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## Deaf protagonism in an amazonian region: school life experiences

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**Abstract:** This study aims to understand how school experiences lived by Deaf people influenced the construction of their political, cultural, and linguistic protagonism. Deaf protagonism is recognized as a political, cultural, and linguistic position of difference that permeates all life experiences. The work aligns with Deaf Studies by situating subjects in their linguistic-cultural singularity, converging with the Philosophy of Difference by affirming difference as a productive and plural element and by rejecting universal and fixed categories. The research took place in the context of an event that discussed Deaf education in the region based on the school experiences of Deaf adults. The identification of protagonists occurred through the local Deaf community association, research groups at the Federal University of Western Pará, and members of the external community, guided by criteria of institutional/public recognition and trajectories of subjectivation. Seventeen Deaf protagonists were identified; the five most frequently indicated, residents of Santarém, Pará (Brazil), were invited to the event and to the study. All presentations were recorded for subsequent translation and discourse analysis from a Foucauldian perspective. Participants reported experiences of exclusion, highlighting ableism and the imposition of oralism as a normative criterion of belonging in family, social, and educational spaces. The institutionalization of exclusionary discourses reinforces the normalization of conduct and promotes historical and structural inequalities. The study also evidences processes of re-signification of Deaf identity, with protagonists assuming active roles in reconstructing their educational and professional trajectories.

**Keywords:** deaf protagonism; education; Amazon.

### 1 Introduction

The Amazonian region of the state of Pará has historically suffered from a lack of fundamental rights for different segments of the population, resulting in profound social exclusion, violence and discrimination (Lemos *et al.*, 2016). In the authors' opinion, the difficulties in gaining access to essential services, deriving also from the vastness of the area and the precarious nature of the infrastructures, are factors that have led to a scenario of social and educational inequalities. Within this backdrop, education in Amazonia reflects the cultural and geographical specificities of the region,



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and also highlights the historical challenges faced by the Brazilian education system (Colares, 2022).

In the field of Education of the Deaf, such challenges are even more complex considering the history of educational and social exclusion these individuals have endured throughout history (Lobo, 2008). In addition to these historical challenges, the geographical conditions cannot be ignored, namely the social and economic inequalities (Colares, 2022) and the lack of professionals with suitable training and appropriate resources in many communities of Amazonia in Pará (Pinheiro; Freire, 2022; Pinheiro; Duarte, 2017).

The city of Santarém in the region faces considerable challenges of a social, environmental, economic and educational nature. However, Figueiredo (2020) believes that the municipality has consolidated itself as an important educational centre, driven also by the founding of the Federal University of Western Pará (Ufopa) in 2009, which has significantly contributed to the development of the region. The Special Education and Inclusive Processes Research Group (Gpeepi/Ufopa) has been deepening the knowledge in the area of the education of the Deaf, taking into account the local particularities and strengthening ties with the Deaf community of Santarém.

Researchers from the group have been drawing up some scenarios. Pinheiro (2016, p. 185), in viewing “the deaf community as a field of production of meanings, and therefore of the very way of being of the deaf,” drew up two contexts of cultural production among the Deaf individuals of Santarém. In one of these contexts, the Deaf individuals presented a cultural identification comprising of the auditive deficiency, and their experience was specifically marked by oralism. Likewise, in her study with deaf people in this same region, Lira (2022, p. 129) identified a powerful cultural marker of the difference of being deaf, stating that “on the back this community’s constant fight, many have occupied noteworthy positions in the higher education institutions.”

By understanding Deaf people in the context of a cultural identification of difference, this study is anchored simultaneously in the approach of the Deaf Studies, defended by Skliar (1998) and in the Philosophy of Difference, proposed by Deleuze (2006). Within this framework, protagonism is understood in this study as agency of individuals and collectives, which produce findings, fight for meaning in institutional and public spaces and affirm themselves as the subject of policies and practices. It is a question of understanding the protagonism as an effect and practice located in the

power relations, in the discourses and in the modes of subjectivation that cut across school and its devices<sup>1</sup> (Foucault, 1996).

In particular, the idea of protagonism of the Deaf, adopted in this study, is based on the perspective of political, cultural and linguistic difference grounded on multiple life experiences (Lara, 2021). In this conceptual logic, experience is a culturally deep-rooted ever-present factor that transcends the situations experienced or accumulation of historical occurrences, but which transforms and comprises each individual (Larrosa, 2002). In this study, the focus is on the experiences at school of deaf people in Santarém-PA, taking the Deaf protagonism to mean a situated practice and the effect of knowledge/power relations, resistance and caring for oneself. Such an understanding allows resistance, reworking of meanings, modes of subjectivation and the transformation of social spheres.

In general, the study aimed to understand in what way the school experiences of the Deaf in Santarém, Pará, effected the process of building their protagonism in this context. It strived, specifically, to understand the academic opportunities provided to the deaf population in different times and spaces, identifying, based on the experiences reported, the processes of construction of the identity of the Deaf students. Furthermore, an effort was made to analyse how the cultural, political and linguistic discourses influenced this construction of identity and to research the effects of these processes in the protagonism occupied by the Deaf community today.

Therefore, this study of a qualitative nature and with post-structuralist inspiration, included the participation of the Deaf individuals identified as regional protagonists, per entity and local association in the year of 2024. These entities were instructed about the concept of protagonism adopted, understood not as a fixed “place” to be occupied, but as a situated practice and the effect of knowledge/power relations, processes of subjectivation and practices of resistance. Grounded on this alignment, the identification took place on two complementary fronts: (i) cases focusing on the current status recognised in institutional and public spaces (visibility, action in boards, departments, teaching staff, projects); and (ii) cases where the emphasis was

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<sup>1</sup> Device, in Foucault (1996), is a heterogeneous arrangement of discourses, rules, knowledge, practices, techniques and architectures that are articulated among one another to respond to a historical urgency, producing ways of seeing, saying and being. In education, school functions as a device in combining the curriculum, assessment, management, policies of inclusion, linguistic rules and teaching practices that establish regimes of truth about who the Deaf student is and how he/she should learn.

on the processes experienced, i.e. trajectories of subjectivation, ways of acting in relation to oneself and in relation to the world, reworking of meaning of the condition of being deaf itself and incidence in the transformation of the social sphere.

This study presents LIBRAS (Brazilian sign language), the contact between Deaf people and the cultural valuing of difference as exercises of resistance to the hegemonic meanings regarding the Deaf in school spaces, marked by practices of normalisation such as oralism. Moreover, it allows the valuing of the particularities of the Deaf community in Amazonia in Pará, allowing the construction of other forms of being and belonging.

## **2 Deaf protagonism as an operational concept in the study**

This study is affiliated with Deaf Studies, which seek to legitimise meanings that affirm the Deaf identity and its own modes of expression, especially those comprising sign language, recognising that deaf difference is not restricted to the condition of being deaf, but should be understood in its cultural, linguistic and political dimension. Lopes explains in an interview with Menezes and Graff that:

He is not different because he is deaf, but in being deaf he lives and experiences things in different ways. (...) More than the deafness in itself, the difference is the living and vibrant result of the conjugations of the experiences. Hence, there must be something of deaf in the subjectivity of one who lives the radical experience of deafness, and all of this should comprise the deaf experience. (Lopes; Menezes; Graff, 2023, p. 228).

In this background, the central concept that guides this study is that of Deaf protagonism. The intention was not only to understand its meaning in Deaf Studies, but also to reinvent this concept within the local reality. To do so, national benchmarks were consulted, carefully observing the theoretical meanings that are being produced about the use of this terminology in different contexts of research and educational practice.

Initially, a search was carried out of the term in the CAPES website of journals, and 28 open-access scientific articles were found, published between 2016 and 2025, in national journals in the area of Human Sciences. Although all the articles found used the term “Deaf protagonism”, few explored this concept in depth. After reading and identifying the concepts based on the perspective of the researchers, five studies were selected that delved into and sustained the use of the term “Deaf protagonism”.

Subsequently, a list of works was drawn up from the perspective of Deaf Studies. The publications selected are shown in table 1.

Table 1 – Articles that tackle concepts of Deaf protagonism from the perspective of Deaf Studies

No.	Title	Author(s)	Availability/Year
1	Curriculum, Deaf Protagonism and Emancipation	Mara Lopes Figueira de Ruzza	e-Curriculum Journal, 2022
2	Contributions of Sign Language for the professional development of deaf teachers	Marta Rejane Proença Filietaz	Transmutare Journal, 2016
3	In Other Words	Celeste Azulay Kelman, Paulo José Assumpção dos Santos	Espaço do Currículo Journal, 2020
4	Deaf culture in museums: the place of speech in the mediation of the deaf	Sabrina Denise Ribeiro, Priscila Arantes	DAT Journal, 2022
5	Inclusion of deaf in Higher Education: pedagogical practices from deaf students' point of view	Polliana Barboza, Ana Dorziat	Communications, 2019

Source: The Authors.

The search for the concept was enlarged to the CAPES bank of dissertations. The search filter considered academic works published between 2017 and 2025, in which the term “Deaf Protagonism” was cited in the texts. Furthermore, the selection was restricted to the broad area of the Human Sciences, with focus on the field of Education. A total of 13 works were found: seven PhD theses and six MSc dissertations. Among these studies, four stand out as tackling the concept of Deaf protagonism with greater relevance for this research, taking into account that they take an approach nearer the perspective of cultural difference, as shown in table 2.

Table 2 – Dissertations and Thesis that tackle the concept of Deaf protagonism from the perspective of Deaf Studies

No.	Author	Title	Institution	Library
1	Lara, Ana Paula Gomes/ MSc/2021	Experiences of deaf protagonism	University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos	Unisinos Library
2	Azevedo, Fernanda Emanuele Souza de/ MSc /2021	Deaf protagonism in inclusion policies in higher education: an analysis of the academic narratives of deaf students in the context of the UNIR Vilhena Campus	Federal University of Mato Grosso	Sector Library of the Institute of Education and Central Library - UFMT

3	Silva, Micheli Porn da / MSc /2021	Constructing the identity of deaf students: the protagonism of the deaf in the bilingual school	University of Caxias do Sul	BICE UCS
4	Santos, Paulo José Assumpção dos / PhD/2021	Where are the deaf in History? A curricular experience in the Teaching of History in the inclusive school	Federal University of Rio de Janeiro	CFCH Library

Source: The Authors.

In her text, Ruzza (2022, p. 307) identifies the protagonism of herself, as a deaf person, dedicating a subchapter to the discussion of “Deaf protagonism as the Centrality of Existence,” in which she pronounces her perspective about this concept:

The article becomes a space to encourage Deaf Protagonism and to break free from the paradigms imposed by society, containing epistemological choices such as the use of the term ‘non-deaf’ (people who can hear) and ‘Deaf’ with a capital D (Deaf people) (Ruzza, 2022, p. 304).

Likewise, Lara (2021), also a deaf person, tackles the concept of Deaf protagonism based on the understanding of the Deaf Studies and the Philosophy of Difference. From the same perspective, Azevedo (2021, p. 34) argues the following:

Assuming the condition of a deaf being is to exercise protagonism as a person and as part of the movement of deaf people. It is an exercise of power in the context of mobilisations defending the recognition of sign language as the natural language of the deaf and the right to health, work, leisure, culture, education, and social wellbeing in general that allows one to live a full life.

Both works agree that Deaf protagonism represents a social and political movement of recognising the Deaf individual. In this context, according to Skliar (1998), subjectivity is constructed based on the cultural and linguistic experience of the Deaf person, reinforcing his/her identity and legitimising the existence of difference. The recognition and the imposition of meanings in given contexts consolidate this identity and reinforce the centrality of the Deaf Culture. According to Strobel (2008, p. 27), Deaf culture refers to “[...] Deaf individuals understanding the world and modifying it to make it accessible and inhabitable, adjusting it to their visual perceptions, [...] this means it encompasses the language, ideas, beliefs, customs and habits of deaf people.”

All the works analysed converge to this understanding of protagonism, although they present different *locus* of manifestation, such as the curriculum, the arts and the pedagogical dynamics in the different levels of schooling (Barboza; Dorziat,

2019; Filietaz, 2016; Kelman; Santos, 2020; Ribeiro; Arantes, 2022; Santos, 2023; Silva, 2022). As such, Ruzza (2022, p. 304) points out that:

As well as a political-academic positioning, this article aims to discuss concepts involved in deaf protagonism, considering the educational context as the starting point for ontological, cultural and epistemological constructions of the deaf and the curriculum as a place-time of linguistic recognition, empowerment and emancipation of the Deaf Community.

These recent productions supply the essential theoretical bases for the construction of the concept of Deaf protagonism, which underpins this study. Through them, one can understand how this concept has been legitimised in different educational and social contexts. Moreover, the contributions help to consolidate the perspective that Deaf individuals should be recognised as active agents in the construction of their own stories and identities.

A relevant work, carried out by Gianotto (2020)<sup>2</sup>, links the concept of Deaf protagonism to the cultural identification of difference. The research raises questions that cut across the deaf experience and gives rise to reflections about identity, visibility and social agency. Among the issues raised by the authors, the following stand out:

What is it to be a protagonist? What is the importance of the protagonism of deaf people? Who are the deaf protagonists that you know? Why are they protagonists? Do you consider yourself visible or invisible in society? Why? What do you do to be a protagonist in your city? Who are you? (Gianotto, 2020, p. 19).

These questions also guide this study. Although the concept of protagonism has been formulated and legitimised in the scientific field, there is an absence of references to the topic in specific contexts, such as in Amazonia, and especially Amazonia in the state of Pará. The concept of Deaf protagonism was initially developed in studies carried out in southern Brazil, as indicated by Lara (2021). However, a cultural and political movement is also noticeable that has consolidated the role of the “Deaf protagonist” in Santarém, as outlined by Pinheiro (2016).

This theoretical and conceptual survey enabled the proposition of the concept of “Deaf Protagonism in the Amazonian context” as a pioneering study on the topic. The lack of previous research that tackles this perspective highlights the need to

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<sup>2</sup> Work not listed among the PhD theses surveyed because it is in the sociology and phenomenology area.

advance in this discussion, broadening the gaze over the deaf experience in historically marginalised regions (Pinheiro, 2016).

While there are technologies of power and situations of violence, there are also strategies of resistance of different social groups and in the constant battle for the quest to create other photographs of Amazonia and other strength relations that operate fighting practices (Lemos *et al.*, 2016, p. 323).

Specifically, the production of this concept in the regional context acts as a mechanism to combat the oppressive and standardised discourses that persist in the educational and social spaces of the region (Lira, 2022). It is understandable, therefore, that in this space too, the “urgency to break down the logic and paradigms that disregard the specificities of deaf individuals” (Ruzza, 2022, p. 308) manifests itself, guaranteeing them the possibility to be protagonists of their own life story.

### **3 Gazes, paths and problematizations**

The research was carried out using a qualitative approach, which, as argued by Denzin and Lincoln (2006), is especially suitable for exploring the complexity of social and cultural phenomena. According to the authors, qualitative research in education stands out owing to its interpretative and detailed approach to educational phenomena, allowing an in-depth analysis of the social interactions and the individual experiences of the participants. The use of this approach enabled understanding of the subjective experiences of the Deaf, taking into account the historical and educational contexts in the Amazonian region and a meticulous analysis of the educational paths.

In this study, the research is understood from Corazza’s perspective (2002), as a dynamic and creative process, which resists rigid structures and explores the possibilities of producing knowledge in contexts marked by uncertainty and complexity. According to the author, research is a “labyrinth” that allows non-linear choices and methods to be adopted, but guided by an open and at times unpredictable perspective. This research, of post-structuralist inspiration, seeks to problematize fixed truths, stable identities and universal categories, valuing multiplicity, difference and the effects of the discourse on the construction of the subjects. According to Ferreira Neto (2015), it is a question of assuming the research as a processual production in itself that raises doubts, problematizes, analyses and produces discourses about the meanings to be legitimised in the study.

The purpose of this study arose based on the organisation of an event supervised by the Special Education and Inclusive Processes Research Group (Gpeepi) of the Federal University of Western Pará (Ufopa), the goal of which was to bring together a group of Deaf people, hearing people, degree course students and Ufopa professors to discuss the education of the Deaf in the region. This discussion was instigated by the Deaf students themselves, invited to make up the panel of speakers at the event, whose reports on their academic experiences served as the basis for thinking about the impediments and advances in the educational processes of the Deaf. The event was held on 26 September 2024, on the commemoration of the national day of the Deaf, in the mini auditorium of the Education Sciences Institute of Ufopa between 2.00pm and 6.00pm under the title: “Experiences of academic life of Deaf Protagonists in the Western region of Pará”.

To identify the participating Deaf protagonists, entities and associations were contacted that work directly with the Deaf community of Santarém-Pará. The institutions chosen for the study, *a priori*, came from contacts established inside Gpeepi (Cnpq/Ufopa), which is a group that the researchers participated in. As a result, the following institutions were established to survey Deaf Protagonists in Santarém – PA: Active members, Deaf or non-deaf, from the Association of the Deaf of Santarém (ASSUSANT) (16% of the responses); members of the Association of Sign Language Translators and Interpreters of Western Pará (ASTILS) (36% of the responses); researchers from the UFOPA research groups, such as the Research in Education of the Deaf Group (GEPES) and GPEEPI (12%); and finally, members of the external community who justified their ties to the community in question through friendship, family, working or educational relationships (36%). They were all informed about the purpose of the study, including the theoretical approach adopted to explore the concept of protagonism.

Based on the questions raised by Gianotto (2020), two major criteria were suggested: (i) Institutional and public recognition: includes cases whose status has been recognised in formal spaces and in the public sphere, considering indicators such as visibility, participation in boards, coordination functions, exercising roles as teachers and project leaders. (ii) Processes and paths of subjectivation: prioritize cases in which paths experienced and ways of acting in relation to oneself and the world come to the fore, including re-working of meanings of the condition itself and specific incidences in

the transformation of the social space. The institutions consulted gave their consent and expressed their availability to collaborate with the research.

As a result, 17 Deaf protagonists residing in the Western Amazonian region were identified. In order of the frequency they were named, the top five were invited to take part in the event and the research, all of whom resided in the city of Santarém, Pará. This cutoff point was necessary given the short time of the event, which lasted 4 hours. Table 3 shows the data relative to the participants.

Table 3 – Profile of the participants

Order	Gender	Age	Academic level	Professional activity
<b>Protagonist 1</b>	Male	39	Specialist	LIBRAS teacher in primary education
<b>Protagonist 2</b>	Male	41	Specialist	LIBRAS teacher in primary education
<b>Protagonist 3</b>	Female	40	Specialist	LIBRAS teacher in primary education
<b>Protagonist 4</b>	Female	37	MSc	Autonomous – independent teaching services in teaching of LIBRAS.
<b>Protagonist 5</b>	Female	36	Specialist	LIBRAS teacher in primary education

Source: The Authors.

The talks at the event, presented by the Deaf guests, were mediated by the researchers' guidelines to ensure cohesion, linearity and consistency, in step with the goal of the study to understand how the educational experiences in Santarém played a role in the construction of the protagonism. At the end of each exposition, supplementary questions were asked, deepening the analysis about the academic opportunities, identity-building processes and the cultural, political and linguistic effects in the social space occupied by the participants. The event included bilingual professionals and the mediation and guidance of the researchers who were also fluent in LIBRAS (Brazilian sign language).

All the presentations were filmed for later translation by a professional LIBRAS interpreter/translator, after obtaining the free and informed consent of the participating subjects. Furthermore, the participants received the translation in the Portuguese language to check it and make amendments, if necessary. This process was also mediated by researchers fluent in LIBRAS.

The study adopts the “toolbox” concept, as proposed by Foucault (2002), who understands the concepts as tools mobilised throughout the research, in a flexible and strategic manner, to interpret and intervene with regard to the objects of analysis, in line with the convenience and requirements of the researcher. “I seek to correct my

tools through the objects that I think I discover, and, at that moment, the corrected tool makes it seem that the object defined by me was not exactly that. That is how I hesitate and waver” (Foucault, 2002, p. 229).

Using the toolbox logic (Foucault, 2002), this study operates with concepts already known, such as Deaf protagonism, in the wake of the political, linguistic and cultural difference of these individuals. Above all, it is understood to be a question of a discursive inversion that this study seeks to validate, at the same time as opening up possibilities of analysis of discourses that escape from or question this understanding. The materiality of the study, resulting from the experiences reported, was analysed based on Foucault’s understanding of discourse (1996), namely the understanding that the subject is constructed through the power and knowledge relations manifested in institutions and social practices. Instead of searching for definitive answers, this study focuses on the ways the meanings are produced, regulated and disputed in the social, historical and cultural contexts.

The materiality of the study allowed four main dimensions to be identified, which guided the analyses: linguistic development; deaf cultural approximation; opportunities and challenges in school and the scope of protagonism of the subjects of the study.

#### **4 Presentation and discussion of the results**

On this topic, the idea was to sift through the discussions about the academic practices that, throughout the educational pathway, contributed to constructing the deaf identities of the individuals taking part in the research. It is pointed out, however, that the study includes the singularities of the spaces of production of these identities, especially related to the Amazonian context where they are located.

Having established that, it is possible to identify that the school experiences in primary education reported by the deaf subjects occurred mainly between the 1980s and 1990s, as they have similar ages. In this period, primary education in Amazonia in the state of Pará involved centralised exclusion from school with little attention paid to the regional specificities (Colares, 2022). The educational model in force remained stuck in a unifying logic, geared towards the national and urban interests, which translated into the negation of local knowledge, indigenous languages and the sociocultural dynamics particular to the region. Moreover, the context was also

characterised by the precarious nature of the infrastructures, lack of effective public policies and shortfalls as regards teacher training (Colares, 2022).

The approach to education for the deaf in the 1980s and 1990s was strongly marked by the predominance of the clinical-therapeutic model and by valuing orality as the main route of access to knowledge. In this period, LIBRAS was not yet recognised officially as a legitimate means of instruction, which led to deaf subjects being excluded from the education process altogether or having ineffective education. The pedagogical practices prioritised correcting the hearing “*deficit*” instead of considering the linguistic and cultural specificities of the Deaf individuals (Santos, 2023).

In this timeframe, all the participants of this study described processes of exclusion, labelled *ouvintism* by Skliar (1998). According to Skliar (1998), *ouvintism* consists of practices of exclusion and discrimination of Deaf people as imposed by hearing people, especially through oralism, which influenced all the experiences recorded in an oppressive, perverse and standardised way. The Deaf people mention actions of discrimination, marked by the lack of the ability to hear, which historically is registered as a normative criterion of belonging, both in the family environment and in community and educational spaces (Table 4).

Table 4 – Ouvintism experiences

Identification	Family experiences	Social life experiences	School life experiences
<b>Deaf Protagonist 1</b>	<p>“my grandparents (...) asked me (...) they would always repeat themselves orally”</p> <p>“My mother taught me to read, at home through books, using oralism, my father would often send me to read, but I didn’t understand anything. Afterwards, my mother used a kind of ‘vase’ to amplify the sound and taught me words.”</p>	<p>“(...) understanding was very difficult. That’s why I only spoke basic words, like ‘oi’ (hey), ‘tudo bem’ (all good), both at school and with friends on the street.”</p>	<p>“I just painted, sketched and copied the words, but I didn’t learn anything.”</p> <p>“At school the teacher just copied, and spent the whole lesson with her back to the classroom, and even though I sat at the front, I couldn’t understand anything.”</p> <p>“She (the teacher) said it was rude speaking with your hands. She argued with the students (...). Using your hands for communication was forbidden.”</p>
	<p>“My family didn’t use LIBRAS, only oral communication, and they</p>		<p>“At school the teacher taught (...) in an oral way,</p>

<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 2</b></p>	<p>forced me to speak (...) and I found this effort to try and verbalise something tiring and stressful. My family thought I had to get used to it. So this part of my life was really difficult.”</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>and I just sat there, saying nothing, observing.”  “I did not study the subjects the same way that the hearing people did. Activities were handed to me. I understood that I was different (...) and there I was, with a sheet of paper with drawings to paint in. At that time there was no interpreter to help me. The teacher looked at me and felt sorry for me.”</p>
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 3</b></p>	<p>“I remember all the suffering we went through in our childhood, adolescence and youth, but now as adults it no longer happens.”  “My family looked after me with lots of affection and dedicated themselves to my learning.”</p>	<p>“I felt really embarrassed because they would look at me in astonishment when they found out I was deaf; they would look at me with pity.”  “I hadn’t learned LIBRAS yet, and I hadn’t seen anything about how my contact with the world would be through gestures, but this communication made me very embarrassed because my feelings were not understood.”</p>	<p>“The classroom teacher didn’t know LIBRAS, she verbalised and gave us oral lessons, and she used material that had drawings with the words below them and forced us to repeat the words orally. She would articulate very clearly and slowly with her mouth in front of us, thinking that we were hearing her.”  “(…) In that school there was no kind of adaptation in the methodologies. There was no didactic material, (...) over all this time there was never a LIBRAS interpreter present (...). “I hadn’t learned anything. I looked at the pages of the books and I hadn’t understood anything. This was very difficult for me, and made me very anxious, as I was already at my third school and I hadn’t learned anything.”</p>
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 4</b></p>	<p>“But when I got home, I’d used it (the hearing aid) again, because if I didn’t use it my mother would shout at me a lot.”  “And that day I got home and told my mother that I would have an interpreter in my lessons. I realised she didn’t like the idea (...). At home my mother said I couldn’t use LIBRAS. She wanted me to talk (...) and it hurt me inside.”</p>	<p>“I used a hearing aid and this made me embarrassed so I kept it in my pocket.”</p>	<p>“That school where I studied was not bilingual and didn’t have an interpreter, or anything like that. It was really bad; everything was really difficult for me.”  “I would copy what my schoolmates were writing or they would give me drawings to colour in (...) I never learned anything at that school, nothing at all, I hated it.”</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Deaf Protagonist 5</b></p>	<p>“I would have sessions with a speech therapist and my mother would take me for this treatment every day.”</p>	<p>“I would see people communicating with one another effectively and I didn’t understand why the same thing didn’t happen with me. I also realised there was a certain distancing of people when it came to communicating with me, a certain prejudice, and I thought it was because I didn’t understand anything.”</p>	<p>“And in that class, it was through oralism. We were taught the letters in an oral way and we had to repeat them, verbalising them until we could talk (...) it made me really sad, because I understood that this knowledge would not get through to me.”</p>
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Source: The Authors.

One can observe by analysing the discourses an absence of suitability or pedagogical adaptations from the perspective of the deaf in regular education as described by almost all the participants throughout their school days. Additionally, there was a lack of qualified professionals, which resulted in a significantly limited or even unfeasible learning process for the Deaf students<sup>3</sup>.

The education was based on oral repetition, punishing the use of hands to communicate, and mechanical activities were handed out, such as colouring in drawings, which are methods that distance the individuals for effective learning. According to Souza (2022, p.18), these deaf experiences often led to “‘scars’ caused by the teachers’ lack of knowledge regarding the educational needs of this linguistic minority.”

Although this work focuses on school experiences, it is impossible to dissociate them from the experiences as a whole of the Deaf individuals, above all when using the understanding of this term given by Larrosa (2002). The author states that “Experience is what we go through, what happens to us, what touches us” (Larrosa, 2002, p. 21). It is the way each occurrence affects, goes through and comprises the subjects in different times/spaces. Therefore, it is not a question of an experience, but

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<sup>3</sup> The education of the participants took place in regular inclusive schools, which did not impede, but also did not guarantee, the cultural construction of a deaf identity. An inclusive school should also ensure a bilingual educational space that respects deaf culture and identity, as stipulated in the Law of Directives and National Bases (LDBN) (Brazil, 2021). However, the literature in the area suggests that bilingual classes or schools should provide more adequate conditions, reducing the need for compensatory adaptations (Quadros, 2017; Holl; Baeck, 2023). These spaces favour more consistent and coherent learning with deaf differentiation.

rather a set of experiences that constructed and edified the truths in the school contexts of those times. Hence, for Deaf protagonists, the family and social life experiences are also the school life experiences that they went through and which constructs the discourse of lacking (Lopes; Menezes; Graff, 2023).

Even if there was no timespan in the collection of these experiences, one can associate them to meanings historically constructed about people with deficiencies, including people with hearing deficiency. Lobo (2008) draws up a historical problematization of deficiency, above all contextualizing by describing how the label of abnormality formed perverse and excluding discourses regarding these individuals. The author carries out an exercise of genealogical analysis problematizing legitimised labels in institutionalised discursive formations leading to social subjectivation, such as benevolence, care, incapacity, madness, degenerate and shameless. The institutionalization of the discourses in political actions, and social and educational organisations are powerful mechanisms of legitimation (Foucault, 1996).

Moreover, within these institutionalised discursive legitimation dimensions, especially in school, *ouvintism* representations manifest themselves (Skliar, 1998). This means of production of difference is also inserted precisely in the logic of the biological norm of the body in exercising an oppressive power that, by imposing itself as the truth, subjectivises the individuals in this logic of dominance. Foucault (1999) believes that it is precisely these discursive relations that install the processes of standardisation and exclusion of the subjects.

The means used to introduce this dominance of life that the power came up with is division: the division between what should live and what should die. In the biological continuum of the human species, the appearance of races, the distinction of races, the hierarchy of races, the qualification of certain races as good and others, in contrast, as inferior. All of this will be a way to fragment this biological field that the power took charge of; a way of dividing some groups in relation to others within the population. [...] (Foucault, 1999, p. 304)

In relating processes of exclusion, the Deaf present “a look to the past”, based from the perspective of those who are protagonists today. In other words, they are no longer subjectivised in that place of exclusion that used to be accepted and practised and by they themselves. They perceived this different place of identity:

It was when I went back to Santarém, my mother saw that my oralism had advanced and she was happy, and **today I find this absurd**<sup>4</sup>. (Deaf Protagonist 1)

Today I realise that at that time I didn't have any help from LIBRAS, or Specialised Educational Care (AEE), no specialised education whatsoever, but I remember that I felt very alone. **But until then I thought that it was normal**. (Deaf Protagonist 2)

She asked us to repeat the words, checking the position of the tongue. **It was completely wrong**. (Deaf Protagonist 3)

As far as I was concerned, I was a hearing person, the same as all the others around me (...). But today I have gone through different experiences, **seen other realities that I didn't have before**. (Deaf Protagonist 4).

It is in these processes of reworking meanings that difference takes on another meaning, no longer as abnormal or inadequate or shameless, and in need of punishment and regeneration (Lobo, 2008), but rather to follow the pathway of the singularity of diverse social, cultural and political experiences. It is no longer a question of rehabilitating a deficiency or respecting it within the parameters of normality, but instead understanding the subjects, all of them, for their different ways of life.

Each individual felt their experiences in a particular way, although they went through institutionalised meanings in the same regional time/space. Therefore, it is fundamental to think of the *locus* in which this study is inserted: a region of Amazonia in the state of Pará. This contextualization is observed when the Deaf individuals relate certain recurrent discursive practices in their school practices to the remote location and the regional difficulties faced. Above all through the constant changing from one school to another in search of better educational quality. This situation was most noticeable in the comments of Deaf protagonist 3, who highlighted the search for special classes for the Deaf as an important space of linguistic and cultural approximation. However, this approximation was hindered by the logistical conditions and by the way education was organised in the region. These discourses also pointed out the lack of teacher training or information about education of the Deaf in those times/spaces.

This relationship narrows with the analyses carried out by Lemos *et al.* (2016), in understanding that violence in Amazonia in the state of Pará is presented as a mechanism of historical and contemporary dominance. Even widening the scope to a

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<sup>4</sup> Authors' highlighting.

larger *locus* of analysis to encompass the Amazonian people as a whole, the authors enable the understanding of the “policies of biopower, and along with them, a state racism in the public policies drawn up for Amazonia” (Lemos *et al.*, 2016, p. 322).

The education of the Deaf in the region was also made unfeasible through oppressive practices of exclusion (Guimarães; Pinheiro, 2024) which institutionalised the conducts of the population via the biopower policies produced.

In domination, there is stigma and prejudice of gender, race, class, secular religion with the most crystallised and difficult-to-break cultural tendency; in violence, practically without the ability to resist, given that it is difficult to produce freedom when you are in chains and have a gun pointing at your head; discipline and biopower, on the other hand, are more modular, sliding between the norm and the law, focusing the individual and the population in terms of knowledge and power. Therefore, power is a relation, a strong force, action on action that allows resistance and can only exist through the construction of freedom. Well, one can say that these various modalities of power played out in Amazonia, in the management of individuals and in the government of the conducts of the population (Lemos *et al.*, 2016, p. 319)

It is in these networks of power relations that resistance is possible as “a continuous and live practice in the region of Pará” (Lemos *et al.*, 2016, p. 323). The exercising of this resistance is what this work concentrates on. In this study, the Deaf participants display a counter-conduct process (Foucault, 1999), by assuming the role of a protagonist, exercising power/knowledge relations in the construction of new and other meanings about the self. Such processes of reworking meanings, as subjects of linguistic and cultural difference, occur with greater relevance precisely in the school spaces, above all in the transition between these spaces and in the cracks of excluding discourses that could be captured.

I studied in Manaus [...]. To start with I only communicated orally. But I saw that communication with gestures took place there. I studied hard and began learning some signs, and I was given my sign-language name [...] We were supposed to use oral language, but we didn't obey [...] When the teacher was not about, we would start communicating with our hands again. (Deaf Protagonist 1).

We deaf people, among ourselves, our communication was with hands, i.e. this was outside the classroom, during our playtime” (Deaf Protagonist 3).

I changed school [...], and in the new school the teacher was great [...] she was excellent, fluent in LIBRAS, and she taught the deaf people of the school [...] It was very good, I learned a lot, I developed a lot, all because of LIBRAS [...]. I changed school again, and moved [...] onto secondary education [...] The studying was excellent. There I studied all the subjects normally and I had access to all of them through Libras. (Deaf Protagonist 2).

At that time, we didn't have a travelling teacher, [...] but it was through him that I got to know about LIBRAS. He only knew basic LIBRAS, but that was my first contact with Libras [...] I was about 15 years old. (Deaf Protagonist 3).

In the classroom a classmate wrote a message on a piece of paper, asking me if I wanted to learn LIBRAS, and I said yes [...], and that was when I came across LIBRAS for the first time. I was amazed [...] and my classmates saw that her and I conversed well with each other in LIBRAS, they saw that we understood each other and all my classmates began showing an interest in learning LIBRAS. (Deaf Protagonist 5).

This recognition process is the effect of other and new experiences for Deaf individuals, given that they themselves had to be subjectivised in these other discourses of difference, which although fragmented into small ruptures like the gradual valuing of LIBRAS, enabled the exercising of resistance in the production of the self. According to Larrosa (2002), experience only occurs when one opens oneself up to the happening, when something touches us and becomes part of who we are.

The reports show that the processes of resistance, as well as the appearance of new institutional conducts, manifested themselves in different spaces of transition experienced by the subjects. This indicates that such transformations do not occur necessarily in one single place or in the same school, but are constantly associated with contexts of institutional change, revealing the dynamics of the practices and the influence of the shifting modes of acting and resisting.

In this process, another mode of constructing identity is perceptible, which according to the Deaf subjects themselves provided them with the opportunity to achieve the scope of protagonism they currently occupy. Although the ruptures of meanings during their schooling were impacted in an extremely significant manner by their first contact with LIBRAS and with other Deaf individuals, the subjects of this study associate the scope of protagonist with, at least, two main contexts: admission into higher education and their current professional occupation.

Table 5 – Spaces of protagonist scope

Identification	Higher Education	Professional Position
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 1</b></p>	<p>"I didn't know about UFOPA. Here everything seemed new to me, everything was very different from the previous institution where I studied, [...] I wondered about the absence of the LIBRAS interpreter. So I made a complaint (...) informing them that I needed LIBRAS interpreters, and that was when [...] the interpreters began to work."</p>	<p>"So, it was in 2011 that I started to teach LIBRAS. [...] I took part in the creation of a Libras sign language glossary of the places of Santarém, places such as schools, neighbourhoods, streets."</p>

<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 2</b></p>	<p>"[...] production of didactic material (Ufopa) with a DVD that relates and shows Amazonian legends, all explained in LIBRAS and produced by deaf people."</p>	<p>"I began working as a Libras teacher, and I was the first in the city (...) This happened 13 years ago now. [...] I work as a teacher in free teacher training provided by the Municipal Secretary of Education. [...] Currently I am a LIBRAS teacher in the institution called <i>Superação Consultoria</i> teaching both hearing people and deaf people."</p>
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 3</b></p>	<p>"I started my degree in pedagogy. The university hired someone I suggested, who had been my LIBRAS student in a basic course. During the action I taught him the signs he didn't know; he helped me with the academic activities by translating and interpreting, and I explained things to him about the profession of being a Libras interpreter, and he learned a lot." [...]</p> <p>"And because of all this mixing of the class with LIBRAS, [...] I felt included, I had good marks, and interacted well." [...]</p> <p>"At the moment I'm studying a Bachelor's degree in law [...], I've almost finished it. Here in Santarém I'm the only deaf person doing the law course."</p>	<p>"I began working for the municipal secretary of education, and I am allocated to several schools."</p>
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 4</b></p>	<p>"Here in UFOPA, we're talking about the year 2015, and here I looked at the world in a completely different way [...] On the very first day I had contact with the interpreter and that surprised me. [...] They [the teachers] motivated me to learn more and more, [...], and I saw all that attention focused on me."</p>	<p>"Today I go places, I'm more independent, I give courses, I do talks here at UFOPA, I'm known by the people."</p>
<p><b>Deaf Protagonist 5</b></p>	<p>"I studied pedagogy [...] and now I wouldn't accept them communicating to me orally, I wouldn't accept it, I would suffer like I did in the past."</p>	<p>"And that deaf student that I was helping, teaching him LIBRAS and helping him with his school work, I remembered that this support I was giving him I didn't have in my time and I didn't want him to go through what I'd gone through."</p>

Source: The Authors.

The schooling is highlighted in all the discourses as the main route to achieve protagonism, both in academic education and in the professional pathway. In relation to the topic, Lira (2022) notes that the admission of Deaf individuals into higher education has driven change in their educational experiences, paving the way for social recognition. This process is encouraged within the Deaf community itself, and is

acknowledged as an essential political device, resulting from the struggles and battles to defend bilingual education for the Deaf.

Participation in the Deaf community is also flagged up as an important *locus* of protagonist production:

I am currently part of the Deaf people's association of Santarém, where we get together to fight for our rights. [...] We communicate a lot by WhatsApp, we have meetings to do sports and leisure activities, we have discussions, all aimed at sticking together and strengthening our friendship ties. (Deaf Protagonist 1)

I began taking part in the Deaf community, having contact with other deaf people, and through these contacts other deaf people would teach me signs that I didn't know yet, and that's how I learned more and more. (Deaf Protagonist 2)

The cultural, political and linguistic appropriation that takes place in these spaces is noteworthy, which felt increasingly legitimised and endowed with meaning. It is in these meetings that the Deaf identity is built and their culture attributed even more value. This analysis attempts to show that, in the local reality, the Deaf community can increasingly encourage an important educational climb, when immersed in the identification of a Deaf culture.

According to Lara (2021, p. 48), a Deaf protagonist "identifies the very living and experience of being deaf." Therefore, Deaf people, in being imbued by experiences of their own, culturally different language, take on a mantle of resistance and go on to also produce in the perspective of political, cultural and linguistic difference. In this study, all the subjects recognise the discursive changes in themselves and fight for the respect and valuing of the difference of the Deaf community in their own lifestyles and professional activities.

In the past, we had to go through a lot, but today it's better. The teachers didn't use to understand anything about LIBRAS or about deaf people. Today the teachers at least know about the Specialised Educational Care (AEE), they know the student has their own language. Today a teacher will go and get the LIBRAS course (...) Today they show this concern for the students inside the classroom, and the deaf students themselves end up teaching LIBRAS to the teacher, in their everyday life at school and in their interaction with the teacher. All of this improvement has led to better learning for deaf students, **contributing towards the deaf person becoming a protagonist in his/her own life**<sup>5</sup>. (Deaf Protagonist 1).

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<sup>5</sup> Highlighted by the authors.

So, **bilingual education was lacking** in the past in my time, because the way inclusion was implemented, with deaf people and hearing people communicating in the same oral way, made the learning very slow. (Deaf Protagonist 2).

In the fight for our rights, one of them is our right to speak LIBRAS, to have inclusion and accessibility in our education, to have accessible materials, **to have the right to be protagonists in our stories**. (Deaf Protagonist 3).

Today I understand that LIBRAS is part of me, and it constructed who I am today. I thank everyone who guided me during this process of discovery of my identity [...] we are being **protagonists of our own stories**. (Deaf Protagonist 4).

In these manifestations, the changes in schooling of the Deaf are crucial forms of resistance, which are essential for this group to achieve protagonism. These changes emphasize the value of difference, and at the same time, impose the need for professional qualification in schools, with a view to a more sensitive approach committed to inclusion and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity.

In this process, the defence of bilingual education for the Deaf is aligned with the contemporary political discourses, notably Law no. 14.191/2021 (Brazil, 2021), which officialises it as a modality in its own right in the LDBN. By guaranteeing the implementation of this modality in the education systems, education is provided to the Deaf based on their first language, LIBRAS, and written Portuguese is their second language, systematised both in schools for the Deaf, in bilingual classes, school groups or standard classes. Above all, this important political device takes into account the differences “allowing the deaf to recover their historical memories, the reaffirmation of their identities and specificities and the valuing of their language and culture” (Brazil, 2021, ch. V, art. 78-A, inc. I).

The education of the Deaf, thought out from this perspective, implies that the experience of the Deaf individuals in the Deaf culture, language and identity is not only a given objective, but something that transforms them and constructs them. And it is precisely in the institutionalization of these new and different discourses about the Deaf that the scope for protagonism is increasingly arising in society.

## 5 Conclusion

In exploring the academic experiences of the participants in this study, one could observe new resistances with regard to the meanings produced about deafness. And it is in these resistances that the Deaf protagonism can be understood as another

experience, insofar as it involves processes of recognition, affirmation and struggle for spaces of existence and meaning.

This study explored how the educational conditions produce effects on the linguistic, cultural and political development of Deaf people in the territorial context researched. By analysing the educational pathways of Deaf protagonists, the research highlights the exit routes able to mobilise other subjects, reiterating the relevance of the local leaderships in the fight for rights and putting the regulatory models experienced in regular education under the spotlight. In contrast, by pointing out pathways that hinder this protagonism, the study exposes the perverse effects on the life experiences of these individuals, enabling the practices that exclude the Deaf from education to be problematized.

The learning of LIBRAS and contact with other Deaf people emerge as crucial factors in the resilience and empowerment of these subjects. Admission into higher education and the workplace stand out as spaces of protagonism, where the participants start to claim rights and act in the education of other Deaf people, helping build new educational perspectives in the Amazonian region.

This understanding is especially relevant for the construction of educational policies and practices that are inclusive and respectful of the deaf community. It is through this valuation of the deaf community that this study intends to be relevant, especially for the region in which it is carried out.

By exploring the school experiences that Deaf people went through, the study has the potential to provide the foundations for the formulation of regional educational policies and strategies. Hence, the results of this study are expected to provide the basis for practices that strengthen the bilingual education in the region, by pointing out shortcomings in teacher training and suggesting curricular changes geared towards the inclusion of Deaf students. Simultaneously, the work is an analytical tool concerning the emerging possibilities and needs for the reconfiguration of the schooling of these individuals, based on implementing bilingual educational spaces.

This study paves the way for new tensions and fronts of analysis, especially concerning its effects on the process of subjectivation circulating in the school spaces. Amongst them, one must stress the harm done by the late acquisition of LIBRAS, the participation and understanding of the family and society, the active insertion into Deaf communities, and above all bringing to the attention of the regional political

organisations to need to implement bilingual education for the Deaf. Therefore, the work does not end here, but rather creates possibilities of resistance, encouraging a new conceptual invention about the protagonism of the Deaf in the interior of Amazonia in the state of Pará, preserving the memory and the history of the local community and breaking down prejudices that subjugate them purely owing to their auditive condition. The valuing of Deaf protagonism derives from educational pathways that recognise difference and, in Amazonia in the state of Pará, legitimise the local particularities.

Meanwhile, it is acknowledged that the Brazilian and regional educational system has structural limitations, such as insufficient funding, unequal public management and specific legislation that is not properly implemented. These issues are not part of the focal scope of this study and may hinder the application of the changes suggested. There is also the risk of idealising the Deaf protagonism, given that certain conflicts, tensions and internal pressures of the community itself are not explored in sufficient depth here, including internal exclusions, political disputes and diversity of positions, which are all aspects that can give rise to other interpretations of protagonism. The study intends to continue by looking into these different dimensions, allowing refinements and the deepening of methodological theories.

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