

# Young deaf children in early childhood education: discussion over hearing-ization<sup>1</sup> processes and practices in an inclusion context

*Criança surda pequena na Educação Infantil: reflexões sobre processos e práticas de ouvintização em contexto inclusivo*

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**Abstract:** In this article, we present the results of an ethnographic study on hearing-ization practices with deaf children in Early Childhood Education, in an inclusion context. The discussion aims to understand the processes of the hearing norm constitution in the inclusion of young deaf children in an institution of Early Childhood Education, in Curitiba. The study seeks to propose a reflection on a new analytical conceptual category - the hearing-ization - that is meant to refer to the naturalization of the hearing standard in those social processes and strategies that privilege the hearing people and their oral-auditory culture as the norm, dialoguing with concepts from the Sociology of Childhood and Deaf Studies in Education. The ethnography recorded in field notes, involved photographic material of the context of a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (in Portuguese, CMEI - Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil), and notes of informal conversations with the teachers and the children. The results showed that hearing-ization is present in practices that overvalue and naturalize symbols and in educational experiences focusing on the oral-auditory culture that make deaf children and their visual communication experiences invisible. The hearing norm and privilege is evident in the educational-pedagogical experiences, in the countless material and symbolic advantages that reiterate the prominence and positivity of hearing and speaking, in the practices of educating and caring in Early Childhood Education.

**Keywords:** Deaf Child. Hearing-ization. Audism. Early Childhood Education. School inclusion.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo apresentamos resultados de uma pesquisa de orientação etnográfica que tematiza as práticas de ouvintização com crianças surdas na Educação Infantil em contexto inclusivo. A discussão objetiva compreender os processos de constituição da norma ouvinte nas experiências de inclusão da criança surda pequena em uma instituição de Educação Infantil, em Curitiba. A pesquisa busca propor a reflexão sobre uma nova categoria conceitual analítica – a ouvintização – significada como referência à naturalização da norma ouvinte em processos e estratégias sociais que privilegiam a pessoa ouvinte e sua cultura oral-auditiva como norma, a partir do diálogo com conceitos da Sociologia da Infância e dos Estudos Surdos em Educação. A etnografia, registrada em diário de campo, contemplou imagens fotográficas do contexto de um Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil (CMEI), notas de conversas informais com as professoras e diálogos com as crianças. Nos resultados encontrados, ficou evidente que o privilégio ouvinte está presente em práticas de supervalorização e naturalização dos símbolos e vivências educativas que dão centralidade à cultura oral-auditiva, invisibilizando a criança surda

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<sup>1</sup>As it is a neologism created from the study that gave rise to this paper, the term "ouvintização" has no direct correspondence in English. We have therefore chosen to translate it as "hearing-ization", with the beginning of the word ouvintização, "ouvinte" (hearing), corresponding to "hearing", and the end "-zação", corresponding to "-ization".

e suas experiências de comunicação visual. A norma e o privilégio ouvinte evidenciam-se nas experiências educativo-pedagógicas, nas inúmeras vantagens materiais e simbólicas que reiteram o lugar de destaque e de positividade das referências do ouvir e falar nas práticas de educar-e-cuidar na Educação Infantil.

**Palavras-chave:** Criança Surda. Ouvintização. Ouvintismo. Educação Infantil. Inclusão escolar.

## 1 Introduction

Deaf bilingual education has been the main demand of the Brazilian deaf movement since the recognition of the Libras Law in Brazil in 2002. There have been a variety of approaches and readings of the theoretical-methodological principles and foundations, the subject of research investigation that seeks to offer guidelines or principles for a deaf bilingualism policy, considering Libras as the first language (L1) and written Portuguese as the second language (L2) since Kindergarten.

Regarding Libras, studies on deaf children's language acquisition (QUADROS, 1997; LILLO-MARTIN, 1999) and sign language curricula (MERTZANI, BARBOSA, FERNANDES, 2022; STUMPF; LINHARES, 2021; MERTZANI, TERRA, DUARTE, 2020) are the themes that have contributed most to the implementation of bilingual education programs in Early Childhood Education. The reality of a large majority of deaf children born into hearing families adds a significant social function to the school: to constitute a space for access, acquisition, and interaction in an L1 of cultural identification – the mother tongue – which, for most children, is learned in their family.

This fact adds a new meaning to educational policies for deaf children: to have the right to assert a deaf humanity built by access and symbolic mediation of a visual-spatial language, the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). If learned early in life (from 0 to 3 years old), Libras would theoretically fulfill the role of an L1, hence all the linguistic, cognitive, cultural and emotional functions necessary for the development of language in parameters similar to hearing children (QUADROS, 1997). Obviously, we are assuming an understanding of deaf people as members of a

linguistic minority that builds historical and cultural community traditions, whose most important expressions are their signed languages, produced within communities of deaf signers. These visual-spatial languages assume the political status of minority languages in the countries where they are used, due to a complex process of oppression and cultural colonization present in deaf education, through the imposition of learning the official spoken language (oral and/or written), to the detriment of sign language access, which presents no barriers to learning (GOYOS, FERNANDES, JESUS, 2020). Such practices have been denounced as expressions of *audism*<sup>2</sup> by different deaf researchers (LADD, 1998; PERLIN, 2003; REZENDE, 2012; TERCEIRO, 2018): the idea of colonialism, that is, an unequal power relationship between hearing and deaf people in which hearing people control and impose their cultural order through normalization practices (LANE, 1992, p. 45).

This scenario contextualizes the writing of this paper, as it focuses on pedagogical experiences with young deaf children in Early Childhood Education and questions how the normalization of the experience of being a hearing, of communicating and learning through the Portuguese language, operates in the construction of the deaf child's subjectivity, knowledge and cultures in the educational environment. It is necessary to problematize the hearing norm and privilege since childhood, as a way of understanding the damage done to deaf children's forms of subjectivation, and to contribute to a Childhood Pedagogy that is also committed to the ways of being

<sup>2</sup>*Audism* is a concept coined in 1975 by Tom Humphries, a deaf American intellectual, to express forms of discrimination against deaf people. In Brazil, the term "audism" was translated and disseminated by Skliar (1998) as "hearing-centrism", helping to deepen and exemplify these practices in the field of education, by highlighting hearing persons' representations for deaf people that assume identities close to the oral-auditory culture. We will use both terms as equivalent ones throughout this paper.

deaf. This article aims at discussing the processes that constitute the hearing norm in the inclusion experiences of a young deaf child in an institution of Early Childhood Education, in Curitiba, Brasil.

We present an analysis of the results of an ethnographic research that focuses on hearing privilege practices (FERNANDES, 2022) with a deaf child in Kindergarten in an inclusive context. The choice of a public Early Childhood Education institution is due to the fact that this is the context in which the majority of children and young people who are the target of special education is enrolled in Brazilian municipalities.

In the National Policy for Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (in Portuguese, PNEEEI - Política Nacional de Educação Especial na perspectiva da Educação Inclusiva) (BRASIL, 2008) deaf people are part of the special education target group, made up of students with disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders or high abilities.

Law 14.191/2021, which created the modality of deaf bilingual education in LDB 9394/1996, regardless of the modality of special education, defined a new target audience of people who are part of a linguistic minority indicated as “deaf, deafblind, hard-of-hearing signing students, deaf people with high abilities or giftedness or with other associated deficiencies, **opting for the modality of deaf bilingual education**”(BRASIL, 2021) [our emphasis].

Despite this legal ambiguity, which sometimes defines deaf otherness as “people with deficiencies” and sometimes recognizes their collective constitution as a linguistic minority, we direct our reflection to the understanding of the deaf community as it is shared in this work. We understand that the plurality of deaf identities is forged in social and historical experiences throughout life. The fact that some deaf people identify with speech and the Portuguese language as a result of their school experiences and clinical-therapeutic processes, does not prevent them from contemplating the visual experience as an aspect of their subjectivity (FERNANDES, 2003, p. 30). This theoretical formulation is presented by Ladd (1998) as

“Deafhood”, an analytical tool that expresses the shifts in social representations, in the sense of defining the multiple experiences lived throughout the deaf existence, individually or as a group, “marked by conceptions and practices that sometimes operate to fix the centralizing forces of oppression and colonization, and sometimes operate to decentralize the forces of struggle and resistance” (FERNANDES; TERCEIRO, 2020, p.15).

In the field of educational policy, this arena of struggle materialized in the clashes between the deaf movement and the federal government in defining the locus of deaf bilingual education, in the national conferences that preceded the approval of the National Education Plan - PNE (BRASIL, 2014).

Although strategy 4.7 (Goal 4 – Special Education) guaranteed the provision of bilingual education “in bilingual schools and classes, and in inclusive schools”, the PNEEEI's legal guidelines prioritized the regular school as the place to offer it. This movement is evidenced in the Technical Summary of the 2018-2022 School Census (BRASIL, 2023), which shows that more than 90% of students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or high abilities enrolled in regular classes. In Early Childhood Education, the percentage rises from 88.9% in 2008 to 95.2% in 2022.

We are interested in identifying and understanding how the bilingual education of deaf people – a legal right provided for in the national legislation of school inclusion, has been offered and implemented with very young children, considering that this is the common period of language acquisition. For Lagares (2018), the situation of bilingualism in a minority context involves complex power relations, due to the risk of minority languages to be repressed or eliminated, being in contact with official and prestigious languages. This can happen when all communicative relations between the minority community and society take place through the mediation of the majority language. In other words, the forms of “elimination” and invisibilization of minority language communities (for example, indigenous and deaf people) result from

a **social monolingualism**, in which only one prestigious language is spoken by the majority. This is the language of the school curriculum, of audiovisual media information and of the national literate culture (legislation, print language and televised press, civil registration, production of academic knowledge, etc.) as some examples.

The author's reflection on the risk of language rights being sidelined, or even eliminated, provokes us to reflect on one of the data points from the Technical Summary of the 2018-2022 School Census (INEP, 2022): the percentage of students in regular classes **without access to the groups of specialized educational care** (in Portuguese, AEE - Atendimento Educacional Especializado) increased from 52.3% in 2018 to 54.9% in 2022. Now, if 94% of deaf and disabled children attend regular schools, spaces are exclusively monolingual in Portuguese, and more than 50% do not have access to AEE, where would the learning of Libras (as an L1) and Portuguese (as an L2) take place? What would be the L1 of these deaf children born to hearing mothers and fathers? Through which language and cultural references has their education taken place? These are some of the concerns that lead us to problematize how the meanings of the norm are constituted in pedagogical and child relations, and how the dynamics of care/education contribute to relations of privilege for hearing children in Early Childhood Education.

These questions may have a variety of answers and would require a long, broad, and continuous process of research into the Brazilian educational contexts, in all their socio-economic and cultural diversity.

Based on the theoretical and conceptual contributions of Deaf Studies in Education and the Sociology of Childhood, we will discuss some points of inflection in the contemporary understanding of deaf education, inverting the usual logic of seeking ways to compensate for the "disabilities" of deaf children via methodological adaptations or compensations. On the contrary, we are interested in being able to take a better look at the naturalization of the Early Childhood

Education centre as a space for those who hear and speak and, as such, develop as a "host" place for those who are different.

The reflection on how the hearing privilege operates in the care-education practices in deaf education starts from investigating a local experience in a municipal centre of Early Childhood Education, in Curitiba, PR-Brasil, in the inclusion context of young deaf children.

## 2 Dimensions of the invisibility of deaf childhood

In this section, we will reflect on a double dimension - deafness and childhood - that sometimes operates to materialize discrimination practices, which place deaf children in inequality. However, it is necessary to make it clear, that oppressions are multiple and complex and that other social markers could be added, revealing other processes of the deaf child's subjugation, such as their social class, gender, and ethnic-racial belonging, among others (COLLINS, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Given our thematic focus, we are interested in debating the asymmetries that define the intersection of deafness and childhood as determinants that constitute, in interaction, stereotypes linked to disability, incapacity, immaturity, and absence of logical thought, among other marks.

Kimberle Crenshaw (2002, p. 179) contributes by explaining how these different social markers can place individuals in a situation of inequality. The resulting forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, audism, class oppression, among others) operate in multiple and intersecting domination systems in the peoples' trajectories. This understanding, on the one hand, translates the dimension of domination and oppression and, on the

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<sup>3</sup>Although this is not an intersectional research, we are inspired by this analytical category to discuss the social markers of deafness and childhood as determinants, with the scope to explain complex social inequalities (COLLINS, 2017). In this sense, understanding how oppression is constituted from the naturalization of social hierarchic systems that produce inequalities, it broadens the debate on deaf education not only from the binarism between deaf and hearing people and their linguistic and cultural difference, but also from contemplating other intersections that interrelate deafness, race, gender, sexuality, generation and the inequalities that result from them.

other, articulates the spaces and resistance strategies forged in collective articulation and political struggle (COLLINS, 2017).

In this sense, in relation to deaf children, it is necessary to break with two conceptions that translate into practices that subordinate them: adult-centric and hearing-centric. The adult-centric concept refers to the power that adults assume over children and adolescents, depriving them of their freedom (SANTIAGO; FARIA; 2015). The hearing-centric conception (FERNANDES, 2022) refers to the power that hearing people exercise over deaf people, every time they prevent freedom of expression by imposing oral communication, when they make decisions for them, and when their cultural productions are repressed or made invisible.

Regarding adult-centrism, studies that propose to approach childhood from the children's point of view are recent, and concerning deaf children, they are still almost non-existent. Ageism is a category that seeks to explain the inequalities generated by power relations between children, young people, and adults. For many years, children have been marginalized due to a social conception of them as immature human beings who need care and teaching to become adults.

Corsaro (2011, p. 15) states that "children are active and creative social agents who produce their own unique childhood cultures, while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies", which he calls interpretive reproduction. This means that children not only appropriate and reproduce the adult world, but are also capable of recreating, expanding, and bringing new meaning to it.

The idea of interpretive reproduction breaks down the vertical perspective and dependence attributed to children in relation to adults, which is fundamental in understanding them as agents in the socialization process. However, this does not mean that children produce cultures in a way that is dissociated from wider cultures. On the contrary, children's cultures dialogue with these cultures, and adults are important agents in guaranteeing the

conditions for them to experience processes of interaction and cultural production.

The author highlights the role of language and participation in the production routines of peer cultures. Language is fundamental to the children's participation in their culture, functioning as a means for establishing social and psychological realities (Corsaro, 2011). It is through language and through the established relationships that children have the opportunity to creatively appropriate information and knowledge from the adult world, produce and participate in a series of peer cultures, and contribute to the reproduction and extension of adult culture. The importance given to language means that not having access to Libras as a baby violates deaf children's right to participate fully in cultural productions with their peers, by accessing, reproducing, re-signifying and producing cultures in collective educational and care spaces.

Sarmento (2009) reaffirms this perspective by arguing that children need to be seen as social actors, capable of building their own lives, as well as influencing the lives of those around them and the society in which they live. Childhood, on the other hand, needs to be seen as a generational social category, socially constructed. When we say it is generational, it means that childhood is independent of the people who make it up and is conditioned by its relationship with other generational categories (ALANEN, 1992; QVORTRUP, 1993).

In Early Childhood Education, care and education are intertwined and it is impossible to receive children without having these two elements present in everyday life. "Caring and educating" take on a broader field than the term "teaching" used in elementary school, for it involves cultural, social, and family relationships and, in addition to the cognitive dimension, it also involves the expressive, playful, creative, affective, nutritional, medical, and sexual dimensions among others. In line with what Rocha (2001) argues, Early Childhood Education is the stage in which knowledge and learning are linked to the child's constitution processes; that is, through

expression, affection, sexuality, socialization, play, language, movement, fantasy, and the imaginary.

Childhood is an important period for the deaf person and notions of otherness, in the position of representing the other, can determine the formation of an identity shaped by cultural difference (PERLIN, 2003), or even the deficient otherness that invisibilizes and excludes the deaf difference in an attempt to reproduce the representation of the hearing sameness (SKLIAR, 2003).

The power of control over children is obvious and the difference of being a deaf child intensifies hierarchies of power and inequality in relation to their rights and possibilities, when considering the double dimension of oppression: adult-centrism and hearing-centrism.

The academic contribution of research on ethnic-racial relations has deepened the debate on the relationship between the dimensions of oppression relating to structural racism, demonstrating that the inequalities that subordinate black people also stem from naturalizing the privileges of whiteness (configuration of a white identity) because they are never objects of racialization. Cintia Cardoso, a black researcher into ethnic-racial relations in Early Childhood Education argues that the hegemonic racial thinking of white as the standard is the norm that naturalizes white superiority and the social inferiorization of black people:

[...] whiteness, understood as a social construction of meanings around white identity in a racist structure in which whites have symbolic and material privileges, can also be reconstructed by abolishing the social advantages of being white. (CARDOSO, 2018, p.41).

Inspired by the same line of reasoning as Cardoso, in her reflections on the relational constructions between racial identities and their unfolding in social practices, Carolina Fernandes (2022), a deaf professor and researcher, draws a parallel between the social relations between deaf and hearing people in the production of cultural identities. For the debate, the author starts from the theorizations

already disseminated in the literature of the Deaf Studies field, which stress the hegemonic power hierarchies and have historically attributed a supposed linguistic and cultural superiority to hearing people, and inferiorized deaf people due to their "natural" inability to hear and speak (LADD, 1998; SKLIAR, 1998; PERLIN, 1998; REZENDE, 2010).

In these terms, the clinical and therapeutic practices of rehabilitating deaf bodies, which have been widely disseminated and institutionalized since the 19th century, can be defined as forms of linguistic colonization, which result in social and discursive practices of cultural superiority of hearing people in relation to deaf people (LANE, 1992; LADD, 1998). It is worth noting at this point that there are many terminologies that define deaf colonialism, whose most socialized term in the literature is audism (PADDEN; HUMPHRIES, 1988; LANE, 1992; LADD, 1998) and hearing-centrism (SKLIAR, 1998). Skliar (1998) explains that hearing-centrism implies representations, practices of signification, and pedagogical devices in which the deaf individuals are seen as inferior subjects.

These forms of oppression involve representations, practices of signification, and pedagogical devices in which deaf people are discriminated against by a social conception of inferiority, based on hearing impairment (not hearing anything or hearing with difficulty) and the inability to communicate through speech. The logic behind the stigma is that in the absence of speech, there are disorders of language, verbal thinking, and logical reasoning.

For Fernandes (2022), understanding the systems of oppression represented in audism/hearing-centrism is important, but not sufficient to explain the complex scenario in which deaf people are in a position of social inequality, based on the idea of hearing superiority. According to the author, it is necessary to invert our gaze in order to investigate how the hearing norm is constituted in a society made up of an oral-auditory culture and language.

The author uses the same reasoning as Cardoso (2019), who expresses relationships between

the concepts of racism (manifestation of oppression against black people) and whiteness (social construction of the white identity in a racist structure), with the scope to propose two new theoretical categories in the field of Deaf Studies that help to reflect on the symbolic and material privileges which hearing people enjoy in a culture structured on the oral-auditory tradition:

My understanding is that "**hearing-centrism**" is the hegemonic power that hearing people assume over deaf people and "audism" is the manifestation of oppression that makes deaf people behave and learn as if they were hearing people [...].

"**Hearing-ization**" consists of the social construction of meanings around the hearing identity, emphasizing that hearing people have symbolic and material privileges. (FERNANDES, 2022, p. 62) [emphasis added].

By proposing the theoretical categories of "hearing-centrism" and "hearing-ization", it provides scientific research with new theoretical categories that not only highlight the social construction of symbolic and material meanings and privileges about hearing identities, but also mobilizes us to confront and overcome these privileges centered on a phonocentric and audiocentric logic of knowledge access and production, as a resistance strategy in the education of deaf children.

Fernandes (2022) also proposes a parallel to the positions assumed by hearing people in relation to the deaf, based on the concepts of critical and uncritical whiteness (CARDOSO, 2018): "critical hearing-ization" situates the allies of the deaf movement in relation to denunciations of hearing discrimination and its oppression mechanisms, strengthening the support for the struggles and resistance strategies of the deaf community for their linguistic rights. The British deaf intellectual Paddy Ladd recognizes in this group the figure of the "hearing ally" (LADD, 1998); that is, the one who publicly manifests and combats audism. On the other hand, "uncritical hearing-ization" can be identified in the individual or in the collective argument expression that reinforce the hearing superiority in their oral-auditory

tradition and culture, inferiorizing or making invisible the diversity of manifestations of being deaf (FERNANDES, 2022). Uncritical hearing-ization can express the position of many deaf people, self-declared "hearing impaired" or "oralised deaf", who recognize and identify themselves with the oral-auditory culture and its forms of social behavior.

In fact, hearing privileges are everywhere, just list the everyday situations that surround us from childhood to adulthood: being welcomed into a family that transmits values and educates in an accessible language; building affective bonds with relatives and friends; having access to the mythical and playful universe of childhood through storytelling, listening to cartoons on TV and the internet; learning rhythms and rhymes of songs and group games; being taught to learn and being assessed in the mother tongue – spoken and written Portuguese; not suffering prejudice in a job interview for not speaking and writing; having access to explanations about everyday personal problems (debts, family and legal conflicts); receiving a diagnosis or appropriate medical treatment in your own language; being able to report domestic violence or sexual abuse to someone who understands; having access to art, theater and culture without worrying about accessibility; among so many other hundreds of privileges for the simple fact of being born a hearing person.

Awareness of these privileges is still diffuse, since they are incorporated as structuring elements of a society with an oral-auditory cultural tradition where things have always been this way. Research that focuses on reflecting on (critical/non-critical) **hearing-ization** and/or **hearing-centrism** is fundamental for raising questions about the forms of exclusion resulting from hearing privileges that are naturalized in the school curriculum and pedagogical practices, excluding deaf people's basic human rights to access and learn a mother tongue, to social/school bilingualism, to a dignified citizenship with equality and social justice.

In this sense, we see the intersection of two forms of oppression over deaf children, coordinating the power of control that adults have over deaf children

(adult-centrism), based on a conception of normality that naturalizes hearing-nization in the family and in school practices.

According to Rezende (2012), since their birth, deaf people are monitored and captured through diagnoses and clinical discourses, seeking to normalize the "deficient" deaf body through surgeries and therapeutic processes to rehabilitate speech and hearing, presented as subterfuges for curing deafness. The problem, in this case, lies in the denial of audiological discourse/practices concerning the condition of cultural difference and the importance of accessing Libras for the linguistic acquisition and development of deaf children. Almost always, when the family is advised on rehabilitation and the use of hearing technologies, the medical recommendation to ban the use of sign language is followed, making bilingualism unfeasible for very young children.

Rezende (2012, p. 92 and 93) states that, in these cases, family and medicine assume the role of "surveillance institutions, correction of deaf subjects, and kidnapping for normalization under the standards of hearing sovereignty". Both form an alliance that is increasingly contributing to the medicalization of deaf bodies, denying their right to humanization through the experience of visual culture and Libras.

In this sense, Early Childhood Education plays an important role in strengthening positive deaf identities, as Qvortrup (2010) points out, fostering children's participation as subjects of rights, based on the guarantee of forming their own opinions and expressing them freely in matters that involve them, valuing their subjectivity and giving their opinion on matters that affect them.

We therefore reaffirm the importance of developing bilingual education programs in kindergartens and schools, so that their institutional function adds the guarantee of constituting a linguistic community of circulation, appreciation and interaction in two legitimately Brazilian languages: in Portuguese and Libras. For deaf children born into hearing families (the vast majority), the bilingual school will provide access, acquisition, development and interaction in a

first language of cultural identification – the mother tongue – with their peers.

In a nutshell, Early Childhood Education aims at the full development of children up to the age of five, in their physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects. Therefore, in order for plural subjectivities and identities to be constituted and deaf children to develop, it is necessary to encourage the creation of spaces and professionals with bilingual training, respecting their differences, valuing and guaranteeing their right to access Libras and other processes and products of the visual culture of the deaf communities.

Slowly, the idea of children as social actors with active participation is being incorporated into society. For deaf children, change has been slower, because in addition to the generational component, there is also the lack of knowledge of their ways of being in the world, based on access to a culture forged in a language and experiences of visual symbolization.

Deaf children often resist the normative practices of adult-centrism and hearing-ization, but their forms of expression are repressed and devalued. They carry with them the marks of a silenced childhood, but not because of deafness, ironically.

Despite recognizing the hard forms of silencing in educational practices, we believe that some cracks can emerge through the force of resistance to hearing-orientated adult power. We are interested in understanding how children's *voices* emerge in the interpretative reproduction of the meanings of this universe of symbolic and material interactions that (re)constitute them. We move on to discuss some of the pedagogical experiences with young deaf children in Early Childhood Education, seeking to capture how the norm meanings are constituted in the pedagogical relationships and dynamics of care and education, and how they contribute to hearing-ization, that is, to the privileged relationships for hearing children in Early Childhood Education.

### 3 Inside ethnographic research...

The research was carried out in an Early Childhood Education unit of the Curitiba/PR Municipal Education Network. We sought to discuss strategies that (re)produce the oral-auditory culture by apprehending the hearing privilege in the educational-pedagogical interactions and experiences in the educational unit.

The ethnographic study was based on the researcher's relationship with the class teacher and the children's perceptions and manifestations, a process of understanding the context and relationships that were crossed by dialogic and horizontal negotiation, with the scope to break with hierarchies or asymmetries. Maia's (2012) view justifies the choice of ethnography because the study is carried out with children and because the researcher is attentive, seeking participation and negotiation through observation, in order to understand different experiences and children's cultures.

Data production took place daily, from October to December 2019, in the mornings and/or afternoons, through participant observation in the interactions, cultures and educational practices in the unit. Rocha and Eckert (2008) explain that after each dive into fieldwork, the ethnographer needs to write up his/her field notes, a recording instrument to be resumed and reflected on, as it is a means of evaluating his/her own conduct in the field, the slips and hits, so that he/she can plan new actions and focus on more interesting elements for the study.

Once the research project had been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (in Portuguese, UFPR - Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa em Seres Humanos) and the consent from the Department of Early Childhood Education of the Curitiba Municipal Secretariat of Education (in Portuguese, SME - Secretaria Municipal de Educação), the ethnographic study began in the educational unit that we will call CMEI Helen Keller, safeguarding the confidentiality of the research data. Helen Keller, as is well known, was a great deafblind American writer and activist, and the first deafblind person in history to enter Higher Education.

It is important to highlight that the researcher, also a bilingual deaf woman, by understanding that children are active and participatory subjects, made her first contact with them in the Maternal II class, explaining her role in that context and requesting their consent. Initially, the hearing children showed curiosity and asked numerous questions about the researcher and, in their own way, they consented to participate. It was difficult to assess the children's understanding of the meaning of their participation, especially of "Rosa"<sup>4</sup>, the name of the deaf child who expressed herself gesturally, with no knowledge of Libras. At first, Rosa just observed the researcher from afar and was shy when she was approached with signing. Her initial interaction was limited to nodding her head (yes/no).

As time went by, the rapprochement between the researcher and the children became more natural, and Rosa came closer and closer for games and brief signed "conversations". Like the other children who shared daily news, Rosa soon felt comfortable with the situation, and she too always tried to be close to the researcher, expressing herself by pointing or trying to speak a few words.

For the discussion in this paper, we will consider two thematic axes resulting from this study: educational practices, and children and their relationships. The division into axes was chosen in order to better organize and analyze the collected materials.

### 3.1 Educational practices

The "educational practices" axis deals with the activities mediated by the teachers. The Report

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<sup>4</sup>The choice of the name "Rosa" for the only deaf child in the unit was based on the understanding that she "blossomed" during the interactions in the research process, constituting her deaf subjectivity, and demonstrating all the beauty of her uniqueness. The analogy with the flower, in a process of development and maturation in stages, is far removed from the thinking of Friedrich Froebel, the founding pedagogue of kindergartens, who saw the child as a seed that must blossom with the periodic care it would receive from its teacher (gardener) in order to grow in a healthy way (FROEBEL, 1842). Our conception of children and childhood obviously differs from this developmental view. The child carries with him a baggage of knowledge which he shares with everyone around him, and is also confronted by the baggage of knowledge of other adults and children. Hence, the child learns from the environment in which he/she lives.

20/2009 of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009) highlights the need for measures that favor respect and acceptance of the differences in Early Childhood Education, ensuring that spaces are structured in such a way as to allow children to be active subjects and to expand their possibilities for action in play and in their interactions with other children. To this end, the accessibility of spaces, materials, objects and toys, procedures, and forms of communication and orientation must be guaranteed, taking into consideration children's specificities and singularities.

One pedagogical practice that took place on a daily basis was the conversation circle, almost always in the morning, when all children sat on the edge of the tatami, forming a circle. After the roll call and the calendar, one of the teachers would start the conversation circle. This latter aimed at developing communication, autonomy, respect for diversity and imagination, among others. Paulo Freire (1983) called the conversation circles "Culture Circles", because they should be moments reserved for speaking and listening.

The conversation circle only took place orally, making the educational experience unfeasible for Rosa's development. It was noticed that at these times Rosa would disperse, while the hearing children had fun, told their experiences, complemented their classmates, and reflected on different topics. Hearing-nization, that is, the reinforcement of the hearing person's privilege and power, was noticeable. In order to have access to this pedagogical practice, hearing capability and orality were required and, once again, the experience only covered the universe of hearing children, excluding the deaf child's right to interact and learn. It is important to emphasize that Rosa's right to learn how to share her ways of thinking, communicating and acting, as well as her right to learn about the ways of her classmates and teachers, was not respected, a practice that jeopardized her overall development.

On my first day at the unit, the teachers of the kindergarten maternal II class held a conversation

circle on the tatami mat and presented a doll with a hearing aid, which was glued and gouache colored (figure 1). The deaf child was absent that day. The aim of the conversation circle and the doll was to facilitate the other children understand the use of hearing aids and the difficulty in hearing and speaking. The teachers' intention was to make Rosa's presence natural, but their lack of knowledge about the diversity of deaf identities and the strong hearing oppression in this proposal was explicit. There is another aspect that prompts reflection. If the research wasn't being carried out, would this proposal to bring a doll with a hearing aid have been planned and carried out? Was it an attempt to prove that there is inclusion? Possibly it would not happen, since the deaf child herself was not present at the time.

We can consider this act as an expression of uncritical hearing-nization! It is an act of reducing the deaf difference to deficiency, of drawing attention to the fact that everyone is equal, except for one, except for a doll, the only one with a hearing aid, like their classmate Rosa. In the teachers' narrative, Rosa's difference was solely represented by the absence of hearing, in other words, the hegemonic clinical-therapeutic perspective of the experience of deafness as a lack (SKLIAR, 1998). Rezende (2010) comments that this view involves relations of power and knowledge, aiming at the normalization of deaf bodies. Deaf people are seen as a deficient body that needs to be cured of its deafness.

Figure 1: Doll with hearing aid in conversation circle.



Source: Research archives (2019).

Normalizing deaf people is a recurring practice, bringing them up within standard, be it with speech therapy, hearing aids, cochlear implants, banning the use of Libras and even by tying their hands (as happened for more than a century in schools between in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). By stating that this is a hearing-ization practice, it is meant that Rosa can be like the others if there is an "adjustment" that replaces her lack of hearing with a device that makes her a "hearing" and, thus, is identified with the normal host community. In the circle, the prevailing representation was that the doll (like Rosa) had no hearing, and that the device and speech therapy could make her hear and speak better.

At no point did they praise cultural and linguistic differences, signed communication as collective learning, and visual experience in interactions and learning. At no time was the experience of the deaf community and its cultural productions, such as Libras, discussed. The only representation constructed in the group reinforced deafness as the negative experience of lack, absence, and the need for correction.

Like in every Early Childhood Education institutions, play is present on a daily basis: "By playing (...) they access the existing knowledge in the world through interaction with other babies, other children and adults, and even through contact with nature and culture" (CURITIBA, 2020, p.15). Playing is one of children's learning and development rights, and for this reason it is so present in the daily routine of Early Childhood Education. In addition, interactions and play are structural axes of the pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, through which babies and "children can build and appropriate knowledge through their actions and interactions with their peers and with adults, which enables learning, development and socialization" (BRASIL, 2017).

One of the activities that troubled the researcher took place on a rainy day, so the teachers "innovated" to play in the classroom. They performed the dance of the chairs (Figure 2), which is a game involving a circle of chairs and another one of people,

with one chair always less than the number of the participants. Music is played while the children circulate around the chairs and, when the music stops, everyone must sit on a chair. Anyone unable to sit down is eliminated and another chair is taken out of the cycle. Whoever sits on the last remaining chair, wins. The merit of this game lies in listening attention. The best listener wins!

Rosa tried to participate and was guided by her eyesight to follow the movement of the other children, but this skill was not enough. After all, if one classmate was late, she would also sit later. Rosa did not win a single round of the game and was always the first to be eliminated.

Situations like this, which are an obvious expression of uncritical hearing-ization, demonstrate that participation and interaction are not enough, and that you have to be a play agent with autonomy. Caring and educating require constant reflection on what learning means for everyone. It is necessary to rethink what proposals will be offered to the children, taking into account their differences as well. This game could easily be modified to include a visual cue. When the music stops, the light could flash or go out. It would be possible to remove the music and just realise the commands with the light flashing or being off. This way, all the children would be playing on equal terms, and Rosa would be fully included without prejudice to hearing children.

Figure 2: Dance of the Chairs



Source: Research archives (2019).

The analysis of the books available in the reading corner contributed to reflecting on elements that naturalize the hearing privilege. As each book

was leafed through to identify whether it included a story about a deaf child, it was possible to observe how literature also represents a hearing hegemony. Many of them featured onomatopoeia in the few words written to represent sounds made by objects and animals. This knowledge is typical of the orality of the hearing children's mother tongue. How would the deaf child understand the meaning of this content when the teachers read or told the story? The writing of sounds was something that Carolina, one of the authors of the text, as a deaf person, took a long time to understand and was only able to grasp the meaning when adults and children explained it. Examples of some of the onomatopoeia identified in the books were: "Catapum" (sounds of elements falling), "Brrm! Brrm! Brrm!" (sound of a car engine), "Nhac!Nhac!Nhac!" (chewing), "Rinch! Rinch! Rinch!" (horse sounds), "Coach!" (frog croaks) and "Smack, Smack!" (kisses).

Figure 3: The reading corner bookcase



Source: Research archives (2019).

The examples of books cited can be an additional difficulty for the deaf child to understand children's stories. This does not mean that these books should be removed from the shelves, for they are important for hearing children and for language development. What would be a posture committed to critical hearing-ization, in the position of an allied educator, would be to be aware of the difficulties that this type of material adds to a deaf child, and to develop strategies for understanding onomatopoeia and other manifestations of orality in the written text.

Contemplating deaf literature books in print or signed video in the reading circles, which highlight images, movements, gestures and other visual signs,

expands the literary collection and includes works from the repertoire and tradition of deaf culture as a way of providing new experiences for the whole group.

Deaf literature includes a variety of productions: translations of texts from Portuguese to Libras, printed books on the subject of deafness, sign language and/or deaf people, stories created and/or signed by deaf people, illustrated books with signing in Libras, and written sign language and Portuguese among other forms (KARNOPP, 2006).

### 3.2 Children and their relationships

Interaction is a component of the Early Childhood Education curriculum that aims at exchanging information, developing languages and actions, relating to others and developing respect, building values and principles of collaboration, generosity, and solidarity. The National Common Core Curriculum (in Portuguese, BNCC - Base Nacional Comum Curricular) (2017) brings, among the competencies, "Empathy and cooperation" and "Responsibility and citizenship" that reinforce the importance of children socializing with other children and adults. Furthermore, the relationship between children is essential for peer culture to take place, that is, the cultural production advocated by Corsaro (2009).

Many of her classmates tried to approach Rosa, but when they realized they were not receiving any answer, they ended up giving up. The classmates closest to Rosa already noticed her difference and adapted; pulling her by the hand when they wanted her to come and play with them, or, if one of the teachers was calling, pulling her shirt down so that Rosa would bend over (for example, in the "Ciranda Cirandinha" circle), pointing at what she was talking about (to another classmate or to a toy), performing the "come" gesture with their hands to invite her, performing the "no" gesture with their index finger when she did not agree, and above all, talking very little (by using few words).

We can say that when the children gave up on Rosa, a movement of uncritical hearing-ization was taking place, because, in a way, they valued hearing friendships in which oral language flowed naturally. When the children noticed her difference and adapted, the opposite happened: critical hearing-ization was manifested, as they exercised empathy and welcomed Rosa into the group.

Rosa is very close to classmate 1 and they both "talk" very little to each other and to the other children:

- *Are you friends with Rosa? (Researcher)*
- *Yes. (Classmate 1)*
- *Do you talk with her? (Researcher)*
- *Yes. (Classmate 1)*
- *A little or much? (Researcher)*
- *A little. (Classmate 1)*
- *Is she cool? (Researcher)*
- *Yes. (Classmate 1)*

The conversation with Rosa's friend was brief, with few words and body expressions and gestures, just as Rosa behaves. Perhaps that's why the two became close, due to their similar behavior. Although they both made little use of speech, they used other strategies to communicate, such as pointing, facial and body expressions, laughter, and touch.

Another interesting conversation that portrays a little about the children's relationship with Rosa took place while they were playing in the kitchen corner:

- *Are you friends of Rosa? (Researcher)*
- *Yes (Friend 1,2 and 3)*
- *Does she speak with you?*
- *No. (Friend 1)*
- *Yes. She speaks slowly and she is shy. (Friend 2)*
- *Yes. (Friend 3)*
- *Does she understand what do you say?*
- *No (Friend 2)*
- *No (Friend 3)*
- *No. I think that she doesn't hear (Friend 1).*
- *Does she play with you? Do you call her to play with you? (Researcher)*
- *I think that she does not hear when we call her. (Friend 1)*
- *That's it. (Friend 3).*

This conversation shows that the other children understand Rosa's difference, but they do not

quite know how to deal with it. The focus is on her lack of hearing and speech, because this is what children perceive in their relationships with her (concretely) and also because they do not know about other possibilities for interaction. Most of her classmates do not understand this difference with pointing, touching, gestures and facial/bodily expressions. I confess that it is also difficult for me to identify differences in Rosa. I have always recognized deaf people by the use of Libras, by the emphasis on visuality, facial expression and gestures, and Rosa does not demonstrate these characteristics.

There was a moment in the park when hearing-ization became clear. Rosa was waiting in line for a swing and another classmate cut in. Rosa tried to tell her other classmate what had happened by speaking and pointing. Unfortunately, her classmate did not understand and just told Rosa to wait. The difficulty in communication between deaf and hearing children also has an impact on playing. Somehow, the hearing child "won" in the situation, due to the privilege of being able to deny what happened orally and Rosa not being able to argue. The reality would be different if the children were deaf or if they knew how to communicate in Libras.

One day, Rosa was wearing a bracelet with different animals on it and the researcher decided to teach her the signs for each one and to see her reaction. Rosa learned quickly and was still giggling.

Figure 4: Rosa showing the bracelet and signing "butterfly" and "fish".





Source: Research Archives (2019).

At that moment, the researcher experienced together with Rosa the feeling of happiness for being free and able to be herself (even if it was unconscious for Rosa). I wanted to teach each sign, adapt the proposals, and encourage her development, promoting a sense of belonging, which is the right of every child who attends the Kindergarten.

#### 4 Conclusion

The hearing norm can be found everywhere in the educational unit under study; in the writing on the walls, in the music played on the radios, in the games that require listening, in the relationship with peers based on orality. In short, many and varied were the forms of constitution and legitimization of the oral-hearing tradition norm, which favors those who hear and speak, for the Portuguese language is everywhere and sign language is rarely found.

We are not defending the superposition of sign language over Portuguese, because it is important that deaf children learn written Portuguese as well (and, when possible, spoken Portuguese). The deaf children's understanding of Portuguese will open doors to many opportunities, but in order for them to understand this language, their first language must be well established. It is essential that the deaf children's first language is Libras, since it is a visual-spatial language that favors their acquisition and cultural identification.

There is an urgent need to enable pedagogical proposals that respect difference and encourage the

creation of unique games and interpersonal arrangements. Bring in elements that address deaf protagonism (books, reports, videos, films, among others), include Libras in the unit's daily routine (even if it is just the basics), bring deaf culture to everyone's attention, use images and visual resources in educational proposals, including deaf people's toys and cultural artifacts in the corners of diversified activities, bringing in deaf literature, providing opportunities for conversation circles with deaf children and adults in order to contact their peers, and presenting deaf art, are some actions that can favor the constitution of the deaf child's identity, while respecting it.

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