

## **I have never heard this word before: Sex education of deaf students from different deaf institutions in The Netherlands from 1960-2000<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

In The Netherlands, five institutions for the deaf have been founded over the past two centuries. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of deaf students have lived and learned in these institutions. Little is said, or signed, about sexuality in the deaf community. The present paper focuses on the sexual identity development of deaf students who lived in three of these institutions from 1960-2000. The threefold focus of this research is on the religious input of these institutions, the way boys and girls interacted in these institutions in their day-to-day life, and the way sexuality was discussed. The archives of these three institutions were subjected to a qualitative content analysis, using the grounded theory method. One of the findings was that there was not a lot of communication about sexuality; the word was seldom used in the analyzed documents. However, it was found that students and their parents did want to obtain information about this subject. Despite this need for information, it seems difficult to consistently offer sex education in institutions for the deaf. Another finding of the present study was that religion is related to the way in which information about sexuality is offered to the students. In the future, it is hoped that more research will be conducted on the topic of deaf sexuality, sexual identity development and sexual education. Such research could well help spur the development of sorely needed sex education programs for the deaf community.

**Keywords:** deaf; sex education; religion; The Netherlands; institutions for the deaf

### **The development of religion, education, manners and sex education in The Netherlands in historical perspective**

This research will be about the sexual education of deaf people in different deaf boarding schools in The Netherlands from 1960-2000. Those deaf boarding schools were run under religious auspices and were founded in an era of social changes within Dutch society and the Dutch educational system (Tijsseling & Tellings, 2009). For these reasons, attention will be paid to the development of religious and public education in The Netherlands, the

development of sexual education, and the way boys and girls have interacted at boarding schools.

Until the eighteenth century, children were educated in Christianity and then started working to support their families (Leune, 2002). In this respect, educational rights are a recent phenomenon (Winzer, 1993). Throughout history, deaf children from fortunate families have, for the most part, been taught at home, while deaf children

from poor families were not educated at all (Tijsseling & Tellings, 2009).

The first deaf boarding school was the “Koninklijke Instituut voor Doven H.D. Guyot”<sup>2</sup> in Groningen in 1790. This was a boarding school with a liberal Protestant ideology. The school was inspired by the Enlightenment. At this institution, deaf children were seen as rational beings who could become valuable citizens. These ideas eventually came to be the dominant discourse in society as regards deaf children (Tijsseling & Tellings, 2009).

One of the most important changes within the educational system was the educational law from 1801 and the revision of 1803. Although education still had a Christian foundation and The Netherlands still was officially a Protestant state, education became more liberal. From this moment on, education became accessible to all children, no matter their religious background (Schama, 1970).

During the years 1795-1806 important societal developments reinforced the growth of the modern nation state (Lenders, 2006). This was a period in which The Netherlands became a modern liberal society, and the influence of Calvinism declined (Sturm, Groenendijk, Kruihof & Rens, 1998). During this period, pornography and prostitution became more visible, as did pre-marital sexual relations. This ‘moral decline’ mainly impacted the bourgeoisie and a limited form of sex education was provided, with a major focus on the negative aspects of sex (Bakker, Noordman & Rietveld-Van Wingerden, 2006).

During those times, boarding schools focused on religious education, instead of parenting and education. Girls and boys lived strictly separated, even when they grew older (Winnubst, 1967). These first boarding schools held the view that children were naturally inclined to evil and that this tendency had to be combatted

through discipline (Mulock Houwer, 1975).

The ‘Schoolstrijd’<sup>3</sup> is an important phase in the development of the Dutch educational system, beginning in 1830, when orthodox-protestants, anti-liberals and anti-rationalists confronted the state. These groups formed their own churches and schools to protect their children from the Enlightenment ideas that had become widely accepted in the country (Sturm et al., 1998). The second boarding school for the deaf, a Catholic institution named “Het Instituut voor Doofstommen”, was founded in 1840 (Tijsseling & Tellings, 2009).

Constitutional amendments in 1848 and an educational law in 1857 led to important changes in the right to education. This resulted in schools that were not affiliated with particular religious denominations. Public schools thus became less religious, and the religious content they offered was monitored by the government (Essen, 2006; Sturm, 1998).

Together with the battle for different kinds of religious schools, compartmentalization emerged in the Dutch population. This compartmentalization, based on religious ideologies or worldview is called ‘verzuiling’ in Dutch. All sectors of social life became compartmentalized (Karsten, 1999; Spiecker & Steutel, 2001).

The second phase of the “Schoolstrijd” lasted from 1870-1920. The government started demanding quality of education, at public and religious schools. These compartmentalized schools sought funding and financial equality for all schools, and this was finally granted in 1917 (Karsten, 1999; Sturm et al., 1998).

Right in the middle of the battle for grants, in 1888, the ‘Protestant Christelijke Instituut voor Doven Effatha’,<sup>4</sup> a Dutch Reformed deaf boarding school, was founded (Tijsseling & Tellings, 2009). At the same time, child labor was prohibited (Weijers, 2007). For this reason, mandatory education became a new subject

of the ‘Schoolstrijd.’ Until then, such a notion was seen as an unlawful interference with parents’ rights and responsibilities. Education became mandatory for all children in 1901 (Sturm et al., 1998). All children between the age of six and thirteen had to go to school (Rooijen, 2007), except for children with disabilities or health problems (for children falling into the latter categories, education became mandatory in 1947) (Dodde, 2000). The ‘Schoolstrijd’ ended around 1920, after all schools got funding from the government (Sturm et al., 1998). Sex education became part of the school curriculum around this time, and more emphasis was placed on the positive aspects of sex. The focus in this sex education was on health, adjustment, relationships and family life (Fitz-Gerald & Fitz-Gerald, 1998).

The ‘Kinderwetten’<sup>5</sup> were established in the beginning of the twentieth century. This development resulted in the government putting more pressure on institutions to raise children to be responsible citizens. These conditions applied for girls and boys (Winnubst, 1967). The Catholic boarding schools continued to provide separate education for boys and girls until 1965 (Perry, 1991). A particular image of the child was deeply rooted in the Catholic religion and consisted of humility, modesty, obedience and discipline. Sex and sexuality were seen as a sin (Hilhorst, 1989).

Reforms in society in the 1960s and 1970s focused on equal job and educational opportunities for girls and boys (Karsten, 1999; Rooijen, 2007). Striving for equal opportunities based on gender changed to striving for better results of students in general in the 1980s. Parents demanded more freedom of choice, more involvement in the education of their children and more control as society became more individualistic (Karsten, 1999).

Compartmentalized schools (i.e., religious schools) began to open their doors to children from different religious groups (Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008).

In addition, there was a sexual revolution during the 1960s. Within society, there was more openness about sexuality and there was a demand for information. Sex education with specific material was developed (Fitz-Gerald & Fitz-Gerald, 1998). Within sex education, emphasis was placed on experiencing pleasure from sex. Nowadays most schools in The Netherlands are required to educate children about sex, although they are free to choose what to tell and what not. Yet even though sex education is a regular part of the school curriculum for most schools, this is not the case in special education.<sup>6</sup> Some research has shown that there is a general discomfort among teachers regarding sex education, especially when it concerns disabled children (Kirby & Scales, 1981). Myths claiming that people with a disability are asexual or hypersexual are part of the reason for this discomfort (Baxter, 2008; Berlo & Put, 2003; McKown & English, 1986). In addition, the signs that are used in deaf education can be perceived as confrontational, and can therefore cause discomfort (Wessels Beljaars, 1998). Nevertheless, sex education is as important for deaf children as it is for other children. The duty of the school is to prepare children for life, and sexuality is a fundamentally important part of life (Korzon, 2010).

Research has shown that deaf children have less knowledge of HIV/AIDS and fewer resources to learn about sexuality (Heuttel & Rothstein, 2001). This is particularly frightening, as they have double or triple the risk of being sexually abused as compared to hearing children (Hoem Kvam, 2004). For these reasons, it is particularly important that deaf children receive information about sexuality in general, and appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior specifically.

The present paper focuses on ideas and policy regarding didactic performance in three institutions for the deaf in relation to the sex education of students. The main question addressed here is as follows:

*In what way are the ideas and policies on didactic performance of the different deaf institutions related to the sex education of deaf students from 1960-2000?*

### **How, what and why**

In this section, we will define and operationalize the concepts used in this article. ‘Sex education’ includes all information on the medical, emotional and psychosocial aspects of sexuality (Kok & Middelaar, 2003). This includes, among other topics, information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), pregnancies, being in love, relationships and interaction between girls and boys. This concept has been operationalized for the purposes of this paper as the classes in school in which sex education is discussed. ‘Sexual identity development’ encompasses thinking about one’s own identity in terms of sexuality, sexual behavior and appearance. The operationalization of this concept consists of the feelings one has concerning one’s manhood or womanhood, whether someone identifies themselves as straight, gay or bisexual, as well as the time one dedicates to their appearance. ‘Gender roles’ are described as *“accepted traditional behavior, which is viewed as typically male or female, within a culture”* (Dolstra, 2006, pp. 2). This concept has been operationalized as the different patterns of expectation that have been prevalent in the institutions for the deaf. The operationalization of the concept ‘deaf institution’ encompasses the following three institutions: Guyot, the IvD and Effatha.

Another important concept in the present study is ‘didactic performance.’ This concerns thoughts and ideas about education and development. This concept has been operationalized as the ideas about development, parenting styles, and both educational and parenting behavior in the institutions.

Finally, the concept ‘deaf’ has two possible definitions, physiological as well as functional. The physiological definition concerns the seriousness of hearing loss. Someone with a hearing loss of over ninety decibels is considered ‘deaf,’ while someone with a hearing loss of less than ninety decibels is labeled ‘hard of hearing’ (Tijsseling, 2001). Such definitions constitute medical diagnoses that influence the type of school that a child with a hearing problem will attend. According to the functional definition, someone is ‘deaf’ when he or she is incapable of processing linguistic information, even with a hearing device. In contrast, a person who is ‘hard of hearing’ can still process linguistic information, with or without a hearing device (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2009).

The relevance of the present study is twofold. First of all, this research has a societal relevance. Earlier research showed that there is less attention devoted to sex education in special education than in regular education. On the one hand, this differential treatment results from a lack of material concerning this topic for the specific target group. On the other hand, teachers are more often than not ill-trained in the subject of sex education, and feel awkward making the suggestive gestures required to represent what they are referring to in sign language (Korzon, 2010). Because a lack of sexual education may lead to risky sexual behavior, it is important that sex education is available for everyone (Fitz-Gerald & Fitz-Gerald, 1998). Second, this research is scientifically relevant. The current

knowledge on sex education for deaf students is for the most part based on research conducted in the United States. The present paper will provide a broader view that will complement the already existing scientific knowledge and offers particular information with respect to deaf students in The Netherlands.

Data were gathered by using a qualitative research method. Qualitative research involves posing a rather broad question when relatively little pre-existing knowledge is available (Baarda, 2009). The goal of qualitative research is to gain insight into the lives and experiences of the target group (Baarda, 2009; Fossey et al., 2002). Because of this, the present report is descriptive in nature (Baarda, 2009; Fossey et al., 2002; Merriam, 1998).

To answer the research question we posed, *grounded theory* was used. This involves the organization of data into certain categories (Baarda, Goede & Teunissen, 2001). With Maxqda, a qualitative data analysis program, relevant pieces of data obtained from the archives of the different institutions were transcribed. With “open coding”, “axial coding” and “selective coding,” general codes were found that represented the findings.<sup>7</sup> Since already existing data were used, and the focus of the research was on thoughts behind the data, the qualitative method best fit this research.

To gather the data, the archives of the three previously mentioned institutions were consulted. First, the digital archives were scanned to get an idea of the existing data. After that, the real life archives were visited. These written sources of data contained information on the policy of the institutions as regards the interaction between boys and girls, religion, sex education and gender roles.

The goal of the analysis was to get a time-bound overview of the policies of the different institutions and the possible differences in those policies. Scientific

articles have been used to relate the situation in The Netherlands to that in the rest of the world, and to ground the results from this research.

An important term concerning qualitative research is inter-subjectivity, since the researcher is the primary data gathering instrument. It is important that the researcher have a clear look at the data instead of being led by previously gathered knowledge. In the current investigation, the researchers consulted each other on a regular basis in order to improve inter-subjectivity (Baarda, Goede & Teunissen, 2001; Frost et al., 2010).

A number of points bear mentioning regarding ethics. Human statements have been used, and these were handled respectfully. The privacy of participants was also respected. The conclusions connected to these statements were drawn with great care. Several sources have been used in this research. These sources were properly referenced, taking copyrights into consideration. A third ethical point of interest is that the conclusions of three different hearing researchers regarding deaf people have been included. While the way in which these researchers can truly understand and describe the issues deaf people have to deal with can be questioned, the goal was to describe and interpret these issues as accurately as possible.

### ***Dusty archives and interesting findings***

In order to find answers to questions concerning thoughts and policies on didactic performance of the different deaf institutions, the archives of Haren and Sint Michielsgestel were consulted. In addition, the city and province archives of Leidschendam-Voorburg and Groningen have been referenced. Because the institutes differ as regards religious affiliation, with one public, one Catholic and one Protestant institute, the issue of

whether there is a relationship between the religious affiliation of an institute and how it deals with sexual education will be addressed. Several written sources of information have been studied: Annual Reports, school papers and magazines. Finally, important documents shared with the researchers by Freke Bonders, director of PonTem, a research and development department of the Koninklijke Kentalis, have been studied, as was the book *Freed from the balloon* by René Fabert, in which the author describes his time as a student at the IvD and the sexual abuse he suffered there.

In the following section, the results of the research of the above-mentioned documents can be found.

## Results

### *Religion: visible or translucent?*

At the IvD, one of the core goals is to help deaf persons participate in the ‘hearing society’ through religious-cultural education. This is done by promoting and establishing connections between students and Catholic organizations (IvD, 1961). *De Vriend*, (*The Friend*) is a monthly magazine published for parents of IvD students. It contains news and information from and about the IvD, as well as other brief news items. According to *The Friend*, religious-cultural education is not only limited to classes, but is also an element of leisure activities (e.g., the scouts group for boys, the motto of which is to *‘Serve God, Church and Country’*) (IvD, *De Vriend*, 1960, pp. 58). Besides the leisure activities offered by the boarding school, there were several activities to promote religious life after leaving school. The core goal of the aftercare of the IvD was religious guidance and integration into the hearing society. Regular religious exercises and weekend activities were organized to which hearing people were invited as well. It is not clear

what exactly was discussed on those weekends (IvD, 1963).

The IvD promoted a religious life for the ‘hearing impaired’; male hearing impaired could enter religious congregations especially designated for the hearing impaired and, for the female hearing impaired, a convent, “de St-Gertrudishof,” was established (IvD, 1963). Catholic moral belief, on which education at the IvD is based, emphasizes the freedom of individuals to choose between right and wrong (IvD, 1960c).

In its 1967 Annual Report, Effatha stated its mission as follows: to prepare deaf children for society in accordance with Biblical teaching (Effatha, 1968). In the 1970 Annual Report, the duty of the school is described as focusing the eyes of children on God. The deaf should not forget about Him, no matter what they do (Effatha, 1971). A deaf child should be raised to be a responsible human being, and the child has to be able to be responsible to his or her fellow human beings, but even more to God Himself (Effatha, 1960).

*"The world of the deaf child"* (*“De Wereld van het dove kind”*), a book that was published because on Effatha’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, emphasizes that parents choose a school according to their religious beliefs, because they think this will provide the best support as their children grow into adults (Effatha, 1963a; Effatha, 1975b). Children attending Effatha receive religious education from the age of eight years until graduation. As soon as they have a fundamental understanding of language, they take Bible history classes. Beginning at age 13-14, they attend catechism classes. These are initially taught by a teacher and later on by a pastor (Effatha, 1964).

The most visible examples of the religious character of the institution was the time that is devoted in the curriculum to religious education, the inclusion of

catechism, and the church meetings in the auditorium. Everything that is done in the living and educational environment should, according to the institution, be seen in the light of God's message. There is no clarification as to the specific content of this message (Effatha, 1975a, pp. 4)<sup>8</sup>. In 1975, the Christian Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed church joined forces to supply churches with pastors for the deaf. Each pastor specifically trained to work with the deaf became responsible for ministering to deaf persons of the two aforementioned denominations in a given geographical region, irrespective of which of the churches the deaf individual belonged to (Effatha, 1975a).

Religion is not a subject in the Annual Reports and documents of Guyot. The only thing that was found in that regard is a remark in the Annual Report of 1965. It was noted in that document that religious instruction, until then part of the curriculum and responsibility of the institute, would in the future be a responsibility of the churches within the area (Guyot, 1964).

***Boys and girls together - imagine that!***

The IvD did not mention anything about the segregated lives of the boys and girls in its institution, although a floor map of the building does clearly indicate distinct areas for each gender. A story in the school paper about the unveiling of a statue in the middle of the playground states that this area will no longer be segregated by gender (IvD, 1960b). In the 1960s, the institution thus saw boys and girls as equal, although characterizing males as naturally the stronger sex (IvD, 1960b). At the same time, the IvD counseled parents not to discriminate in the way they raised boys and girls.<sup>9</sup>

In education, boys and girls at the IvD were separated beginning at age 6 (IvD, 1963). The curriculum of the school

differed in a gender-specific way: boys could go to the Technical School and girls to the Nijverheidsschool<sup>10</sup> (IvD, 1963). Girls were prepared to care for their future family and could not participate in 'male' education'. The IvD's 1963 Annual Report refers that girls were requesting educational options beyond sewing and ironing, and the school granted their wishes and added office training to the curriculum for girls (IvD, 1960a). The reason for these forms of segregation is that the institution wanted to avoid early marriages, especially marriages between deaf students, because the risk of inheriting hearing problems was a major concern (IvD, 1963).

Effatha had a strict separation policy between boys and girls in living as well as in studying. In 1962, a new 'boys-flat' opened and the new 'girls-flat' opened in 1968 (Effatha, 1962; Effatha, 1969). In 1964, the separation between the sexes was mentioned at a PTA meeting at the institution and Effatha stated that:

*"Interaction should not be called wrong and should not be discouraged. We should, however, guide them and set ground rules in order to prevent excesses"* (Effatha, 1964, pp. 16). In 1969, parents were described as worrying and asking questions about the contact their child could have with the other sex and the rules that were involved. Effatha responded that these rules were necessary, even though they were different from those in regular schools (Effatha, 1969).

The educational goals were not similar for boys and girls. Boys had to learn craftsmanship skills and girls had to develop caring skills through education. Parents as well as the girls wanted more possibilities and requested programs for occupations such as dog groomer, driver and stable employee (Effatha, 1965). A 1975 report stated that the government had agreed to build a new facility for combined lower education for boys and girls

(Effatha, 1976). In that year, the first combined school trip took place, although boys and girls slept in different hotels and not all activities were mixed (Effatha, 1975a).

A 1964 Guyot document referred to a girls house and a boys house (Guyot, 1964), with a common room for the ‘bigger’ boys and girls. This was mentioned only once, and nothing further was mentioned about interactions between boys and girls until 1987. In that year, a student wrote about her life at the institution: “*First of all one should not forget that, in Group 10, several boys and girls live (...)*” (Guyot, 1987a, pp. 35-36).

The boys went to technical school and the girls to vocational school (Guyot, 1963). In 1977 this changed, when the technical school became available for girls as well (Guyot, 1978). In the 1965 Annual Report, there is a reference to a school trip for both boys and girls to the same location (Guyot, 1965). In 1978, a second school trip is mentioned with the older boys and girls in a mixed group (Guyot, 1978). After 1987, no information about the separation or the mixture of boys and girls is available through the archived documents.

***Let’s talk about sex. Or not?***

Concerning sex education, little was found in the Annual Reports of the institutions. The theme of ‘*being in love and marriage*’ is briefly mentioned in the 1959 Annual Report of the IvD, in terms of development courses for former students, as well as ‘*responsibility for one’s own religious life*’ and ‘*the influence of film*’ (IvD, 1960a, pp. 89).

The term ‘sex education’ is mentioned for the first time in the 1988 Annual Report, in connection with the rise of HIV and AIDS (IvD, 1988). The importance of education regarding this topic was not stressed, because the students were thought of as not being able to completely understand the

information they received on the topic from television or newspapers (IvD, 1988).

The religious background of the institutions plays an important role in the content of the sex education they offer. However, an accurate view of this content cannot be found in the Annual Reports. Effatha began paying attention to sex education and development in the early 1960s. Effatha saw sex education as:

*“The education of mature youth; education about the relations between boys and girls, men and women; education about the relations during engagement; education about preparing for marriage and about marriage itself”* (Effatha, 1962, pp. 20).

Also, sex education is seen as “*confirming what is already “known”*” (Effatha, 1964, pp. 15). However, this does not mean that “*you and your child can start talking about all kinds of things*” (Effatha, 1962, pp. 21). The importance of saying “*no*” in relation to sexuality was stressed, in order to establish clear boundaries (Ibid., 22). Also, the importance of sex education was stressed so that “*the deaf will be less physical than they were until now*” (Effatha, 1963b, pp. 7). Sex education was seen as a tool through which mental and physical development would happen at the same pace. If not, “*an incongruence between mental and physical development*” would occur that might block the transition into adulthood (Effatha, 1963a, 114). No further explanation was given on this topic. Furthermore, the importance of being open when talking about sexuality was discussed. If this did not happen, the child could get confused (Effatha, 1969, pp. 18). Effatha mostly taught sex education in relation to current events (Effatha, 1964, pp. 24). Nothing was said about the nature of these events.

Guyot, in contrast, began specifically discussing sex education as early as the



1980s, in a final report from a workgroup focused on general development. This workgroup organized a special course for deaf parents and former students on providing sex education to their (hearing) children. Furthermore, personal development was discussed in classes. Sex education and “dealing with one’s own body” are a part of this (Guyot, 1980, pp. 11). There is a specific description of the contents of sex education:

*“...making contact, forming relationships and maintaining them, discussing one’s own sexual feelings, birth control, the menstrual cycle, the structure of the reproductive organs, etc.”* (Ibid, 9).

Guyot’s vision on sexuality was clearly stated. Sexual development is seen as an integral part of personal development and consists of two components: the lust principle and inter-human relationships. There are positive comments on sex education within the school, since a lot parents find it troubling to deal with such material at home. This development consists of six parts:

*“sex education and everything to do with it; relationship problems: who am I, who is the other, how do we deal with each other?; heterosexuality, homosexuality etc.; marriage/living together; family planning etc.; and prostitution and pornography”* (Ibid, pp. 12).

This education was given during biology classes and in relation to “current events” (Guyot, 1983, pp. 2). The nature of these events is not addressed.

Sexuality is mentioned in several reports from organizations related to Guyot, however the topic is not mentioned in the Annual Reports until 2002, after Guyot merged with Effatha. Here, sexuality was discussed in relation to a complaint commission on sexual harassment (Stichting Effatha Guyot Zorg, 2003, pp. 5-

6). From 1987 on, sexuality and relationships were topics of interest in the school paper. Topics like having little privacy in the institution were referenced and jokes about women, cheating and sexuality were published (Koninklijke Effatha Guyot Groep, 2005, pp. 20). The Royal Effatha Guyot Group (KEGG) released an official document in which their vision of sexuality was discussed. The KEGG sees sexuality as something that is natural and that contributes to the quality of life. For this reason the organization stresses *“(...) an open climate and positive attitude towards sexuality.”* (KEGG, 2005, pp. 4).

By this they mean that being open is the only way to discuss and prevent sexual abuse and intimidation (Koninklijke Effatha Guyot Groep, n.d.).

The book *Freed from the balloon*<sup>11</sup> by René Fabert deals with his time as a student at the IvD and the sexual abuse he experienced there. He writes that there was no sex education whatsoever offered during his years at IvD:

*“my first introduction to that were the sex games the boys would play in the showers, the only time of the day without supervision”* (Fabert, 2004, pp. 16).

According to Fabert, this led to a great gap in knowledge concerning sexuality, and it created the feeling that *“he had to figure out himself what sexuality was about”* (Ibid). Homosexuality was not a topic of discussion at all, and the values of the Catholic institution were based on “the traditional hetero-thinking and –doing” (Ibid., 33).

### ***The relationship between thoughts on sexuality, sex education and religious background***

Little information was available about the interaction between boys and girls at the

institutions. In the 1960s, there was little contact between boys and girls, and they were kept apart to a certain extent. Due to societal changes, the rules of the institutions were altered later on. The disappearance of compartmentalization and the sexual revolution contributed to this process (Fitz-Gerald & Fitz-Gerald, 1998; Grotenhuis & Sheepers, 2001). In addition, little material about sex education could be found in the consulted documents. This was inconsistent with the strong emphasis on the integration of deaf people into hearing society. For such integration to take place, one has to be prepared for life in the larger community, and sex education is an essential part of this. This lack of education was not solely based on unwillingness, but also on 'a certain fear of the possibilities a deaf person has within himself' (IvD, 1960a, pp. 89). Most likely, the avoidance of sex education for deaf students was based on the thought that people with disabilities are either asexual or hypersexual (Baxter, 2008; Berlo & Put, 2003; McKown & English, 1986).

At the IvD segregation of boys and girls was discussed as early as in the 1960s. On the one hand, it was stated that boys and girls should be treated as equal, while, on the other hand, the opportunities for boys and girls in school differed for quite a long time. During the 1960s, it was generally accepted that girls went to the 'Huishoudschool'<sup>12</sup> before getting married and starting a family afterwards. Boys had more freedom of choice. The general rationale behind these different forms of education are rooted in the policy of the institution. From the age of six years on, boys and girls lived in separate buildings and there was no contact between the sexes. Education was also separated. The reason for this was that marriages between deaf people had to be discouraged. Also, it was thought that children with different religious backgrounds should not be

brought into contact with one another. Religion was thought to be very important and a great deal of the school's aftercare program was related to that.

In the documentation from both religious institutions (i.e., Effatha and the IvD) the institutions claim that student enrollment in their institutions is based on the religious background of parents. However, it is not clear why parents would choose the Guyot Institution in Groningen. This was a public school where religion played no role. A possible explanation might be found in the fact that Guyot was the only option for parents who did not want their deaf child to receive an overtly religious education. Effatha's policy on contact between boys and girls was comparable to the IvD's policy. No contact between boys and girls was allowed. There was not much attention given to parents' concerns about the contacts between boys and girls at school. This means that there was some interaction between boys and girls, but this is not mentioned in official documents. At Effatha, the educational system differed for girls and boys, with practical courses only available for boys. In 1965 parents complained about this, but nothing was done.

Within Guyot, boys and girls lived separated in the 1960s. Yet it is interesting that there was a common room for the older students. This might be explained by the fact that the institution was public instead of religious. Therefore there might have been a different perspective on boy-girl interaction. Nothing is mentioned about boys and girls living together until 1987. In that year, an article was published in the school paper mentioning common living facilities. Nothing is found in the documents from the other institutions, and therefore Guyot probably was the most progressive of the three institutions. Nothing was written about sex education in the Annual Reports, so no comparison can be made concerning this issue.

It is striking that sex education was discussed at Effatha from an early stage, despite the strictly separated living and studying environments. From the 1960s on, sexuality was discussed in several of the school's documents. Sex education was first discussed in detail in the Annual Reports of the IvD in 1998, making clear that this was not seen as a subject with high priority. This is confirmed by René Fabert, who states in his book that there was no sex education whatsoever at the IvD. Because of this, he did not know anything about his own sexuality and, for a long time, he did not recognize the mistreatment he suffered as sexual abuse. Guyot discussed sex education for the first time in detail in the Annual Report of 2002. For this reason, Effatha seems to be the first to mention it in comparison to the other two institutions. The 1980 documents of this latter institution consisted of a final report of a work group on development and education. In this report, one chapter was dedicated to sex education. The topics that were to be discussed within these lessons were explicitly mentioned. The year 1987 was a clear turning point for Guyot. During that year, we see more attention devoted to sex education, and sexuality being discussed in a more casual manner than before. The entire atmosphere surrounding the topic became more relaxed (Guyot, 1987b).

An interesting conclusion is that, in the sources used for this paper, sexuality was mostly discussed in relation to negative experiences, like AIDS and sexual abuse. Whenever an issue like this arose, a great deal of information and educational material suddenly became available. Sex education lessons were given to prevent sexual abuse. Nowhere was sex education mentioned as a preparation for life as a sexual being, in which the students learn how the body works, what one can do with it and how to enjoy it. This clearly shows that sexuality was still surrounded with

taboos in the three settings examined in this paper. In earlier times, these taboos mainly focused on talking about sex, while nowadays the taboos focus on enjoying sex. However, it is widely recognized that sex is an essential part of life, for people with or without a disability.

## Conclusion

The present study attempted to show the relationship between the thoughts and policies on didactic content and the sex education of deaf students from 1960-2000. Based on the findings, one can conclude that a relationship existed between religion and the extent to which sexuality was discussed at the different institutions. Protestant Effatha discussed sexuality first. Guyot followed suit and discussed sexuality in a more explicit manner. The IvD began discussing the topic after the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. It is striking that Effatha, the Protestant institute, discussed sexuality first, instead of the public institute Guyot. However, sexual feelings were discussed at the Guyot Institute, while the other institutions mainly discussed the negative aspects of sex.

Boys and girls were strictly separated at the two religious institutions and this did not change until the end of the twentieth century. Guyot was quite progressive concerning interaction between boys and girls, as reflected in the fact that there were common rooms for the two sexes. This openness might have been responsible for the attention to the positive effects of boy-girl interaction. From a religious point of view, the interaction of boys and girls might have been seen as problematic, and therefore the focus was mainly on the negative aspects of sex in the religious institutions.

The most important conclusion of this study is that the subject of sexuality was

barely discussed in the institutions. There is a noticeable contrast between the number of documents the researchers have read and the amount of information found on the topic. Because of this, no hard conclusion can be drawn from the data, although little information also allows one to draw certain conclusions. Sexuality was not much spoken about. Nowadays most people think that every human being, with or without disability, is entitled to a rich and fulfilling life of which relationships, love and sex are an essential part. Thus, being deaf is not so much seen as a disability anymore, but as a characteristic of a minority group in society.

In the future, research should be conducted to find out whether or not this lack of sex education for deaf students is still present

in nowadays education. If so, interesting would be to find out why this is. The development of learning plans for sex education classes for deaf students will be a big step forward. This research focused primarily on sex education. This subject greatly influences sexual identity and the way one deals with sexuality in general. Future research should focus on the sexual identity of deaf people and the way it relates to their (lack of) sex education. Our most important recommendation is that research should focus on the ideas deaf people themselves have about sexuality. Such research might allow us to discover solutions that work for these people and that might enrich their lives.

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**Notes**

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- <sup>2</sup> “Koninklijke instituut voor Doven “H.D. Guyot”<sup>2</sup> referred to as Guyot in this article.
- <sup>3</sup> “Schoolstrijd” can be translated as “school controversy”.
- <sup>4</sup> “Protestant-Christelijke Instituut voor Doven Effatha”<sup>4</sup>, referred to as Effatha in this article.
- <sup>5</sup> “Kinderwetten” can be translated as children laws.
- <sup>6</sup> “Special education”, referring to schools for children with disabilities, learning- or behavioral problems.
- <sup>7</sup> The first step is ‘open coding’ in which the text will be split up into rough categories. The second step is ‘axial coding’ in which several categories will be put together. The final step is ‘selective coding’ in which, again, categories will be put together to create some general codes that represent the findings.
- <sup>8</sup> “*Building on your future, your family, the community with all the people that believe. This is how to find a place in the big world. A world that will give problems, problems with the associations between deaf and hearing people as well. but when you know God, you know you are not alone. People who know God know they can pray for help and strenght, and knows that there are others to accept Gods message. This is how we can work together in Gods Kingdom*” (Effatha, “Effathablad”, 1975, nr. 5, 14)
- <sup>9</sup> “*Be fair and unbiased...don't treat the girl with different values than the ones you have for a boy*” (IvD, 1960b, pp. 20).
- <sup>10</sup> Nijverheidsschool can be translated as ‘school for diligence’
- <sup>11</sup> The original title of the book ‘Freed from the balloon’ is ‘Bevrijd uit de ballon’
- <sup>12</sup> “Huishoudschool” can be translated as domestic science school.