people from inland areas in Rio Grande do Sul. The project is mainly aimed at providing Deaf experiences for Deaf people from the countryside, who have not been organised as a Deaf community. Some of these Deaf people have never been in contact with other Deaf people and, therefore, they do not know how to

sign. This project was started in 1999 with very impressive results. In small cities, Deaf organisations started to be created and to connect with other Deaf organisations, constituting a network of different Deaf experiences. Moreover, they started to become literate as part of the educational programme. Miranda (2001) presented an analysis of this process showing the importance of the Deaf meeting with their peers and how sign language is the way to make all this possible. Nowadays, this project is growing and includes new inland areas as a State Government project in Rio Grande do Sul, together with the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFRGS). Martins (2003) analysed the building of subjectivity through sign language in these Deaf people, who had never signed before, when they met Deaf signers. He found that their lives changed after starting to learn sign language, in that they acquired sign language, constructed a Deaf identity, recognised themselves as students, and constructed discourses. Having access to language meant also having access to the world, becoming a significant actor in this play. The past started to be reviewed, interpreted and told by them.

Something similar is happening in Santa Catarina, although at regional levels. There is a project preparing Deaf people from different areas of the state to become leaders. The aim is to give these Deaf leaders guidelines to organise the Deaf community in each area of the state. This is already happening in some places more than in others. This articulation also involves educational proposals, political issues and the creation of Deaf organisations.

At the same time, we think that Deaf Education depends on the establishment of a network with all the people involved in this process, such as interpreters of Brazilian Sign Language, public power, public and private universities, Deaf and hearing teachers, Deaf organisations and researchers. Therefore, a discussion forum was created and opened to the community in two places: at *UFRGS*, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, and at *CEFET/SC*, in Florianópolis. Since 1998, these two forums have been discussing different themes: the Deaf at university, intellectual Deaf people, teaching Deaf teenagers in the middle school, laws to officially recognise sign language in different areas of the country, the political organisation of the Deaf community and the participation of Deaf people in decisions about Deaf education. These forums have had an impact on growing Deaf political participation in society and they have made a difference to actions in Deaf Education. Deaf people are now participating actively in the decisions about their claims and rights.

## **Final Comments**

We are sure that Deaf Education involves all these paths. It does not involve only discussion on language, but this subject is complex and involves a rich interplay of many, often subtle, details, as we have tried to show here. The present is an ambiguous time, with changes in the meaning of the representations of Deafness, Deaf people, Deaf Education. It is the time of the epistemological inversion of what the Deaf 'problem' is to hearing 'problems' in Deaf Education. Deaf claims have started to be recognised by some of the hearing professionals and hearing state governors. They have started to realise the complexity of Deaf Education. Deaf leaders are

continually fighting to show what they want, what they believe and what they are doing. Deaf people are engaged in the process; they are political people with fluctuating identities acting in the play of life. In presenting the South of Brazil experience, we feel that bilingualism in Deaf Education has to be the starting point to make Deaf people's rights possible, in order for them to live as true citizens.

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