



Teachers' ongoing training for deaf students' bilingual education service

Formação continuada de professores para o atendimento educacional bilíngue de alunos surdos

Formación continua de maestros para el servicio de educación bilingüe de los estudiantes sordos

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Abstract

Objective: to analyze, under teachers' point of view, the implementation of a process of teachers' ongoing training for a bilingual education service (atendimento educacional bilíngue – AEB). **Methods:** Data were collected by the strategy of focus group and by an interview applied to 15 teachers that participated in the training process. Qualitative research is grounded in a sociohistorical perspective of the language. **Results:** Through the analysis of the enunciateds, three categories were identified: a) teachers' expectations to participate in the ongoing training; b) The ways that teachers perceived and experienced the ongoing training for deaf students' AEB; c) suggestions to carry on the ongoing training. **Conclusion:** it has been noticed that ongoing training guided by meaningful dialogical practices, anchored in a sociohistorical perspective of the language, can be configured as an alternative for teachers to become subjects of their own practice and training.

Keywords: Deafness; Ongoing Training; Language.

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar sob o ponto de vista de professores acerca da implementação de um processo de formação continuada de professores para o atendimento educacional bilíngue – AEB. Métodos: A coleta de dados foi realizada pela técnica do grupo focal e de uma entrevista realizada com 15

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professores que participaram do processo de formação. A pesquisa qualitativa fundamenta-se em uma abordagem sócio-histórica de linguagem. Resultados: Por intermédio da análise dos enunciados foram identificadas três categorias de análise: a) as expectativas que levaram os professores a participarem da formação continuada para o AEB de alunos surdos; b) Os modos como os professores perceberam e experienciaram a formação continuada para o AEB de alunos surdos; c) sugestões para a continuação da formação continuada. Conclusão: percebe-se que a formação continuada pautada em práticas dialógicas significativas, ancoradas numa perspectiva sócio-histórica da linguagem, pode se configurar como uma alternativa para que o professor possa tornar-se sujeito de sua própria prática e de sua formação.

Palavras-chave: Surdez; Educação Continuada; Linguagem.

Resumen

Objetivo: Analizar desde el punto de vista de los docentes la implementación de un proceso de formación continua de profesores para servicios educativos bilingües - SEB. *Métodos:* La recolección de datos se realizó mediante la técnica de grupo focal y una entrevista con 15 profesores que participaron del proceso de formación. La investigación cualitativa se basa en un enfoque socio-histórico del lenguaje. *Resultados:* Por intermedio del análisis de las enunciaciones se identificaron tres categorías de análisis: a) las expectativas que llevaron los maestros a participar de la educación continua para los SEB de estudiantes sordos; b) las formas en que los profesores percibieron y experimentaron la educación continua para los SEB de estudiantes sordos; c) sugerencias para seguir con la educación continua. *Conclusión:* se mostró que la educación continua guiada por prácticas dialógicas significativas, ancladas en una perspectiva socio-histórica de lenguaje, se puede configurar como una alternativa para que los maestros puedan convertirse en sujetos de su propia práctica y formación.

Palabras clave: Sordera; Educación Continua; Lenguaje

Introduction

In the light of the contemporary movements of social and educational inclusion, Brazilian society has been going through a moment of deep changes in the way it perceives and relates to social differences and inequalities. From the standpoint of the organization of public education in this country, this process has been intensified with the increasing performance of social movements and agencies elaborating educational policies which meet the needs of “all” subjects getting into Brazilian education system. Such a process has contributed to intensify the debate on the rights to social and intellectual inclusion of groups which have been excluded or set apart from the educational process.

In order to confront some contradictions manifested in the processes of redemocratization as well as restricted, unequal possibilities to access education, some laws and statements favoring diversity have been subsequently put forth.¹⁻² Such documents are landmarks for some outstanding institutional initiatives in the attempt to introduce structural changes in social and civil relations aiming at State redemocratization, and power decentralization for Municipalities and States so that they can have more autonomy for planning, managing and implementing educational policies.

Regarding the specificities of deaf students, educational policies toward the individual needs of such subjects and the professionals in their school context have been in steady debate. However, studies and research^{3,4} have shown shortcomings for the full development of their potentialities to the extent that Brazilian deaf population lacks the access to education, either by studying in schools or special classes which still make oral language a priority, or by studying in regular schools where deaf students are usually expected to learn like hearing students.

One of the necessary actions to overcome this scenario is to meet hearing impaired students' linguistic and educational needs. Therefore, they ultimately should learn and use the sign language at school, and schools should also be bilingual, that is, they should enable the deaf to develop their full potentialities, so that they could perform in society in an autonomous and dignified way.³

Consequently, the implementation of bilingual education programs in regular schools is imperative,⁵ just like the current policies of teachers' initial and ongoing training, which objectify the training of teachers and other education professionals – Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) interpreters and instructors to work for the Bilingual

Education Service (Atendimento Educacional Bilíngue - AEB).

To the extent that AEB entails a set of pedagogical measures aiming at the interaction, the participation and learning of hearing impaired students in regular classes by choosing a bilingual educational proposal, a school takes on a linguistic policy where two languages will co-exist in its settings – the sign language as well as the Portuguese language.

Due to that, pedagogically, the school must make both languages accessible to those children, and also develop the other school activities in both languages. In case of schools which offer bilingual education service, both languages must permeate the school activities or they must be the object of study within a specific schedule, depending on the school proposal. That will depend on “how”, “where”, and “in what way” children use both languages at school.

Given the implied complexity to set up the AEB and the gaps present in the initial training offered to educators in Brazil, we stress the offer of ongoing training courses to all the teaching staff and education professionals as fundamental. Thus, we claim that besides learning and immersion in the Brazilian sign language, this training must focus on specific thematic related to deafness, the deaf, the sign language itself, and the teaching and strategic methodologies necessary to this population.³

This article refers to a training intervention for teachers interested in AEB, which objectified to apprehend the ways and define the validity of ongoing training grounded in the social practice and in the principles of dialogics, authorship, responsibility and responsiveness. Therefore, in this research study, the sociohistorical perspective of the language,⁶ which perceives education professionals as social and historic ones, was taken into consideration.

From this focus, it has been searched the relation of the unique to the whole, the individual to the social, and the phenomena understanding from their historic event, where the particular is considered an instance of the social whole⁷.

In the light of what has been discussed, this study will address the process of implementation of a pedagogical project – teachers’ ongoing training for the bilingual education service – objectifying to analyze teachers’ point of view on the process of continuous training for the bilingual education service that they had attended.

Methods

This is a qualitative research study, which used the strategy of the focus group to develop the dialogical situations in teachers’ training. By means of the focus group meetings, it was addressed an inclusive, bilingual educational model with the participants, which would be implemented at a municipal school of a municipality in Paraná State. That model contemplates the training of teachers and other professionals for the AEB, Libras learning by the teachers, and in-service training.

It should be clarified that this study is only based on the initial training of teachers who participated in the project, and participating teachers as well as researchers in this approach, took part in the research, its change and re-meaning.

This project was a partnership between a university in Paraná State and the Municipal Secretary of Education of a municipality in this state, which aimed to develop actions for teachers’ ongoing training on deafness, so that deaf students could study in the same place where they lived.

Thus, this experience was expected to expand the training of educators to work properly with the hearing-impaired, as well as to multiply this training model to other schools.

Initially, a group of researchers from the aforementioned university, comprising a Speech-Language professor, two Master Degree and Doctorate students of the institution and the pedagogical team of the Municipal Secretary of Education invited teachers from the municipal teaching network of the municipality and nearby municipalities to participate in the project.

In all, 15 teachers joined the Project, participating in the meetings of the focus group proposed in the project. In this article, specifically, only the first eight meetings with this population will be analyzed.

All meetings were recorded with a digital camera, and a field diary was also used to write down the relevant situations during the sessions. As teaching and interaction support during the meetings, several strategies and teaching media resources were used, such as a projection screen, data show, microphone, amplifier, notebook, chairs disposed in a semicircle, among others. In order to meet the theoretical and practical assumptions of the meetings, diversified text genres were provided, such as Decrees, Laws and Resolutions, a timeline

with a historical review of deafness and Libras, pedagogical settings; contextualizing in Libras, we had teaching strategies, books, manuals, and other written texts, for example, poems, songs, printed dictionaries and e-dictionaries, e-books, among others.

Subsequently, the themes addressed in each meeting of the focus group are presented as follows:

1st Meeting of the Focus Group: Intervention proposal: teachers' training for the AEB;

2nd Meeting of the Focus Group: Social representations of deafness and public policies on the education of the deaf;

3rd Meeting of the Focus Group: School as the favorable setting to generate knowledge. The central school as the favorable setting to develop a bilingual proposal for deaf students' education;

4th Meeting of the Focus Group: Supporting services and professionals for the AEB;

5th Meeting of the Focus Group: Historical review of deaf people's education in Brazil. Pertinent questions related to the deaf-blind;

6th Meeting of the Focus Group: Central school: the AEB in regular education. Teachers' training for the AEB to work at the central school;

7th Meeting of the Focus Group: Oral semi-structured interview on the ongoing training held with the teachers;

8th Meeting of the Focus Group: Interaction among school, community and families.

The analysis and data interpretation provided by the research participants were grounded in Bakhtin's perspective of the language. This theoretical, methodological background is based on the dialogical understanding, involving not only the meetings of the focus group, but also the answers to the semi-structured interviews applied during the 7th meeting of the focus group, which are the result of dialectic relations with speeches materialized in the form of enunciates. Understanding is a dialogical event, as it is responsive, thus getting the active participation of listeners. That is similar to listen to the other, which carries the seed of an answer in itself.

For data analysis, three axes were defined, comprising the body of this study, which were organized in categories from the set of enunciates elaborated by the teachers during the meetings of the focus groups, as well as the answers to the semi-structured interviews. They are as follows:

1. Expectations which led the teachers to participate in the training for deaf students' AEB;
2. Ways that teachers perceived and experienced the ongoing training for deaf students' AEB.
3. Suggestions to continue the ongoing training.

It is worth pointing out that the present study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Sociedade Evangélica Beneficente de Curitiba – Paraná State, under number 279.418. All participants signed the free informed consent form.

Results and Discussion

Thematic axis 1: **Expectations which led the teachers to participate in the ongoing training for deaf students' AEB.**

In relation to this thematic axis, it was perceived during the first meeting of the focus group that there was already an expectation in teachers' speeches to participate in an ongoing training to work with deaf students. It was opted for selecting meaningful accounts describing the tensions, conflicts and possibilities around the inclusion of deaf people in school.

[...] in this training, I see the opportunity to experience other kinds of knowledge, and even spread them to the other schools of the municipality (P9).

[...] we have enough students with difficulties, now do we still have to work with deaf students (P7)?

[...] once I had a deaf student in the classroom. At the time, I couldn't meet his (her) pedagogical differences, but now, with this training, I can get this knowledge. (P13).

There were still teachers who mentioned that the voluntary participation in the ongoing training for the AEB was due to:

[...] professional upgrade (P10);

[...] possibility of professional and personal growth (P11);

[...] expand my knowledge (P12);

Another teacher pointed, besides her motivation, her doubt on the use of the sign language with the inclusion of deaf students in the municipal education network:

[...] I understand that this training for the AEB is important, but the school language isn't the sign language, which takes time to be learned, then I have doubts about it (P4).

Regarding the expectations which led teachers to participate in the ongoing training for the AEB, it was perceived through their answers that many teachers understand the training process as a possibility to get more knowledge on deaf people's education in their work settings. That is, it is a "probability calculation", when we select the present possibilities that will enable us to work in the future.

It was still observed insecurity and fear in participant P7's speech about the training proposal, as the participant mentions that besides all the difficulties she already faces, she will have to work with deaf students. It is implied in her speech that deaf students will also have difficulties in adapting to the educational system, in her point of view, by studying in a regular school.

This speech seems to be connected with a social hegemonic view, which does not consider subjects' potentialities, and is merely based on biological aspects to judge their learning level. P7's speech seems to demonstrate that professional identity breaks down when "the teachable" is changeable, not settled. Sometimes, ready, closed knowledge to be taught features the exercise of the profession, and in a way, identifies teachers. However, if teachers do not give up teaching on behalf of learning with the Other – we cannot forget that the teacher is also the Other for his students – bridges will not be built between teachers' lost identities and teachers' possible identities. That requires the redefinition of the teaching practice at school: not a teaching site, but a learning site.⁷

On the other hand, P13's speech states his frustration having taught a deaf student and not having been able to meet his (her) needs. Therefore, we can assume that this participant viewed the training course as an opportunity to think over linguistic and pedagogical issues on deafness. Thus, it deems necessary to (re)understand life, accepting process irreversibility. That participant does not seem to view the training course as a problem to be set aside, but as an inspiration for his new activities.⁷

Based on P10, P11 and P12's remarks, who refer to the training course as knowledge expansion for them, it could be perceived that the

understanding about ongoing education is complex and involves different conceptions on education and a personal definition of knowledge. That is to say, it is understood that knowledge is not ready, finished, but it is built upon subjects' interactions, upon the access to information, upon the possibilities provided by the socioeconomic context and upon individual needs.⁷

P4, through his speech, poses another expectation in relation to this training course; he refers to the use of the sign language when deaf students are included in the municipal education network. This participant questioned how they would tackle with the sign language in a regular school, not specific for deaf students, which seems to unveil that this participant already perceived the sign language as the Brazilian deaf language, and it should fundamentally be used within the school so that deaf students could learn.⁸ From that speech, the team responsible for the training could explain about the sign language and its use in the subsequent meetings.

Still about the teachers' expectations on taking part in the focus group meetings, most teachers stated that the training course would enable them to improve, develop, and contribute to their practice in the classroom.

An interesting fact is that only two, P6 and P13, out of fifteen participants mentioned that they once had deaf students in their classes before the training course. The other participants of the focus group answered that they had never had this experience, but they volunteered to participate in the training course for deaf students' AEB during the evening period every fifteen days. In a way, this shows the interest that teachers have in their own qualification, and specially, in their students' education, as they mentioned that such training aimed to improve their pedagogical practice and to obtain/foster knowledge.

Thematic axis 2: how teachers perceived and experienced the ongoing training for deaf students' AEB.

Regarding the second thematic axis, it was subdivided in positive and negative aspects mentioned below.

It could be evidenced that all of the fifteen participants found it positive the ongoing training offered for the bilingual education service of deaf students. On the other hand, there were eight

teachers who pointed the negative aspects of this training.

Actually, the positive aspects were subdivided in four items:

1. Contributes to learning – pointed by nine out of 15 teachers (9/15);
2. Added to professional and personal development – mentioned by four out of 15 teachers (4/15);
3. Refined the teaching practice – stated by three out of 15 teachers (3/15)
4. Enabled the reflection on deafness and AEB for the deaf – pointed by one of the teachers (1/15).

Based on the fifteen participants' positive answers, it could be apprehended that this training enabled them to start reflecting on the contents that they work with in their teaching practice, apart from contributing to their learning. This shows the importance of education grounded in sociohistorical principles, able to mediate the articulation between teachers' perceptions and the broader meanings in the exercise of their professional activity.⁹

By attending this training course, it seems that the teacher could review their professional practice by means of a collective dialogical activity, which occurred in the articulation of theoretical foundations and the ongoing social practice at school, enabling participants to be active subjects during the training, not only performing pre-established tasks. It seems that, in this context, the teachers started to perceive themselves as fundamental subjects in their own training process.

Subsequently, teachers' eight accounts on the negative aspects of the ongoing training for the bilingual education service to deaf students can be observed. In fact, the answers for the semi-structured interviews were organized through the set of enunciates provided by the teachers in four items representing the negative aspects. They are as follows:

1. Inclusion of (more) professionals in the training – mentioned by three out of eight teachers;
2. (More) Themes on the sign language – pointed by two out of eight teachers (2/8);
3. (Longer) Time for the training – commented by two out of eight teachers (2/8);
4. (More) Themes related to deaf students' routine – reported by one teacher (1/8).

Based on the data mentioned in the first item – Inclusion of (more) deaf professionals in the

training, and in the second item – (More) Themes on the sign language – it can be considered that the participants in this project, through the meetings of the focus group, showed the will of interacting with deaf professionals. This is a very important fact because it shows that the participants are interested in the training course, but they need to have more contact with deaf professionals and the sign language for this training to be really effective.

It can be understood that such reports are in conformity with a bilingual perspective, which values not only the sign language, but also the Portuguese language and the deaf professionals, as they are the linguistic models for deaf children.¹⁰

It is worth mentioning that the teachers had weekly meetings for four months with a deaf professional to learn the sign language, concomitantly with the initial training. It was probably due to those meetings that some teachers perceived the short contact they had with deaf professionals and the sign language as negative. It is possible that those teachers had a different view of that language and the deaf before getting into contact with the sign language, and by means of their participation in the training they could understand the specificities of the sign language, as well as relate to deaf adults.³ Moreover, the fact that they are willing to have more contact with Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and deaf adults shows that they have been able to understand the principles of a bilingual education, and they are interested in learning more and more about this theme.

Such an interest can also be revealed in the third item – (Longer) Time for the training course – and in the fourth item – (More) Themes related to deaf students' daily routine – when the participants mentioned that they lack information on themes related to deaf students' daily routine, as well as the training length was not enough, that is, these teachers could notice that only eight meetings were not enough for them to feel prepared to work with this share of the population in the classroom.

Regarding professional training, it should be pointed out that this is a permanent, continuous and dialogical process,¹¹ in addition, training only constitutes a movement of interaction between subjects – researchers and participants – with readings and also reflections on their practice, but it is necessary time for that. Thus, it is understood that a consistent training is only possible from a collective and individual construction.

Taking this into consideration, it is necessary to think about the training courses usually offered by states and municipalities, in which participants do not participate actively in the process and just get information and guidance as “an item” to be traded, transmitted from one to another. Therefore, there are no changes, it does not entail the interaction between the one who teaches and the one who learns.¹² Thus, as for the ongoing education, it is necessary not to consider the current body of knowledge available as a closed pack, that is to say, as a closed, taken-for-granted and unchangeable set.¹² A training course must take into account time, space and transience of events. That is why, it should be pointed out that after the eight meetings of professional training, there were many other meetings of the focus group, which objectified to deepen into the themes and issues formerly discussed in this course. Thus, it is implied that the first step of the training aimed to bridge the gap between the universe where deaf students’ education lies (special education), and hearing students’ education (regular school), as only two of the participants mentioned that they had already had contact with deaf students.

Thematic axis 3: **Suggestions to continue the ongoing training**

In this thematic axis, six items were analyzed, enunciated as follows:

1. To get to know school and social settings attended by deaf people – mentioned by five out of 15 teachers (5/15);
2. To hire specialized professionals – pointed by three of the 15 teachers (3/15);
3. In-service training – recommended by three out of 15 teachers (3/15);
4. (More) Contents on deaf students’ assessment - reported by one teacher (1/15);
5. (More) Materials to settle the discussed themes – addressed by one teacher (1/15);
6. Functioning of the central school – commented by three teachers (3/15)

By analyzing those suggestions, it is evidenced that in the first and second items proposed by the participating teachers – To get to know school and social settings attended by deaf people and – To hire specialized professionals – it can be considered that the participants, from their initial training, were willing to expand the interaction/experience with deaf people and the involved professionals.

The importance of this fact is paramount, as most participants decided to attend the training before having deaf students in their classes, and they also perceived that other professionals must be included within schools so that this kind of service can be performed in a meaningful way, such as interpreters and instructors for the sign language. Thus, it can be assumed that the professionals, who participated in this training course, perceived the importance of the other so that they could perform a really effective job.¹³

Moreover, when they had the chance to give their opinion about the training, the teachers could think about and view what else should be done so that their qualification could improve in the next step. It seems that doing so, these teachers could perceive themselves as integrated parts of the training, giving opinions about it and reassuring with that the active, responsive attitude,¹³ fundamental for a process of efficient training.

Another factor about teachers having perceived themselves as an integrated part of the training can be observed in the third item – In-service training. In this answer, participants evidenced that they were thinking about and visualizing the themes to be addressed in the next step of their training. In addition, they suggest conditions to make this process feasible, such as the in-service training. This answer may indicate the real wish to have deaf students in their classes, but it is necessary to be prepared and also updated for that, before returning to their classes.

It can also be stated that the participants showed that they did not consider the body of knowledge currently available as a closed, taken-for-granted, unchangeable set;¹² it seems that such participants understood that it should be considered time, setting and event transience for a training course.

Those statements can also be extended to the fourth item – Assessment of deaf students – and to the fifth item – (More) Materials to settle the addressed themes, as it is perceived in the enunciations that the teachers are claiming for the expansion and deepening of those themes in the next step.

Still about this, in the sixth item – Functioning of the central school, it can be considered that teachers really took their positions as authors of change when they claimed for settling down the bilingual central school for deaf students. This is in conformity with the sociohistorical perspective, in which the subjects must view themselves as unique

and irreplaceable, that is, somebody to occupy a unique place, which has never been occupied by anybody else, and cannot ever be occupied by anybody else.¹⁶

Thus, it is noticed that when subjects perceive their unicity, they are compelled to take a stand, a position as authors of their own history, acting and being able to tell others that they cannot take their place in such achievements. That is an authorial position. Subjects are unique, but they are also social ones. Their individual awareness comes from the collective construction as well as the interaction with other subjects having their own history, crowded with other social voices, which generates different ways to mean the world.¹³

By means of the dialogical strategies used during the meetings of the focus group, participants' accounts pointed to meaningful and essential issues, which need to be brought to the center of the discussion whenever teachers' ongoing training is thought of and planned.

In the case of the teachers in this research study, it was perceived that they recognize themselves as collective subjects, participating in processes of teaching within the classroom, and in the discussion of the political, pedagogical process during their training process. Therefore, teachers need to consider themselves as an integrated part of this social, dynamic and contradicting movement in order to understand their training process.

Conclusion

During this study, regarding the initial training proposal, it was taken into account the way education professionals perceive themselves in the educational process, and how they are capable of interacting in their work settings. Data showed that most teachers put themselves as active agents in their training process. However, education field in this country mostly makes teachers not consider themselves as an active and integrated part of the educational process, which makes some professionals to find it difficult considering ongoing training, as they do not perceive themselves, and sometimes they are not perceived as social transforming agents.

As a result of this study, it is understood that ongoing training grounded in meaningful dialogical practices, anchored in a socio-historic perspective of the language, along with favorable conditions for the profession, such as environment, work condi-

tions, material resources and fair pay, can be an alternative to promote the quality of teaching, besides the re-meaning of teachers' personal and professional life by empowering them, leading them to recognize themselves as truly active subjects in their own educational process.

Based on the objective of this research, which aimed to analyze teachers' viewpoints about the ongoing training process that they went through for the bilingual education service, it was possible to evidence in the limitation of this activity – eight meetings – the impact of this study in the development of the dialogical activities during the meetings of the focus group, anchored in a sociohistorical perspective of the language. As a consequence, teachers perceived this training as positive, and gave their opinions about it, reassuring the active, responsive attitude in this interaction.

The training process will only be meaningful for teachers when they have the opportunity, based on reflections about their background and daily activities, to understand and not only to explain the process that they are inserted. Thus, it is the researchers' task to retake this process from what has already been performed, and re(start) their work with the teachers, by viewing the other, as well as the other within themselves.

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