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AN ANALYSIS OF THE BRAZILIAN NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR READING INSTRUCTIONS IN PORTUGUESE TO DEAF STUDENTS

**ANÁLISE DAS ORIENTAÇÕES NACIONAIS BRASILEIRAS PARA O ENSINO DE LEITURA
EM LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA A ESTUDANTES SURDOS**

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the national reference work for the instruction of written Portuguese, in the initial phase of literacy, for deaf students in the formal basic educational context, such as: *Ideas to teach Portuguese to deaf students* (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006). Qualitative assessments are performed, taking into account what the work conceptually presents and in what forms it proposes an implementation of the teaching of Portuguese. The results indicate that, although this is an important work dedicated to one of the central aspects for promoting student school achievement: literacy, there is no evidence to allow teachers to guide themselves on how to conceive reading literacy, nor how to proceed in order to deaf students to read.

KEYWORDS: deafness; literacy; reading instruction.

RESUMO: Neste artigo, analisa-se obra de referência nacional para o ensino da modalidade escrita da língua portuguesa, na fase inicial de alfabetização, a estudantes surdos no contexto da educação básica formal, qual seja: *Ideias para ensinar português para alunos surdos* (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006). São realizadas análises qualitativas, levando-se em conta o que a obra apresenta conceitualmente e de que forma ela propõe a implementação do ensino da língua portuguesa. Os resultados indicam que, embora se trate de importante obra dedicada a um dos aspectos centrais à promoção do sucesso escolar do estudante, a alfabetização, não há indícios que permitam ao professor orientar-se sobre como conceber a alfabetização para a leitura, tampouco sobre como proceder de modo a alfabetizar os estudantes surdos.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: surdez; alfabetização; ensino de leitura.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on the need to teach deaf students to deal with written texts of the Portuguese language has been taking shape since the approval of Federal Law No. 10.436 dated April 24, 2002, which recognizes the linguistic status of the Brazilian sign language (*Libras*), making sure that it does not replace the written form of the Portuguese language. In order to meet the requirements of the legislation, the Brazilian government established bilingualism as a goal for the education of deaf people through Decree No. 5.626/2005.

Since then, the challenge of deaf education, whether in regular or special schools, has been to educate not only individuals who master *Libras*, but who are also able to deal effectively with texts written in Portuguese. Such a goal, however, does not seem to have been achieved. Evidence of this is the public manifestations of the deaf community requiring bilingual schools, with an adequate curriculum and with trained teachers. Another consistent sample of the problem can be drawn from the growing participation of teachers involved in deaf education at conferences and symposiums on Portuguese language teaching. Places where they may bring up not only their doubts regarding how to teach the written Portuguese language to this audience, but also where they share their classroom experiences in an attempt to teach deaf students to read and write.

Thus, in order to explore what was perceived in the speeches woven in these spaces of interlocution, this paper analyzes and discusses the national guidelines for the teaching of reading in Portuguese to deaf people. It is based on the study of a book considered a national reference in the area, namely *Ideias para ensinar português para alunos surdos (Ideas to teach Portuguese to deaf students, our translation)*, written by Quadros and Schmiedt (2006).

It is worth mentioning that the Department for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (*Secadi*) of the Ministry of Education presents, among its publications in the area of special education, only two reference works for teaching Portuguese to deaf people³, namely *Ensino de Língua Portuguesa para Surdos:*

³ The works published by Secadi can be accessed at the link: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17009>. Retrieved Jan 10, 2018.

caminhos para a prática pedagógica – volumes I e II (Teaching Portuguese Language to the Deaf: Means for Pedagogical Practice – volumes I and II”, our translation), written by Heloísa Maria Moreira Lima Salles and colleagues (2004), and the book selected for analysis in this study. The choice was made mainly due to the fact that, besides being part of Secadi's publications, it is one of the most cited materials in research dealing with the teaching of Portuguese to the deaf.

1. “IDEAS TO TEACH PORTUGUESE TO DEAF STUDENTS”: A PROPOSAL FOR LITERACY?

Despite the unpretentious title, the work of Quadros and Schmiedt is presented by Cláudia Dutra, secretary of Special Education at the time of publication of the book, as [...] “a coursebook that addresses the bilingual way of implementing literacy to deaf children, and that can contribute to continuing teacher education”⁴ (2006: 8, our translation). This characterization seems to be ratified by the authors when they state, in the introduction of the book, that their purpose is to deal with deaf bilingual education in order to promote the learning of *Libras* as the student's first language, – therefore, the instruction language to be used in the classroom -, and the teaching of written Portuguese as a second language.

Departing from this issue, we point out the fact that, if written Portuguese language is taken as an object of teaching, a process of literacy should be introduced that allows the learner to have access to the written system, a necessary condition for the learning and development of reading that leads to literacy (Scliar-Cabral, 2018; Heinig, Souza, Finger-Kratochvil no prelo; Souza, 2012a; Britto, 2012; Scliar-Cabral, Souza, 2011; Mcguinness, 2006; Soares, 2004, 2016; Solé, 1998, among others). This condition for the achievement of dominance over written Portuguese is acknowledged in the book under discussion, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

The deaf child may have access to the graphical representation of Portuguese, a psycholinguistic process of literacy, and to the explanation and construction of the cultural references of the literate community. The task of teaching Portuguese will become possible if the process is of second language literacy, with the sign language being acknowledged as effectively the first language⁵ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 24, our translation).

⁴ From the original excerpt: [...] “um material que aborda a forma bilíngue de efetivar a alfabetização de crianças com surdez, podendo colaborar com a formação continuada de professores.”

⁵ From the original excerpt: “A criança surda pode ter acesso à representação gráfica da língua portuguesa, processo psicolinguístico da alfabetização, e à explicitação e construção das referências culturais da comunidade letrada. A tarefa de ensino da língua portuguesa tornar-se-á possível, se o

The aforementioned acknowledgment, however, is nothing more than the assumption of a presupposition, at least there are no identifiable signs in the book that might make it appear anything other than a presupposition. Throughout the first chapter, despite engaging in a theoretical discussion about the principles of bilingual literacy, the authors end up constructing a lacunar text about the fundamentals and the instructional procedures necessary for the literacy teacher to implement an effective teaching of Portuguese. It is necessary for the educator not only to be clear about the objectives to be achieved, but also the means – formal and non-formal – by which those objectives will be achieved. In this sense, what the work objectively does is to emphasize the goals to be achieved in bilingual education, especially regarding the acquisition of sign language⁶. Unfortunately, there is no clarity about the means that would make the literacy of Portuguese effective. There is not even the delimitation of what the authors understand by literacy and reading. The closest they get is a proposition, in a synthetic way and through the use of a direct quote from Magda Soares's excerpt. Such excerpt assumes literacy a

[...] status of one who not only knows how to read and write, but also makes competent and frequent use of reading and writing, and, when one becomes literate, one changes one's social place, way of living in society and insertion in culture⁷ (Soares, 1998: 36-37)⁸ (Quadros, Schmiedt 2006: 17, our translation).

The conceptualization of letters, through the direct citation of the speech of others, even though it brings implicitly a vision of literacy – knowing how to read and write –, does not account for the specificities involved in the initial process reading teaching⁹. That is, there is the proposal to speak about literacy, there is a

processo for de alfabetização de segunda língua, sendo a língua de sinais reconhecida e efetivamente a primeira língua.”

⁶ It is understandable and desirable to emphasize the need for the classroom to be a place for sign language acquisition. The first reason comes from the fact that most children deprived of hearing do not have contact with the language within their family, since their parents are not deaf and most of them do not know *Libras*. The second reason is that learning to read cannot take place without mastery of a language, which should preferably reflect a rich linguistic ability. For a detailed discussion on the influence of language ability on learning to read, see McGuinness (2006). On the intellectual, emotional and social impact of non-acquisition of a language, with emphasis on deaf people, we suggest reading Sacks (2010).

⁷ From the original excerpt: [...] “estado daquele que não só sabe ler e escrever, mas que também faz uso competente e frequente da leitura e da escrita, e que, ao tornar-se letrado, muda seu lugar social, seu modo de viver na sociedade, sua inserção na cultura (SOARES, 1998:36-37).”

⁸ The reference cited by Quadros and Schmiedt is the following: SOARES, Magda Becker. *Letramento: um tema em três gêneros*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 1998.

⁹ Regarding the specificity of literacy in reading teaching and learning, we recommend consulting the texts of Scliar-Cabral (2018), Scliar-Cabral (2013), Scliar-Cabral (2003a, 2003b), Souza (2012a), Soares (2004, 2016) and Solé (1998).

presupposition of the need for a literacy process, but there is no approach to the subject, there are not clarifying statements as how to achieve this fundamental step to learn how to read and write in Portuguese. An example is the identification of the beginning of the literacy process with activities aimed at guaranteeing the sign language acquisition: “The process of literacy is outlined based on this process of discovering one's own language and relationships expressed through language”¹⁰ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 28, our translation). It may be assumed, although it is expected that consistent arguments will be made, that the mastery of a language, in this case the sign language, in all its richness and complexity, is, in some way, a condition for the initiation of literacy. But how to walk the path that separates the acquired language, which is of visuospatial modality – *Libras* –, to the language represented in alphabetical writing, which is of oral modality – Portuguese?

It must be considered that literacy itself, responsible for guaranteeing the future reader the means to access written texts, begins only when the learner – deaf or listener – is instructed on how to deal with the alphabetic system¹¹ and specifically with the writing of Portuguese. Any proposal that does not take this into account cannot be considered literacy in Portuguese. The teaching of reading requires explicit demonstration as to how to operate with the graphic symbols that materialize the language on paper (or screen). This is, of course, only the first step towards achieving the literacy stage, since it is not enough for the educator to teach how to operate with the decipherment of the written system. One must also teach how to understand what one accesses through writing.

To access writing and construct the meaning to what has been accessed is, in a very general sense, the means that allows the learner to reach the literate person status - who knows how to use reading and writing in a way that satisfactorily fulfills social practices involving the mastery of written language. It turns out that one cannot only prioritize one of these means throughout literacy. Neither the decipherment of the system without understanding, nor the understanding without considering what is codified in the writing allows the formation of a reader. However, it is not uncommon to find pedagogical propositions that focus only on one of these components: the understanding. This is a result, according to Soares (2004), of misinterpretations of

¹⁰ From the original excerpt: “O processo de alfabetização vai sendo delineado com base neste processo de descoberta da própria língua e de relações expressadas por meio da língua.”

¹¹ This raises the question, which we shall return to later, of how the deaf can deal with the alphabetic system, since this system consists of representing the oral language.

the constructivist paradigm in the area of literacy, which have been bequeathed to the Brazilian education, in the last decades,

[...] A holistic conception of the learning of written language, from which the principle of learning to read and write is to learn to construct meaning *for* and *through* written texts, using previous experiences and knowledge; in the framework of this conception, the graphophonic system (phoneme-grapheme relations) is not the object of direct and explicit teaching, since its learning would naturally follow the interaction with the written language.¹² (Soares, 2004: 08, our translation)

Although not explicitly stated, this seems to be the case of the approach of teaching the written language to deaf people presented by Quadros and Schmiedt (2006: 31-32, our emphasis and our translation), to which the following excerpt serves as support:

Talking about the processes of communicative interactions, in sign language and in written Portuguese, is the means to **develop awareness of the value of languages and their respective complexities**. This exercise will provide the conditions for the process of acquisition of reading and writing in signs to happen, as well as for the development of reading and writing of Portuguese as a second language. [...] **When the child deals more consciously with writing**, s/he has power over it, thus developing critical competence about the process. **The child begins to construct and recognize his/her own process**, as well as to reflect on the process of the other.¹³

It can be inferred that the child is made aware of the linguistic value and, especially, the social value of the languages that are the target of bilingual education, in the belief that this gives them greater awareness of writing and creates conditions for its use. However, it is not clear what the authors take as greater awareness of writing. What can be concluded, following the citation, is that the awareness provided by the authors does not fall on the procedures necessary for the child to operate with the writing system.

¹² From the original excerpt: [...] “uma concepção holística da aprendizagem da língua escrita, de que decorre o princípio de que aprender a ler e a escrever é aprender a construir sentido *para e por meio de* textos escritos, usando experiências e conhecimentos prévios; no quadro dessa concepção, o sistema grafofônico (as relações fonema-grafema) não é objeto de ensino direto e explícito, pois sua aprendizagem decorreria de forma natural da interação com a língua escrita.”

¹³ From the original excerpt: “Falar sobre os processos de interações comunicativas, sobre a língua de sinais e sobre a língua portuguesa escrita são formas de desenvolver a conscientização do valor das línguas e suas respectivas complexidades. Este exercício dará subsídios para o processo de aquisição da leitura e escrita em sinais, bem como para o desenvolvimento da leitura e escrita do português como segunda língua. [...] Quando a criança lida de forma mais consciente com a escrita, ela passa a ter poder sobre ela, desenvolvendo, portanto, competência crítica sobre o processo. A criança passa a construir e reconhecer o seu próprio processo, bem como, refletir sobre o processo do outro.”

In addition to the citation discussed above, there are others that attempt to theoretically guide educators in the task of making their deaf learners readers. In certain moments of the book, as it is possible to observe in the four passages quoted below (all of them were translated by us), it seems that the authors offer to educators a theoretical-methodological systematized proposal, in stages, at the end of which literacy would be reached:

Part 1:

In this process [of literacy in Portuguese as a second language], there are several moments in which it becomes necessary to implicitly and explicitly analyze the differences and similarities between the Brazilian sign language and Portuguese. In this sense, there are processes in which the acquired knowledge in sign language, the concepts, thoughts and ideas are translated into Portuguese.¹⁴ (p.24, our comments)

Part 2:

The process of literacy continues through the recording of children's productions [sign language productions]. The initial record forms are essentially visual and need to reflect the complexity of sign language.¹⁵ (p.28, our comments)

Part 3:

The texts produced by the students in signs and general literature in signs are essential sources for the development of this process, since they serve as a reference for the written record in Portuguese.¹⁶ (p.31)

Part 4:

When the child already records his/her ideas, stories and reflections through written texts, their productions serve as a basis for reflection on the discoveries of the world and of their own language.¹⁷ (p.31)

The first part of the aforementioned set would be the subsequent step in the literacy process that, according to the authors, begins with the acquisition of sign language. Behind it lies the intention for the deaf student to look at the structural differences between sign language and written Portuguese, revealing concern for a kind of knowledge that is very useful in constructing meaning. However, this good intention

¹⁴ From the original excerpt: “Nesse processo [de alfabetização da língua portuguesa como segunda língua], há vários momentos em que se faz necessária a análise implícita e explícita das diferenças e semelhanças entre a língua de sinais brasileira e o português. Nesse sentido, há processos em que ocorre a tradução dos conhecimentos adquiridos na língua de sinais, dos conceitos, dos pensamentos e das ideias para o português.”

¹⁵ From the original excerpt: “O processo de alfabetização continua por meio do registro das produções das crianças [produções em língua de sinais]. As formas de registros iniciais são essencialmente visuais e precisam refletir a complexidade da língua de sinais.”

¹⁶ From the original excerpt: “Os textos produzidos pelos alunos em sinais e literatura geral em sinais são fontes essenciais para o desenvolvimento desse processo, pois servem de referência para o registro escrito na língua portuguesa.”

¹⁷ From the original excerpt: “Quando a criança já registra suas ideias, estórias e reflexões por meio de textos escritos, suas produções servem de base para reflexão sobre as descobertas do mundo e da própria língua.”

is unsuccessful because it demands from the learner a knowledge that s/he does not yet possess: access to writing as a system. To put it in another way, it is a path of literacy that requires an already literate individual, albeit in an elementary way. It should be remembered that, until such a suggestion is given, there is no explicit statement in the book under analysis as to the means necessary to introduce the deaf apprentice into the world of writing; there is no suggestion on how to get one to work with the symbols one sees written on the paper or the screen. This lack, already indicated in other points of this text, is sustained throughout the entire first chapter of the book. Only in the second chapter, dedicated to describing activities whose purpose is literacy, it is possible to infer procedures by means of which the student would have access to the written system.

Before we focus on this issue, we want to draw attention to the second and third excerpts listed above. They discuss the basic function that sign language would provide students to the extent that they would seek those references to deal with Portuguese writing, and in our view, there are two possible readings for the term “reference”. The first relates, as indicated in the third citation, to the students to take the productions in sign language as visual texts to be transcribed in written texts – interpretation, even, backed by the fourth citation listed – and thus to appropriate the writing system. This interpretation reveals a paradox because, when transcribing visual texts produced in *Libras* into Portuguese, the mastering of written code production is placed ahead of the mastering of reception, which, as the authors themselves highlight inside a red rectangle, must be precedent: “Understanding precedes production! Reading precedes writing!”¹⁸ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 42, our translation). However, what the sequence of citations listed above indicates – attention to the fourth excerpt – is that the child engages in a literacy process that practically does not approach reading.

The second possible reading of the term “reference” refers to learners transposing their experience into building meanings in sign language for reading and writing activities in Portuguese, an interpretation supported by Quadros and Schmiedt (2006: 30, our translation) that “reading the signs will give linguistic and cognitive conditions to read the written word in Portuguese”¹⁹. It occurs that, in the context of

¹⁸ From the original excerpt: “Compreensão precede produção! Leitura precede a escrita!”

¹⁹ From the original excerpt: [...] “ler os sinais vai dar subsídios linguísticos e cognitivos para ler a palavra escrita em português.”

the book in question, “reading the signs” is not properly a reading activity²⁰. Through this expression, the authors try to approach the activity of comprehension of the sign language – considered in its visuospatial modality, which would be, in a way, corresponding to the oral languages for the listeners – to reading. Obviously, one would not dare to make such a correlation between the activity of oral language understanding and reading²¹: listening is not the same as reading. What the authors seem to mean is that the cognitive ability to understand sign language is crucial for the learning of the writing system only in the condition of a linguistic system that provides meanings; it cannot be inferred that it serves as a reference in the condition of a procedure, which can be reused. From the point of view of processing, they are tasks of a distinct nature, so just *reading the signs* is not enough to get to the *reading of the written word*. Just as the use of oral-auditory language does not lead to literacy, although it is a means to reach it (Souza, 2012a; Scliar-Cabral, Souza, 2011; McGuinness, 2006; Ruddell, Unrau, 1994).

Preparing the reader for the chapter in which the suggestions for activities to be implemented in the classroom are presented, Quadros and Schmiedt (2006: 40, our translation) warn that ‘the activities suggested to the teachers aim to reach the reading and writing of Portuguese as a second language. Thus, activities are always preceded by the reading of texts in signs’²². In fact, one cannot develop reading competence without working on reading. It would be like waiting for a child to ride well on a bicycle without having practiced. Teaching the student to deal with writing, as well as teaching a child to ride a bicycle, requires situations of guidance and instruction on how to proceed, practical demonstrations and help, intervention, in the initial moments in which one does not yet have mastery over the developed activity. However, the roles of student and teacher need to be well defined. In the case of the alert made by the

²⁰ The authors suggest that if the child were literate in the writing of signs, it would provide a good basis on which to build the literacy process in Portuguese. However, since Brazilian schools – public and private – still do not exploit this resource, the authors focused the discussion on the literacy work regarding Portuguese.

²¹ Except in the case that someone reads and someone else accompanies this reading only “by ear”, a hypothesis pointed out by Britto (2012) in discussing the meanings of the word “reading”. For him, one can only denominate “reading”, in the strict sense of the term, those activities that involve the decipherment and intellection of the written code. It is necessary to recognize that in the educational environment this conception can be characterized as radical, an argument that the author considers in elaborating his discussion.

²² From the original excerpt: [...] “as atividades sugeridas aos professores objetivam chegar na leitura e escritura da língua portuguesa como segunda língua. Assim, as atividades sempre são antecedidas pela leitura de textos em sinais.”

authors, one has to ask who performs the reading of the texts in signs: Would be the educator with his group of students following up? Would be the group of students supported by the teacher? Or would each student do his or her own reading? The answer to these questions appears, rather vague, later on the same page:

Reading needs to be contextualized. Students who are in the literacy process in a second language need to be able to “understand” the text. This means that the teacher will need to provide tools for his student to come to an understanding. Provoking the interest in the students in the topic of reading through a previous discussion of the subject, or a visual stimulus about it, or through playing or an activity that leads to the subject can facilitate the understanding of the text²³ (p.40, our translation).

Naturally, the objective of literacy is to develop in the student the condition to understand the written text. Understanding must come from reading, for this is what the proficient reader does: s/he produces meaning from what s/he reads²⁴. Motivation for reading is a fundamental step for the student to engage in reading, but it cannot be confused with the provision of instruments that anticipate comprehension of the text before reading, at the risk of not forming readers. After all, why the need of the effort to access the written text and understand it, when pre-reading activities provide meaning? As long as there are pedagogical practices that do not place the reader in his/her proper role, that of the person responsible for dealing with the text, whose delegate indefinitely to the teacher the task of promoting a prior reading of the reading activity, schools will be forming functional illiterates – it does not matter if the apprentice is deaf or listener. It seems to have been made clear at this point the answer to the questions formulated in the previous page: the reading in signs that must always precede the activities is done by the teacher, according to the proposal of the authors.

It is necessary, fundamental, for the teacher to help, guide and accompany the students in the task of reading, as proposed by Ruddell and Unrau (1994), but under no circumstances should s/he carry it out in their place. It is part of the process to talk about the theme of the text in order to motivate students to read, as well as to

²³ From the original excerpt: “A leitura precisa estar contextualizada. Os alunos que estão se alfabetizando em uma segunda língua precisam ter condições de “compreender” o texto. Isso significa que o professor vai precisar dar instrumentos para o seu aluno chegar à compreensão. Provocar nos alunos o interesse pelo tema da leitura por meio de uma discussão prévia do assunto, ou de um estímulo visual sobre o mesmo, ou por meio de uma brincadeira ou atividade que os conduza ao tema pode facilitar a compreensão do texto.”

²⁴ The good reader, when engaging in the comprehension of a text, knows that s/he must not only use his/her previous knowledge, expectations, but also be attentive to the discursive intention of the author of the text, using the clues that the text offers. For a more detailed view on the subject, see Souza (2012b), Possenti (2001), Solé (1998) and Ruddell and Unrau (1994).

demonstrate reading procedures (those related to deciphering the system and those related to comprehension strategies), as well as to provide tasks in which the students can individually apply what they are learning about reading, not forgetting that they should receive feedback on the performance. In this respect, the figure of the teacher as a more experienced reader and as an instructor is very important, because with him/her students can discuss the meanings elaborated during reading, to know which interpretations are authorized by the text and which are not, thus improving the understanding process of the writing. After all, [...] “one cannot expect the child to be competent in something that s/he has not been instructed²⁵” (Solé, 1998: 63, our translation). This is a motive to raise once again, as crucial as it is, the lack of guidelines in the book analyzed that can at least shed some light on the procedures to be adopted by teachers in order to literate their students. And this is in a book presented as “a material to accomplish literacy in deaf children”²⁶ – presentation of Quadros and Schmiedt’s book, by Cláudia Dutra (2006: 08, our translation).

Only at the end of the chapter of theoretical assumptions can one find some unwarranted and unexplained clues regarding the process by which the deaf student passes – or should pass – in order to be literate and, thus, able to develop his/her competence in reading and textual production:

- In the context of the deaf student, reading goes through several levels:
- 1) Concrete - sign: reading the sign that refers to concrete things, directly related to the child.
 - 2) Drawing - sign: reading the signal associated with the drawing that can represent the object itself or the shape of the action represented by means of the sign.
 - 3) Drawing - written word: reading the word represented by the drawing related to the object itself or the form of the action represented by the drawing in the word.
 - 4) Manual alphabet - sign: establishing the relationship between the sign and the word in Portuguese spelled by means of the manual alphabet.
 - 5) Manual alphabet - written word: associating the written word with the manual alphabet.
 - 6) Word written in the text: reading the word in the text²⁷ (Quadros, Schmiedt 2006: 42-43, our translation).

²⁵ From the excerpt: [...] “não se pode esperar que a criança se mostre competente em algo sobre o que não foi instruída.”

²⁶ From the original excerpt: “um material para efetivar a alfabetização de crianças com surdez”.

²⁷ From the original excerpt: “No contexto do aluno surdo, a leitura passa por diversos níveis: 1) Concreto – sinal: ler o sinal que refere coisas concretas, diretamente relacionadas com a criança. 2) Desenho – sinal: ler o sinal associado com o desenho que pode representar o objeto em si ou a forma da ação representada por meio do sinal. 3) Desenho – palavra escrita: ler a palavra representada por meio do desenho relacionada com o objeto em si ou a forma da ação representada por meio do desenho na palavra. 4) Alfabeto manual – sinal: estabelecer a relação entre o sinal e a palavra no português soletrada por meio do alfabeto manual. 5) Alfabeto manual – palavra escrita: associar a palavra escrita com o alfabeto manual. 6) Palavra escrita no texto: ler a palavra no texto.”

Levels 1 and 2, considered by the authors as reading, are effectively the stage of acquisition of *Libras* in the school environment. From level 3 on, it is possible to infer how the child is taught to access the written code. First, the association of drawings with Portuguese words is encouraged, but curiously, the sign in *Libras* is not mentioned at this stage. Thus, the child must memorize a word and an image that tries to represent it, without being oriented, apparently, as to the sign associated with that written word. Untrained teachers for deaf education – to whom the authors direct the book – might ask themselves, as we ask ourselves: why not associating the written word directly with the sign? A question, incidentally, that should further alarm these teachers when they encounter level 4, where the use of the manual alphabet²⁸ is directly associated with the sign, and not with an image drawn on a card.

Another question that arises is: how to insert the manual alphabet while correlating it to the letters it represents? In isolation or within context? Judging by the content of the first chapter, the probable answer would be within context, that is, to explore the manual alphabet within the written word. However, this is level 5. Finally, in level 6, the student reads the word in the text. Of course, if, fortunately, one can remember that this written word corresponds to an arbitrary set of configurations of the manual alphabet, which corresponds, in relation to the last two strategies, to an arbitrary sign, which, remembering well, was not taught in association with a written word, but a drawing. Therefore, there is no way to conclude that, throughout the theoretical chapter of the book, there are enough conditions to provide the teacher with the tools to accomplish the literacy of deaf subjects. At best, believing in the extensive memory tracing condition, students can remember the items they have been taught, but will not be able to read new items that have not been repeatedly presented previously.

However, since the purpose of the text written by the authors is to provide suggestions for activities that “reach the reading and writing of Portuguese as a second language”²⁹, we also try to look at these suggestions for the conditions we mentioned above. Quadros and Schmiadt expose six proposals intending, in each one of them, to include the six levels of reading abovementioned:

²⁸ A resource that allows the deaf to reproduce with their hands the letters of the alphabet and, through which, they spell words. Each sign language has different options of representation.

²⁹ From the original excerpt: [...] “cheguem na leitura e escritura da língua portuguesa como segunda língua.”

The activities can be used from the beginning of the process of reading and writing acquisition, that is, with those children who had not had contact with Portuguese until the end of the early years, in which the child is already literate. The difference will be at the level of depth. Thus, we will always provide some tips to say what would be most appropriate for children at the beginning and during the literacy process³⁰ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 11, our translation).

Of the six proposals we discuss only two, one indicated as literacy and the other as work with reading and vocabulary, are directly related to the object of discussion in this article. Before starting the analysis, it should be noted that there is no information, contrary to what has been promised by the authors, which activities of each proposal are recommended for beginners and which are for already literate children.

Even if the first proposal considered here seems to have been indicated in the work as literacy – the authors’ explanation leads us to this interpretation – that is, it presupposes students who are not literate, it involves activities that require the student to have effective writing mastery, both in the reception (reading) and production (writing) modes:

Table 3 - Activity of reading and written interpretation:

Read a text carefully and answer.
Material: a text, on the subject, all illustrated that the child can understand alone or a more elaborate text that the teacher wants to work with and, for that, will be at this table with all who pass through it; sheets with comprehension questions for each child, pencil and eraser. Suggestion for the last question – “What do you think happened next?” One variation of this activity would be to present only the picture to be observed with the written comprehension questions [...].

Table 5 - Written output activity:

Watch a scene (on the topic) and write a story about it.
Material: an image pasted on a colored card, which presents richness of information and allows different interpretations. Make colored sheets, pencils and eraser available.³¹ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 62-63, our translation)

³⁰ From the original excerpt: “As atividades podem ser utilizadas desde o início do processo de aquisição da leitura e escrita, ou seja, com aquelas crianças que ainda não tiveram nenhum contato com o português, até o final das séries iniciais, em que a criança já se encontra alfabetizada. A diferença vai estar no nível de profundidade trabalhada. Assim, sempre daremos algumas dicas dizendo o que seria mais adequado para as crianças no início e durante o processo de alfabetização.”

³¹ From the original excerpt: “Mesa 3 – Atividade de leitura e interpretação escrita: Ler um texto com atenção e responder. Material: um texto, sobre o tema, todo ilustrado que a criança consiga compreender sozinha ou um texto mais elaborado que o professor queira trabalhar e, para tanto, ficará nesta mesa com todos que por ela passarem; folhas com as perguntas de interpretação para cada uma das crianças, lápis e borracha. Sugestão para última pergunta – “O que você acha que aconteceu depois?” Uma variação desta atividade seria apresentar somente a gravura para ser observada, com as perguntas de interpretação escrita [...].

Mesa 5 – Atividade de produção escrita: Observar uma cena (sobre o tema) e escrever uma história sobre ela. Material: uma cena colada num cartão colorido, que apresente riqueza de informações e possibilite diferentes interpretações, folhas coloridas, lápis e borracha.”

As this proposal involves several activities to be carried out in the same classroom, in group or individually, in the rotation system, the resource of distributing different activities (of visual discrimination, of solving mathematical problems, of reading, etc.) on the same theme at tables spread across the classroom is used. Hence, the title for the proposal *Trabalhando com 'Mesas Diversificadas'* (*Working with 'Diverse Tables'*, our translation), from which come tables 3 and 5, which deal with reading and writing output. There is no activity in the “Diverse Tables” proposal that aims at literacy, no activity that teaches the deaf person to associate the written word with the words of his/her sign language. Instead, what the reader of the book finds is a reading activity that requires a student who already knows how to read.

Now, if the proposals were designed to literate, and, instead, present activities that presuppose mastery of the writing system, one can only think that there is a great confusion between what literacy activities and reading activities are. Even because, as previously discussed, these concepts are not presented in the theoretical chapter. If, in theory, it is not clear what literacy and reading stand for, neither can they be in the practice that the authors propose:

[...] whether the teacher knows the characteristics and dimensions of reading, the less likely s/he is to propose tasks that trivialize the activity of reading, or that limit the reader's potential to engage his/her intellectual abilities, and therefore, the closer this teacher will be to reach the objective of educating readers³² (Kleiman 2011: 11, our translation).

Thus, knowing the necessary distinction between literacy and reading is part of the responsibility of those who educate readers. The development of reading depends on it, since [...] “reading is not decoding, but to read it is necessary to know how to decode”³³ (Solé, 1998: 52, our translation). Therefore, there is no effective reading without access to the writing system, and access to the written system, that is, to know how to deal with the alphabetical system, how to decode it, is something that must be taught explicitly, since it is not acquired naturally and spontaneously (Souza, 2012a; Scliar-Cabral, Souza, 2011; McGuinness, 2006; Solé 1998). This first task in the education of readers is called literacy³⁴. However, the process does not end there, it is

³² From the original excerpt: [...] “conhecendo o professor as características e dimensões do ato de ler, menores serão as possibilidades de propor tarefas que trivializem a atividade de ler, ou que limitem o potencial do leitor de engajar suas capacidades intelectuais, e, portanto, mais próximo estará esse professor do objetivo de formação de leitores.”

³³ From the excerpt: [...] “ler não é decodificar, mas para ler é preciso saber decodificar.”

³⁴ In this passage, we mean the beginning process of teaching and learning to read. In Portuguese, there is a specific term for this process, which is called *alfabetização*.

also necessary to instruct learners about comprehension strategies, how to improve, more and more, how they understand what they read. At this point, the work with reading comes into play, with reading being, at first, an object of teaching, not a tool to mediate other types of learning. Before we can serve the purpose of learning through reading, the act of reading must be what we learn itself.

Finally, in order to conclude the analysis of this first proposal, it should be noted that, only when learning to read has begun that it makes sense to work with written production at a level that does not exceed the knowledge that the person already has about the writing system, at the risk of creating scribes. Therefore, the said literacy situation is not very promising, since it neglects basic phases and knowledge and requires students to face activities that can only be accomplished through knowledge that they do not possess yet.

Continuing the analysis, under the title *Trabalhando com leitura e vocabulário* (*Working with reading and vocabulary*, our translation), the second proposal included in this paper is to “extend and consolidate knowledge of Portuguese words in a playful way”³⁵ (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 74, our translation). This enlargement and fixation, however, is not due to the work with the reading of texts, as one might suppose by the title of the proposal. Instead, the activities of this proposal explore, in particular, the association of signs of *Libras* and/or concepts with written words of Portuguese, as well as the association of the manual alphabet with written words and/or signs of *Libras*, as shown in figure 1 below:

³⁵ From the original excerpt: [...] “ampliar e fixar o conhecimento de palavras da língua portuguesa de forma lúdica.”

Make different memory games:

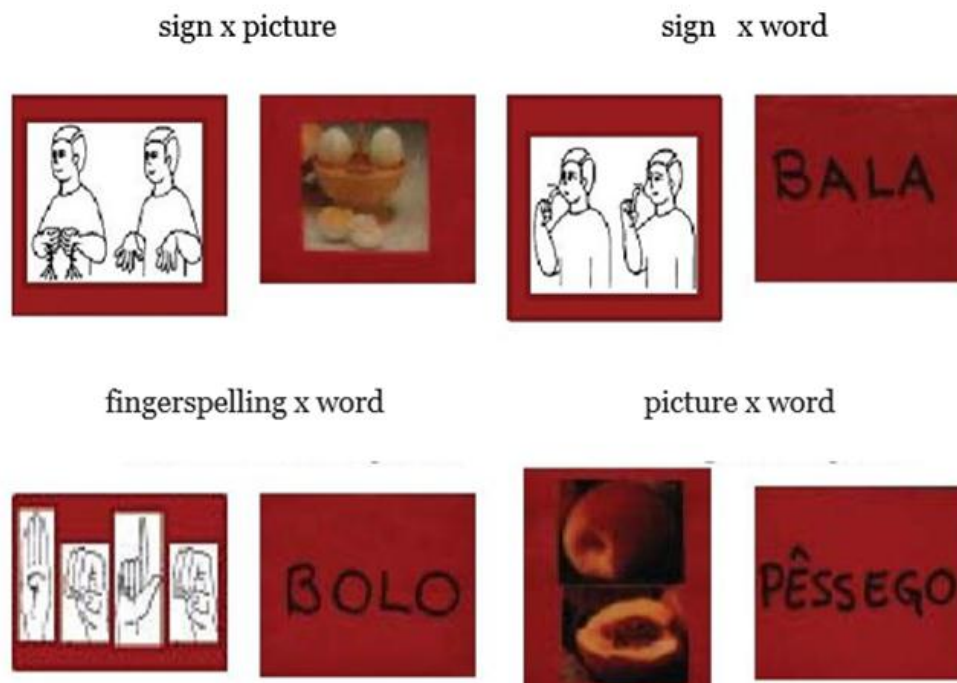


Figure 1: Example of an activity of the second proposal (Quadros, Schmiedt, 2006: 75, our translation)

These activities, although not explicit in the proposal, deal with access to the written code. When the authors talk about vocabulary expansion, they do not seem to have in mind a work that demonstrates how a single word can have several meanings (or a meaning to be expressed in different words) and the importance of context to determine the most appropriate one. The verb “consolidate”, next to “extend”, referring to vocabulary, provides a more exact idea of what the proposal involves: a means of literacy for the deaf students. Literacy in the extent that such activity attempts to provide the learner the means to transform the written word into *Libras* signs.

As can be deduced from the example, the resource used is to access memory to associate words, manual alphabet, and signs. Since it is assumed that the deaf child cannot resort to the phonology of Portuguese to make the association between grapheme and phoneme (which has been questioned by the literature; see Seimetz-Rodrigues, 2017), the recurrent output is to make them memorize correspondences between words and signs. For this reason, possibly, the fixation and memorization are justified as a means of expanding vocabulary. Just as it justifies the work of literacy – teaching the correlation word-sign – in parallel, during a certain period of time, with the work of reading. After all, the greatest asset that the child has is his/her memory, a

resource that, for an elementary level of success, needs to be stimulated continuously, without overloading. This does not justify though the confusion, once again, between the concepts and practices involved in the task of teaching to read. Despite the confusion, at least now, through the activity presented above (Figure 1), the reader of the book seems to find clues to instruct his/her deaf students to deal with the written word.

Finally, it is obvious that reading is not the object of the teaching-learning process in this proposal. In the same way, it is possible to observe that, throughout the book, divided into three chapters – the third one only gives suggestions on materials to be made as teaching resources –, we can cite, with a certain numerical expressiveness, the terms literacy, reading, written production. However, the necessary conditions to provide the teacher with the tools to teach his/her deaf student to read and write are not created.

Still, despite all that has been said, we cannot say that the book is of no use. In the hands of teachers who understand the implications of literacy for reading and writing, the proposals can serve to some extent as a basis for the development of clearer, more effective methodologies. In the hands of teachers who do not have this understanding, the chances of the material being useless are significant. It is not a question of belittling the efforts of Quadros and Schmiedt (2006), but it is also not a question of turning a blind eye to the fact that there are, not only in deaf education, many mistaken theoretical and methodological proposals when the goal is to teach how to read and write. Evidence of this is the extremely high indexes of functional illiterates, according to reading competency assessments such as SAEB, ENEM and PISA³⁶. Reiterating this situation, both in the education of listeners and deaf people, requires that literacy work, more than presupposition, be put into use. And to be put into use, it needs to be clearly understood.

³⁶ The first two are national Brazilian assessments: National System of Assessment of Basic Education and National Examination of Secondary Education, respectively. The third is international: Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development of the European Union.

2. NOT TO CONCLUDE: THE NEED FOR RESEARCH ON THE MEANS OF ACCESS TO THE WRITTEN TEXT IN PORTUGUESE BY DEAF INDIVIDUALS

It is undeniable the obstacle that the decoding stage of the alphabetical system represents for the access of deaf people to written texts in Portuguese. Since this system of writing takes as its unit of representation the words of the language and its phonemes, and, therefore, requires the mastery of the correspondence between grapheme and phoneme to learn how to read it (Scliar-Cabral, 2003a, 2013, 2018; Soares, 2004, 2016; Souza, 2012a; Kleiman, 2011; Scliar-Cabral, Souza, 2011; McGuinness, 2006; Solé, 1998; Rudell, Unral, 1994), the deaf child and his/her teacher are faced with the problem of how the child will have access to the writing system if s/he lacks the element taken for representation. This obstacle, which is not small considering the role that decoding plays in initiating meaning-building processes from writing, has been neglected in the teaching of the deaf.

We have closed our eyes, somewhat out of fear, somewhat out of ignorance, to the need to propose more effective means for deaf students to deal with the alphabetic system. We have done this as if it were possible to achieve good readers without initiating them in the ways in which the written text can be accessed; as if it was possible to achieve good readers only through contact with writing and/or with other readers (Souza, 2012a). We have done this as if we wanted to forget the problem that the teaching of the writing system represents in the education of deaf people. We have done this as one who ignores that [...] “the teaching of strategies to have access to the text is not an end in itself, but a means for the child to interpret it”³⁷ (Solé, 1998: 60, our translation).

Therefore, the challenge of seriously discussing the means by which the deaf can gain access to the written system can no longer be postponed; which modes of access are better from the point of view of processing; which are subject to teaching in regular schools and/or special schools; what types of difficulties one will have to face in adopting a particular decoding procedure and what strategies one can use to deal with them; what the learner brings of knowledge about the object of learning and what is necessary to teach to reach the goal of literacy and to train readers. We must convince ourselves that turning a person into a reader requires a method. It is not that we,

³⁷ From the excerpt: [...] “o ensino de estratégias para ter acesso ao texto não é um fim em si mesmo, mas um meio para a criança poder interpretá-lo.”

teachers, have recipes. Nor are we interested in maintaining palliatives. Rather, we need to study in depth how to turn deaf students into proficient readers. It is such an unattainable objective when it is assumed that we cannot teach the deaf student the relationship between grapheme and phoneme and what to do instead.

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