

From the empirical self to the epistemic self: the meanings attributed by deaf students to the Bachelor's Degree in Brazilian Sign Language

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Abstract

The theoretical notion of Relationship with Knowledge, from Bernard Charlot's anthropological perspective, refers to the relationships that individuals establish with people, objects, situations, thought content, activities, and contexts related to learning and knowledge. This relationship develops in three dimensions: epistemic, social, and identity. This article highlights the epistemic dimension, the meanings attributed by the subject to knowledge in the constitution of their epistemic self. The aim of this study is to analyze the value attributed by deaf students to the Bachelor's Degree in Libras Language, based on what they say they learn and how these learning processes take place. The research, which took a qualitative and exploratory approach, involved nine deaf students from a federal university, whose narratives were obtained using the knowledge balance technique. Three meanings attributed to the course were identified: opportunity for training, work for subsistence, and linguistic self-knowledge; the latter highlighting knowledge as part of personal development and the construction of the knowing subject.

Keywords: Deaf education. Epistemic dimension. Teacher training. Libras. Relationship with knowledge.

Do eu empírico ao eu epistêmico: os sentidos atribuídos por estudantes surdos à Licenciatura em Libras

Resumo

A noção teórica da Relação com o Saber, na perspectiva antropológica de Bernard Charlot, refere-se às relações que o sujeito estabelece com pessoas, objetos, situações, conteúdos de pensamento, atividades e contextos ligados ao aprender e ao saber. Essa relação se desdobra em três dimensões:

epistêmica, social e identitária. Neste artigo, destaca-se a dimensão epistêmica, aos sentidos atribuídos pelo sujeito ao saber na constituição de seu eu epistêmico. O objetivo deste estudo é analisar o valor atribuído por estudantes surdos ao curso de Licenciatura em Letras Libras, a partir do que dizem aprender e em como se dão esses processos de aprendizagem. A pesquisa, de abordagem qualitativa e exploratória, contou com a participação de nove estudantes surdos de uma Universidade Federal, cujas narrativas foram obtidas por meio da técnica dos balanços do saber. Identificaram-se três sentidos atribuídos ao curso: oportunidade de formação, de trabalho para subsistência e de autoconhecimento linguístico; este último evidenciando o saber como parte da formação pessoal e da construção do sujeito cognoscente.

Palavras-chave: Educação de surdos. Dimensão epistêmica. Formação docente. Letras Libras. Relação com o saber.

Del yo empírico al yo epistémico: sentidos atribuidos por estudiantes sordos a la Licenciatura en Letras Libras

2 Resumen

La noción teórica de la Relación con el Saber, desde la perspectiva antropológica de Bernard Charlot, se refiere a las relaciones que el sujeto establece con personas, objetos, situaciones, contenidos del pensamiento, actividades y contextos vinculados al aprender y al saber. Esta relación se despliega en tres dimensiones: epistémica, social e identitaria. En este artículo, se destaca la dimensión epistémica, es decir, los sentidos que el sujeto atribuye al saber en la constitución de su yo epistémico. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar el valor que estudiantes sordos atribuyen al curso de Licenciatura en Letras Libras, a partir de lo que afirman aprender y de cómo se desarrollan dichos procesos de aprendizaje. Se trata de una investigación de enfoque cualitativo y carácter exploratorio, que contó con la participación de nueve estudiantes sordos de una universidad federal. Sus narrativas fueron obtenidas mediante la técnica de los balances del saber. Se identificaron tres sentidos atribuidos al curso: oportunidad de formación docente, posibilidad de inserción laboral para el sustento y oportunidad de autoconocimiento lingüístico; este último resalta el saber como parte de la formación personal y de la construcción del sujeto cognoscente.

Palabras clave: Educación de sordos. Dimensión Epistémica. Formación docente. Letras Libras. Relación con el conocimiento.

Introduction

Embarking on the path of research based on the notion of Relationship with Knowledge (hereinafter referred to as RK) implies understanding the subject itself as a being that is constructed through the appropriation of the world and, therefore, as a learning subject (Charlot, 2005). RK is understood as the set of relationships that the individual establishes with activities, content, interpersonal relationships, spaces, and situations, as long as they are linked to knowledge or learning, and which manifests itself historically, socially, and dialogically. Charlot (2000, p. 81) states that it is also a "relationship with language, relationship with time, relationship with action in the world and about the world, relationship with others, and relationship with oneself." According to the author, there is no knowledge without relationship and there is no subject of knowledge without a relationship with the world, with oneself, and with others, without being inserted in a collective history, resulting from the construction of the mind and human activities.

Learning, in this perspective, goes beyond the acquisition of school content; it involves the way in which the subject engages with knowledge, the meanings they attribute to what they learn, and the desires that drive their trajectory.

The question of the relationship with knowledge can be raised when it is observed that certain individuals, young or adult, have a desire to learn, while others do not express the same desire. Some seem willing to learn something new, are passionate about this or that type of knowledge, or at least show a certain willingness to learn. Others seem unmotivated to learn, or to learn this or that topic, and sometimes explicitly refuse to do so (Charlot, 2001, p. 15).

This relationship is built on the tension between what he calls the "empirical self" (the subject of concrete, everyday experience) and the "epistemic self" (the one that is constituted by the desire to know and by conscious engagement in a formative project). The development of the epistemic self is,

therefore, a central element of schooling and can be analyzed based on the meanings attributed to learning throughout its trajectory (Charlot, 2000, 2013).

The transition from the empirical self to the epistemic self reveals the specificity of the educational process. An illustrative example occurs when a deaf student enters university with a command of *Libras* (Brazilian Sign Language) as a language of everyday use, but begins to study it as an object of formal knowledge, with rules, structure, and diverse uses. This movement constitutes not only a linguistic acquisition, but a milestone in the formation of the knowing subject, who begins to recognize himself as an agent of knowledge.

This journey, which involves the transition from lived experience to systematized knowledge, becomes even more remarkable when considering the trajectory of historically marginalized individuals in school settings, such as deaf students, whose school experiences have been marked by the denial of their language and identity. In this scenario, *Libras* used in everyday life is appropriate as an object of study. This new approach to sign language, mediated by academic formation, has sparked our interest in understanding how deaf students experience this transition and what meanings they attribute to the process.

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Although the notion of RK is widely disseminated in researches through the country, just a few studies relate it to the education of deaf people. Surveys conducted in databases identified only two dissertations that focus deaf students: one by Edna Misseno Pires (2008), which dealt with the academic success of students with severe/profound sensorineural deafness who completed higher education, and other by Aline Nunes dos Santos (2017), which addressed the challenges of two deaf students in a situation of academic failure in understanding the subject of chemistry, from the Federal University of Sergipe. None related to teacher training or *Libras* as an object of knowledge.

The doctoral research that forms the basis of this article (Souza, 2022) investigated the meanings attributed to the course and sign language, as well as the mobilizations and identity construction of future deaf teachers. In this section, we specifically address the relationship with the course and curricular knowledge, focusing on the transition from *Libras* as empirical knowledge to epistemic, formal, and systematized knowledge.

Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze the value attributed by deaf

students to the Libras Teaching Degree course, based on what they say they learn and how these learning processes take place, highlighting the implications of this relationship with knowledge in their constitution as epistemic subjects, aware of their own learning process.

The construction of the epistemic self in the theory of Relationship with Knowledge

The notion of Relationship with the Knowledge, from the anthropological perspective of Bernard Charlot (2005, p. 42), seeks to "[...] study the subject as it constructs itself through appropriation of the world – therefore, also, as a learning subject." The RK is simultaneously a relationship with language, with time, with action in the world and about the world, with others and with oneself, "[...] as practically capable of learning such a thing, in such a situation" (Charlot, 2000, p. 81).

The understanding of the meanings that the subject attributes to knowledge must start from their human condition: the individual is born incomplete and constitutes himself or herself as a social and cultural being through the appropriation of the world, the product of which is the constitution of the self as a singular subject, traversed by social experiences. Because of this incompleteness, we constantly seek knowledge, confronted by this need, motivated by desires: to know, to be, to have power, and to have what is not in us, but in others.

In the process of appropriating the knowledge historically produced by humanity, within a specific sociocultural context, the subject is formed and educated. From this perspective, education is the "appropriation of humanity by each individual"; it is humanization, socialization, and singularization (Charlot, 2005; 2013).

Charlot (2000, 2005, 2013) establishes three dimensions of RK: the epistemic dimension, related to the object of knowledge and the desire for knowledge; the social dimension, related to the context and relationships that permeate the educational process; and the identity dimension, related to the construction of oneself as a subject of knowledge.

To understand the constitution of the epistemic self in the learning

process, it is necessary to analyze the meanings attributed to knowledge, school, and/or university, without disregarding one's trajectory as an empirical self, which carries knowledge from experience (Bicalho, 2010). The appropriation of formalized knowledge, whether through academic content and theories, is articulated with learning about life, with new ways of seeing and understanding the world, of understanding oneself and others. Thus, the epistemic self is not dissociated from the empirical self, but transforms it, incorporating new relationships.

We are born into a historically constructed world; we are social beings, as we are born and raised among other people with whom we develop bonds; we become unique beings by constructing our own history, through our interpretation and position in the world (Charlot, 2013). Since birth, we are in contact with objects, figures that carry knowledge, which are internalized in specific historical and social contexts, whose conditions directly interfere in learning experiences. This is the core of the epistemic relationship.

At school, it is not the empirical self that learns, nor is it the self of everyday experience; it is the epistemic self that learns at school, what philosophers call Reason, the thinking self. That is why teaching is often useless, because teaching assumes a student who already wants to learn (Charlot, 2013, p. 160).

Charlot highlights the need for mobilization so that teaching can produce formative effects. The transition from the empirical self to the epistemic self occurs through three processes: distancing, objectification, and systematization. The subject must be immersed in learning situations, in control of their actions, aware of what is happening and what they are doing; the self must be intertwined with the learning situation (Charlot, 2000). In the construction of the epistemic self, they do not lose their experiences, but incorporate others; in mediation with the other, they do not become a copy, but a unique version of themselves, resulting from these relationships.

It is in this process of self-construction, in interactions with others and with the world, that identity is defined. It involves relationships with significant figures (friends, family members, teachers), who provide support, encouragement, or stimulation, but can also be seen as models of who one wants to be in the future. Above all, it is in interactions with oneself, in questions such as "who

am I, to others and to myself, am I capable of learning this, or am I unable to do so?" (Charlot, 2000, p. 68), that the identity dimension is constituted.

Every relationship with knowledge implies desire - an internal movement that drives the subject to seek the object of knowledge, attributing meaning to it and constructing different roles in the world. This mobilization is intrinsically linked to intellectual activity and engagement with knowledge (Charlot, 2013). The question, therefore, is to investigate the meaning of going to school, of learning and studying or not, whether in school or outside of it.

Thus, according to Charlot (2000), every identity and epistemic relationship will be permeated by social relations, which do not constitute a third dimension, but rather cut across the others. The subject is socially situated: born into a context, occupying a position in the world, interacting with people, attending institutions, learning, planning, desiring. Suffering pressures, incentives, or denials. All this complexity shapes their relationship with knowledge. The analysis of this dimension therefore permeates the trajectories and interactions that constitute them as a knowing subject.

Based on these foundations, we understand that every relationship with knowledge is permeated by meanings attributed by the subject. In the case of deaf students, these relationships involve experiences with language, with school, and with others, as we will show below.

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Research procedures

The research presented here is based on a doctoral thesis project that was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of origin and approved through substantiated opinion N°. 4.530.674, relating to CAAE N°. 28060019.1.0000.5546. This qualitative, exploratory study used knowledge assessments and semi-structured interviews as instruments. Nine deaf students from the Sign Language Teaching Degree program at the aforementioned university participated in the study. They signed the Free and Informed Consent Form, and to preserve their anonymity, fictitious initials identify them.

During the first part of the meeting, we used a tool developed by Charlot called Knowledge Scales. This tool encourages respondents to discuss their learning processes based on a statement designed to highlight their

relationship with the subject. Inspired by Charlot's (2009) version developed with his team at the Department of Education Sciences at Paris VIII University in Saint Denis, France (*Education, Socialisation et Collectivités Locales [ESCOL]*), we developed the following version: "Since I was born, I have learned many things. What have I learned? Who did I learn from? What do I consider the most important aspect of this learning? I am currently studying Libras Language Arts. How did I get here? What have I learned? From whom? What is important to me in this course? In addition, the future, how do I imagine myself in 20 years? What will I be doing? How will I make it happen?"

According to Charlot (2009), knowledge scales do not show exactly what students have learned. Rather, they show what students choose to say they have learned at a given moment and in a given context. This highlights what students consider most significant. Since the aim is to understand the student's relationship with knowledge, this choice is valuable, especially since the data collected can be influenced by how the question is asked.

Although it is common to ask participants to write their narratives, the participants in this study narrated their experiences in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), with the presence of a Libras translator and interpreter, acting as a simultaneous interpreter. Three meetings were held, lasting an average of one hour and thirty minutes, with three members per group, in order to stimulate interaction on the themes and the plurality of ideas. The meetings were recorded, and the audio was transcribed and analyzed using the content analysis technique according to Bardin (2016).

After the first two stages guided by Bardin's technique, pre-analysis and exploration of the material, we proceeded to the third stage, the treatment of the results according to the theoretical notion of RK. The data were organized into three main areas of meaning: a) educational trajectory and unique formative experiences in the family, at school, and in other educational spaces, as well as the factors that drove the search for the university formation and, specifically, training in Libras Language Arts; b) learning process in the Libras Language Arts course; c) meanings attributed to professional performance in teaching Libras.

This article focuses specifically on the second axis, related to the epistemic dimension, seeking to understand the value attributed by students to the

formal knowledge acquired, the activities developed, the challenges faced, and the strategies constructed in the learning process.

The choice of methodological instruments - knowledge assessment and interviews - allowed us to access the experiences, perceptions, and trajectories of these subjects, respecting their linguistic and identity singularities. The data produced were interpreted in light of the theoretical perspective adopted. In the next chapter, we present the main findings of the research, focusing on the epistemic meanings attributed to the Libras Language course and the learning experiences constructed therein.

The constitution of the epistemic self in learning Libras

Before delving into the meanings of studying Libras, a survey was conducted on the profile of participating deaf students, focusing on their relationships with their families, deafness, language, and school - fundamental elements in the construction of meaning.

Based on the students' experiences in the Libras Language course, we sought to analyze learning situations, challenges and successes, perceptions of themselves as cognizant subjects, the learning agents involved, and the values attributed to the course. We emphasize the meanings of studying sign language as epistemic knowledge, in comparison with the empirical knowledge of the language they had before entering the undergraduate program.

It must be highlighted that all participants are children of hearing parents and many got into the university with poor knowledge of sign language, due to difficulties in acquiring it during childhood, limited contact with deaf adults and bilingual teachers, and little or no communicative interaction with family members and other close relatives. Investigating the challenges faced in their initial training and the transition from the informal and even limited knowledge they bring from sign language, from the empirical self, to formal, epistemological knowledge, allows us to understand how they construct themselves as subjects aware that they are learning, subjects of knowledge.

Charlot (2000) states that, in order to understand knowledge, it is necessary to think about the relationship established with it. Five of the nine

participants stated that they enrolled in the Libras Language course due to the influence of friends and family, who not only highlighted the need for continuity in their studies, but also assisted in the enrollment process and monitoring of results. However, there are those, such as JF and AC, whose aunt is a teacher and Libras interpreter, who brought with them the wish to learn Libras beyond communication:

When I was a child, I used to watch the teachers teaching in the classroom, there at the first row, and then when I went home I thought: I want to be like them, I want to be a teacher. But I wanted to be a sign language teacher, in the field of signs, right? A sign language teacher who could teach that, that was my dream (JF, 2022).

[...]

I always had a dream of being a teacher for the deaf, because I know how deaf people are treated and I didn't want them to go through the same way I did, so I wanted them to feel the same joy I felt, which is why I decided to take this course (AS, 2022).

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The narratives reveal how deaf students attribute unique meanings to learning Libras and choosing to become teachers, highlighting the process of constituting the epistemic self. In both cases, the desire to teach is linked to previous personal experiences and symbolic figures that mobilize knowledge.

For AS, motivation rises from the desire to transform the reality of other deaf people, preventing them from experiencing the difficulties she herself faced. Her relationship with knowledge is characterized by a strong ethical and emotional component, which shapes a view of learning associated with overcoming obstacles, care, and reparation. The exclusion she suffered in childhood motivated her to choose a career in teaching. JF, on the other hand, builds his desire to learn from his admiration for the teachers he observed in childhood. His trajectory is marked by a figure of learning associated with belonging and social recognition, with teachers as his positive role models. His desire to become a Libras teacher shows a strong connection to his linguistic identity.

The narratives demonstrate how the value attributed to knowledge is related to significant figures and role models, which organize the wish to learn and influence life choices. These mobilizations reveal that the educational

process goes beyond the acquisition of content: it involves the constitution of epistemic subjects, aware of themselves, their history, and the transformative role they can play in the education of others.

From this perspective, knowledge is a subjective and social construct, mediated by the subject's activity in relation to the object, between empirical use and systematized knowledge. The perceptions and experiences of students at the beginning of the course demonstrate this:

I thought the course would be very easy, but it is not. It has structure; it has grammar [...]. There were teachers, details, subjects, discussion groups [...], information passed directly to the deaf, with listeners who knew sign language, deeper subjects [...] (AC, 2022).

[...]

The subject I was most interested in was linguistics. I loved this subject because it introduced me to new terms, new signs that I had never seen [...] before, I had a language barrier (SK, 2022).

The discovery of "new signs," "deepening," and "interest" in the new content point to the emergence of the epistemic self, since, according to Charlot (2000), knowledge becomes meaningful when linked to a self-project.

The perception between the different levels of language allows us to compare the empirical use of sign language with the epistemic, systematized level, a change also pointed out by AS: "I knew a little about the structure of sign language and thought it was much easier, but after I entered university, I realized that it was much deeper" (AS, 2022).

The interaction with the object of knowledge, which goes from informal use to a systematized understanding, mediated by teachers, interpreters, and colleagues, highlights the presence of the social dimension, which cuts across the others:

As the semester went by, I realized that there were other deaf and hearing people communicating there, and I was very happy to be able to have that relationship with them. I also saw that the teachers knew sign language, and there were interpreters there to support us as well. (JF, 2022).

[...]

I take the opportunity to ask questions and clarify my doubts with a deaf colleague [...] also when reading texts [...] but with the help of interpreters, I can understand a little. I use Google a lot to find out the translation of words, I look for images of some words to try to understand the subject (JM, 2022).

These practices reveal the construction of unique meanings, influenced by previous experiences and the need to belong. This is even more evident in situations of adaptation to the academic environment, when participants point to strategies for overcoming obstacles:

[...] when I started the course, I had difficulty with the linguistics class; it was a very difficult class because the teacher talked a lot. Then the interpreters were there just translating what she said, the subject was very long and that caused me some anxiety and concern. I talked to other deaf colleagues and hearing people too, asking them to help me [...]. I have a hearing family; they do not know Libras, so when I got home I felt very alone. Then I remembered the teacher in the resource room [...] (MS, 2022).

12 Recognizing own limitations and find support to overcome them is the strategic point according to the subjects' speeches. We observed that the search for support is not limited to deaf or hearing colleagues, but also to interpreters and people who were part of their lives before university, which is quite significant, as it highlights a connection with people who provided support, which is not always possible to find at home, because their family does not know Libras. All these people act as learning agents for these students.

The presence of deaf teachers or hearing teachers who are fluent in Libras also significantly influences the process.

I feel better when the deaf teacher is there in front of me [...]. With the hearing teacher, I have a little more difficulty, because sometimes he moves around too much, and in the case of the deaf teacher [...] the method is bilingual, it is much easier to understand (NR, 2022).

[...]

In the course, there is a difference between learning with a deaf teacher and a hearing teacher. [...] The deaf teacher signals, explains the subject in my language, so it is easier to understand.

It seems that with a hearing teacher, it does not make much sense. There is an interpreter and I can understand well, but of course there are times when I miss a little of the subject (DS, 2022).

It is clear that the students' complaint about hearing teachers is related to teaching methods. In mainstream schools, deaf students often complain that classes are predominantly spoken, without the use of visual aids, and that the teacher constantly turns their back on the class, making it difficult to see and understand. The testimonials indicate that such practices also occur in higher education, which is surprising, especially considering that these are teachers who deal directly with deaf students and, therefore, should be aware of the specific pedagogical requirements.

In relation to deaf teachers, a noticeable identification strengthens the epistemic and identity dimension of the student's training process. According to Strobel (2018), seeing deaf people in positions of professional reference enables new projections for the future, as it evokes the question of the desire of the "other," which mobilizes their intellectual activity.

Due to the differences in teaching methods between deaf and hearing teachers, as well as the way understanding is facilitated when content is taught exclusively in Libras, some students believe that the course should be entirely sign language-based.

[...] what I would really like is for hearing teachers to know Libras and then teach classes in one language, since the Libras language course is geared toward that, right [...]? A Libras language course should be taught in sign language, the teacher should know it (RL, 2022).

It is very common to compare Libras and Portuguese, which reveals the power relations and reinforces the dichotomy between them, according to Quadros (2017). Since Libras is their first language, it is evident that the cognitive effort required for comprehension will be less. Being in a language course in which Libras is the language of instruction, it is legitimate, from the point of view of these students, that it should be the priority language, which would be a movement of resistance and decoloniality, of liberation from the logic that favors the language of the listener over sign language, to which they have been subjected.

Adapting content to "facilitate" understanding for deaf students can lead to simplification and a loss of quality in teaching. Given their fragile educational foundation, it is common for them to encounter this difficulty, but it is important to ensure that they have the opportunity to fill in the gaps by seeking other paths to learning.

Despite the difficulties, students do not disregard content that is considered demanding. JF reveals great effort in the discipline of sign writing:

In the compulsory subjects, I had to work hard; I needed to learn well because I knew that these subjects would help me in my education. I found the *SignWriting* course itself very difficult; my hands hurt from doing so many drawings. I respected the subject; I wanted to learn, of course. I did not disregard the subject; I had to work harder, but I felt that way (JF, 2022).

Charlot (2009) explains that internalizing a learning figure involves distancing, objectifying, and systematizing the object of study. The student expresses his difficulties with the content, but does not invalidate it; rather, he reaffirms its importance, demonstrating extra effort. Despite the difficulty, he wanted to learn because he understood the need, because it made sense. He distances himself from the object, but, above all, he considers on it. In this context, Libras ceases to be just a form of communication and becomes an object of study, with structure, function, and complexity.

In this process, language is essential, because without it there is no epistemic self, it is not possible to organize and produce objects of thought. This dimension is fundamental to our analysis because we are dealing with subjects who have taken on the wish to appropriate sign language as an object of knowledge, a field of linguistics, and an area of human formation.

Therefore, we understand why the students participating in this research refer to their previous learning of Libras as fragile and insufficient, in the course, however, it was enhanced through the possibilities of constructing "[...] objects of thought different from objects of experience" (Charlot, 2013, p. 149). In the student's commitment to their education, there is an awareness of the specificity of school, the need for effort, struggle, rationalization to the detriment of their emotions, and the search to fill the gaps in their deficient basic education based on the set aim.

Some signaled, and I did not understand, but when they explained the sign, I thought it was weird, but they were the signs being used at the university, different from school, which were much simpler; there, the conversation was more informal [...]. I knew a little about the structure of sign language and found it much easier, but after I entered university, I realized that it was much more profound (AS, 2022).

[...]

The subject I was most interested in was linguistics. I loved this subject because it introduced me to new terms and new signs that I had never seen before. I was able to delve even deeper into the language, especially because I had previously faced a barrier in the language [...]. There is a big difference. I realize that learning sign language in college is very novel, there is always something new, I realize that (SK, 2022).

The perception that the epistemic level of Libras is crucial for teaching, the effort made to meet demands and overcome initial difficulties with the language and the additional language reveal subjects who are conscious of their own learning, involved with the need to know, and who distance themselves from the empirical self with each new discovery.

The relationships, meanings, and knowledge that they establish with the object of study are affected by their life stories, by their entire trajectory up to that point. Thus, we cannot disregard the unique history of these subjects, marked by late learning of Libras, the consequent difficulty in learning Portuguese as an additional language, the absence of communication with family and school, and resilience in the face of all these issues. The construction of the subject and future Libras teacher will reflect these relationships and provoke others, since they are always in motion, changing and adapting in a continuous process of self-construction. For SK, learning the subjects of the course, especially linguistics, "brought new terms, new signs that I had never seen before, and I was able to delve even deeper into the language, especially because I had previously had a barrier in the language."

We seek to understand the value attributed to the acquired knowledge and the course, since it is in formal education that future teachers systematically come into contact with the theoretical and practical knowledge of their scientific field. For JF (2022), the course was crucial in acquiring the knowledge and

improving the language skills necessary to achieve his dream of becoming a teacher: "[...] it was a great help to me, it helped me develop and change my life."

The Libras course is unique, very different from anything I had seen before. I am very satisfied with the knowledge I have acquired, with my understanding of all the subjects, because I end up understanding them well, I am satisfied with that [...]. I have really enjoyed studying and the subjects in the course have opened my mind, so that I can understand things much better (NR, 2022).

Engagement with the training is also motivated by the possibility of teaching Libras and expanding access to communication:

That is my dream, to have no barriers. However, what I really think about is what the Libras course would be like in the countryside. Here in the capital, it's fine, but there are other schools around the state where deaf people are disadvantaged, so I would like them to also have the opportunity to graduate from the Libras Language course, to be able to return to their homes in these places and be able to practice the profession. I think it's very important (AC, 2022).

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From the students' narratives, we identified three meanings attributed to the course: the opportunity for teacher training (four students), job opportunities (three students), and language improvement (two students). Although they express different relationships with knowledge, all are traversed by a process of mobilization and desire.

We differentiate the meaning of "opportunity for teacher training" from that of "entry into the job market" because, according to the students, the value of the course lies in the fact that it presents them with a possibility they did not have before: that of becoming Libras teachers, whether teaching deaf or hearing people. Those who refer to job opportunities see the course as the most likely alternative to guarantee their own livelihood, not necessarily in the teaching profession.

Those who pointed to linguistic improvement, whether in Libras or Portuguese, although they refer to the teaching experience, attribute greater value to linguistic self-knowledge. In our analysis, this is the group that seeks

knowledge for their own personal and epistemic formation, as they do not highlight the professional training value, but rather their subjective development.

However, the most meaningful relationship, as evidenced by the participants, is that which concerns teacher training. The Libras course promotes hope and interaction with other deaf people, the possibility of practicing the profession, and doing so with pleasure. The course is in itself an object of pleasure or, in the words of RL, "something that whets the appetite, something very tasty." This relationship is perceived as learning and certification necessary for the exercise of the profession, always in relation to others of the same kind.

The epistemic self deals with the subject of knowledge as one that is constructed from a process that takes the world as an object of thought; different from the empirical self, which learns from everyday experiences, from practical life (Charlot, 2005; 2013). Citing Vygotsky (1987), Charlot (2013) highlights that the processes of interweaving the self, distancing-regulation, and objectification-denomination are necessary, which means involvement in the appropriation of instruments and signs, learning conventions and rationalizing knowledge, and perceiving that one knows and sees meaning in this.

For the deaf students analyzed here, this process manifests itself in the transition from lived knowledge to the systematized knowledge of Libras, mobilizing efforts, strategies, and new projects of self. The appropriation of Libras as an object of knowledge represents a break with empirical knowledge and an opening to the epistemic field. In this process, the university becomes a space for the symbolic, political, and subjective reconstruction of knowledge.

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Final Considerations

For many deaf students, access to higher education still represents a major challenge, marked by linguistic, pedagogical, and structural barriers that hinder not only admission but also retention and completion of education with quality. Based on the question of the meanings attributed by deaf students to the Bachelor's Degree in Libras, this article investigated, from the perspective of the Theory of Relationship with Knowledge, the values they attribute to the course, what they claim to learn, and how they learn. We sought to understand what they say about their relationships with the course, with teachers, and

with other students, what value they attribute to the training, to the curricular subjects, and how they face difficulties.

The analysis of the narratives showed that the course represents a structuring formative experience. When reporting on their efforts to overcome gaps in their basic education, difficulties with the language, and challenges imposed by the level of academic demand, students demonstrate a commitment to learning and awareness of the value of the knowledge acquired, establishing themselves as epistemic subjects in training.

The narratives reveal that systematic learning of Libras occurs mainly when there is continuous contact with the language in meaningful contexts, such as in face-to-face classes, in interactions with deaf classmates and teachers, and in the everyday use of Libras in real communication situations. They highlight the importance of proficient teachers, especially deaf teachers, who teach the language intentionally, promoting understanding of its grammatical structure, vocabulary, and expressiveness. By appropriating Libras, they develop not only linguistic skills but also strengthen their deaf identity and their relationship with knowledge, recognizing Libras as a tool for expression, participation, and belonging.

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Training in Libras marks the transition from everyday use of the language to its appropriation as an object of knowledge, contributing to the constitution of the epistemic subject. Its value lies not only in professional qualification, but also in the subjective constitution of the epistemic self. Students attribute intellectual and academic learning to the course and are able to specify what they have learned and how they have learned it.

Three main meanings were identified in the narratives: the degree as an educational opportunity, as a job opportunity for subsistence, and as a means of improving language skills. The latter most clearly reveals the epistemic dimension of RK, as it points to a desire to understand one's own language and to act as an agent of knowledge. Even those who did not initially desire higher education value the university as a space for personal, intellectual, and social transformation. Faced with difficulties, they establish survival strategies, seeking support from learning agents, demonstrating intellectual maturity, progression in dimension, and adaptation.

By bringing these relationships to light, the research invites reflection

on the role of the university in terms of the real conditions of access, permanence, and quality for deaf students in other areas of knowledge, beyond Libras, and on what has been done to recognize the linguistic and cultural singularities of this population.

These issues point to recurring tensions in Brazilian higher education regarding inclusion and the guarantee of rights related to the linguistic and cultural diversity of deaf students, whose admission is not merely an individual achievement, but a movement of resistance in the face of the neglect they have suffered. In this sense, we hope that the experiences of these students will spark reflection and drive further research, new ways of thinking, teaching, and learning.

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