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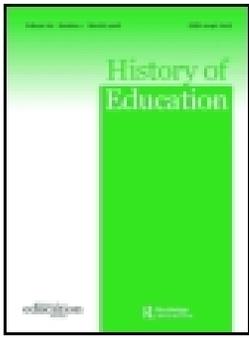


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Educating the deaf in The Netherlands: a methodological controversy in historical perspective

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Between 1760 and 1820, most West European countries as well as the USA organized their institutes for the deaf. In The Netherlands the first one was founded in 1790, and was followed by others in the next century. The increasing interest in the education of the deaf in The Netherlands and abroad was prompted by three developments. In the first place, since the late sixteenth century, there had been an international awareness of deafness as a partly curable disease. Second, there was growing consciousness of the importance of education for good citizenship and the efforts of the state to provide such education. Third, the changing concepts of deafness and the social position of the deaf resulted in a pedagogical controversy and a drive to set up new institutes.

I will explore the genesis of the Dutch institutes in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century against the background of international developments. Three aspects proved important: the educational methods, partly based on a certain perception of deafness, the involvement of the state and the importance of religious education.

Noteworthy is that the history shows two methods of education of the deaf, which seemed to exclude each other.¹ The main question was whether the deaf should learn (time-consuming) spoken language or whether sign language was a sufficient means of instruction and communication. These respectively oral and manual views all have to do with philosophical ideas as, for example, Ree (1999/2000) clarified in his *I See a Voice: A Philosophical History of Language, Deafness and Senses*. Preferences for oral or sign language are founded on the perception of the human voice as a basic feature of the human being, opinions about cognitive development, and ideas concerning basic features of humanity. The history of the Dutch institutes highlights some of these philosophical points of view. In the last part of this article, I explain briefly the discussion from recent decades in favour of the manual method, in which a new philosophical perception concerning deafness is relevant.

Is deaf-muteness curable?

The question as to whether deaf-muteness was curable became relevant in early modern times, when during the Renaissance the negative perception of deafness, and especially muteness as a consequence of deafness, gradually changed into a more positive one.

1 A. Tellings, *The Two Hundred Years' War in Deaf Education. A Reconstruction of the Methods Controversy* (Nijmegen, 1995).

Before that time the deaf were outcasts and were treated poorly in legislation and society, which excluded them from hereditary rights and participation in Church life. Speech was considered to be a basic human trait and a necessary tool for the development of cognition and religious belief and consequently deaf people were not treated as full human beings.² Humanists such as the influential Dutchman Agricola (1443–85), however, wrote respectfully about the deaf who had learned to talk.³ Two centuries later the Dutch protestant minister Anthonius Deusing pleaded in his *De surdis ab ortu mutisque ac illorum cognitone* (1656) for the full acceptance of deaf people in the Church and asked that Holy Communion be opened to them. This book appeared some years later in English under the name of Geo Sibscota, entitled: *The Deaf and Dumb Man's Discourse or a Treatise Concerning Those that are Born Deaf and Dumb, Containing a Discovery of their Knowledge or Understanding* (1670). The originally Dutch Johannes Lavater, Professor of Theology at Zurich University, elaborated on the ideas of Deusing and supplied a teaching method (1665–66)⁴. They claimed that deafness had nothing to do with idiocy or a failure of the speaking organs, but with hearing, and that the dumbness in particular could be 'cured' by appropriate treatment. Consequently, they stressed the importance of teaching the deaf to speak and acceptance of the deaf as valuable human beings who are able to participate in society⁵. One thing they were adamant about was that thinking and religion as basic features of the human being required the mastery of speech⁶.

At the same time scientific attention to deafness grew and supported the new philosophical view with regard to the deaf as full mental and rational beings, as well as the curability of muteness. Physicians described the auditory organ and the mechanism of speaking organs. Linguistics specified the sounds and methods of sound production. In 1600 Fabricius ag Aquapendente (1537–1619) published his *De visione, voce, auditu* concerning phonetics, which other scientists elaborated on. One of them was the Dutch Protestant minister Petrus Montanus, who distinguished 2520 phonetic sounds in his *Bericht van een nieuwe konst, genaemt de spreekkonst* (1635) (Message of a new capacity, called the speaking skill). The Dutch-Flemish Jew Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1614–99) studied the speaking movements, and in respect of education of the deaf, he propagated the use of a mirror and feeling the air, bones (vibrations), muscles and face movements during the act of speaking. Van Helmont corresponded with famous teachers of the deaf, such as John Wallis, Professor at Oxford University in England (1616–1703) and the Amsterdam doctor, Johann Conrad Amman (1669–1724).⁷

Important in the history of education of the deaf were the private teachers who intended to combat the social isolation of the deaf by describing the positive outcome of their efforts and methods. As far as is known, the Benedictine Abbot Pedro Ponce de Léon (1510–84) was the first person whose methods and successful educational results were recorded. His main aim was to teach the deaf to speak and by proving their learning capacities in speaking and writing he endeavoured to change the discriminatory laws of

2 R.E. Bender, *The Conquest of Deafness: A History of the Long Struggle to Make Possible Normal Living to those Handicapped by Lack of Normal Hearing* (London, 1970); P.L. Safford and E.J. Safford, *A History of Childhood and Disability* (New York, 1996), 6–7; Bender, 1970, 20–24; A. Huisman, *Johan Conrad Amman, de Grondlegger der Spreekmethode bij het Onderwijs aan Doofstommen* (Heusden, 1910), 4–5.

3 Bender, 1970, 31–2; M.J.C. Büchli, *De Zorg voor de Doofstomme* (Amsterdam, 1948), 17–18.

4 H. Lane, *A History of the Deaf* (Suffolk, 1984), 69; Büchli, 1948, 28–9; Bender 1970, 49–53.

5 J. Réé, *I See a Voice: A Philosophical History* (London, 2000), 79–109.

6 Réé, 2000, 93–6, 118–28.

7 Van Helmont correlated the speaking movements with the written Hebrew characters. For him Hebrew was the original language of all the others and the Hebrew characters a visual reproduction of the mouth position while speaking. B. Meylink, *Voor Doofstommen te Rotterdam, of de Kunst om Doofstommen te leeren Spreken en Verstaan* (Kampen, 1859), 9; Büchli, 1948, 31.

the feudal system.⁸ His fellow countryman Juan Paul Bonet (1579–1633) elaborated on this method with his *Reduction de las letras y arte para enseñar a ablar los mudos* (1620) (Simplification of the letters and the competence to teach deaf-mutes to speak).⁹ Bonet copied the sign alphabet from Léon, in which each letter was represented by a certain posture of the fingers.¹⁰ Soon after, other teachers started to write about the education of the deaf in countries such as France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands and Switzerland. For them the cure for deafness lay in the undoing of the ‘dumbness’. Nevertheless until the twentieth century a deaf person was referred to as ‘deaf-mute’ or ‘deaf and dumb’.¹¹

In The Netherlands the first private tutor who wrote an internationally known and broadly used book about the education of the deaf was Amman, mentioned previously in this article. On the Continent he was considered to be the founding father of the speaking method. He even rejected the sign alphabet. In fact he was a physician from Switzerland, who was awarded his doctoral degree at Basle University when he was only eighteen. On his first study tour, he visited Amsterdam and decided to stay to start a medical practice. Soon afterwards, Pieter Koolaart, a wealthy businessman, asked him to educate his deaf daughter Hester. He agreed and the results were so amazing that the example of Hester Koolaart was often mentioned in the literature. Amman himself contributed to his popularity by describing his method and by offering a kind of manual to teach spoken language supplied with an explanation of the origins and mechanism of the voice, sound production and pronunciation. His *Surdus Loquens* (1692), written in Latin, was soon translated into Dutch, German, French, Hungarian, English and Italian. Just like Van Helmont, he propagated the use of a mirror and feeling the nose, larynx and other movements during speech. Both were convinced of the superiority of the phonetic method and rejected the spelling method generally used in regular education.¹²

Institutes for disabled children

These attempts to educate deaf children were restricted to children of the elite, whose parents could afford private tutors. That changed in the eighteenth century as a result of the Enlightenment. The new middle class was anxious about the growing pauperism and considered education to be the only means to change it. It was believed that if children of the lower class were able to attend school, society would be more disciplined and ordered. Charity schools were established in which poor children learned their religious and civic duties.¹³ Also national governments, including the Dutch one, started to invest in a national system of education as a means to enforce unity. The French occupation (1795–1813), and the efforts of Napoleon to structure his vassal states, stimulated Dutch national legislation concerning education, which was effected in 1801–06.¹⁴

8 Rée, 2000, 99–100; Büchli, 1948, 12; W.W. Taylor and I. Wagner-Taylor, *Special Education of Physically Handicapped Children in Western Europe* (New York, 1960), 29.

9 Harlan Lane (1984, 57–8) defended the opinion that famous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century private teachers of the deaf derived their methods, which they kept secret, from that of Pedro Ponce de Léon, elaborated by Bonet. Among them were Jacob Rodrigues Pereire in France, George Dalgarno in Scotland, Keith Digby and John Bulwer in England, Johann Conrad Amman in The Netherlands and Van Helmont in Belgium.

10 Q.J. Cappron, *Levensbespiegelingen. Blinden en Doofstommen, Karakterschetsen, Geschiedkundige Bijzonderheden en Maatschappelijke Wenken* (Terneuzen, 1862), 160; Safford and Safford, 1996, 30; J. Densham, *Deafness, Children and the Family* (Hants, 1995), 64.

11 Lane, 1984, 67–111; Tellings, 1995, 54; Bender, 1970, 46–60.

12 Safford and Safford, 1996, 33; Huisman, 1910; Lane 1984, 100–103; Bender, 1970, 65–71.

13 Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London/New York, 1995), 117–18.

14 Cunningham, 1995, 122–4.

It withdrew schools from the influence of the Church, in a way similar to the developments in other West European countries. This did not mean that religious education was of no value; on the contrary, a general Christian education was considered the only means to shape unity and minimize denominational differences. In particular, the knowledge of an Almighty God in Heaven and Christian virtues could promote national unity and shared values including tolerance, respect and patriotism.

As the interest in education for everyone grew, Western societies became concerned about those children who, as the consequence of a handicap, could not profit from the national schools. Deaf children were the first to have their own special public institutes, and these were soon followed by institutes for blind and mentally retarded children.¹⁵ General new features of these institutes were free acceptance of children of the poor, class instruction and new methods of teaching. All these special institutes originated in France, where individual persons took the initiative to bring about education for handicapped children. In 1760, 1784 and 1790 respectively institutes for the deaf, the blind and the mentally retarded were founded in Paris. They functioned as examples for other parts of Europe.¹⁶

In the case of the deaf, Charles Michel de l'Épée (1712–89), known as 'Abt de l'Épée', took the initiative. He was a Catholic clergyman who, because of his deviant religious ideas, was not eligible for Church work. In the 1750s he met two deaf sisters whose teacher had recently died. He took over their education and soon other deaf people joined them and he decided to open an institute with his own money (his father was the Royal Architect) and with the help of supporters.¹⁷ He was praised for his generosity, self-denial and his total dedication to the deaf. Whereas, prior to the founding of his institute, teachers of the deaf worked only with the children of the elite, he accepted poor children in his institute and spent his own financial resources for the benefit of his pupils.¹⁸

Épée knew of the work of his predecessors such as Bonet, Amman, Wallis and Dalgarna¹⁹. Nevertheless, he deviated from their main aim, which was to teach the deaf to speak. In observing his first pupils, he discovered that they had developed their own system of natural signs with their hands and bodies. Contrary to his predecessors he claimed that sign language was the mother tongue of deaf people and that spoken language had to be treated as a kind of foreign language, to be taught from sign language only: 'all deaf mutes who come to us, already have an appropriate language, which is very expressive, i.e. the language of nature itself, familiar to all people'.²⁰ During lessons the pupils had to translate the gestures into written French: 'while the teachers dictate with signs, the minds of the pupils work until they have chosen the French word which corresponds to the matters and ideas expressed by signs'.²¹ He went on to describe the natural signs, which his successor Sicard elaborated with artificial signs. De l'Épée also used the sign alphabet in first language teaching and the spelling of names and unknown words, but rejected this as a general means of communication

15 Taylor and Taylor, 1960, 19.

16 Safford and Safford, 1996, 28, 63–77.

17 Lane, 1984, 57–8; Büchli, 1948, 53.

18 Lane, 1984, 57–63; Bender, 1970, 80–1.

19 H. Betten, *Bevrijdend Gebaar. Het Levensverhaal van Henri Daniël Guyot* (Franeker, 1990), 35.

20 C.M. de l'Épée, *Institution des Sourds et Muets par la Voie des Signs Méthodique*, part 1 (Paris, 1776), 36–7.

21 De l'Épée, 1776, 112–13.

because it was too time-consuming.²² De l'Épée's sign language contained gestures not only for words and meanings, but also for the grammar of the spoken language (plural–singular, and the past, present and future tense of verbs).²³ His main aim was to teach his pupils to read and write French. He was so successful that delegates from several countries visited his school to observe the instruction and progress of the pupils. He even attracted the attention of royalty, such as Katharina II from Russia, and Kaiser Joseph II from Austria. The latter asked him to set up an institute for the deaf in Vienna, and instead of doing it himself he trained a Viennese priest (Stork) for the job.²⁴ Every week he gave a public lecture for interested people, sometimes attended by more than a hundred, during which the pupils had to write the answers to all kinds of questions, while the more advanced among them answered in written Latin, Italian or other foreign languages.²⁵ Soon, between 1790 and 1820, institutes for the deaf, based on the manual method (primarily using sign language as the method of instruction and communication), were founded all over Europe—Vienna, Berlin, Ghent, Bordeaux, Rome, Sleswijk, Madrid, Geneva and Groningen—and also in the USA.²⁶ The main reason for the popularity of De l'Épée's method is that he was always eager to demonstrate it and even invited foreigners to attend lessons, contrary to most oral-oriented teachers, who kept their method secret.²⁷

Was the oral method from the previous centuries out of the picture by 1800? No, not totally. While most institutes in Europe followed wholly or partially De l'Épée's manual method, the majority of institutes for the deaf in Germany continued to use the oral method during the nineteenth century. This is why the manual method is called the French method, and the oral one the German method. The pioneer in Germany was Samuel Heinicke (1729–90), who opened his institute in 1778 in Leipzig but kept his method secret. From polemics with De l'Épée, in which he defended his method, he did, however, explain some aspects of his teaching and the organization of his institute.²⁸ He emphasized articulated speaking and lip or face reading. Pupils even had to learn to interpret the movements of the face while the mouth was covered. Heinicke knew the *Surdus loquens* of Amman, and like Amman, he was sharply opposed to the manual method, to such an extent that he forbade sign language in pupils' leisure time. After some decades, Heinicke's example was also followed outside Germany—for example in a second institute in Paris and in the Dutch city of Rotterdam.²⁹ One of his prominent disciples was Moritz Hill (1805–74), who wrote many books about the education of the deaf and the importance of speech, articulation and lip-reading from an early age. He elaborated and popularized Heinicke's method by introducing 'natural' and spontaneous activities, which could rapidly be replaced by oral language and by emphasizing the need for a broad range of varied techniques.³⁰ During the nineteenth century, the oral-oriented influence

22 C.M. de l'Épée, *La véritable Manière d'Instruire les Sourds et Muets confirmée par une Longue Expérience* (Paris, 1784), 3–5.

23 De l'Épée, 1784, 20–97.

24 Betten, 1990, 33; J.G. Brugmans, *De Eerste Eeuw van het Instituut voor Doofstommen te Groningen* (Groningen, 1896), 20–1; Safford and Safford, 1996, 38–9.

25 Brugmans, 1896, 22; Lane, 1984, 47.

26 Brugmans, 1896, 21; Lane, 1984, 64; Taylor and Taylor, 1960.

27 Tellings, 1995, 38–9.

28 Rée, 2000, 162–5.

29 Safford and Safford, 1996, 34; Lane, 1984, 100–5.

30 Bender, 1970, 132–4; I. Bickers, *Hill's Opvatting en Toepassing der Amman'sche Methode, Geschetst naar Aanleiding van een Bezoek aan de Doofstommenschool te Weissenfels* (Rotterdam, 1858).

gradually grew in Europe and in the USA at the expense of the manual method, as the example of The Netherlands shows below.

The first institute for the deaf in The Netherlands

In 1790, Henri Daniel Guyot (1753–1828) founded the first Dutch institute for the deaf in Groningen in the northern part of The Netherlands. Guyot was a minister of the Walloon Protestant church, first in the city of Dordrecht and from 1781 in the city of Groningen. During his first years in Groningen, he went to Paris to visit an old study mate. There he heard about the wonderful results of De l'Épée's institute. He visited the institute and was invited to join the lessons. He stayed for ten months finally and, with other aspirant teachers, he received private tutoring from De l'Épée. He hoped to be able to start such an institute in The Netherlands.³¹ Back again in Groningen in 1785, he was asked to teach a deaf Christian and a Jewish child. Soon other pupils joined them and Guyot, still always fostering the hope of founding his own institute, searched for funds with the help of some friends. He succeeded and opened his institute in 1790.³² To assure the institute of annual financial aid, he and his friends decided to set up a system of local unions of contributors all over The Netherlands.³³ During the French occupation (1795–1813), the new Dutch national government started to subsidize the institute in 1796, on the grounds that education and good citizenship were basic needs of all children including the deaf.³⁴ In 1808, 52 pupils attended the institute, some from regions outside Groningen. They stayed overnight with their own families or foster families. The purchase of new buildings in 1819 and 1822 made it possible to open both a girls' and boys' boarding house. Guyot and his two sons, who were his successors, preferred the idea of a boarding house because they feared that deaf children might be neglected by foster families and even by their own families. They considered a boarding school to be the only means of helping to shape children both at school and in leisure time.³⁵ In addition, they were of the opinion that deaf children needed their own environment in which they felt at home and happy: 'After some days of boarding the deaf child already loses his depression, dullness, sadness and shyness, and will be glad and cheerful among his companions, playing and conversing with them.'³⁶ In other words, deaf children have the right to their own deaf culture in which they feel secure. Thanks to state subsidies and a large number of contributors the education was free. Parents had to pay only for boarding, and for those who could not pay the boarding fees, charity organizations and churches wholly or partly supplied the necessary resources³⁷.

The programme was quite intensive: the school started at six in the morning and closed at eight in the evening, with intervals every two or three hours. That meant ten hours of

31 Betten, 1990, 28–44.

32 Betten, 1990, 61–4.

33 The local unions grew from one with 120 members (Groningen) in 1790 to 24 with 1294 members in 1792 and to 72 with 3000 members in 1865: A.W. Alings, *Beschrijving van het Instituut voor Doofstommen te Groningen, aan de Leden en Oud-Kweekelingen Aangeboden tot een Aandenken aan de Viering van het 75jarig Bestaan der Inrigting in het Jaar 1865* (Groningen, 1865), 4.

34 Brugmans, 1896, 51.

35 A.W. Alings, *Beschrijving van het Instituut voor Doofstommen te Groningen, aan de Leden en Begunstigers, de Kweekelingen en Oud-Kweekelingen Aangeboden tot een Aandenken aan de Viering van het Honderdjarig Bestaan van het Instituut, 1790–1890* (Groningen, 1890), 9–10.

36 C. Guyot and R.T. Guyot, *Beschrijving van het Instituut voor Doofstommen te Groningen, ten Geleide eene Systematisch Gerangschikte Lijst der Werken en Geschriften over Doofstommen en het Onderwijs aan Doofstommen* (Groningen, 1825), 23.

37 R. de la Sagra, *Voyage en Hollande et Belgique*, part 1 (Paris, 1839), 145.

school per day, except on Saturday (half a school day) and Sunday.³⁸ Guyot's education began with the extension of manual signs of objects and abstract meanings such as belief, trust and love. For this purpose he used objects from the environment, drawings on the blackboard and pictures. Unlike De l'Épée's successor in Paris, Sicard, he avoided the use of artificial manual signs and stressed the natural ones.³⁹ The education of signs formed an integral part of the curriculum during the whole eight-year course. In the first three years, the pupils learned to correlate the manual sign with the objects, elements of pictures and meanings, next to the visual and schematic representation (drawings on the blackboard) and finally with the written word. In the same way as De l'Épée, he spent much time on dictating in sign language while the pupils wrote down the corresponding words. In his teaching Guyot also used the sign alphabet to spell names and unknown words. In the fourth year Guyot started with grammar: the structure of sentences, conjugation of verbs and nouns and differences between the grammar of manual and written sentences. Guyot considered most of the pupils to be incapable of learning spoken language and only the more advanced and intelligent pupils received speech education in an individual setting.⁴⁰ Gradually, with an increase in teachers and the involvement of his two sons, Charles and Rembt Tobie, education in spoken language became part of the curriculum. The pupils learned to pronounce the written words and to 'read' the words from the lips of the teacher. Charles and Rembt Tobie Guyot replaced this time-consuming individual speech education with group education. For that purpose, after 1830, they introduced a large mirror: the teacher in front of the mirror functioned as example and corrector of the group of about six pupils behind him. Pupils began with the pronunciation of small (meaningless) syllables of a vowel and a consonant in the first school year. With progress in education pupils learned to correlate the written language with the spoken language and in the last school years (third level) most pupils were able to repeat spoken sentences by voice.⁴¹ The main reason why Guyot and his sons paid attention to speech was its relevance for participation in society: 'The main aim is to elevate these "unfortunates" to cooperate with others, to make themselves clear to others, and to make them understand that they can be useful in society.'⁴² Speaking, however, was a goal and not a method of instruction. Besides this time-consuming language education (sign language, reading, writing and later on speaking and lip reading), the curriculum contained the normal subjects of primary education: arithmetic, geography and history. The Guyots especially considered arithmetic to be an excellent means to shape cognition and promote logical thinking. The Groningen institute also provided training for professions, mostly handicrafts or manual work such as shoemaking, tailoring, printing or carpentry for boys. The girls learned cooking, needlework, housekeeping and other skills necessary for servants. Most residential institutes did the same both in The Netherlands and abroad until late into the twentieth century.

Religion formed an integral part of students' education. In accordance with the general perception of religion as a basic need for good citizenship, the Guyots stressed the importance of Christian virtues and of the knowledge of God as creator and helper, to whom pupils had to be grateful: 'Education will help them to understand their duties, to elevate their soul above the animal and to become conscious of the ultimate goal of

38 Guyot and Guyot, 1825, 33–4.

39 M. van Heyningen Bosch, *Berigt houdende Eenige Wenken over het Eerste Onderwijs aan Doofstommen* (Groningen, 1823), 17–22.

40 Brugmans, 1896, 60–2; Alings, 1890, 12.

41 Guyot and Guyot, 1825, 35–9; De la Sagra, 1839, part 1, 147.

42 Guyot and Guyot, 1825, 6.

human existence: the knowledge of the Supreme being and the honouring of God as creator and benefactor.’⁴³ Sunday was used for specific religious education, administered partly by pastoral workers of the denomination to which the pupils belonged⁴⁴.

Their education was successful and the institute grew to 151 pupils in 1824 and to 160 in 1854.⁴⁵ Like De l’Epée, Henri Guyot and his two sons were eager to demonstrate their method of education and the progress of their pupils. Public lessons were given every Wednesday morning at eleven. Also visitors from abroad visited the institute for a short or longer time. Their reports were full of praise. In 1828 the Parisian paper *Constitutionnel* wrote: ‘It is certain from reports that no other teacher has had such remarkable results with deaf-mutes as Guyot and we do not believe that there is another institute on the European continent with more pupils and better organized than the school at Groningen.’ F. Neumann, Director of the Koningsberger Institute, and the French philosopher J.M. de Gérando also commended the Groningen institute as the largest and best of its kind in Europe in 1827–28.⁴⁶ The Spaniard R. de la Sagra visited the institute in 1839 and concluded: ‘The Netherlands can be proud of the outstanding institute and the remarkable progress of the Groningen institute. . . . From the beginning it has excelled in brilliant outcomes, resulting in the growing population of pupils, which is also due to state subsidies.’⁴⁷

New institutes: denominational education and the methodological controversy

For a long time the Groningen institute was the only one in The Netherlands: the pupils came from the whole country and several religious denominations. However, in 1840 the Catholics started their own institute in Sint Michiels-Gestel, in the southern part of The Netherlands. Here also the initiator was a clergyman, Henricus den Dubbelden, who was confronted with the deaf in his parish. He had two motives to start a Catholic institute. First, Groningen was far away and, second, Catholic education was important to enable the deaf to participate in Church life and to develop a religious belief. He encouraged the headmaster of the local Latin school, M. van Beek, to take responsibility for the education of these handicapped children, and he agreed. After some years of providing private education in the evenings to a small group of deaf pupils, the institute was opened in 1840 with 46 pupils, of whom 26 were from poor families and did not pay tuition fees.⁴⁸ This institute also used the manual method, for which Van Beek developed his own version based on that of De l’Epée and adapted to the Dutch language sentence structure.⁴⁹ The institute rejected every form of articulation exercises and speech because this would take too much time and pupils would forget it in their future life.⁵⁰ The pupils learned to write and read the Dutch language with signs as means of instruction and communication. Some of the assistant teachers were deaf themselves, like Maria Kuipers (appointed in 1840) and Antonius Megens, appointed in 1842.⁵¹ The school was also residential like the Groningen

43 Guyot and Guyot, 1825, 7.

44 Van Heyningen Bosch, 1823, 27–8.

45 C. Guyot and R.T. Guyot, *Verdediging der Leerwijze, Gevolgd op het Instituut voor Doofstommen te Groningen* (Groningen, 1853), 4.

46 Brugmans, 1895, 63; J.M. de Gérando, *L’éducation des Sourds–Muets de Naissance*, part 2 (Paris, 1827), 157, 164–5.

47 De la Sagra, 1839, 133–4.

48 Brugmans, 1896, 81; M. Rietveld-van Wingerden, ‘De school voor doofstommen in St. Michielsgestel’, *De School Anno*, 20/2 (2002), 18–21.

49 *Verslag wegens het Instituut voor Doofstommen St. Michiels-Gestel*, 1843, 4–5; 1855, 43–4.

50 *Verslag wegens het Instituut voor Doofstommen St. Michiels-Gestel*, 1855, 38–9.

51 *Gedenkboek Instituut voor Doofstommen te St. Michiels-Gestel* (St. Michielsgestel, 1940), 34–35.

institute, and adopted the same pedagogical point of view: the unity of education and upbringing. Financial aid came from the Church, individual persons and the local and provincial governments. The national government initially refused to subsidize the school for economic and religious reasons. It claimed that this institute would become an undesirable competitor of the (subsidized) Groningen institute and the government rejected denominational education and certainly did not want to subsidize it.⁵² Once the Catholic institute proved not to be a danger for the continuation of the Groningen institute, and the number of pupils in Groningen remained stable at around 150, the government started to grant annual subsidies in 1851. This followed after the assurance of a Catholic politician that the institute had a public character in the sense that no children were refused entry on the basis of their religious background. Nevertheless the institute preserved its Catholic character laid down in the statutes: 'The education of religion and morality will be exclusively Catholic. Religion will be considered as the main aim of the institute resulting in daily one hour religious education, while as much as possible religion will be integrated into other subjects of the curriculum' (art. 19).⁵³

The third institute, in the Western part of The Netherlands, marked a methodological change. In the city of Rotterdam the Jewish doctor Polano had two deaf children. He refused to send them to Groningen because of the manual system practised there. So in 1849 he invited the Jewish teacher D. Hirsch (1813–95) to come to Rotterdam to teach his children. At that time Hirsch, who had received his training from Moritz Hill in Weissenfels, worked at an institute in Aachen, where the German method was in use.⁵⁴ Shortly after Hirsch had started to teach the children of Polano, other deaf children joined them and finally in 1853, when the group had grown to 18 pupils, it was possible to open a new school. Just like Heinicke in Germany, Hirsch did not allow any form of sign language in his school. Contrary to Groningen and Sint-Michiels-Gestel, the leaders of the Rotterdam school not only opposed the manual method but also the residential character of for example Groningen. They favoured the use of foster families on both social and educational grounds: deaf children should not be isolated from society in an institute, where they were cooped up together with other deaf children day and night. Moreover, living with hearing people was considered important for the development of speaking abilities.⁵⁵ To help (foster) parents in their pedagogical activities, Hirsch wrote a manual in which he explained how a deaf child should be treated.⁵⁶ Hirsch helped to promote the oral method both in The Netherlands and abroad. He wrote about his method and he visited schools for the deaf in Belgium and Italy, where the manual method was in use, to persuade them to introduce the oral method.⁵⁷ Two of his trained teachers exported his method to England and Belgium: W. van Praagh became leader of the 'Association for the oral instruction of the deaf and dumb' and director of the associated school in the London area, and M. Snyckers became director of the institute in Liege.⁵⁸

52 *Verslag wegens het Instituut voor Doofstommen St. Michiels-Gestel*, 1851, 20–33.

53 *Gedenkboek*, 1940, 37.

54 C. van Meurs, *75-Jarig Bestaan van de Inrichting voor Doofstommen-Onderwijs te Rotterdam* (Rotterdam, 1928), 7–9; Brugmans, 1896, 82.

55 B. Meylink, 1859, 21–3.

56 D. Hirsch, *Wenken bij de Opvoeding van Doofstommen voor Ouders, Pleegouders en Leermeesters* (Rotterdam, 1875).

57 D. Hirsch, *L'Enseignement des Sourds-Muets d'après la Méthode Allemande (méthode Amman) Introduit en Belgique. Souvenirs d'une Visite aux Écoles des Sourds-Muets, à Anvers, Bruxelles, Gand et Bruges* (Rotterdam, 1868).

58 D. Hirsch, *Le Troisième Congrès International pour l'Amélioration du Sort des Sourds-Muets, Tenu à Bruxelles* (Rotterdam, 1884), 11–12.

Hirsch developed language instruction based on the phonetic pronunciation of vowels and consonants. He rejected the old spelling method, used over centuries in regular language education, of first learning the separate letters of the alphabet, next (meaningless) syllables and finally words and sentences. His phonetic method was not new, but has already been propagated by Van Helmont, for example, and practised by Amman in the seventeenth century. Hirsch's innovation was that he started with short words, which were easy to say and were selected by virtue of their pronunciation. His analytic-synthetic method is based on the word as starting point for the explanation and pronunciation of the separate letters. He began with simple short words such as 'aap' (monkey) and 'koe' (cow), in conjunction with a picture. The pupils learned to pronounce the words and separate vowels in combination with other consonants and to correlate them with the written representation.⁵⁹ From the beginning, Hirsch's language education was a simultaneous combination of speaking, lip reading, reading of written text and writing. Hirsch also propagated words as the starting point on psychological grounds: The pupils had to understand the purpose of learning as soon as possible and therefore language education should avoid meaningless syllables and stress the importance of fast results ('I can already read').⁶⁰ He also introduced playing in his method of education, for example, the use of an alphabet cube (with the written form of letters). Articulation exercises (in both individual and class form) and the touching and feeling of the nose, mouth, throat and other muscles and bones during speech, as well as the use of a mirror, were important in shaping natural pronunciation. Hirsch emphasized the importance of early exercises in speaking and lip reading: 'The earlier a child learns to speak, the more lithe the speaking organs, the stronger the chest and lungs and the clearer its voice.'⁶¹ In his manual for parents and caretakers he encouraged them to exercise speaking and lip reading from the very beginning: 'Speak slowly and clearly to the child, right in front of the child, to enable the child to observe your speaking movements and reproduce the same words. If you do that, then the children will try to speak the repeated words, for they are eager to learn and practise. Try to understand their deformed vocal utterances to stimulate the child to speak.'⁶²

After the founding of the Rotterdam school, discussion concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the manual and oral methods was revived. Already in 1853, the Groningen institute had defended itself against Hirsch's accusation of using the manual method exclusively. The Groningen directors claimed that they used a combination of writing, manual signs and speech. In teaching the deaf every means, including natural signs, had to be used to shape the child according to its talents: 'The teacher has to follow nature and to make good use of the predispositions, capacities and talents of the pupil like imitating, drawing, pantomime, memory and pleasure to produce sounds.'⁶³ The Catholic institute did not make any concessions in favour of speech and continued to abandon articulation and speech. Conversely Hirsch forbade every form of signs from the point of view that (additional) signs reduced the effectiveness of the time-consuming oral method, because pupils would not learn to rely wholly on spoken language: 'As long as thinking

59 The written representation was not a printed form of letters, at that time generally used in language education at regular schools, but the written form.

60 D. Hirsch, *Spraakoefeningen ten Dienst van Doofstomme Kinderen bij het Onderwijs in het Afzien, Spreken en Schrijven. Ook Geschied ten Gebruike bij het Eerste Leesonderwijs aan Hoorende Kinderen* (Rotterdam, 1858), 1ste stukje, I–IIIIV.

61 Hirsch, 1875, 16.

62 Hirsch, 1875, 15.

63 Guyot and Guyot, 1853, 7.

of the deaf is divided between signs and words, teaching will be a vale of tears for both the teacher and pupil.⁶⁴ Another also important difference between the Groningen and Rotterdam schools was that the latter used spoken language for instruction, while the Groningen institute did not use speech as a method of instruction but as an aim of education. Gradually, after the appointment of a new director, the Groningen institute accepted the oral method of education and in 1883 proclaimed that speech should be ‘the vehicle of all education’.⁶⁵ The Catholic institute continued to defend sign language, largely on religious grounds: ‘sign language, more than spoken language, is suitable to offer the deaf a good understanding of the doctrines of our Holy faith, whereas religious education ought to have first place in a Catholic school’.⁶⁶ This perception changed in 1907, when the new director A. Hermus defended speaking as a method of instruction on social, pedagogical and religious arguments, after visits to institutes in Rotterdam and Belgium. He insisted that the mastery of speech was the best means of reducing the social isolation of the deaf as most hearing people cannot communicate through signs. Also, in later life, the capacity to communicate with hearing people would stimulate personal development. Moreover, he had observed in other institutes that in the beginning the progress of pupils was very slow (it took a lot of time to teach the deaf speech and lip reading), but that if pupils mastered spoken language the progress of all education was much greater than with sign language. For this reason he also acknowledged that in the case of religious education, speech also prevailed over signs. The transition to the new method meant a great change in school organization: small classrooms and small groups sitting in a half circle around the teacher (to be able to see the face movements), good lighting and individual counselling. New institutes in the cities of The Hague (1892) and Amsterdam (1910) used the oral method from the beginning.⁶⁷

The example of the Rotterdam institute shows how important family education was considered in the oral method. For this reason, soon A.G. Bell (1847–1922) in America and even earlier, J.B. Gräser (1766–1841) in Germany promoted the founding of day schools instead of residential institutes. They were aware of the importance of the social environment to the education of hearing-impaired children. If deaf children live in institutes with other deaf children only, then the need to speak would be diminished.⁶⁸

Government policy

The policy of the Dutch government affected special education of the deaf in three ways. In the first place, it promoted education as a general concern. The intention of the first national legislation (1801–06) was to stimulate school attendance of children, although they were not obliged to go to school. The government tried to get more children into school by cooperation with local authorities and private organizations in order to make both public and private schools free of charge for the children of poor families. This strategy was successful. When compulsory education was legislated in 1900, more than 90% of children aged between six and twelve attended a primary school. The same happened to the deaf and their schools. After the Compulsory Education Act of 1900, only

64 Meylink, 1859, 19.

65 Brugmans, 1896, 94–5.

66 *Gedenkboek*, 1940, 87.

67 *Reglement der Vereeniging voor Doofstommen-Onderwijs te Amsterdam* (1910), Amsterdam; Huisman, 1910, 20.

68 J.K. Love, *The Deaf Child: A Manual for Teachers and School Doctors* (Bristol, 1911), 10–11; Bender, 1970, 159; Safford and Safford, 1996, 97–8.

one new institute was founded (the school in Amsterdam in 1910). Apparently most deaf children attended a special school in the late nineteenth century.

Second, the Dutch government largely relegated education to private initiative and local authorities. That changed gradually with regard to primary education. During the nineteenth century the government increased its influence on schools by legislation in respect of the curriculum, requirements of teachers, school buildings, class size and inspectorate. It is remarkable that this legislation did not affect special schools. The government was of the opinion that such schools were primarily a form of therapy determined by specialists for which the state only had to shape the financial conditions. When in 1863 the Secondary School Act was accepted in parliament, special education was administrated under this form of education. It was nothing more than the acknowledgment of special schools as extraordinarily public (and subsidized) schools, just like secondary schools. It lasted until 1920 before special education, including schools for the deaf, was recognized as a special form of primary education, which needed its own rules and (specialized) inspectorate.

A third aspect of the government's school policy was the rule that both public (organized by local authorities) and private schools should be denominationally neutral. Churches were not allowed to have their own schools in which doctrines formed part of the curriculum. Religion was important, but primarily as a form of moral education in which generally shared convictions were important. Denominational religious education was considered to be the responsibility of the churches, and as such was to be provided out of school and school hours. The Groningen and Rotterdam schools for the deaf acted in line with these governmental aspirations. They were neutral in the sense that no denomination prevailed or determined the contents of the education provided and that children from all kinds of denominations were welcome. For specific religious education, pastoral workers were involved who were active before and after school hours, and on Sundays.

This policy became a problem after the founding of the Catholic institute in 1840, which asked for state subsidies. Although religious Catholic education was part of the curriculum, the state nevertheless supported the school from 1851. This was an exceptional situation. It is true that the revised Constitution of 1848 proclaimed freedom of education or the freedom to found denominational schools, but it took until 1857 before the Constitution effectuated in a new Education Act. Moreover, the Education Act of 1857 permitted denominational schools, but they had to be wholly self-supporting without state subsidies. At least the governmental support of the Catholic institute (Dfl. 2000, and from 1907 onwards the same as the Groningen institute, i.e. Dfl. 6000) proves on the one hand that education of the deaf and the spreading of these schools were important for the government as a public interest, and on the other hand that such education was considered as exceptional.

After the Education Act of 1857, Catholics and Protestants founded their own primary schools, legally called private schools, alongside the existing public or state schools. Gradually the state even started to subsidize such denominational schools after 1889. That meant the ending of the extraordinary position of the Catholic institute for the deaf within the Dutch educational system and was a stimulant for the Protestants to establish their own institute. The protestant institute ('Effatha') opened its doors in 1892. In spite of being accused of separatism, the founders continued in their own way.⁶⁹ The statutes declared

⁶⁹ *Gedenkboek ter Gelegenheid van het Vijftigjarig Bestaan van de Vereeniging Effatha, 1888–1938*, (Middelburg, 1938), 8–9, 58.

that the basis of the school was the Holy Bible and the Reformed confessions (art. 2) and that the purpose was to provide Christian education to deaf children (art. 1).⁷⁰ With this realization of Effatha, the Dutch education of the deaf acquired a typical feature of the Dutch educational system: private (subsidized) Catholic and Protestant schools alongside the neutral state schools (the so-called 'pillarization').

Teaching methods

The history of the Dutch institutes of the deaf shows the arguments used in favour of the manual and oral methods. These arguments can be divided into three categories: social, pedagogical and philosophical.

The social argument was important from the sixteenth century onwards: how should deaf children be educated to help them to participate in a hearing society? Although the Groningen and Catholic institutes used sign language as a means of instruction, they nevertheless emphasized the importance of the national language for the socialization of deaf children. To become useful citizens, children needed the capacity to communicate with hearing people. Initially the Groningen and Catholic institutes were satisfied with communication in written form. Later the spoken form also became relevant in the case of more advanced children. The difference between the oral and manual methods rested in the appreciation of the deaf culture for the socialization of children. Groningen considered boarding with other deaf children as a means of helping them to develop their own identity and to stimulate their self-awareness, self-respect and happiness. Rotterdam, on the other hand, considered the deaf culture as a hindrance for participation in society and therefore rejected residential schools: deaf children should participate in a hearing environment from the beginning. Later on, when the shift towards the oral method was made, the Catholic institute added a new argument. They insisted that if deaf children learned to communicate exclusively by speech, then they would be more capable of profiting from the hearing world and achieving permanent education resulting in a more cultivated personality.

The pedagogical or educational arguments were mainly based on the evaluation of the effectiveness of either the manual or the oral method as a means of instruction. Rotterdam rejected sign language totally on the grounds that it hindered the development of speaking abilities; here the goal of socialization determined the method of instruction. Groningen and the Catholic institutes disagreed on the basis of other educational arguments, which partly had to do with a certain concept of deafness: the deaf have their own language (signs using the hands and mimicry) and culture which should be made useful in education. Moreover, they considered the oral method to be too time-consuming as it required individual counselling in addition to class teaching, and it was effective for the more talented pupils only. The Catholic institute added some new arguments, first in its defence of the sign method, and later on regarding the oral method. It considered sign language a more appropriate means to transfer religious values and concepts. After the switch to the oral method in 1907, it claimed that initially the oral method took much time to make it effective, but that later on speech guaranteed faster development of cognitive capabilities and religious identity.

These perceptions of the aim of education and usefulness of methods all have to do with philosophical ideas. From the sixteenth century the attention to deafness increased as a result of the acknowledgement of deafness as a partial defect, which resulted in

70 Gedenkboek, 1940, 8–9.

muteness and could be cured by appropriate speech education. Speech was considered to be the only means of shaping cognition, and the voice and (spoken) language token to be a basic feature of humanity. De l'Épée deviated and promoted gestures as an alternative to the voice. He stimulated discussion about the nature of human thinking and philosophers such as De Gérando defended the idea that sign language could do the same as speech in respect of rationality.⁷¹ A basic condition, however, was that the primitive sign language should be elaborated and systematized, as Sicard (De l'Épée's successor) stated and put into practice. These new philosophical ideas concerning human nature, rationality and sign language were never implemented totally. Always, both in the Parisian and the Groningen institutes, the ultimate goal continued to be the teaching of normal language to pupils, and even De Gérando defended the opinion that deaf children should give up sign language as soon as they mastered the written word. His main argument was that the deaf should learn to trust written language and should have the opportunity to become integrated into the intellectual (largely written) tradition of humanity.⁷² The most important ideological change after the founding of De l'Épée's institute was that it was not speech as such that was important as a central feature of humanity, but the understanding and use of the written language.⁷³

Despite the new perception of sign language as an adequate means of shaping thinking and cognition, the manual method did not survive, either in the Netherlands or in Europe and the USA. The Milan congress of teachers of the deaf marked the switch in 1880.⁷⁴ Almost unanimously the delegated directors and teachers decided that speech was the best goal of education and the best means of instruction. They agreed on the following resolution: 'Considering the unmistakable superiority of speech above sign language to prepare the deaf for society and to give them the best knowledge of the language, the congress has decided that the oral method is preferable over signs as such and as the method of instruction.'⁷⁵

The history of the Dutch institutes shows how gradual the shift was towards the oral method. The last institute to make the methodological change was, in fact, the Catholic institute in 1907. Until far into the twentieth century the oral method was popular. Interestingly, in the last four decades the discussion about oral and manual methods has been revived, mainly because of a new philosophical view on deafness in which respect for the deaf culture is dominant. Why should the deaf adapt themselves to the dominant culture of hearing people instead of vice versa? Moreover, it should be left to the deaf themselves to determine which language they want to use. The growing self-awareness of deaf people has promoted this view. The American William Stokoe was the first to emphasize that the deaf should be treated as an ethnic group with its own language, culture and cultural activities.⁷⁶ The result was the refining, coding and establishing of American Sign Language (ASL) and its recognition as an official language. Soon other countries followed with their standardized Sign Language and corresponding dictionaries.⁷⁷ Moreover, sign language became a reasonable alternative for speech and an appropriate means for cognitive development. This new concept of deafness resulted in a fresh method

71 Rée, 2000, 209–15.

72 Rée, 2000, 215.

73 Rée, 2000, 184–92, 214–15.

74 Lane, 1984, 376–97; R. Janssen, A. Bijlsma, H. Buter and K. Schippers, *Handalfabet van Doven* (Utrecht, 1986), 63–4; Densham, 1995, 65.

75 E. La Rochelle, *Le Congrès de Milan pour l'Amélioration du Sort des Sourds-Muets* (Paris, 1880), 10.

76 Tellings, 1995, 79, 97–9; Safford and Safford, 1996, 119; Rée, 2000, 230–5, 242–3.

77 J.P. Braden, *Deafness, Deprivation and IQ* (New York/ London, 1994), 36–8.

of education, i.e. the bilingual/bicultural method, in which sign language is dominant and the spoken language is treated as a second language, first in the written form and later (or not at all) in the spoken form⁷⁸. Recently in The Netherlands, the Groningen school decided to use the bilingual/bicultural method.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The history of the Dutch institutes makes two things clear. First, it shows that there was a strong awareness of being part of an international movement from which one profited, and to which one contributed. During the first half of the nineteenth century, this partnership was acknowledged by foreign visitors to the Groningen institute, who presented this school as an example. Hirsch of the Rotterdam institute in particular was aware of his responsibility to the international community with regard to the propagation of the oral method. A second reason for the importance of the history of the Dutch institutes for the deaf is that it presents in a nutshell the international discussion concerning the changing modes of education: first from the oral to the sign method (1790–1850) and after 1850 vice versa.

In respect of the methods chosen, it is noteworthy that the Groningen institute of 1790, being the first in The Netherlands, imitated the Parisian institute of De l'Épée. Although De l'Épée and Guyot of Groningen introduced gestures as the means of instruction, they nevertheless aimed to teach pupils the national language in written form. In essence the method was monocultural: adaptation of the deaf culture to the dominant culture. This was in line with the aspirations of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which stressed the importance of education as the most important tool to prepare children for good citizenship. The Dutch government based its main policy concerning education on this perception, by providing free education for children of the poor and prescribing class teaching. The Groningen institute introduced both class teaching, for which the manual method was an excellent tool, and free education for children of the poor. The latter was the main reason for the government subsidizing the school from 1796.

As religious education was considered to be the most important means for moral upbringing, the Dutch institutes for the deaf all provided religious education. This education, however, had to be denominationally neutral. It is remarkable that, while denominational primary schools were forbidden, the Catholic institute for the deaf (1840) could be founded and even received government subsidies after 1851. Apparently the spreading of institutes was more important for the Dutch government than religious identity.

The education of the deaf formed an exceptional phenomenon. Legislation concerning primary school did not affect schools for the deaf; the government considered such schools as a specialized form of therapy for which no rules were necessary, or applicable. So when in 1853 in Rotterdam a third institute was established, which implemented a totally different mode of education, the government did not intervene. Moreover, all the institutes for the deaf received financial support from the government, for which the Secondary School Act of 1863 provided the necessary legislation.

Disagreement about the preferred method (oral versus manual) resulted in the founding of the Rotterdam institute. This institute introduced the oral method in institutional form and rejected all manners of manual sign language, thereby reviving the

78 Densham, 1995, 87–9; 112–15; Safford and Safford, 1996, 95–9; Tellings, 1995, 52–112.

79 Tellings, 1995, 80; J. Simon, 'Gebarentaal Garandeert Toegang tot de Wereld', *Uitleg*, 18/2 (2002), 9–11.

discussion about methodology. The Groningen institute defended a combined method of sign language as instruction and speech as one of the goals of education, while the Catholic institute upheld its total rejection of speech and articulation exercises. The Netherlands, however, was not an exception: in many European countries a shift was in process that favoured the oral method. The Milan congress of 1880, which determined that the oral method was the best, functioned as a catalyst. From that time on, in most countries including The Netherlands, deaf children primarily learned to speak and to hear by lip reading. However, after 1960, the discussion about the manual and oral method was revived, and a new element was introduced, i.e. the perception of the deaf and their culture as a valuable and autonomous entity. Deaf children should be educated in the ethnic deaf culture with the dominant culture as a second-best option. It is up to the deaf themselves to determine to what extent they wish to participate in either of these forms in further life. This biculturalism in perception and practice in education is the main difference between the current discussion on the one hand, and the propagators of both the manual and spoken language in former times.

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