Summary
This paper offers an overview about the developments towards inclusive education in Brazil and a brief perspective of education of the deaf in the country with the aim to provide information about the launching of the BSc for the Deaf in National Institute of the Deaf and some of its further impacts.

Developments towards Inclusive education in Brazil

The Brazilian Constitution that passed in 1988 establishes that ‘education is a right that should be ensured by the State and the family in collaboration with society’ (III, Art 205). In 1996, a new National Education Law (No. 9394/96) has passed and it innovates when introduces a whole chapter on Special Education (Chapter V) establishing that

‘special education is the type of education offered preferably in the mainstream system for learners who have special educational needs (Art. 58)’ and ‘this education begins in the age range from zero to six years, during Nursery and Pre-School education (Paragraph 3)’.

Aligned with this, in 2002 the Brazilian National Council for Education defines Special Education as

‘ a modality of education that consist of a process in which a set of resources and special provisions are organized in order to support, complement, add to and, in some cases, substitute the mainstream educational provision with the aim of ensuring formal education and promote the potentials of students with special needs in all educational levels.’ (CNE, Resolução no. 02/2002)

Schools, therefore, should develop towards promoting and accepting the enrolment of children who have specific learning needs which result from disabilities, and at the same time, they should create suitable provision for a successful schooling of these pupils. Such a change should involve too the
qualification of teachers to respond to special needs in mainstream classrooms, the provision of specialists teachers (in the case of the deaf learner, the interpreter of the Brazilian Sign Language) and organization of specialised pedagogic support that should be offered in the shift distinct from that of the schooling in resource centers, hospital classes, residential support, etc.

The year 2000 has been of a particular importance because the government published an official data about the percentage of the population with disability for the first time in the country. The Demographic CENSUS (IBGE 2000) shows that

‘24.5 million Brazilians or 14.5% of the total population of the country have some type of disability. These are people with, at least, difficulty in understanding, hearing, or moving or with some physical or mental disability’

Brief perspective of education of the deaf in Brazil

Historically, as in other countries, deaf people use to have mainly access to oral methods. In Brazil, the same happened and the large majority of them ‘do not speak well, are not able to lip reading or to simple verbal interaction’ (MEC 2004, p. 56-57). As a consequence, deaf children who have access to basic education spend many years in primary schooling, and consistently fail academically because these learners are not able to develop reading and writing skills that are compatible with each grade of schooling.

After the publication of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), there has been a significant change in the field of the education of the deaf in the country. Salamanca stresses the crucial importance of providing an education that recognizes the natural language of the persons with hearing impairments. This document then supports the conception of a bilingual education based on which deaf people should have access to both the Sign and Portuguese languages in their schooling. In this process the Sign Language should be understood as the mother tongue (natural language) of deaf students and the base for them to achieve and develop their written skills. (MEC 2004)

Particularly in regard to education of the deaf the Law No. 10.098 (December 2000) ‘establishes general rules and basic criteria for promoting accessibility of disabled people or people with reduced mobility and provides other provisions.’ It sets out that the government should adopt relevant procedures to eliminate communication barriers in order to ensure the access to
information, education (…)’ for people with sensorial disabilities and with communication disorders. This involves the promotion of the training of Sign language interpreters with the view to facilitate communication for these persons.

In this context, in 2002, the Federal Law No. 10.436 about Sign language was passed and it represents a major victory for promoting and ensuring the education of deaf people in the mainstream system. This law recognizes the Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) as the official language of the deaf community. It brings significant implications for its dissemination, schooling and teaching, access to bilingualism in institutions and for the qualification of those professionals working in the field of the education of the deaf.

Despite all these changes and progress towards inclusion for the deaf persons, there are still many challenges that requires time and efforts to allow the education system to accommodate to the demands imposed by the laws as well as to create the suitable provisions to respond to special educational needs that derives from disabilities in general. Concerning the education for the deaf, perhaps the major challenges are the qualification of bilingual teachers able to teach in both Portuguese and Brazilian Sign Languages, and increase the access of deaf people to higher education. The BSc for Deaf that has been launched in 2005 at the National Institute of the Deaf in Rio de Janeiro attempts to support developments and changes in these two areas of concern.

The National Institute of the Deaf and the BSc for the Deaf

The National Institute for the Deaf (INES www.ines.mec.gov.br) is a federal organization funded mainly by the state. It was founded in 1857 as a home care for the deaf, but now it is a national centre of excellence in the field of hearing impairment which provides basic education, early intervention and detection of hearing impairment, and qualifies professionals and teachers to work with the deaf. The INES mission is to produce and disseminate knowledge that can support and promote the full development of deaf people in Brazil. In this line, the INES main commitment is to promote the right to education and to inclusion for all deaf people by breaking the isolation and segregation created by the linguistic barrier.

In order to accomplish the law, a major challenge for the Brazilian government is the qualification of bilingual teachers skilled in teaching children, young people and adults with hearing impairment both Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese language. A teacher training programme that aim to qualify these teachers should prepare them to provide to deaf pupils access to education, to information and to the curriculum.
In accordance with the national legislation, the Secretariat of Special Education has been working towards responding to this challenge. First, the Decree No. 5 (28/07/2004) passed a new structure of the INES; it widens the INES provision that now includes higher education.

In 15 August 2005, the Ministry of Education created the BSc. on Bilingual Languages- Portuguese and Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS), the first of its kind in Brazil. The BSc aims to prepare human resources to work with deaf people in multiple settings, but mainly for teaching and learning in the mainstream education system. Following the features of the BSc is presented:

- open to deaf and non deaf people,
- qualify teachers to teach in Nursery and Pre-schooling as well as in primary education (year 1 to 4)
- it ensures that 50% of the available places are for deaf students
- four years degree
- teaching placement will be provided at the INES Basic Education School
- 120 places per year divided in two groups of students:  
  - group 1 will attend lessons in the morning shift  
  - group 2 in the evening shift,
- candidates will go through a selection process and the deaf candidates will have interpreter and an hour additional time during the exam,
- the candidates must have skills in Brazilian Sign Language,

The selection process will start is taking place in November 2005 and the course begins in March 2006.

**Final words**...

The launching of the Brazilian BSc in Bilingual Language-LIBRAS/Portuguese will heat the debate around inclusion in the country and, at the same time, will enlighten new possibilities for creating opportunities to disabled people in mainstream education.
In general, deaf children have non-deaf parents. This, of course, creates a barrier of communication between them that affects their relationships, interaction and mainly lack mutual learning that is possible only through the language. The university degree will create new opportunities for deaf children - and deaf people in general too - to have the access to a new social role model, that is, deaf children who will study under the guidance of deaf teachers will be more likely to develop their self esteem and a much more solid identity about their capabilities as a person.

In the same line, the presence of deaf teachers in mainstream schools will enrich the school environment in terms of diversity and, surely, these teachers will also serve as a role model for other teachers and students that will chose to become a bilingual teacher too. So, in the medium run the BSc degree may also provoke an impact in others university to create the same kind of degree to respond to this new ‘costumers’ and to create degrees that qualify teachers in different disciplines (e.g. Math, Sciences) and in LIBRAS too. (Gotti, 2005)

The government initiative and support to the education of the deaf can serve as a model for other countries in Latin America where the developments towards inclusive education are still slow and lacking encouragement, considering all the existing adversities that pervades the mainstream system, being the major one the lack of quality in Basic education and the consequent academic failure of pupils in general. Within this context, those students with disabilities are still at the margin of the educational opportunities.

References


