

SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN CROATIA

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ABSTRACT

The health effects of physical activity on the human body are often a subject of conversation, so there is no need to emphasize it. However, not all people have equal conditions, rights and opportunities to engage in physical activity. According to the data of the Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, it is estimated that in the population of Croatia are 8000-10000 Deaf and 100000-150000 harder of hearing people. One of the main reasons, that the previous studies have suggested as a major cause of non-inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing people in organized forms of physical activity, is a communication barrier. Because of it, these people prefer to deal with such activities as walking, running or cycling. For equally involving deaf and hard of hearing people in all aspects of life, including the organized forms of physical activity, there is a need of learning sign language as part of the general culture. With this knowledge would be increase the number of people who can establish quality communication with deaf and hard of hearing people. Furthermore, future coaches and teachers of physical education with knowledge of sign language will be able, in a quality way, to transfer their sports knowledge on this cultural minority. Hearing impaired people will open the door of sports activities in which so far they have not been able to participate because of the previously mentioned problems. That will also affected their better socialization, higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and quality of communication and interaction with other people.

Keywords: sign language, deaf, hard of hearing people, physical activity.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history, the deaf people have been exposed to many humiliations. It was thought that without speech there are no external indicators of intelligence, and that deaf, due to the fact that they do not hear, can not be educated. The situation began to change after the introduction of sign language among the Benedictines, which was used to bypass the vow of silence (Berak, 2013). Over the years that followed, there was a gradual affirmation of the deaf community and the establishment of the first school for the deaf. 1951 in Rome was founded WFD - World Federation of the Deaf (World Federation of the Deaf, 2013), and in 1965 American Sign Language was given the status of language and was recognized as a real and natural language of deaf people and has thus become the first generally recognized sign language in the world (Berak, 2013).

DEAF IN CROATIA

1921 in Zagreb was founded HSGN - Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which through its 24 members act on the entire Croatian territory (HSGN, 2013). The aim of the Association is to help hearing impaired people in overcoming difficulties caused by deafness. February 29th 1992 was established Croatian Deaf Sports Association, which brings together sports federations, associations and clubs of deaf people from all over Croatia (HSSG, 2013).

According to the volume of the Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (1999), the previous research has led to the information that in the Croatian region, after the Second World War, more than 50% of deaf people lost their hearing due to illness and injury, 20% of deaf people were born without hearing and a further 20% lost their hearing due to birth injuries or mothers illness before birth. Today, the causes are something different and as the main culprits are cited the traffic noise, industry, loud music, drugs and injuries, and the greater percentage of deaf-born children.

Croatian sign language, unlike the U.S., is not recognized as a language of cultural minorities, and it is not standardized, which means that people in different cities use different signs for the same word, similar to the dialect of the Croatian language. Recognition of the sign language can be considered as one of the ways of expressing respect for this cultural minority. People who lose their hearing during life, after they had learned Croatian language, are in a better position than people who were born without a hearing. People born without hearing learn the Croatian language as a foreign language and have much more difficulties in mastering the hearing subjects, primarily due to the inability to hear word pronunciation. Radić, Bradarić-Jončić and Farago (2008) in their paper about the lexical knowledge of hearing impaired youth, reviewed the results of the research of many authors who speak of a big lag in the number of learned words in deaf-born children compared with normal hearing, which often diverge up to 10 years. That research has found that a deaf 16 year olds have an average vocabulary of hearing 6 year olds. The same differences, these authors confirmed in their research and have also found differences in language proficiency between deaf children integrated into regular schools and deaf children who attend special schools for the deaf. Deaf children who are integrated into regular schools in the study have achieved better results than other groups.

SOCIALIZATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE DEAF

Although the deaf do not consider themselves disabled but only the cultural and linguistic minorities, when viewed in terms of defects, the society also puts them in this group. One of the best ways to view the situation of disabled people in Croatia and the attitude of people towards the disabled is an experience that we can get from experts in various sciences that are themselves disabled. Krizmanić, a prominent Croatian psychologist, in his book, *Life with different*, among other things, reflects on the social acceptance of people with disabilities, citing as an example the differences between Croatian and American countries. People in Croatia have problems with accepting people with disabilities and they have prejudices even though the people with disabilities should be equal members of society. Some people accept them, some ignore, some openly rejected. In America prejudices are not presented to the extent as in Croatia, at least when talking about prejudices for the disabled and someone's disability is seen just like the one of their characteristics. However, Krizmanić highlights that a society without prejudices does not exist and that the only way to get rid of society's prejudices is systematically learning from an early age that this is just one feature of a person, which does not define her personality.

LEARNING SIGN LANGUAGE IN CROATIA

Sign language is not included in the mandatory school subjects. We rarely encounter it in schools, except among children who use sign language alphabet as a game. Knowledge of sign language is very useful. It allows people to communicate with a large group of people who depend on that language. In Croatia, the sign language courses are conducted in several cities organized by Association of the Deaf and Deaf-blind and organizations of other legal entities. Most involved in this are the Association "Theater, visual arts and culture of the Deaf - DLAN" and "Croatian Association of Deaf-blind DODIR". In organization by the Croatian Association of Deaf-blind DODIR, sign language courses are conducted in three locations in Zagreb, in two locations in Osijek and in one location in Split (Croatian Association of Deaf-blind DODIR, 2013). The Association has released the first textbook for learning Croatian sign language "Sign by sign 1", written by Sanja Tarczay and associates, which was launched in 2005 in Zagreb (IndexHR, 2005). Association "Theater, visual arts and culture of the Deaf - DLAN" has been organizing sign language course at one location in Zagreb for the past 12 years (Naumovski, 2013). There is

one more sign language course in Zagreb, under the leadership of the Union of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Zagreb (SGINZG, 2013). In Križevci, Association of Disabled Križevci, in cooperation with the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of the City of Zagreb and city of Križevci, in accordance with the provisions of the "Strategy of Križevci for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in the period from 2007 to 2010", conducted sign language learning program (City Križevci, official website, 2010). Budo Jusić is another sign language instructor who runs a course at one location in Zagreb (Alfa portal, 2011). The Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Gradiška was also conducting sign language learning program in 2012 (Tarbuk, 2012). In Zadar course is conducted in the organization of the Association of Persons with impaired hearing (Antena Zadar, 2013) and it is aiming to train hearing people as interpreters to assist the hearing impaired in performing daily tasks such as going to the doctor, the police or school. Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of the city of Varaždin and Varaždin County are organizing sign language course in Varaždin (Regional Weekly, 2010). Sisak is organizing course within the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Sisak (Sisak City, the official website, 2011). In Bjelovar, sign language course is organized in collaboration of Public Library "Petar Preradović" Bjelovar and the Association of Hearing Impaired of Bjelovarsko-Bilogorska County (Berak, 2013).

According to collected data, the school education in sign language was conducted in just two locations-in IX Gymnasium in Zagreb, where students and teachers attended the course together (Šebestijan, 2011), and in Našice, at the Croatian National Library Našice, where a crash sign language course was organized for educational staff (Radio Našice, 2010).

It should be considered that some sign language courses in Croatia are not sufficiently promoted, and that there are probably more cities, which are conducting courses, whose data were not reached.

WHERE IS KINESIOLOGY IN ALL THIS?

Since 2001, when the sign language courses started to conduct in the organization of the "Theater, visual arts on and culture of the Deaf - DLAN", and since about 1000 participants have finished the course, only three attended kinesiology course. One of them dropped out, and two are still attending. The most participants are from the Faculty of Social Work, Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy - Department of Psychology and Croatian studies.

Competitive and recreational sport for deaf people in Croatia is well organized by the Croatian Deaf Sports Association and their students regularly participate in European and international competitions and in Olympic Games for the Deaf in many sports (Croatian Deaf Sports Association, 2013).

A major step forward in terms of the inclusion of deaf people in the sport outside HSSG's was made by the members of the Skipper Association of the Adriatic, in cooperation with the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of the Primorsko-Goranska County. Their project "Sport and Recreational Sailing for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people" includes learning sign language for skippers whose task is to transfer the sailing skills to the hearing impaired so that they can equally enjoy sailing. For the purpose of learning sailing skills, it was necessary to devise some new signs in sign language to fulfill the needs of this physical activity. The project has a long-term character and it began to implement in 2002 (Adriatic Skipper Association 2012).

Juriša, Ciliga i Tolja (2011) in their work "Sign language for PE classes" have set the rules for the teachers of physical education how they should treat deaf children and how to communicate with them. However, those rules are not sufficient for high-quality communication and all teachers, including physical education teachers, should know at least the basics of sign language. It would be nice to have a hearing person communicating with this cultural minority in their own language, regardless the fact that the deaf can read from lips very well. Accordingly, in the future we should urge the induction of the sign language elective class so that all kinesiologists learn to communicate well with the deaf and be able to, in the best possible way, bring the deaf closer to the sport, recreation, and explain what is expected from them.

CONCLUSION

While Croatia has organized numerous courses of sign language and has great opportunities for its learning, the need for kinesiologists to learn sign language is still not sufficiently recognized. Learning sign language would facilitate the work for children and teachers. Children would better understand what is required from them, and teachers would have less problems while explaining their expectations to the children. This would further facilitate the life of deaf persons, who, under the assumption that in the future all kinesiologists undertake a course of sign language, could engage in all forms of sport and recreation, which would then be available to them in the same way as it is to hearing people. This would lead to destruction of communication barriers and it would allow deaf people to be more equal with hearing people.

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