

Summary

Polish Sign Language in the Experiences of People with Hearing Impairment, their Parents and Rehabilitators

In light of the analysis presented in this book, concerning the place of sign language in the experiences of deaf people, their parents and rehabilitators, Polish Sign Language (PJM) appears to be an extremely important element of the process of supporting the development of deaf and hard of hearing people. It is a tool not only for communication but also for socialisation. This proves to be decisive for the access to education and work for those with impaired hearing who were surveyed. Moreover, it is an important element in building the identity of people who are deaf/hard of hearing, in many cases determining their sense of quality of life.

Polish Sign Language is also a prerequisite for the proper cognitive and socio-emotional development of a deaf child, whether within a deaf or hearing family. From the responses presented in the book, it seems that PSL is a natural way for a deaf person to communicate, so by using this means, both deaf and hearing people should adapt to the needs and possibilities of a deaf child in order to ensure his or her comprehensive development. Several respondents stressed with some bitterness that they had not received adequate education, although this was not hindered by their intellectual potential, but by deficiencies in the teaching process, which was not adapted to special educational needs, including the need to communicate in sign language. Some respondents did manage to take up university studies and use a PJM interpreter during their studies, although others were unable to do so.

The analysis of the respondents' statements indicates potential areas for pedagogical intervention. These are:

- educating parents on access to PJM for a child with hearing impairment;
- organising more sign language courses;
- organising a training system for professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing people, including knowledge of sign language, Deaf culture, bimodal education and bilingual education for people with impaired hearing;

- providing children with impaired hearing with access to good linguistic models, both in sign language and in phonics, taking into account all activities aiming at this group’s bilingualism;
- monitoring the cognitive development, including linguistic development, of children with impaired hearing within the framework of screening tests to assess their school maturity, which are carried out by a speech therapist and an educationalist with knowledge of sign language and of using PJM-based tools;
- supporting the social development of children and young people with impaired hearing by giving them opportunities to interact with deaf and hearing peers;
- supporting hearing-impaired young people in their search for their own identity, especially when discovering their disability, and dealing with stigma and feeling of loneliness;
- affirming sign language and Deaf culture through access to its products in educational institutions attended by children, adolescents and young adults with hearing impairment;
- developing the strengths of children with impaired hearing, including their linguistic potential in relation to bimodal upbringing and education;
- supporting bilingual education for the hearing-impaired through the preparation and appropriate selection of pedagogical staff.

The spheres of potential intervention outlined in this way, which echo the statements of deaf people presented in the book, allow us to draw attention to how such people function in the culturally diverse world of the hearing and the deaf. We hope that these interventions will also foster the development of effective strategies for coexistence and interpenetration between the two cultures.

Translated by Rob Pagett