

Speaker Maria Fitzi / 2 min

My name is Maria Fitzi.

I am speaking about Deaf Culture from a hearing point of view.

I do not represent any organisation.

I am working since 25 years for different deaf organisations, associations, institutions; first in Germany, then for many years in Paris with the IVT, directed by the deaf actress Emmanuelle Laborit and the GRETA Institut, on the Reunion Island and Switzerland.

I started studying Sign Language to find out more about languages in general, where language comes from and sign language taught me a lot. It is actually based on a inner movement, which we all have in common.

Deaf Culture is centered on Sign Language and communication among one another.

Deaf Culture is not associated with any native land; it is a global culture.

Every country has its own Sign Language, but please notice, that the interpreter here present, is translating in International Sign Language, which can be understood by the whole deaf community.

If we all could learn International Sign Language, we could have an Esperanto for Deaf and Hearings, which could resolve a lot of communication problems.

A very brief step into Deaf History:

In Paris, 18th century, the world's first public Deaf School, the National Institut for deaf children, was founded by Abbé de l'Épée.

The deaf educator Laurent Clerc, ex student of Abbe de l'Épée, went to America, where he founded together with Thomas Gallaudet, the Hartford School. In 1857, the youngest son of Thomas Gallaudet, founded the nowadays very wellknown Gallaudet University.

But in 1880, in Milan, an international congress was organized by hearing educators, no deaf educator was invited, and they decided to ban Sign Language.

How dared they – as Greta Thunberg would probably say.

The mother tongue:

A deaf child may have hearing parents, a hearing child deaf parents, so the mother tongue does not match.

Parents and the education system should accept this, in order to give the child the chance to learn his/her own proper language, to develop his/her identity and to build self-confidence, otherwise it may create severe traumatism.

My recommendations:

- Sign Language should be recognized as a minority language
- Bilingual education for deaf children
- Deaf community should be present in every single government
- Sign Language should be offered as a foreign language in hearing primary schools.