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Discourses and Practices in the Inclusion of Deaf Indians in Differentiated Indigenous Schools

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ABSTRACT – Discourses and Practices in the Inclusion of Deaf Indians in Differentiated Indigenous Schools. The interface between special education and indigenous education is a new and complex research field, drawing boundaries not defined yet between two fields of knowledge being constituted. This paper investigated the discourses of differentiated indigenous education, inclusive education and deaf education, and also recorded the perceived effectiveness of educational policies in the discourse of staff working in indigenous schools. The analysis, in addition to locating the indigenous deaf person in a differentiated culture, has identified the problems, possibilities and specific needs of communication in the school environment. The results indicated the need to create spaces for dialogue with the indigenous school community, so that the issue of deaf education is discussed and built collectively.

Keywords: Indigenous School Education. Special Education. Deafness.

RESUMO – Discursos e Práticas na Inclusão de Índios Surdos em Escolas Diferenciadas Indígenas. A interface entre a educação especial e a educação escolar indígena é um campo novo e complexo de investigação, traça fronteiras ainda não definidas entre dois campos de conhecimento em constituição. Este trabalho investigou os discursos acerca da educação diferenciada indígena, educação inclusiva e educação de pessoas surdas, bem como registrou a percepção da efetivação das políticas educacionais na fala dos profissionais que atuam nas escolas indígenas. As análises, além de situar o indígena surdo em uma cultura diferenciada, permitiram identificar as dificuldades, possibilidades e necessidades específicas e de comunicação no ambiente escolar. Os resultados apontaram a necessidade de criação de espaços de diálogo junto à comunidade escolar indígena, para que a questão da educação de pessoas surdas seja discutida e construída coletivamente.

Palavras-chave: Educação Escolar Indígena. Educação Especial. Surdez.

Introduction

In the last decade, both the Indigenous School Education and studies on deaf education – the latter with increasing scientific production in the field of linguistics and education – have made efforts to devise a robust framework for debate about culture, language specific processes and special ways of learning. In this ongoing process, the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC), through the Brazilian Special Education Policy from the perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008), proposed the interface between Special Education and Indigenous Education.

It becomes a challenge for researchers from both education modalities to set paths and demarcate boundaries between these two fields of knowledge, which are not yet formed or are constituted in a timid and parallel manner.

Currently, about 818,000 people who claim to be indigenous live in Brazil. Of these, about 517,000 live in indigenous villages and reservations and belong to about 305 ethnic groups speaking more than 270 languages, according to 2010 census data (Brasil/IBGE, 2012). More than half of this population lives in the North and Central-West regions of Brazil, and the second largest indigenous population of the country lives in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul alone, corresponding to 77,025 indigenous people. The state's indigenous population consists of nine peoples: Atikum, Guarani/Kaiowá, Guarani/Ñandeva, Guató, Kadiwéu, Kamba, Kinikinawa, Ofaié and Terena.

The 2013 Brazilian School Census (Brasil/MEC, 2013) pointed out that in Brazil there are 238,113 indigenous people enrolled in schools located in indigenous villages, but there were no data on the amount of students with hearing impairment. It is known that the number of indigenous people who cannot hear or have great difficulty in hearing in Brazil is around 8,772 people, according to 2010 census (Brasil/IBGE, 2012).

In this article, we present some discourses that organize, regulate and discuss differentiated indigenous education and deaf education from the inclusive perspective, relating them to the discourses of teachers and other indigenous staff about the reality of inclusion in schools. We aim to show the results of a survey conducted in schools located in indigenous villages within the cities of Amambai, Paranhos and Coronel Sapucaia, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

The Discourses on Traditional Indigenous Education and Differentiated Indigenous School

The education of indigenous children and youth in the Guarani and Kaiowá cultures traditionally is responsibility of their extended

family (including grandparents, parents, uncles and brothers) and is carried out within their household. This teaching aims at the perpetuation of the social order established, i.e., the conformation of the individual to the group, however, developing the ability to feel accomplished as a person and serve the collectivism as a whole.

Since the European colonization, education within the indigenous communities has been suffering influences and, consequently, has been modified. Souza (2014) explains that indigenous education has gone through different phases. It started with the phase of colonization, when Catholic missionaries, especially the Jesuits, created, in the name of the “Christian civilization”, the formal school to teach the natives how to read, write, count and sing (the intention was teaching *correct Portuguese*, and the consequence would be the exclusion of their Mother Language from school). Next, federal institutions like the Indian Protection Service (*Serviço de Proteção aos Índios* - SPI) and the National Indian Foundation (*Fundação Nacional do Índio* - FUNAI) were created. In the last decade, state universities have given indigenous education contributions, providing specialized advisory services, until the reaching the phase when indigenous people themselves are protagonists, claiming quality education, in which they feel an integral part of the educational construction, seizing actions and productions of their own, drawing on their conceptions of *being indigenous*.

The right to education, under those principles, was secured in many contemporary official documents, such as the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, promulgated in 1988, which recommends for the school to be an instrument for the “maintenance of the cultural identity of indigenous people”, valuing indigenous languages, knowledge and traditions (Brasil, 1988, online).

After the National Educational Guidelines and Framework Act (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* - LDB) (Brasil, 1996), the focus turns to the need to value the cultural differences of the indigenous population in educational spaces. The National Reference Curriculum for Indigenous Schools (*Referencial Curricular Nacional para as Escolas Indígenas* - Brasil, 1998) was published in order to subsidize the pedagogical practices of teachers in indigenous schools. For some researchers like Grupioni (2008), these proposals still bear the marks of a time of colonization and control of indigenous communities by the Brazilian State, as they do not provide any opportunities for the indigenous people themselves to build their curricula and set their school practices.

In the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, Decree N. 10734/2002 (MS/SED, 2002) *created* the category *Indigenous School* in the K-12 level of the state education system. In this document, it is recommended that primarily indigenous teachers and the community's participation define the organization, structure and operation of the indigenous school, among other specifications.

After the referred decree, the State Education Plan of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS/SED, 2004), drawn up in 2004, was revised in 2014 establishing the guidelines and goals of the Indigenous School Education in the municipalities of the state. These guidelines were elected by the indigenous population – whose claims consist of: preparation of specific teaching-learning material; continued training and qualification for indigenous technical and administrative staff and teachers working in indigenous schools; all schools provided with an information network, a computer lab, library collections and adequate physical structure.

More recently, in the document drafted in 2007 – the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) – the issue of education for people with disabilities is placed on the international agenda as a right, just like health, freedom and language. In this document, school education should not conflict with another fundamental right: the right not to be forcibly assimilated or deprived of their cultures. For this reason, it is argued that differentiated indigenous education would be one way to ensure this right without violating the freedom and autonomy of these peoples in the design, organization and implementation of cultural practices that affect them. It is also recommended that States take effective measures to ensure the continuous improvement of the economic and social conditions of indigenous peoples, with special attention to the rights and specific needs of the indigenous elderly, women, youth, children and people with disabilities.

Currently, indigenous movements, with the support of researchers and teachers in the area, struggle for this institutionalized education to prioritize the indigenous mother language at school, as well as to appreciate cultural differences, to legitimize the alternative educational practices of the indigenous community, and also to allow access to other knowledge produced by mankind.

In this sense, teachers Nascimento and Vinha (2012) assume that the post-1988 legal system defined, therefore, a new social function for the school in the context of indigenous peoples, pointing to equity. Thus, the indigenous school should be a repertoire of scheduled actions with the clear intention that students, teachers and communities carry out their own anthropology, producing the synthesis and/or dialogue based on the relationship between culture (or cultures), curriculum and identity. The purpose is, thus, for the indigenous school to be a new space, a “[...] space of social boundaries” (Nascimento; Vinha, 2012, p. 73).

For these authors, the indigenous peoples of Brazil have had their own forms of social organization recognized, as well as their symbolic values and traditions. They advance towards building a specific and differentiated school that does not promote erasing senses of their knowledge and sociocultural practices; even so, there is still much to do (Nascimento; Vinha, 2012, p. 80). Self-management of the differentiated

indigenous school and intercultural dialogue are measures encouraged by researchers of the field.

Discourses on Inclusive Education and Deaf Education

The disabled indigenous person's right to education is a very recent feature of the Brazilian educational policy. This right arises in the official documents, particularly the discussions of the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (*Política Nacional de Educação Especial na Perspectiva da Educação Inclusiva* - Brasil, 2008).

The above-mentioned document defines a disabled person as the one *who has had long-term impediments of physical, mental or sensory nature who, in interaction with various barriers, may have their full and effective participation in school and society restricted* (Brasil, 2008). It also recommends for these people to be included in mainstream schools, with guaranteed access, participation and learning, ensuring provision of special education in all levels of education, Specialized Educational Service (*Atendimento Educacional Especializado*, AEE) and training of teachers and other education professionals for school inclusion, as well as other recommendations.

For deaf students to enroll in ordinary schools, they are taught in bilingual Portuguese/LIBRAS [Brazilian Sign Language] education. The specialized education service is offered for these students in both oral and written forms, and in sign language. According to the educational policy, we consider a deaf person's first language to be the sign language, and from this language we teach Portuguese in the written form (second language). Accessibility is guaranteed with the use of professional LIBRAS translators/interpreters who accompany students in all classes of all subjects. Due to the linguistic difference, it is advised for the deaf student to be, along with other deaf students, in ordinary classrooms of ordinary schools, so there is effective communication among children, throughout the school space (Brasil, 2008).

This proposal for bilingual education is based on the fact that deaf students learn to signal naturally, from birth, using strategies such as pointing at things to communicate with the environment. But for such signs to be agreed upon in a language, favorable conditions for its development and its use in communication processes with the group in which it is inserted are necessary (Quadros; Karnopp, 2004). Research indicates that enabling the learning, dissemination and use of the sign language enables deaf students' full development and social participation (Quadros, 1997; Skliar, 1997; Lacerda; Góes, 2000). It should be emphasized that the sign language agreed upon by the group of deaf people of a region must be included in the educational policy, actions and practices referring to this population.

In 2002, the LIBRAS joined the list of sign languages legally recognized, and is now on the agenda of discussions on the language policy of the country (Brasil, 2002). In a parallel way, other sign languages were identified as being in use in indigenous communities, such as the Brazilian Kaapor sign language (*Língua de Sinais Kaapor Brasileira*, LSKB), described by Lucinda Ferreira (Ferreira, 2010), the Kaingang Signs of the Village (*Sinais Kaingang da Aldeia*, SKA) described by Marisa Giroletti (Giroletti, 2008) and the Terena signals (Sumaio, 2014).

For the education of indigenous students with disabilities, the policy recommends that:

The interface of special education in indigenous education, rural education and maroon education must ensure that resources, services and specialized educational services are present in educational projects built on the basis of the socio-cultural differences of these groups (Brasil, 2008, p. 17).

However, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, it is believed that (whenever any) qualification courses are offered and organized to indigenous teachers, aiming at promoting the inclusion of disabled people, particularly deaf people, they are not at all different from the qualification courses offered to teachers in urban areas. Probably, there is a silencing process going on in relation to deaf students in indigenous schools and/or a standardization of the subjects, who, at other times, have been shown to have specific characteristics in their communication (Coelho, 2011).

School Practices and the Question of Communication in Indigenous Schools Voiced by Education Professionals

This section discusses the results found during observations, informal talks and interviews conducted with teachers, coordinators, principals and education managers who work in indigenous schools where there are or there used to be deaf students.

As it was observed by Chamorro (2008), mastering the language used by the indigenous community is essential for the child who is born and grows within this location, for interactions, the transmission of knowledge of the traditional culture, songs and rituals are carried out through speech by most of the population. The problem lies in the fact that the deaf person's condition while living in the indigenous community could imply, sometimes, in isolation and exclusion from cultural and social practices of their community. However, the impossibility of learning satisfactorily the oral language spoken by the group triggers deaf people to develop communication strategies, such as lip reading of some words and signaling in the household environment through family-only signals.

At school, it is noticed that content is conveyed through oral language and the learning required from students is for them to master, at least, two languages (the Guarani and Portuguese languages). Within this context, in which linguistic barriers are present on a daily basis, deaf students' process of teaching and learning and communication with their classmates and teachers in the classroom may be compromised.

The contact between the indigenous teacher who can listen and the deaf indigenous student is restricted to basic communication within the classroom. In the school environment, teachers feel that the resources for transmission of knowledge to the student are limited by linguistic barriers. In the teachers' narratives, it is possible to notice their frustration for not being able to establish a dialogue with these young students:

So, you can imagine how I felt like during the two years I was teaching an indigenous deaf student and another one with mental impairment. I mean, I felt completely discouraged, standing before them, not being able to help them. I had plenty of teaching experience at the school back then, but I'd look at them and think 'What is the best I can do for them?', and they would try their best to be participating too. So, imagine a special person like them, who are benefited from laws, like any other citizen – I saw myself with no conditions to provide them what they deserved (Teacher 1).

We feel so sorry for her... if she looks at my mouth, she understands. She copies things from the board very well, beautiful handwriting, the problem is when we have to solve problems... if I show her pictures, she understands it better (Teacher 2).

[...] I don't know how his previous teachers passed him up to the fourth grade. We worked with computers, drawings, I don't know, he felt isolated from the others somehow, he didn't talk to anyone (Teacher 3).

Teachers show concern in relation to teaching strategies for these students, they recognize the guarantee of deaf students' right to education, but they demonstrate not to know how this education should take place. They believe that using strategies like pictures, images and drawings makes the teaching-learning process easier, but they affirm not knowing any teaching methodologies specific to deaf people. They often justify school failure of deaf students with their difficulty of communication in oral language:

[...] another student, A., he quit (school), he didn't speak anything, he didn't even move his mouth (Teaching coordinator).

In the classroom he couldn't, let's put this way, focus, you see... (Teacher 3).

It's a communication difficulty, indeed (Teacher 2).

Many teachers don't know sign language and resources indicated to teach deaf people, whose strategies consist of overcoming communi-

cation difficulties. Teachers recognize that part of this difficulty lies in the qualification (or lack of specific qualification) and lack of knowledge on the topic. Some admit not having noticed the students' struggle.

When this happens in the classroom, (we) don't know how to deal with these people (Teacher 3).

[...] nobody notices she is like that because she understands well what we tell her and answers our questions (Teaching coordinator).

I only knew she had a hearing device during midterm, because she is attentive... but now we have to ask her to sit on the front row (Teacher 4).

But I've never noticed he has this condition. From what I see in the classroom, he is messy, that's his only problem. [...] He understands well when you speak like this to him. Even I, when I speak like this to him, he understands very well (Teacher 5).

It is noticeable, based on the speeches above, that the school is not aware of the linguistic barriers deaf students have to face; the staff argues that their difficulty is unnoticeable, but they do not comment on the student's learning issues. This demonstrates that they are unaware of the characteristics and difficulties of students with hearing impairment, as teacher 4's report shows, when he says that for a long time in the classroom, he did not notice any difficulties the student had. Some measures were only taken after the school coordinators asked them to do so, and they were probably alerted by professionals with specific knowledge to identify these students' needs.

The lack of interface between Special Education and Indigenous School Education results in lack of knowledge of sign language and other pedagogical resources from teachers, hindering the interaction between young students using sign language in the classroom. Another issue observed by a LIBRAS interpreter who has worked in an indigenous school is the linguistic complexity of such an educational environment. Students learn oral words with their families in Guarani or Kaiowá languages and, at school, they are in contact with teachers who give classes in Portuguese. This situation can be observed in the following account:

My first contact with A. (deaf young man) was in 2007, when a technician of the State Special Education Center (NUESP) asked me to support the inclusion of the student in the school he had been attending for a while. Back then, I was working as a LIBRAS interpreter with another student in the same period [...]. This is how I accompanied student A: one meeting every two weeks in the school for a period of around 4 months. I would take him LIBRAS materials and booklets to teach him the signs of basic communication. The student managed to learn some signs and used them at school, but these meetings were not enough to teach him LIBRAS, as they were not constant and, also, there was a communication barrier. A. only knew some words in Guarani and I didn't speak this language. Also, the student could not understand classes given in Portuguese. I once tried to accompany the student in the classroom, but I couldn't make him understand, as there was a difficulty in the classroom:

the teacher was speaking Portuguese, I was doing basic signals in LIBRAS and the student clearly could not understand any language. During the class given in Guarani, I was the one who didn't understand anything so I couldn't explain it to him. It was nerve-wracking!

Evidence shows that in indigenous schools, there are many non-indigenous teachers who speak Portuguese and teach various subjects. About this topic, when asked, one of the education managers argued that in one of the municipalities researched, there are not enough indigenous teachers qualified to teach children and youth in the indigenous villages schools, and, for this reason, they hire non-indigenous professionals. The very mother tongue of the indigenous population is a second priority or, as Nascimento (2003, p. 42) explains, it is used as a "bridge, transition language, facilitation language for the understanding of the mastering content and to diminish the rate of failure expressed by flunking and school evasion". It can be observed that it is a complex issue, as it involves children and teens in a stage of cognitive and social development, who often have their linguistic right neglected in plurilingual contexts.

When observing three indigenous deaf students in their respective schools, it was possible to see that they are included in games and activities carried out with the other children and, despite their limited communication due to the linguistic barrier, their relationship with their peers is good.

He is like that in the classroom. Out of the classroom, he plays, talks with his colleagues. He was the most beloved of all (Teacher 3).

She is smart, an easy learner and has good relations in the classroom, does all activities, plays with the younger children (Teacher 2).

A. has always been a good student and is very smart. The only problem is that he was in a classroom with younger children and had no one his age to talk to (LIBRAS Interpreter).

He works hard, learns things easily and is attentive to everything (Principal 1).

C. plays with colleagues in the classroom and is quite messy. Sometimes he gets aggressive, but not too much (Teacher 5).

It is noteworthy that the difficulty of communication does not prevent young deaf people to relate with their peers and learn to perform tasks which procedures they understand. But, just like student A., relationships with colleagues were determinant in their choice of leaving school. By the time the student attended school, he was 16 years old and enrolled in a 4th grade classroom with younger children. According to his family, he complained to everyone he did not like to be in the classroom of the *small ones* and demonstrated he felt frustrated and discouraged with school. This means that, beyond the language barrier, there was still the age-grade lag, which discouraged him to remain studying.

This is a relevant fact not only to the indigenous school, for many students with disabilities in urban schools lack qualified human resources, physical resources and materials that enable their learning. For this reason, they remain without mastering elementary concepts of basic education. Teachers find themselves facing a dilemma: to keep the student in an initial grade or allow them to advance, even if they do not master the minimum content required for this. Even the teachers and education professionals report that students are able to learn and socialize; however, they realize that the system does not provide an environment suitable for deaf people to learn more elaborate and complex contents.

In addition, it was observed that those who had the most success and remained at school were students who had partial hearing loss and, therefore, learned the oral Guarani language spoken in the community and Portuguese. Most youth identified as deaf remain illiterate, copy names and words, but do not understand what they write. Some were unable to sign their own names.

It was observed that deaf youth are included in the ordinary classrooms and do not have the service of a LIBRAS professional interpreter (who are also available in small numbers in urban schools of the municipalities); besides, the resource of Specialized Educational Service (AEE) is not offered to students.

The bilingual proposal for deaf education is unknown in the school. It is observed, in the narrative of the indigenous teachers, that most of them have little knowledge of teaching strategies and of the linguistic status of the deaf students. When asked about the strategies he uses to teach a student with hearing loss, the teacher answers:

There isn't any need to do anything differently. With me, she follows the pace of the others (Teacher 4).

Teachers from another indigenous school also comment on the lack of preparation to deal with the situation and denounce the lack of support from the municipal department of education:

Yeah, I've had in other situations, but I had more support. [...] But how should we work with them? (Teacher 1).

I think they (the Municipal Department of Education) do not know they have this child here... I'm not sure, but I think they don't know (Teacher 2).

Teachers have also reported that they receive no support from the Municipal Department of Education, both as regards to the provision of resources and continuing education for teachers and to monitoring compliance with the deaf student's specific needs. When asked about the existence of professional interpreters of sign language or qualified to service the deaf student, a teacher responds:

No, it's just me in the classroom and I think she doesn't feel too well in the classroom, because of her difficulties (Teacher 2).

All teachers interviewed agree that students are able to learn, despite the difficulties they present. They also agree that speaking slowly and in front of the deaf students helps them in communication. They report they use images and pictures aiming at allowing students to understand the content; however, they believe that such measure is not enough, for the school lacks resources and basic structures.

Taking these accounts in consideration, it can be noticed that indigenous schools are facing a challenge: the construction of a differentiated and plurilingual indigenous school that includes people with disabilities/linguistic difference in their daily learning space.

Despite the recommendation for organization and instrumentalization of special education in schools, many indigenous people notice these discourses as imposing, arising from an education model which was not considered to the indigenous reality.

For the teachers who participated in this study, the construction of an inclusive space, respecting the diversity present in the communities may and should only be done through the activity (and participation) of the indigenous people themselves. For them, recognizing traditional knowledge, language and culture is not enough for the school to be considered an indigenous one. It is necessary having methodologies and educational management ways to be thought through and executed by the community itself, as an indigenous school principal claims:

We can't find a proper mechanism of our own to protect these families who have such needs, these difficulties (families of disabled people). We ourselves, as a Guarani-Kaiowá people, we don't find a traditional way, as this is no longer being respected. [...] You have a way to deal with, to have this space, but that is not completely as you create it, right, there has to be some mean of our own there, with our manners. [...] I also think that there is a different methodology that our people may adequate to the one you have, the one you use, so that both are connected. And work on that. This methodology needs to be in a scheme, it needs to be organized. [...] After all, all constructions are science. I believe there is, therefore, a mean of bringing; there is now, before it was not accepted, but now it is, and this acceptance is an opening, it is a space. So we need to find a way to do one more thing in common, right, an ordinary thing (Principal).

This indigenous professional believes that changes are taking place in villages and the problems arising from these changes are explained by the interference of non-indigenous people in the culture of the community. In the differentiated indigenous school, the way inclusion policies are being configured leads teachers to question the intention and efficacy of this model they desire for the school. Before this, the education managers of the municipalities should provide dialogue environments for the indigenous professionals, so that the issue of education of deaf people and those with various impairments is discussed and built collectively.

Finally, for the linguistic development, learning promotion and school inclusion of deaf students, it is necessary to set an intercultural dialogue of hybrid nature – in which social cultural processes, where structures or discreet practices exist separately, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices (Canclini, 2008, p. 19) – a movement of intersection and transactions that allows the discussion of linguistic strategies taking in consideration the plurilingual context of indigenous communities.

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