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“Iconologia” as an alternative look at the education of people with hearing impairments

ABSTRACT: This article discusses the aspect of educating people with hearing impairments in the perspective of alternative teaching methods sought for such students. The authors have analyzed the assumptions of the main models of education of students with hearing impairments implemented in the Polish education system; the most important issues, problem areas and potential solutions. They have also begun to reflect on the educational potentials that museum education can bring in the education of these students. In the context of the proposed solutions, they present an interdisciplinary educational project inspired by iconology, the field of art history that supports universal nonverbal communication and a modern model of the participatory museum.

KEYWORDS: student, hearing impairments, education, museum, iconology, participation

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In recent years the education of people with hearing impairments has changed. The subject of education of this group of students interested researchers from many fields of science; a number of papers were produced, and documents and legal regulations also appeared.

A basic legal act in this respect, the Act of Septe. 7, 1991, on the education system (Journal of Laws of 2016, pos. 1943), legally guarantees that content, methods and organization of teaching are to be adjusted to students' psychophysical capabilities. It also ensures the possibility of using psychological and pedagogical assistance and special forms of didactic work (article 1, item 4), as well as the possibility of learning in all types of schools by children and young people with disabilities in accordance with their individual development and educational needs and predispositions (article 1, item 5). This regulation also offers caring for disabled students by enabling personalized education forms, curricula and revalidation classes (article 1, item 5a). Still, despite the current state of knowledge or regulation, there is noticeable maladaptation of educational realities to the needs of students with hearing impairments.

Looking for sources of perceived imperfections in the education of people with hearing impairments in Poland, we have analyzed the education of these students in the context of the most important problems and issues. We model assumptions based on which it is possible to introduce necessary changes and potential solutions.

We are looking for alternative teaching methods that have not yet been developed by the education system, starting with institutions having social and educational potential that are not included in formal education. We would like to present the idea of museum education for people with hearing impairments, taking into account the latest trends in museology, in the context of the philosophy of education and selected ideas of G. Biesta, and drawing from art history. That idea could be implemented in Poland and serve many areas of science, including pedagogy.

EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN POLAND

The Polish education system envisages the implementation of education of people with hearing impairments in two main models: special and integrative (Sak, 2011). The

special model focuses on securing for each child with a disability appropriate conditions for comprehensive development and full activation of his or her psychophysical abilities by creating specialized facilities for this group of students. In the integrative model common learning, organized in integrated or mass schools, involves students with diverse development opportunities (Wyczesany, 2006).

These models differently address the issues of education of students with hearing impairments. These differences are expressed primarily in the accepted assumptions, the way education is organized, or a selection of didactic and educational methods. Their characteristics are included in the model of special education – manual communication and bonding with other people with hearing impairments – and in the model of integration education, with rare contacts with other deaf people and the development of oral communication (Sak, 2011).

The special-education model, we believe, undoubtedly characterizes some educational potential related to the possibilities of creating conditions for: individualization of learning, reducing the level of school stress students', contacts with other deaf and hard-of-hearing people, who are a specific point of reference for their goals and aspirations; the application of appropriately adapted teaching and learning methods; and the use of manual forms of communication, including sign language and sign language system (Wójcik, 2008; Sak, 2011).

At the same time, we should point out a number of limitations related to the education of students with hearing impairments. These limitations relate primarily to a small number of educational institutions and the consequent need to organize transport for students or their stay in a boarding house, narrowing down social networks to peers with hearing impairments; several years of student separation from the family; weakening emotional ties or isolation from the natural social environment; lack or reduction of natural support in language development; and the risk of disturbances in the educational process (Dryżałowska, 1997; Szczepankowski, 1999; Wójcik, 2008).

In the integration model, however, we see, above all, equal access to education for all students, regardless of their deficits and their ability to support their comprehensive development (Czajkowska-Kisil, Siepkowska & Sak, 2014). The implementation of education in this model must enable the hearing-impaired child to remain at home. It must also provide opportunities for the child's full integration in a natural social environment; linguistic development close to that of able-bodied peers; better mastery of the curriculum material; higher levels of acquired social and adaptive skills; and higher social status in the future (Dryżałowska, 2008; Wójcik, 2008).

Also in this model, education of students with hearing impairments is associated with a number of organizational, substantial and technical problems, particularly in communication difficulties and the lack of specially prepared pedagogical and teaching staff members, too many class groups or the need to equip school facilities with the necessary equipment. We would also like to point out the importance of problems experienced by the students themselves and related to strict requirements, including language competence and communication in Polish, as well as related stress; misunderstanding of their cultural identity and linguistic difference; and inadequate or no contact

with other students with hearing impairments. Such problems are closely connected to difficulties with group identification and relationships, or lack of conditions and capabilities for manual communication (Szczepankowski, 1999; Wójcik, 2008; Sak, 2014; Czajkowska-Kisil, Siepkowska & Sak, 2014).

The difficulties and problems described in the two models, special and integrative, helped us distinguish the main problem areas of education of students with hearing impairments.

MAIN PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

The most important issues, in our opinion, can be related to three basic areas: stereotypes in education, communication and the teacher's role. Like other areas of human activity, the education of people with hearing impairments is affected by a number of stereotypes and myths. Deeply rooted in the social consciousness, they are a permanent part of the school reality and constantly appear in the conversations of teachers, students with impairments, their families and peers (Krakowiak & Panasiuk, 1994). Imagination and mental stereotypes related to hearing impairment concern students as people with impairments, their language and communication methods; they also concern these students' parents, as well as their special education or training (see Sak, 2011; Czajkowska-Kisil, 2014; Tomaszewski, 2004, 2006). All these stereotypes combine the category of difference, being worse or weaker than normality (Sak, 2011).

The authors see the effects of stereotyped perceptions of students with hearing impairments not only in teachers' attitudes and peer relationships, but also in the overall approach to these students' learning or the ways it is implemented. This is particularly evident in poor, unattractive school offerings, especially at advanced stages of education; staff and material shortages; and insufficient funding for new profiles or courses of study (Czajkowska-Kisil, Siepkowska & Sak, 2014). Secondary consequences may, in turn, include the reluctance of people with hearing impairments toward certain forms of education, especially special education; school failure; or disruption of social integration, up to the experience of social isolation. As a consequence, a student with hearing impairments, instead of being an active participant in education, becomes a passive observer.

Another area of education for people with hearing impairments that, in our opinion, can be considered problematic is communication. Basically, the education of this group of students in all types of schools is carried out in the Polish language, which for them is perceptibly inaccessible and therefore foreign (Januszewicz, Jura & Kowal, 2014; Czajkowska-Kisil, 2014). In this context, attention is drawn to the lack of language availability for educational content and teaching. The characteristics of hearing impairments, and the resulting low competence in communication with the Polish language and disturbed hearing perception, allow hearing-impaired persons to be perceived as weak pupils and unattractive peers, at the same time adversely affecting their social integration in the hearing world (Dryżałowska, 2008).

In fact, full participation in education is available only to students who can communicate in Polish. Depriving people with hearing disabilities of learning and communication in their language, which is synonymous with forcing verbal communication on them, is essentially a communicative compulsion (Czajkowska-Kisil, Siepkowska & Sak, 2014). These communication barriers also contradict the notion of communication in education of G. Biesta (2013), who, in reference to J. Dewey's work, considers education in terms of a community of experience and participation in its qualitative dimension. It is, therefore, necessary to develop an alternative method of communication that is accessible to both deaf students and their hearing peers and teachers.

Communication difficulties with are closely related to other problematic aspects of the education of people with hearing impairments as expressed in the teacher's role. K. Krakowiak (1998) depicts the view that problems in this area result from negative phenomena rooted in the bad tradition of educating people with hearing impairments and sustained by the learned helplessness of the school education staff, described by the author as "enslavement by bad tradition."

Of course, this is a complex issue, but it indicates a few important factors. On the one hand, they include inadequate preparation of teachers to work with students with hearing impairments and lack of continuous cooperation between the teacher in school conditions and professionals in the field of speech therapy for hearing impairments. On the other hand, they express themselves in teachers' imagination about their profession based on the myths of professional initiation or long-term experience, as well as the conviction that they must carry all responsibility for the educational process, which hampers their professional development, and the search for ways of liberation from "bad tradition" (Krakowiak & Panasiuk, 1994; Krakowiak, 1998). As long as the teachers do not try to overcome this tradition, they will not be able to teach in its essence, bring something new, into the educational situation or creating the school reality (Biesta, 2013).

IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS

The sources of all emancipation¹ are perceived in education, as D. Pogórska-Jachnik (2013) writes. She points out that the educational emancipation experience is a difficult and complex process, requiring that the student gradually overcome barriers and obstacles that appear on the way. Potential for emancipation undoubtedly exists in the education of people with hearing disabilities, but its discovery requires a number of changes: in the organizational dimension, in the sphere of philosophy, and approach to teaching.

Analyses and reports addressing the issues of education for hearing-impaired people show that education, both special and integrative, incorporating this group of students is unable in its current form to fully realize its goals, especially in social integra-

¹ The issue of "types" of emancipation, differently understood by P. Freire and J. Ranciere, is discussed and analyzed in G. Biesta's insightful perspective, cited in literature listed at the end of this article.

tion; it is ineffective and sometimes even harmful. Good social integration of students with hearing dysfunction is possible only if they are aware of their identity (Kowalski, 2014; Czajkowska-Kisil, Siepkowska & Sak, 2014). The authors think all proposed changes in this respect should therefore be subordinated primarily to the objectives of special pedagogy in pursuit of improving the educational, rehabilitation, life and social situations of people with hearing impairments (Zielińska, 2005). Finding possible solutions to the educational problems of these students should therefore be oriented toward three key areas: overcoming social isolation, student subjectivity and conscious participation.

Breaking the social isolation of people with hearing impairments, from the point of view of this social group's characteristics as well as the goals of its education, is an important area of action. The solutions introduced in this area have not achieved the intended effects, and therefore this is still the group least integrated with the hearing community. In this context, there is talk of a barrier separating these students from the hearing world, of barrier which they, their parents, specialists or teachers are not aware. Seeking effective ways to overcome the social isolation of hearing-impaired students, requires going beyond accepted schemes based on medical approaches and taking action to change social attitudes and remove mental barriers from hearing-impaired students', awareness of themselves, their families, their teachers and the social environment (Krakowiak, 2006).

Full social integration is also related to the need to open the education of people with hearing impairments to the subjectivity of the student, to see in him the acting and responsible person (Biesta 2013). This opening requires the creation in education of space for a community experience, shaping personal identity, developing empathy, finding constructive ways of solving problems, learning the principles of effective communication, and building a sense of group affiliation (Dunaj & Rechowicz, 2011).

Only education in which there is room for a student's subjectivity and his aspirations to break social isolation has, in our opinion, a truly integrative character, moreover, it gives an opportunity for conscious participation. Such education can also play an important role in preventing the social exclusion of people with hearing impairments. Any lack or limitation of participation in social life, of which education is an important part, is associated with negative judgment and various forms of social exclusion (Galor, 2013).

In our opinion, this educational potential is brought by museum education, which is, in the perspective of the outlined direction of change, an interesting proposition for solutions to the problems in education of people with hearing impairments. Our proposed specific educational project, responding to the most important problems found within the existing models of education for hearing-impaired students, goes beyond the traditional framework of education, departs from the teacher's central position in the learning process, and adopts a universal way of communication contained in the language of art. It therefore entrusts responsibility for the process of education to students, who become active, full-fledged participants.

Museum education and new communication opportunities Contemporary museums pride themselves on overcoming barriers. After adjusting facilities to the needs

of people using wheelchairs, it was time for Braille and customization of signs and routes for blind people. In Polish museums, however, deaf and hard-of-hearing people are still an undeveloped audience. Like the aforementioned groups, they have difficult access or even lack opportunity to participate fully in cultural events because of other, unsatisfied communication needs. We purposely do not call these needs a barrier because that term imposes a certain perspective primarily on the person who cannot hear and see. Is the museum ready to meet the needs of such a visitor? Theoretically, yes. Personally, we found only one museum, in the Pomeranian region, Gdansk History Museum, in which a course in sign language was obligatory, primarily for the staff of the Education Department and the staff members directly serving the museum, such as cashiers and custodians. The “action,” unfortunately, was a one-off; it did not reverberate in the local media, nor did it reflect the spectacular attendance of the group to which the action was directed. However, it was a milestone in a traditional Polish museum, which is associated with the relics of the Polish People’s Republic, with special shoe covers called “slippers” and boring, dusty display cases for whose sake unpleasant ladies every now and then point out that nothing may be touched. The museum was an oppressive place and, at the same time, overwhelming space that do not encouraging visitors to spend time there. However, it cannot be denied that cultural institutions grow like weeds: new establishments claiming the right to be called museums appear every year in different regions of the country, and they are different types of places that fulfill various missions.

The modern museum is undergoing deep transformations. Affected by the crisis of the Enlightenment, it gains completely different functions as a result. The Western discourse theory of museology is talking more and more about a participatory museum model, which is - personally involved in work-team, preferring the action and co-creation than the display of objects additional plays at least several different roles in local society. The canonical position of N. Simon (2010) on this subject mentions the nature and aims of such a museum in a textual manner and introduces the application of activities known as participatory. For example, by striving to meet the needs of 21st-century society, especially digital natives (Prensky, 2001), museums are eager to take on a community-building role, trying to create a local identity and respond to current challenges and social conflicts. Modern city museums take on this role – for example, in Copenhagen or Frankfurt (Janus & Banaś, 2015). As a result, the language and the interpretation of the objects on are changed. These are not only inventory lists of the collection, the objects store – but primarily the medium by which the museum want to initiate an action. The change in rhetoric, and indeed in the paradigm of traditional participation, carries with it the evolution of the museum’s whole character and mission. Audiovisual content is no longer based only on listing numerous objects in the showcase and the form of a tours and lectures. Often, employees choose to show only a few elements from an entire collection, in favor of selected stories, and to open up space to multiple interpretations. In addition to the traditional guided tour, visual guides, maps, animations with subtitles, and relevant applications are provided. A variety of forms and techniques convey and interpret content in various museums, but we

have not yet met with an idea to refer to a historical medium that could be of interest in communicating with people with hearing impairments. By leaving a broad subject of participation, we would like to focus on its narrow dimension: participation as communication that results in mutual understanding, sharing the world with museum staff members and visitors, including deaf or hard-of-hearing people from the local environment (Biesta, 2013). Hence, we would like to elaborate on the idea of building a common pattern of symbols, based on a historical source, intended for a common reading of the language of art, especially in two types of museums: historical and national.

CODIFICATION AND DECRYPTION OF THE ART LANGUAGE (NOT ONLY) FOR DEAF PEOPLE

In reading visual art, especially historical art, the trouble has not been limited to people affected in various ways by dysfunctions. The language of the art of the past has ceased to be readable in the present. Beyond the circle of specialists, such as art historians, historians and conservators, the work of art for contemporary culture remains silent. When drawing on iconography – that is, science dealing with describing objects presented in a plastic artwork – it turns out that there are aids that could also serve the present recipients. Not only in the context of mentioned participation, but also in socialization, individual emancipation and development of the fashionable *lifelong learning*. However, using the terminology of G. Biesta (2013), learning is not the domain of institutionalized teaching understood as education, but has become an individualized act understood as allowing for a change of order that has so far functioned in this way. For example, a very helpful work for museums with a collection of Italian Renaissance paintings would be C. Ripa's "Iconologia". In 1593 Ripa published a book that became the traced patterns of personification in the symbolic language, difficult to grasp in the image. In this way, he developed numerous allegorical representations, such as personifications of wisdom, reason, love and freedom. With the help of Ripa's pattern, we can read what characters mean in the paintings of Italian painters. For example, in "Iconologia" Ripa placed an image of prudence – *prudenza*. It is a woman whose attributes are a mirror and a snake held in the hand. The mirror serves as a symbol of mindfulness and self-awareness, peering into oneself and into one's conduct. In contrast, the snake is a symbol of evil deeds – captured in this context, which means the prudent can handle various traps. Two Italian painters, V. Carpaccio (Fig. 2) and F. Montemezzano (Fig. 3), which we put together with Ripa's pattern of Prudenza (Fig. 1), have drawn from this motif.

Carpaccio represents the mature Renaissance art, while Montemezzano – a late Renaissance, described as Mannerism. Despite different styling, the symbolism of images still remains legible if one knows the pattern. By this example, the language of art would communicate its message to every contemporary recipient of a work of art, including the person who is hard of hearing or deaf. This is just one of many examples of visual patterns in the history of art that inspired the artists and their patrons. In prin-



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

inciple, language competences such as reading and writing were the privilege of a marginal class of society until the Enlightenment. Visual arts functioned primarily as the *biblia pauperum* for those who could not read or write. Their message – the content – had to be communicative. Modern digital culture seems quite different yet remains very close to historical patterns in its return to reading signs and symbolic images. Why not create a pattern that would serve any group interested in a particular museum? Such an option allows visitors to go around without the help of a guide, as long as they want to remain fully independent. In



Fig. 3

addition, it provides a much greater amount of knowledge that until now has been inaccessible to an ordinary visitor. Such patterns of art language, which would also be

available for download from the internet, allow all interested groups to become familiar with an exhibit for without specifically highlighting the “dysfunctional group” (Cant, 2014). At this time, such knowledge is not limited to art researchers but allows the broadening of cultural competences to all interested groups, regardless of their professional, social and ability status. Being able to decode old artwork allows for the unique experience of wisdom and the perception of the world of our ancestors. It becomes a key field for active educators through open interpretations of, for example, moral messages and values, with contemporary views on life and culture. The practice of emancipation contained in this practice, referring to G. Biesta (2013), may be both monological and dialogical. The first will be to get to know Ripa’s thoughts and the specific meaning of his personification – that is, the transmission of the finished idea presented above. On the other hand, the second meaning will be the deciphering of the cultural dependence of symbols, such as patrons’ ideas and contemporary – interpretations, provided by the researchers themselves, building into the “official” source – that is, in the scientific literature. These meanings of one symbol are moving toward a common, informal and open reinterpretation that allows to know what the visitor and the art researcher know. Based on the context of the reading of the artwork, a common subjective understanding (and maybe even demystification) will arise.²

A CHANCE TO SOLVE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS FOR EVERYONE

When selecting a suitable source as a symbol pattern to be used for communication in a museum, it is important to remember that types of hearing loss and its range can vary. Therefore, a single selected communication form, such as sign language, may be insufficient or inadequate if the potential visitor is a member of a group that has not learned the grammar of the spoken language and does not understand the message conveyed. In addition, if the museum cannot ensure that every potential deaf visitor can see a guide and interpreter to understand what he is talking about, it increases the number of obstacles (Cant, 2014). The meeting may take much longer and be able to handle a much smaller number of interested people, thus interfering with the visitor’s sense of independence and freedom. The codification of the museum does not consist only of consistent, visual signs; staff members must also be deployed and prepared to use the communication system. The ability to employ or work closely with teachers, especially those specialized in deaf education, will help museum’s employees to work with the interested parties to find the optimal communication solution and to prepare appropriate training. Unfortunately, the most common mistake in museum practice is lack of motivation even to see the need to expand communication skills of curators and those who care for the collection, for example, to communicate with deaf people. If all this occurs, the museum education department is burdened by the task (Cant, 2014).

² We refer to emancipation understood as the act of “subjectivity”, see: Biesta, G. (2013). *The beautiful risk of education*. London: Paradigm Publishers.

If visitors are treated only in the category of “educational event with special educational needs,” it is difficult to understand the communication process as radically open and indeterminate. Visitors may remain distasteful and disappointed because the museum, including the exhibition, completely fails to meet their expectations and needs. Through the educator or the specially arranged “educational” event, the museum may give the sense that it is not prepared and open to the hard-of-hearing or deaf visitors at all, but that these people are categorized as “dysfunctional.” That statement leads to the assumption that well prepared and educated persons should be dealt with them which is quite at odds with my idea of freedom and flexibility in treating these visitors subjectively. Such an approach imposes control; that is, it does not allow for the existence of inherent risks naturally borne by mutual communication, especially of two such different groups. Without that risk, we cannot talk about any education, a change in the essence of the museum-visitor relationship, especially for the deaf people and their willingness to enter the existing, not arranged, situation (Biesta, 2013). – If we talk about emancipation and *lifelong learning* as slogans leading to the idea of implementing a pattern appropriate to a given museum, they could provide the possibility of creating ‘amateur specialist’. On the basis of competences and resources (or closer to the Bourdieu terminology – capitals) of both interest groups, the final result will be a specialized guide for deaf who can freely take over the role of museologist, but remains as an unofficial museum’s co-worker. This procedure is beginning to function in Western museums, such as Tate Modern in London. Thanks to the introduction of guides for the deaf or workshops addressed to everyone interested, irrespective of dysfunction, the Tate breaks the hierarchical atmosphere, democratizes communication and, most important, builds a local network of “professional amateurs.”³

SUMMARY

The model of the participatory museum and the proposed action for education of all people, including all without categorizing people with hearing impairments into cultural and social life, turns out to be a valuable asset for the development of the museum, as well as for further education and applied education systems in the 21st century. The concept presented here has enormous educational and revolutionary potential, which in turn can be risky. There are dangers, such as the distortion of existing roles and the division of power within the competences of the museum, the educated person, the educator, and finally the local recipient – the participant. However, as G. Biesta (2013) contends, without potential risk, we as the authors cannot speak about a truly educational event in which the most important act of communication – dialogue – takes place. With great hope, we expect that the idea will not remain a theoretical project, but such an initiative will be realized even in Poland.

³ “Pro-am”, the term forged by the museologist Leontine van der Mensch; see: Mensch van, P. & Meijer-van Mensch, L. (2015). *New trends in museology II*. Celje: Muzej Novejše Zgodovine.

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„IKONOLOGIA” CZYLI ALTERNATYWNE SPOJRZENIE NA EDUKACJĘ OSÓB Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ SŁUCHOWĄ

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł porusza aspekt edukacji osób z niepełnosprawnością słuchową w perspektywie poszukiwanych alternatywnych metod nauczania tej grupy uczniów. Autorki dokonały tu analizy założeń głównych modeli edukacji uczniów z uszkodzeniami słuchu realizowanych w Polskim systemie kształcenia: specjalnego i integracyjnego, najważniejszych jej kwestii, obszarów problemowych oraz kierunków zmian i potencjalnych rozwiązań. Autorki podjęły tu również refleksję nad możliwościami edukacyjnymi, jakie w nauczanie osób z uszkodzeniami słuchu wnieść może edukacja muzealna, która jest traktowana marginalnie w systemie kształcenia. W kontekście proponowanych rozwiązań autorki przedstawiają interdyscyplinarny projekt edukacyjny, czerpiący inspiracje z ikonologii, dziedziny historii sztuki wspierającej uniwersalną komunikację niewerbalną oraz z nowoczesnego modelu muzeum partycypacyjnego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: uczeń, niepełnosprawność słuchowa, edukacja, muzeum, ikonologia, partycypacja