

Interviewee	Interviewer	Monastery	Date of interview	Keywords
Brechtje ¹	Fenna Ijtsma	-	July 9, 2020	Nyang'oma; speech therapy

Brechtje went to Nyang'oma (Kenya) to work as a speech therapist in the primary school for the deaf. She was involved in speech therapy classes. Her husband also travelled to Nyang'oma for duties. Brechtje stayed in Kenya for 9 months because of illness.

- What is now known as PABO², was formally known as a nursery school. Well, then I started working in deaf education. That was all with religious pupils and teachers. Boys and girls had separate departments. Anyway. That was fun, I really liked doing that, I thought it was fantastic. Because you could develop things, so I gave individual speech therapy. And what I said: So, there were also a lot of foreigners visiting, we also had special visiting weeks. Those weeks were three times a year and then people who were involved in deaf education came from all over the world, also a lot from developing countries. They came over to see what we were doing.
- Brechtje and her husband had to get married in the church before they could stay on the campus in Nyang'oma.

Q: At that nursery school you were not specifically trained for deaf education, huh?

A: There were special education courses. Also, one about teaching the deaf. That was the A-course (two years) and then the B course, also lasted two years. Then you learned all kinds of aspects of deafness and deaf education and so on.

Q: Can you give an example?

A: For example, things about audiology, hearing aids, and how to use them. And further, about language development in particular. That was really the most important topic. Language development. So then at least you got an explanation about what aspects language has. But the most important thing was "how does language develop in children". It turned out that the interaction with their mother was extremely important.

A: It was an eye-opener: "yes, that's how it happens". And then you did indeed start observing mothers with young children and then you did indeed see that a child said something like "ah, ah, ah" and then the mother knew about "oh, you want that" and what the child wanted to say was then translated by the mother into good Dutch and then that mother responded. Well, we called that a conversation. And that's why we introduced the conversation method at the institute. That means that you really entered into a dialogue with a child. And that you realized that was the basis for language development. And then we looked at which phases you all have, so at some point you did not really improve or something, because then you knew: "oh, this is part of that phase". For example, when it comes to the development of phonetics, the development of speech sounds, there is simply an order. As long as a child cannot say the G or the K in a manner of speaking, they will use the T or something. And then you said that in the correct form, but you are not really going to improve them. So that was really a very specific

¹ The name of the interviewee is anonymized, just as the name of her partner Harm. Both their first names and surnames are known by the researchers. For contact details:

www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/victoria-nyst#tab-1

² Pedagogische academie voor het basisonderwijs – *pedagogical academy for primary education*

approach. And because we therefore language development in young children [...], that was really 1-on-1, a lot, so we went to individual speaking education.

Q: So, this conversation-method was explicitly meant for deaf children?

A: Yes, actually it was the ordinary approach, following the normal development and also the technique in it, what mothers did with their children ... We also call it the mother tongue method, the conversation method ... Follow naturally, because it is most effective. Because children are all born languageless. And when they are four, they can already speak properly and express themselves well, and so on, eh. Hearing children. Well, with deaf children you expect that to slow down, so you assumed that, but hearing aids were also very important there. So, then the development in hearing aids came up. So that's why we had our own audiologist, hearing care professionals, well, people who could keep up with hearing aids. But it was just basic that a child received a hearing aid as early as possible and that it was also used in education. Well, at that speaking education, which was 15-20 minutes a day, the child had on headphones so that the sound of the spoken language came in as directly as possible. You were talking together. It was not really practicing, it was really talking together, having a conversation. And then gibberish exercises, which you did of course to get the voice good and beautiful and to train a little rhythm. So that was all there, of course.

Q: Was there a clear difference between children with and without residual hearing?

A: That was really something you did right away: When the child came in, he was given headphones, his own equipment, "wha-wha-wha, can you hear it?" Yes, that was also a part; hearing training.

Q: Part of...what?

A: Part of the approach, at the entire institute, it started in toddlers. Those children had hearing training sessions, too, also in group. They also had music education, which was quite special.

Q: Why music education?

A: Because children could express themselves in that way, but also indeed for the hearing part. In a certain way it also stimulated the hearing. We then used, as we called it, the residual hearing, to exploit it to the best of our ability. We had a special music Sister, yes.

Q: And those children who were completely deaf, how did you deal with that?

A: Well, that was mainly lip reading alone. However, only a very small percentage of children were completely deaf. There is almost always some residual hearing. And that's why an audiologist, who was able to measure that well, is important. And then the teachers and the parents must help to develop the residual hearing as much as possible.

- In that time, I think that is also important to emphasize, we then started inclusive education, integration. So, I was the first to be involved in that kind of thing. That a child would then go to school in the home town, in Waspik was the first child for a while, and he went to school and we went on ambulatory basis from the institute: Guiding the child in the home situation and in mainstream school.

Q: How did you end up in Kenya?

A: Well, I told you about those visiting weeks, right? And on such a visit week Sister Laetitia and another sister of that Order, that was the Franciscan, came over. They took a speech therapy class and then Sister Laetitia said, "That's just what we need in Nyang'oma! Just what we need!" Harm and I were working on the Dutch Volunteer Foundation. Around that time, a lot of young people started working in developing countries. Then you indeed had the Dutch

Volunteer Foundation and then you could go to some developing country on the basis of expense allowance. And we were doing that because we both wanted, if we were married, say, to go to a developing country... Or, we shouldn't have married at all [laughs], but we wanted to go to a developing country. So, I said "Well, I'm dating and I actually want to go". And then she said, "Yes, what does Harm do?" I replied, "Well, he's a teacher of technical education, metal education." "A gift from God! A gift from God! Because Miserior has promised us 100,000 guilders to build a school, a technical school, but then we need to have a qualified teacher who can become a director". So, that was a win-win situation [...] Well, then we went to England at the expense of the Congregation for three months to learn English. Because the educational language in Kenya was English. We worked in the hospital there for three months: Salisbury Hospital...

About visiting the school for the deaf in Sint Michielsgestel

- Many requests came from foreign people who want to visit the school
- Our reputation was very good, even internationally. Because of all requests, we set up 'visiting weeks'. People were allowed to come over in groups to visit classes (e.g., music education or speech therapy)
- Mostly people who were involved in deaf education
- People came from Europe, Asia, India, Vietnam...
- African Sisters and Brothers also came by, also the Dutch one who lived in Africa (mission)
 - Like Sister Laetitia

Q: And then Kenya. How did you experience your arrival?

A: That was a culture shock. Really. Like, everyone was black and tropical weather. All huts you saw, that was really... And that at a certain moment you realize, if you haven't got anything, you have nothing. Because yes, some people had nothing at all. Then we came at the mission post, Nyang'oma, and that was just a little paradise. And because we would be there for at least 2.5 years, they were building a house for us. We had a nice house there. Further, you had schools with a boarding school, you could almost say that was a campus, which was almost always busy. Only during holidays, it was deserted. Teachers also had a house there or a hut there or something. And everyone knew each other there. It was very social. Fun and yet almost inclusive. You were just part of it.

Q: Did you experience a difference between Kenyan people, like teachers, and the European Sisters?

A: Yes, yes. There was a difference. In that time frame, religious people had higher status than non-religious people.

Q: How did you notice?

A: Uh. Those are just the manners and the obvious way... Yes, we had... I find that very difficult to point. Because they were not really authoritarian figures. It was a little bit two way, of how they looked at each other. Because I know, Harm and I did not want a worker/cleaner. Because, we thought that was a bit ... We just did not want that difference.

Q: What became your task at school?

A: The development of speech education. That conversation method, I mentioned before. And then you saw... Because I found that interesting, that it was not quite the same as in the Netherlands, that there was much less communication with children anyway. But if you

observe well, you see the same patterns. For example, a Kenyan mother was stirring in a jar, a little child came by, and then there was something of a conversation.

A: We used this example every time: 'look, there are so many moments in a day that you are actually unconsciously communicating with a child, talking, say, if you do that with a deaf child well consciously, that you ensure that 'he can see you well and so on, then that will help'.

Q: *Was it a boarding school?*

A: Yes. Deaf children came from everywhere. Those parents were not involved. We used parents of hearing children as a role model for the staff to show them how to communicate with a deaf kid. It was important that the deaf children could communicate with the staff on the campus.

Q: *You came to Kenya to teach language classes and speech therapy. How was the education given before you arrived?*

A: Well, those were classes too. Yes, there were children in a class with their peers and they were taught: to speak; math; language; reading ...

Q: *Was it specifically designed for deaf children?*

A: Yes. Yes, the classrooms were smaller than usual. At that time, the consequences of hearing impairment and deafness were not taken into account so much.

A: Because learning in regular education was not possible, a child could not follow anything: If you were in the classroom, well, then the teacher was standing with their back turned a bit or there was just a lot of talking, then you cannot follow it as a deaf child. There was much more attention for this in deaf education.

Q: *What about equipment? Were there devices?*

A: Yes, they just started to use hearing tools.³

Q: *What was the most important thing to teach them?*

A: Well. Expose them [to sounds] as early as possible so they can get used to it and learn how to process it, that is important. Also, the quality of the equipment [...] children themselves also state of 'hey, now I hear nothing because it is off or is broken, or ...'. But also, the adjustment, because the hearing loss is so different in children, it varies from mildly hard of hearing to completely deaf. And everything in between. You have higher and lower tones. Anyway, I don't have to tell all that of course. So, the adjustment is very, very important that it goes well. So, audiologists are also involved, audiologists. And indeed sponsors of course, eh. It is indeed true that the Netherlands sponsors quite a bit, yes.

Q: *What was the age of the students?*

A: When we were there, 50 years ago, the youngest children were 6 years old since they had to be potty trained. To work with younger children is so 'hopeless'. Now, they [Kenya?] have so-called *Early Intervention Centers (EIRCs)*. When parents think "hey, there is something wrong" that they can go there immediately. Then the children are examined and diagnosed, say. These have all been great developments. Because to answer your question, at the time those youngest children were about 6 years old and they stayed until middle school age, the household school and then that craft school, technical school.

Q: *What were the future perspectives for those students?*

A: Well, I think, as it was for non-deaf children, it also depended a little on "where do you end up" and what education can your parents afford. But I think it was a lot of agriculture and just a bit of the primary work.

Q: *But, do you know whether the Sisters had ideas about that?*

³ Provided by Ierdrop: see final page for further explanation about the organization

A: Well, of course they had: the same as what has been here in the Netherlands for a while. Girls just get married and then they have children and then they have to do all kinds of work. But a career, that was not a perspective.

Q: *But not so much because they were deaf, but more because they were women, perhaps?!*

A: Yes, yes. Anyway, we also had boys, huh, it wasn't a school for just girls. And those guys who got tailor training, carpenter training, afterwards I think car mechanics, metal...

Q: *Have you been able to transfer your work?*

A: Well, in so far of course that I have briefly been a role model with regard to that conversation method/language development. But yes, that is really... Because the Sisters were already working on it, otherwise they would not have asked if I came over there. However, in the end Nyang'oma has not become as good as, for example, Mumias and a few other schools for the deaf.

Q: *Why do you think that?*

A: I wouldn't know that. I just think of what kind of people are still there... Also of course, what role has the government played. That's all important, isn't it.

Q: *What made those other schools better than Nyang'oma?*

A: At least the people who were in charge. In Mumias...I think about...I forgot her name... Well, they were just some sort of soul mates. She also thought it was so much fun and so interesting, so you could transfer that. Afterwards, she continued with that. Also, she has been in the Netherlands regularly.

Q: *Who?*

A: That person from Mumias' [laughs]. Because then at some point that team was established from Ierdrop, so say, so from ... Then we had a discussion about that and then I said 'you have to make sure that you have two centers, so you can develop in specializing. And it has to be in two places in Kenya'. So, one has become Nairobi, the Nairobi hospital. There was also an audiologist: Paulien Joho [?], She later became Fred's wife... Amusa [?], Now I remember [the name of the aforementioned woman from Mumias]. So, I said "well, then you have to do Mumias", because they already had an early guidance center and they were really developing. Then you can also get people there, so they can see how it works in practice

Q: *Sign language was no option during your time in Nyang'oma, right?*

A: No, no. Look, sign language is of all times with deaf people. That's kind of a natural thing. But yes, because that is not a written language, all written language is based on spoken language, it was already very difficult. Then you could only work with concepts. A certain kind of gesture, you could have a written word with it, but really if you want someone to learn to read well, then you have to master that language. Besides that, in that time they want to offer everyone the same as many as possible. All of which differ that ... No.

Q: *Is that the inclusive character?*

A: Yes, yes. If you want to be part of the society, it is important to know the language. That is also in St. Michielsgestel, then you get bilingualism. Then sign language is always offered alongside Dutch. Because you live in the Netherlands and you have to be able to read and write here. So, you have two languages: Dutch Sign Language and spoken Dutch.

Q: *What do you think about these developments?*

A: My opinion: "things go the way they do". If you support an idea, you need to have good arguments and you should be able to tell them. It doesn't mean that if you are in favor of something, you are opposed to something else. And that was a great pity in the discussion between, say, Dutch and Sign Language. That was completely played off against each other.

What used to be discussed about religions, you now got into these things. I thought that was nonsense. But yes...

Q: What exactly was the contradiction?

A: Well, for example, if you are in favor of the development of spoken language, and I am a big supporter of it, still, you have to be very committed to it. That does not mean that you say "I am against sign language". You only say "sign language causes delay in the development of spoken language", because they are two very different things.

A: But we learned of this: if two parents offer two different spoken languages, like the father always talks French and the mother always offers Dutch, you get a bilingual child. So, if you have a deaf parent using sign language and a parent who uses spoken language in interaction, the child becomes bilingual too.

Q: How do you look back on the school? Especially on the language teaching that was there. How do you look back on the way they approached that? The congregation in Kenya.

A: I have to say, I had a lot of respect for that. Because it varies from person to person, he had really nice, brilliant people who were really good at it. Of course, you just had people who... But that is everywhere. But the approach, it was very clear. It was the thought: "A child should learn to speak, read, write and so on as best as possible to get as far as possible". And there was no discussion about that either. So, everyone was going the same way. And that does have many advantages.

Q: Was that also the case for the African teachers?

A: Yes. And of course, one was more convinced that it was also possible for children and the other was more of "yes, be a bit realistic, come on". Nor was it the same for all children. But I found ... Yes, also the atmosphere and all that. I look back on it positively.

A: The only thing for us, I must say, is more of a personal note... A bit difficult for us was the religion. Because we were a bit more anti-authoritarian, and, well, the Catholic Faith, especially that congregation, was a bit more "so and so it is". And... Yes, I don't know if I can actually say that... But we also had the idea that: The more people identified with the church, the better they were helped and guided. For us, that was kind of like "not everyone is equal, it also depends on how Catholic I am". And that has also been a reason for us to leave the church.

Q: Really. And that is really based on your experiences in Kenya...

A: Yes. Beforehand we were already in doubt: "Are we going to get married in the church?" Because yes ... And officially Christianity preaches equality, brotherhood and so on. And they have also raised a lot of things to help people to develop. That is all true. But it was still, it had to be within a certain framework. We had the feeling, huh. Something you can't fully prove, but that was a reason for us to say "no, we don't want to belong to the Catholic Church."

Q: Could you give an explicit example?

A: No, I can't. It was interwoven.

Q: Yes, but do you find the principle of those congregations there and the fact that they are missionaries...

A: Well, they had a mission to convert as many people as possible to Christianity, or to the Catholic Church. That was... And I think, in that respect, they approached it very well, because they matched people's basic needs. But I don't know ... It was that you overhear a conversation, for example, when the Father said "I haven't seen you in church for a long time" to someone. And then... yes. Because they depended on water supplies (what was provided by the mission post), I sometimes had the feeling that there was a hidden message like: "yes,

you have to come to church, too". But that's just an idea, huh. I'm not saying it is. But in any case, it happened to us that way. But yes, we came from the '60s...

Q: But then I think: What do you dislike? Is that the fact that they preach equality but don't show equality in their behavior? Or is it because they want to bring Catholicism into a different culture?

A: Well, you can have your doubts about that anyway, whether it was a good idea. Because I mean, just look at how we view Islam when people start to mission here, say, from the mosque. But at a certain point I also think that in missionary work, and that was their main task, I think, that indeed there is an abuse of power. Some kind of bribe or I don't know what. No, we didn't like that. We would never say it in a lifetime, I once wanted to become a Sister when I was religious. That was probably because I wanted to work in education, but that's another story.

About Ierdrop

- Ierdrop is an organization that started out from ENT doctors who formed a group, and started to distribute hearing aids. At some point you conclude that it is not like "give your child a hearing aid, then he can hear and develop well", that is not the case. Most children were already "numb". They received the device too late to benefit. So, at one point those ENT doctors said "yes, we need people to train those children, like rehabilitation". Then training started
- Ierdrop was mainly Kenyan. However, there were also Dutch people involved. At some point, a kind of "education-rehabilitation group" joined Ierdrop. This was to train people to develop. Because yes, again, it is not like "here you have a hearing aid and then it all goes by itself".