VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Report on a survey of

Deaf Paraprofessionals'

Perspectives on Mainstream Learning Contexts for Deaf students in New Zealand

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1.0 Introduction

The Deaf community in New Zealand is emerging from a century of oral education in residential schools and units for deaf children. This oralist tradition has essentially continued through the increasingly prevalent practice of enrolling individual deaf children in mainstream schools with ancillary support. In this context, Deaf people have only recently entered professional and paraprofessional roles as educators in the last five to ten years. Smith's (2003) recent survey of Deaf people working in deaf education reported 48 Deaf people employed in educational roles; of these, eight hold paraprofessional[1] roles specifically designed to support mainstreamed deaf students. This small group are known as 'Deaf Mentors' or 'Deaf Resource Persons'. A further 13 Deaf people are employed by the Deaf Education Centres as Teacher Aides within Deaf Units, and two in mainstream classes[2]. 'Language Assistants' are another new category of deaf paraprofessionals employed in deaf education, however since they mainly work in deaf schools or units, they are not included in this study which focuses specifically on mainstream schools.

This paper reports on a study of Deaf paraprofessionals working in mainstream settings, which aimed to investigate:

a) the nature of their work
b) how they perceive themselves to fit professionally and culturally into the educational context
c) their perceptions of the current learning situation for deaf students in mainstream schools
d) their views on how the above might be improved

This investigation was an outgrowth of a larger study of communication access and learning outcomes for mainstreamed deaf students, which comprised six case studies of deaf students in mainstream primary school classrooms, and written surveys of national samples of parents, mainstream teachers, itinerant teachers of the deaf, and teacher aides. The views of parents, mainstream teachers, teachers of the deaf and the observational classroom data were found to concur in some areas, and in other respects revealed discordant perceptions (between and within groups) about how effectively deaf students were accessing education in the mainstream.

Interviews with deaf paraprofessionals during the case studies revealed that they held particular perspectives on these students' learning situations that were distinctive from other parties. Deaf people are a 'new' voice in the educational context and passionately regard themselves to be key stakeholders in deaf education. Having personally experienced the journey and outcomes of deaf education in its various forms, and being members of the community which many deaf students will eventually join, they can be said to have an 'insider' perspective on the situations they observe. Conversely, being newcomers to formal roles in the educational context and operating outside the 'culture' of deaf education professionals, they also bring an outsider perspective to their encounters

[1] Paraprofessional is used here to mean a role which does not require evidence of professional training or qualification.
[2] Other mainstream schools may independently employ Deaf persons as Teacher Aides, but these numbers are not known.

with current systems, practices and situations in deaf education. Their dual insight into deaf students as learners in mainstream schools was thus considered important to explore within this project. [3]

2.0 Research procedure

2.1 Participants

Eight Deaf people took part in this survey - six of whom were employed in 'Deaf Mentor' or 'Deaf Resource Person' roles, and two as Teacher Aides (one of whom had formerly been a Deaf Mentor). Distance and time constraints prevented the inclusion of two other potential Deaf Mentor participants. Participants represented all regions of New Zealand (northern, central, and southern) and worked in both metropolitan and provincial/rural areas. All participants were users of NZSL, and four of the eight were bilingual in spoken English and NZSL, moving easily between oral and signed communication. Seven of the eight had experienced some mainstream schooling themselves, most having also attended a deaf unit or deaf school for part of their education. Only one had exclusively attended a deaf school, and only one (from a Deaf family, but considered to have too much hearing for deaf school) had been exclusively mainstreamed. The age of participants ranged from early twenties, to approximately fifty. Five of the eight participants had a deaf sibling, and a sixth had deaf parents, sibling and other relatives. This statistic about the first cohort of deaf people in paraprofessional educator roles is interesting: it may reflect the relative educational and social advantage that often accrues to deaf people with deaf family members.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

Data was collected by interview in six cases and by an e-mailed questionnaire for two participants. Semi-structured, videotaped interviews lasting approximately an hour were conducted in NZSL by the hearing researcher who is fluent in NZSL and is personally known to all participants. The written questionnaire contained the same questions as the interview schedule (see Appendix A).

Interviews were not transcribed in full, but summary paraphrases and quotations were translated for each question of each interview. These interview notes and written questionnaire responses were then collated across all participants, and recurring themes found in responses to each question (or set of related questions) were identified and coded. Thematic analysis proceeded from groupings of ideas emerging from the data. The analytic approach aimed to achieve a qualitative understanding of participants' experiences and views, rather than a quantitative profile of responses to questions. The data are therefore reported and discussed in a descriptive manner, illustrated by direct quotations from the respondents (translated by the researcher in most cases).

[3] Themes that emerged from observed interaction in the classroom data accord more closely with the perceptions of Deaf paraprofessionals than with the perceptions of any of the other groups surveyed. This could be a product of the interpretive lens through which that qualitative data was analysed (i.e. the author's), or may reflect the fact that Deaf people are more acutely attuned to the communication and cultural realities of situations that Deaf students face, which they have personally experienced in similar 'language immersion' situations throughout their lives.

There was a high degree of consistency between participants' responses, despite a range of personal backgrounds in terms of age, education, and cultural/linguistic profile. This level of agreement suggests that the sample provide a fairly representative, or at least consistent, picture of deaf paraprofessionals' experiences and views on the current situation for mainstreamed deaf students across New Zealand.

3.0 The nature of Deaf Mentors' work

3.1 Roles, responsibilities, and employment conditions

Three different job titles – 'Deaf Resource Person', 'Deaf Mentor', and 'Deaf Instructor'- were held by participants performing essentially the same itinerant role. Two other participants with a different role are employed as a Teacher Aide for particular students in different mainstream schools. [4] For ease of reference in this paper, participants will be referred to collectively as 'Deaf Mentors' because this is the most recently evolved job title for the position held by most of the group,) and also because it best captures the essence of the role as identified in this study. It is also the only title originated by Deaf people .

The roles and tasks of Deaf Mentors are many and varied. Their work is mainly in the form of one-to-one contact with individual deaf students, at times in the presence of another adult (typically the teacher aide) or selected hearing classmates. They work on an itinerant basis, visiting deaf students usually in schools and sometimes their homes at intervals ranging from weekly or more often, to monthly to approximately once a term, while other students are seen only upon request for intervention when specific issues arise. All Deaf Mentors cover a large geographical distance, regularly travelling away from home overnight to cover their caseload. Most are employed less than full-time, averaging 20 hours per week. The two Deaf teacher aides were also employed 15 – 20 hours per week.

The range of roles and responsibilities they describe are summarised in order of emphasis in the data:

- **Language model**: modelling and fostering NZSL as first or second language for deaf students, with a focus on building competence in basic vocabulary, grammar, and discourse skills (such as conversation). This is carried out through conversation, rather than through structured teaching.
- **Social and cultural role model/advisor**: fostering self-awareness and a sense of deaf cultural identity in deaf students, and promoting appropriate interpersonal behaviours (starting from conversational communication skills). As with the language modelling role, Deaf Mentors incorporate this function into spontaneous conversation and discussion with students.

[4] These participants were included because they were working directly in mainstream classes and were therefore considered to have experiences and views relevant to the research questions, and they were available for interview. Also, one of the Teacher Aides had recently been employed for a year as a Deaf Mentor and so was able to speak from experience in both roles.

Participants also report being called upon to intervene directly or to advise other staff when 'behaviour problems' arise at school or at home.

- **Teach deaf studies:** as an extension of promoting deaf identity, most participants report some activities aimed at making deaf culture more explicit - such as NZSL storytelling, sharing of life experiences, and teaching signs and 'deaf awareness' to hearing students and teachers.
- **Assist deaf student with class work**, especially reading. This often happens when the teacher aide and teacher are unable to convey a teaching point or to assess the child's understanding of concepts through verbal or written means. This kind of assistance or intervention was also described in terms of supporting teacher aides by modelling deaf communication and teaching strategies for them.
- **Teach NZSL** to hearing teachers/advisors of the deaf (in professional development sessions), and to parents – usually informally, in a home situation.
- **Home visits:** giving advice to parents and providing a role-model for the deaf child; for example, modelling effective communication strategies, talking to parents about deaf adult life and their child's future, or acting as an interpreter or facilitator between parent and child when they face communication difficulties in discussing specific issues such as behaviour expectations, or puberty.
- **Participate in regional 'Keep in Touch' (KIT) days**: taking part in, and/or leading collective activities organised once per term for regional groupings of mainstreamed deaf students. Deaf Mentors saw their role in KIT days as encouraging deaf students to develop bonds with deaf peers and to develop skills for communicating with other deaf people. They noted this as an opportunity for the 'oral' students to be exposed to a deaf adult role model, with whom they would not normally have contact through school visits, (as discussed in Section 3.3).
- **Support deaf pre-school play groups**: some Deaf Mentors are involved with play groups where they can informally model deaf communication strategies to mothers, and interact directly with deaf infants and toddlers through informal play and early literacy activities.
- **Interpret speech and translate print in class** – this is most frequent in the case of deaf teacher aides with positions based in a mainstream classroom where they support one student throughout the day. Deaf teacher aides report that they 'interpret' by watching the teacher and lip-reading what they can, reading what is written on the board and using their own knowledge to convey key information during class instruction. They often translate print into NZSL while doing deskwork with the student.

This list of responsibilities shows that scope of Deaf Mentors' work is both deep and wide. They describe their role as addressing linguistic, social, emotional, educational, and cultural needs of deaf students, often in the perceived absence of other adequate input in these areas (i.e. 'filling gaps', or providing remedial input). Their primary concern is the development of language and communication skills appropriate to a deaf person, along with fostering identity and self-esteem based on self-knowledge; from a deaf–world perspective, deaf mentors observe both language and self-esteem to be typically under-developed in the students they visit.

Support for academic learning is also implicit in their role, but this is more often provided indirectly through input to teacher aides, mainstream teachers and teachers of the deaf, by informally modelling a deaf approach to instruction, or providing a deaf perspective on dealing with learning and behaviour problems that arise in the classroom. In the view of Deaf mentors, such issues are typically related to communication barriers or the hearing parties' lack of insight into deaf experience.

Deaf mentors act as educators for a wide range of target audiences– including deaf students (from infants to adolescents), hearing students, parents , teacher aides and mainstream teachers who usually have little knowledge about deafness, as well as specialist teachers and advisors who have professional training grounded in an orientation which differs markedly from the Deaf mentor's own experience. They interact with these various groups in a range of setting*s* including mainstream schools (inside and outside of regular classrooms), informal pre-school settings, families' homes, deaf units, professional development contexts, and outings.

3.2 Training and supervision of Deaf paraprofessionals

Due to the newness of their positions, none of the participants had specific pre-service training for their work; geographical spread also allows little opportunity to work with or observe others working in similar role. Participants described their skills as being mainly developed intuitively and in response to the situations they encounter on the job. Four of the deaf mentors had previously worked as a teacher aide or language assistant in a deaf unit, four had experience teaching NZSL to adults, while three had no previous experience of working in an educational setting. All but one of the participants had, at their own initiative, taken courses in the programme 'Certificate in Deaf Studies: Teaching NZSL' at Victoria University of Wellington, either prior to or after their appointment to the mentor position. Several had received financial support from their employer to do so. Although this qualification is not specifically tailored to their job, participants found that courses on Deaf Culture, NZSL Linguistics, Language Learning, and Second Language Teaching provided relevant preparation for their work.

While the positive side of working in a newly forged role is individual scope for shaping the job itself and the development of intuitive skills, Deaf mentors unanimously identify a need for training to equip them for some fundamental aspects of the work, as these comments express:

> *I know I need more skills for this job – I have training and experience teaching NZSL to adults, but teaching children is completely new to me – I often feel unsure about what I'm doing.*

> *Sometimes in (IEP) meetings when I am asked specific questions, I'm not sure what to say as I am not a qualified teacher - I need to be careful, I need more training. I'm asked questions about oralism, communication, NZSL, T.C., English, or Reading Recovery - but I'm not a*

Reading Recovery teacher. I'm willing to explain what I can, but I can't explain everything they ask.

Since taking up their position, all had attended intensive professional development sessions offered during school holidays by their employers, the two Deaf Education centres. They clearly valued these opportunities to work with colleagues in professional development activities, and particularly emphasised the value of sharing experiences with other Deaf people in the same position. However there was some dissatisfaction with employment conditions that do not include a break in the school holidays, to which professional teachers are entitled. All mentioned some sense of 'burn-out', especially as the training sessions during school breaks normally entail a residential week away from home, which takes a toll on personal life and family commitments.

Due to the regional and itinerant nature of these positions, deaf mentors feel themselves to work with a high degree of autonomy and little regular supervision. Other than professional development sessions, most report contact with their employer (a DEC) once or twice per year for appraisal, and by occasional email for specific advice (although as one respondent commented, this is only possible for those who are confidently literate). Deaf mentors report varying amounts of contact with a local Itinerant teacher of the Deaf (ITOD) and/or an Advisor on Deaf Children with whom their caseload overlaps. This avenue of potential support was dependent on the hearing professionals' perceived level of interest in the deaf mentor's role, and their degree of cultural and linguistic comfort in interacting with a Deaf adult (as discussed in Section 4.0).

I work by myself. I wish to have other Deaf staff around working for Deaf education to share about our values.

It's very isolating because although I do share a lot with two ITODS in my area who are really supportive, I can't fully open up about everything because there are some sensitive issues that relate to their colleagues– which of course I can't discuss with them. Really the job is quite isolating.

Contact with ITODS and Advisors was described as centering around scheduling of visits and administrative matters rather than providing supervision that addresses content issues about mentors' work with students. Planning and reporting were identified by some participants as functions in which they would appreciate more structured support at times.

Deaf mentors try to maintain informal contact with deaf peers in the same role, albeit at a distance; all expressed a desire for supervision (and training) by a deaf professional, whom they believe would bring relevant insight and enrichment to guiding their work with deaf students.

Without having other deaf people there… it's hard to tell how you are doing, whether you are doing things right or not … Like having an appraisal. If I was around other deaf people, we could work together…

I need training, by way of observing other Deaf instructors like they have in Tasmania.

Deaf mentors place a strong value on sharing information and learning cooperatively with other Deaf staff, with whom they share a mutual sense of purpose, and a feeling of being on the same wavelength, as described by these participants:

We help each other. When I need support [the deaf mentor from an adjoining region] will come up and work with me – I feel comfortable, we support each other, share ideas and our different perspectives. When I observe how she teaches I learn new ways to do things, it's like - "Oh - that's how you do it!'"

The comments above indicate that Deaf paraprofessionals (somewhat like many of the students they work with), experience some sense of cultural and professional isolation within the mainstream education context due to their scarcity, unique role, autonomous mode of working, and communication barriers.

3.3 Contact with parents

Most Deaf mentors reported limited contact with parents of deaf students; they are not routinely introduced to parents by advisors or teachers, although some are asked to visit families. For example, one participant had met only four out of 30 sets of parents on his caseload, while others reported self-initiated contact through attendance at a preschool group or at Keep in Touch days. Most are not regularly involved in IEP meetings which parents attend. However some mentors do make home visits on a regular or 'as-needed' basis. The better 'speakers' are more likely to work directly with parents than deaf mentors who are predominantly signers. A possible factor here is the lack of interpreter provision, and another is deaf mentors' perception that many parents do not want their child to have contact with a signing deaf adult, as this participant explained:

"[whether I have contact with parents] *is parental choice, which the itinerants have to respect. It's not easy for me to get to parents at all and that's why it's good for me to work with whole classes where there is one deaf child. In that situation I can still do some work with the deaf child even though it's not one to one – which the parents don't want because they think I will sign to the child… These parents only want the itinerant to be working one to one with the deaf child. It's funny the way they think. I don't understand it."*

It is perhaps cyclical that parents' lack of personal contact with role models such as deaf mentors contributes to their anxiety about having a deaf person work with their child at school.

Those mentors who do home visiting describe it as an important opportunity to share information about being deaf, and to assist parents with communication skills that can enhance their relationship with their child, as this participant outlined:

> "*I tell them about myself, as a deaf adult, and we talk about their child. I talk about what it's like for a deaf person in the home, which is new information for many parents. I have to get to know the family first before I start making suggestions about their home and their ways of doing things. They have to get to know me, have that rapport there – that's what I believe, and I have to respect their culture. When I return on subsequent visits I will start talking about things around the house but my main focus is the child – how do they communicate? What difficulties are they having? I might ask simple questions about their friends and who they play with – are they deaf or hearing? They may indicate that the child is not happy and I'll talk to them about it. After a while they'll start asking me questions on their own, and I try to answer in a way that is helpful. I often tell them about my own experiences and how I did things. Parents realise that their children are capable too. I communicate with them by writing, and a bit of signing too. Most of the time the fathers aren't involved – they go off to another room.*"

3. 4 Caseloads of deaf mentors: profile of students and selection issues

Deaf mentors report caseloads varying from six to 30 students, depending on the size of their region, the intensity of contact with each student, and the extent to which their involvement is encouraged by deaf education professionals. For some students, the deaf mentor is clearly an integral part of the child's regular support team, while for many others, the deaf mentor's input is an 'occasional extra'.

Deaf mentors work with children aged from pre-schoolers in play groups through to senior high school students. Most also work with students with additional characteristics such as autism, CHARGE syndrome, cerebral palsy, and ESOL home backgrounds. They described working with a lot of students who have limited or delayed language competence (in either NZSL or English) and significantly delayed literacy skills. Some felt that they were specifically assigned to work with a disproportionate number of such students as a remedial measure: *"If there's a student with limited language, I'm put with them. That's what I've noticed in my work"*. Some participants also noted that they seem to work with a higher proportion of minority background students: *"What I find is that I get most of the Maori and Pacific Island students. These are the students I most frequently visit"*. These two student characteristics often overlap, in terms of educational disadvantage.

A Deaf mentors' involvement with a student is initiated by the request of an ITOD or an advisor on deaf children (who are invariably hearing), or occasionally by a parent. The question of how students are selected to receive visits from Deaf mentors was contentious for a number of participants. They reported that typically, the students referred to them are those identified as 'signers', or students who

are oral but with poor communication skills for whom the parents, ITOD or the student have expressed an interest in learning NZSL. Deaf mentors also commented that overall the proportion of deaf children in mainstream schools who use sign language (and with whom they thus have regular contact) is very small. Some Deaf mentors who themselves are predominantly signers accept that the referral of only signing students is logical or inevitable, as expressed in this comment:

> *"I only work with signing students – I can't work with the oral ones as I'm a signer. I can't force them to sign. The ITOD introduced me initially to the oral students, but I was not requested to work with them. I feel it's not my place to try and get involved with them. If the children want to learn NZSL, they ask the ITOD and then a request can be made to me. But it*'s *their decision*."

However, several (particularly the bilingual speakers/signers) questioned what they saw as an imposed limitation, regarding themselves as having a relevant contribution to the development of communication skills and identity in a much wider range of deaf children. A deaf mentor (from a deaf family) who communicates comfortably in both speech and NZSL and whose caseload does in fact include some 'oral' students expresses dissatisfaction with selection issues:

> *"Most teachers feel that oral deaf students don't need me to work with them. They feel they're okay on their own at school. I don't agree with that, because it's a matter of their identity. It's not as if I'm going to take over the teacher's job of teaching: I'm more concerned about identity, knowing who they are, being aware that there is a deaf culture, and having the opportunity to ask me lots of questions. I sometimes say to students – 'why don't you ask your teacher about these things?' and they always give the same answer: 'They don't understand because they're not deaf like you. I can't really talk to them the same, they don't understand me.' But most teachers (of the deaf) think that they <u>do</u> understand deaf children. I think many of them have some fear of signing and almost try to keep me away from oral students. I've had to prove to them that if a child is oral, I will speak to them. If they seem comfortable with it I'll introduce a little bit of signing and they can see me using both [languages]. Then the student will ask why I use both, and I can explain about knowing two languages and that sometimes I use an interpreter if I want to. I believe it's very important for them to be aware about interpreters for their future lives*."

The referral process is perceived by some Deaf participants as either intentional or unconscious 'gatekeeping'. Mentors articulated frustration at this gatekeeping power of hearing professionals in relation to allocation of their caseloads and understanding of their role:

> *Some TODs and Advisors don't seem to understand my role, or they are reluctant to let students have contact with me. They seem anxious that I might 'lead them astray' into the Deaf world, and away from the hearing world, or something. Or they say the family isn't ready to meet a Deaf person – they think I'll frighten them, and that they need to deal with a hearing*

person. Why would I frighten parents?! I have not yet been introduced to a family of a cochlear implant child or a prospective cochlear implant family. I think that's wrong because at the end of the day, the child is still deaf. My experience is that they will call on me after a couple of years, if things aren't working well and the child hasn't developed good speech -then they will want me to teach them NZSL, once they have a major language delay. Even if they don't sign, why can't they just meet me as one deaf person to another?

A mentor who covers a large geographical area, but has a small caseload, also comments on this:

I am very disappointed because there are tons more deaf children out there that are not mentioned for me to visit, because the ITOD is scared, or too lazy to send in a request form – which they kept saying they will do but never do it.

These comments suggest that the criteria by which children are considered 'deaf enough' or needy enough to benefit from their services do not always seem relevant or valid from a Deaf perspective.

3.5 Deaf students' response to Deaf paraprofessionals

Deaf students are reported to respond positively to contact with deaf staff. Conversations with deaf mentors and teacher aides allow students to explore and clarify questions surrounding social norms and ways of communicating with deaf and hearing people, their identity and their futures. Growth in students' NZSL skills and conversational competence is also observed as a direct outcome of regular contact. Deaf mentors report that some parents of deaf students have commented favourably to them on the positive impact of their visits to students, using words such as 'happiness',' excitement', and 'confidence'.

4.0 Relationships with hearing professionals in deaf education

4.1 Operational relationships and communication with education professionals

In their everyday work, Deaf mentors are not formally linked to a team structure and some describe inconsistent or ill-defined operational relationships with other deaf education professionals. They consider themselves to work mainly independently, with some administrative and classroom contact with ITODs and Advisors, as these participants explain:

We don't really work as a team. I sometimes model things for the ITOD, but mostly I like to work with deaf students on my own.

If timing allows, the ITOD will work with me. Sometimes I'll visit a hearing class with one deaf child, and while I tell a story to the children the itinerant will interpret for the hearing children.

While autonomy is seen as advantageous in maintaining flexibility in the role, it can also contribute to a sense of isolation, and frustration that others with whom they interact do not entirely understand what they do.

Further exploration of how Deaf paraprofessionals relate to hearing professionals reveals that a gap in communication and perspective on deafness are underlying issues for many, as these comments illustrate:

- *Most ITODs and Advisors don't sign very well, although we can 'get by'. It makes deep communication difficult.*
- *Some staff [in mainstream schools] are snobby… I believe some of them want talk to me but they are too scared … so I make the move and show them that they can communicate with me.*
- *They [ITODs] don't really understand my role.* (Having no access to an interpreter in professional meetings exacerbates this.)
- *A lot of teachers think my role is only to do with sign language, but I see it as broader – I want to work with <u>all</u> deaf students*
- *The attitudes of hearing professionals are variable! 50% have changed their attitude to positive, but the other 50% don't see deaf mentors as relevant to their hearing impaired/ oral students… there is still a long way to go.*
- *During meetings with all the itinerants the Regional Manager has become aware of some itinerants' negative attitudes, and he has been working to change that. He asked them to involve me and at IEP's he asked them to promote the position of the deaf mentor and mention their availability. He emphasised speaking positively about the mentors. They found this difficult…*

In general, more recently trained ITODs are seen as more receptive to working with deaf paraprofessionals than older teachers for whom their presence may represent a disruption to the established pattern.

In a mainstream classroom, tensions can occur where communication barriers with the teacher give rise to misunderstanding of a deaf paraprofessional's intentions and approach, as this Deaf teacher aide recounts:

> *Sometimes the class teacher doesn't understand what I'm doing – why I might be spending time just talking with the student. Or sometimes when the student is trying to demand my attention in inappropriate ways, I will deliberately look the other way and ignore this – as my strategy for teaching her appropriate communication behaviour. But the hearing teacher sees me 'ignoring' her and thinks I'm not on the job, that I'm just being lazy.*

4.2 Deaf paraprofessionals as a resource for hearing professionals

Deaf mentors are conscious that they serve as a linguistic and cultural resource for hearing professionals' skill development, as well as serving deaf students directly. For example, they frequently provide NZSL tuition (formally or informally) for hearing professionals. This 'resource' role is generally seen as a positive opportunity for change, although it can lead to tensions when expectations on each part do not coincide, as this deaf mentor explains:

> *Being a resource for hearing staff is part of my job, but my problem with teaching them NZSL is that they don't turn up! They say, "I've got no signing students" and those kind of excuses. But now their job description says they must have NZSL skills, so soon I'll be starting classes for teachers again – and I have been asked to assess them and record attendance…*

At the other extreme, some deaf paraprofessionals may have an enthusiastic ITOD (and other staff) sitting alongside them as they work to learn from their intuitive teaching strategies, as this participant describes:

> *Sometimes the itinerant wants to watch me as I work with a deaf child, so I can guide her how to improve the ways she works. For example, I might show the ITOD how to read with the child, using NZSL. She may not realise that when the child reaches a word he doesn't know, it needs to be fingerspelled so they can link it to the word on the page … The ITODhas realised now that just giving them a sign for a word's meaning is not enough: both spelling a word and giving a sign to the child is necessary.*

However, hearing professionals' interest in observing the Deaf mentor working with deaf students needs to be balanced with maintaining an appropriate learning situation for the student, as this popular mentor comments:

> *I worry about the deaf child: yesterday, there was the speech therapist, me, the teacher aide and the ITOD all around the table with the student. It's just too much – four adults that the child has to deal with at once. I wish there were just myself and the child with no-one else there. Then there would be more dialogue between us and things would go a lot quicker. But at the moment I have to make the best of it. With three or even four of us present there is too much pressure on the child.*

Some dissatisfaction was expressed about a perceived lack of acknowledgement of deaf paraprofessionals' contribution in modelling strategies and skills for teaching deaf students, as this mentor remarks:

I'm a good role model for the ITOD and Teacher Aide, but later on when they learn the skills and start working alone with the deaf child, then they go to the parents and boast about the skills they have learned when really it's come from me… I would prefer it if the ITOD would say that they had been working with me and that they had learned skills from me that had helped them to work with the deaf child, instead of taking all the credit for themselves at the end of the day.

A teacher aide commented in similar vein, highlighting the implicit power differential that can create tension in the working relationship :

I meet weekly with the ITOD and I often make suggestions for things to try. She seems enthusiastic about my suggestions, but there isn't any follow up action. Or sometimes I suggest an idea to try, she does it and then claims it as her own – that makes me feel put down. Because I'm still the newcomer to the situation, I don't challenge this – I don't want to rock the boat too much. There is some tension with the ITOD. I sense resentment or jealousy that the student is working well with me, after the ITOD has worked with the student for several years. Recently the student has made a lot of progress and the ITOD gives the impression that it's all due to her; she might be right, but I feel I am not given credit for my part.

Other participants, however, talked about positive and supportive collaborations with a particular ITOD or a Regional Coordinator, invariably qualified by a comment about their good sign communication skills and having a positive attitude towards deaf adults being involved in a bilingual/bicultural teaching approach.

4.3 Access to participation in professional situations

Deaf mentors described ways in which they feel included or not as a member of a professional team in the deaf education context. Factors affecting their interaction with other professionals are the fact of being the only deaf person in most situations, the hearing professionals' level of skill in NZSL, and limited access to an interpreter in meeting and classroom situations. For most (but not all) of the deaf paraprofessionals interviewed, interpreters are not routinely present in meetings: they are not available, not requested with sufficient advance notice, funding is said to be unavailable, or the deaf person has oral skills and so is presumed not to need an interpreter. Some report that a 'communicator' (a person with sign language skills but no interpreter training) is used in meetings, or more typically that one of the meeting participants - usually an ITOD or Teacher Aide - will interpret, but invariably incompletely. One deaf teacher aide with partial hearing reported taking on the role of interpreter for another deaf participant in professional meetings, with the result that both of them miss a great deal of information and feel unable to contribute. Such conditions can result in Deaf paraprofessionals feeling marginalised and unable to express their views. With a few exceptions, the general impression of respondents is that meeting situations within the deaf education profession are not 'Deaf friendly'. A bilingual (oral/signing) deaf mentor commented, "In a small meeting with just four of us, communication works well, as long as I keep reminding them I'm

there", while another was more outrightly critical, saying, "We work for deaf education so (they) should know better to provide our rights … to tell the truth it's shameful."

Deaf mentors emphasise that having a professional interpreter in such situations is important not only for facilitating the exchange of information, but that it also serves as a visible demonstration to everyone present that interpreting is a vital and normal means of ensuring that deaf adults and children can take a role as equal participants:

> *Having no interpreter in an IEP meeting is a bad example for parents of deaf children. It would be good for them to see a Deaf person taking part with an interpreter so they understand how this works for their child in the future. Also it would allow them to see the Deaf person having a more active role in the discussion.*

> *I go to a range of meetings like IEP's and other general meetings. It's good for people to see who I am when I am there with an interpreter. They realise then that a deaf person can communicate through an interpreter. They can hear a deaf perspective about how to help a deaf child make improvements, as well as hear about tips for their own work.*

A deaf mentor in a region with very few interpreters available recounts an example of how having no access to an interpreter affects her ability to perform her role effectively and present herself as she would wish:

> *I visited [a town] to do a presentation about deaf culture and community to the parents and teacher aides of children who were getting cochlear implants. I tried to book an interpreter but there wasn't one so I wasn't very comfortable to go ahead. I rang [the Deaf Education centre] to organise one but they refused to let me have an interpreter and made me do the presentation by myself. The people I presented to have no idea of NZSL – it was the first time they had met a Deaf person like me. So I had to do role-plays, write on the board and show OHPs. It was very challenging for me, but also this opportunity was good to show that Deaf people can do anything and communicate with hearing world. But I wish there was an interpreter there to pass on all the information I wanted to say. I presented for one and a half hours instead of one hour and told them to be patient with me as an interpreter was supposed to be her, so they accepted and understood the situation.*

Inadequate consideration or provision of communication access to Deaf employees may extend to deaf students, according to Deaf mentors, as this account illustrates:

> *In a meeting to plan a visit to the airport for a KIT day - I queried [ITODs and Advisor] what they were going to do there, and they said that there would be a tour around the airport. When I asked how the children were going to understand the person giving the tour the response was that they would lipread. I said that they would need an interpreter but was firmly told 'no, these*

children don't sign'. I felt so angry. Imagine being the only deaf person in a room full of all these hearing people - but I did challenge one of them. I asked what would happen, even if these children did not sign, if they didn't understand what was being said. One said that the teachers would be with the students individually - but what a waste of time, I thought. In the end they had second thoughts and swapped the airport visit for a trip to the zoo. I felt like my view was starting to be listened to.

4.4 Deaf/Hearing differences of perspective on educational issues

Most Deaf participants felt that they hold perspectives and values on certain issues that differ markedly from many of the hearing professionals and parents they interact with. The main points of difference centred around five issues: communication modes (and identity), cochlear implants, hearing aids, behaviour management, and academic expectations.

4.4.1 Communication mode choices

Deaf mentors commented with regret on the small proportion of mainstreamed children who use NZSL, as a result of parental choice, professional advice, isolation from resources, or a combination of these factors. One commented that, in her experience, "parents and teachers have a strong belief in oralism and cochlear implants". They noted that many children start out 'oral' and later come to the attention of the deaf mentor with language and academic delays, and a request that NZSL be introduced as a remedial measure – which from their perspective is both predictable and unacceptable.

Deaf mentors objected to the apparent separation of oral and cochlear implanted students from signing students, not only in allocation to their own and teacher's caseloads, but at some out-of school activities such as KIT days:

I work with cochlear implant, oral and signing students and when I introduce them to each other they go "Wow": they love it! These kids aged 7 and 8 years old have said to me, "We're all the same, we're all deaf!" They don't see themselves as separate groups. But I have caught some parents, teacher aides and teachers saying things like "I don't want my child waving their arms about signing".

In this vein, some participants commented that they strongly disagreed with the rationale that some teachers of the deaf do not need to develop NZSL skills because they will work predominantly with oral children. From their point of view, this simply functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy and holds back a large number of deaf children from meaningful exposure to the full range of communication options that might benefit them.

4.4.2 Cochlear implants and subsequent language use decisions.

Deaf people perceive deaf education professionals, in general, to be advocating cochlear implants to parents. It was felt that parents lack exposure to a deaf perspective when considering an implant for their child's future, although deaf mentors were aware of the sensitivity needed in presenting this to parents:

> *I worry about putting down parents for their decision that their child needs an implant. A while ago I was in a meeting where professionals and the cochlear implant team were putting a bit of pressure on some parents to have an implant. The parents then met with me for the first time last week. They were really pleased with what they saw and decided to drop the idea of giving their child an implant. What they were pleased about was seeing their child happy to see me - as another deaf person. They realised that there was nothing wrong [with being deaf]. Through the presence of an interpreter too, they saw that their son's future wouldn't be all negative. The father was saying that if his son had the implant he would have had to start his learning all over again, which was a waste of time, and he should just carry on as normal. He's right. This is the reason I want itinerant teachers or advisors to take along deaf adults to meet parents and give them some hope and confidence. Parents often feel so down about having a deaf child. They think their child is different and they feel guilty. Teachers, teacher aides, advisors, whoever, should make contact with deaf clubs, deaf schools, and deaf community because they will give them support and they won't just get a hearing perspective.*

All mentioned concern at cochlear implant 'failures' they had seen, describing children on their caseloads who lack communicative competencies needed for normal social interaction and learning. Regardless of their degree of acceptance of cochlear implants as an inevitability, Deaf mentors unanimously recommended the early use of both signed and spoken language with all implanted children. This view was based on pragmatic, cultural, and educational concerns: firstly, they point out that implants don't result in good hearing for all children and that all implanted children remain effectively deaf in certain situations and thus cannot afford to rely exclusively on hearing; secondly, experience has shown that implanted children may later choose to identify socially as deaf (and therefore should have access to an understanding of the signing deaf community from the start); and thirdly, most of the participants had personally observed cases in which children with implants had begun to acquire age appropriate language skills only after they had been introduced to sign language, when significant spoken language delay had become obvious: *"I see both deaf students and those who have had cochlear implants are the same in being behind at school. Especially those with late implants who have almost no language development. It's terrible. I feel sad that all this time has been lost and wasted."*

Underlying these responses to communication and cochlear implant choices is Deaf people's belief that all deaf children are potential members of a Deaf community, no matter what decisions parents and educators might take on their behalf. This is in contrast to the professional/parental view that communication approach or an audiological category or intervention (such as 'oral', 'hearing impaired', or 'cochlear implant') will determine language preference and future social identity. From deaf peoples' perspective, the basic commonality of being deaf is the most defining factor in social identity, and they believe that educational practice should therefore be to introduce all deaf children to a range of deaf adult role models and to the reality of bilingualism. Deaf adults' own experiences as children and as adults inform them that the origins of Deaf community members – in terms of schooling and communication decisions made by others – are in fact diverse, and are not necessarily the determinants of adult identity and language use. Their own experiences of the disjunction between educational practice and adult language use also underlie their concern at the persistent dominance of oralism (particularly among mainstreamed students), not because they devalue spoken language - indeed almost half the respondents were proficient in spoken English and NZSL – but because of the linguistic and academic delays that ensue for many of those children, which they see as avoidable if NZSL was introduced early and effectively.

4.4.3 Hearing aid use

Deaf mentors and teacher aides observe pressure exerted on deaf students to have hearing aids turned on constantly at school. Even those participants who were regular hearing aid users themselves were opposed to this practice, believing that deaf children need some independent choice in this matter. In their personal experience, enforced use was not beneficial, and teacher's emphasis on it was counterproductive to relating deaf learners in a more holistic way.

4.4.4 Behaviour issues – perceptions of 'problem' behaviour

Deaf mentors are often called upon to intervene or advise on behavioural issues with students when other attempts have failed. They commented that student behaviours characterised as problematic were often, in their view, 'normal' deaf behaviours, or understandable responses to situations of communication frustration:

> *Teachers tend to automatically attribute behaviour problems to deafness. To me, their behaviour is normal but they have problems as a result of continual communication breakdowns.*

Deaf mentors had usually experienced similar situations themselves, and were able to quickly pinpoint the source of difficulty and suggest strategies to address the situation from a deaf viewpoint.

However, they also observed that many students do in fact have inappropriate or under-developed communication behaviours (in relation to the social codes of either signers or speakers) which negatively impact their learning and social relationships at school. While all participants described examples of mainstream staff who could communicate quite well with their deaf student and take effective responsibility for behaviour management, these were cited as the exception rather than the rule. They observed that the more typically impoverished communication with a deaf student in the mainstream classroom can lead to 'exceptional' treatment and ultimately stigmatising behaviour outcomes:

> *Signing students in the mainstream know how to avoid work. They are treated differently because it's too hard for teachers to communicate and resolve problems properly, so they back off and let the student get away with far too much. For example, I see deaf kids butting in and wanting to be first at everything – and they get their way instead of being made to wait their turn, because the other children and staff say "We don't know how to communicate, it's too hard to explain". It's easier for them to just let it go. So signing Deaf students can be pretty smart and exploit this power, and they become very controlling. It's not an equal situation at all, compared with a group of deaf students together. They know how to manipulate teacher aides, and they have too much control in many situations.*

Several participants remarked that during mixed class sessions teaching NZSL, the hearing students are often more receptive than deaf students to learning, simply because the deaf students don't know how to concentrate or uptake new input. In other words, their school experience has not equipped them with effective learning behaviours. Participants surmised that, fundamentally, such problems reflect deaf children's isolation from deaf role models and peers, from whom they could learn visually-based discourse skills such as attending and turn-taking norms, and with whom they would have more equal interaction.

4.4.5 Low expectations for deaf students

A perceived point of difference between themselves and mainstream teachers in particular, is the level of expectation for deaf student achievement. Several mentors stated that mainstream teachers tend to have low expectations for deaf students, in the absence of experience with deaf learners, compounded by an inability to communicate effectively with the deaf student - including not fully understanding what the deaf student is signing/saying to them. One related this to the lack of role models in the environment, saying that "low expectations are worst in one area I work where there are almost no deaf adults around in the community; they don't know what to expect". The mentor's role in modelling deaf adult capabilities is clearly important input for shaping the expectations of hearing professionals.

4.5 Challenging the status quo: expression of Deaf perspectives in the professional setting

Participants were asked how freely they feel able to express potentially conflicting viewpoints to work colleagues and parents. As the minority participant in the educational setting, in terms of cultural identity, language, and professional status, they tend to be acutely aware of sensitivities around how their views might be expressed and received. They expressed a range of responses with regard to how freely they feel they can challenge the status quo or frankly articulate a Deaf viewpoint.

Some participants reported that they regularly offer their opinion on the strength of their personal insight into issues that students face, while others were more reticent to speak up. All expressed the importance of doing so in a 'careful' manner that would not risk alienating participants with different viewpoints, or who might feel threatened by the deaf mentor's role. They expressed a need to establish a level of professional and personal trust over time, before disagreement can be safely broached.

> *It's important for me to develop good teamwork with the hearing professionals instead of being an aggressive and narrow-minded Deaf professional worker.*

> *Sometimes I don't want to leap in and say anything out of turn. I need to think before I say some things. I want to challenge people but it's about how to do it so that there are no misunderstandings and people are clear with what I am saying*

Deaf mentors appeared to be very aware of how parents, in particular, may respond to conflicting views or information that directly challenge their belief system. They emphasised the importance of developing a comfortable rapport before gradually introducing parents to Deaf-world perspectives and concepts:

> *I can't really pressure parents regarding choices that they want. I know that parents, teachers , teachers of deaf children as a group have a hearing view, whereas I am deaf, and have the experience of being deaf. I know how to help a deaf child because of my experience growing up - I have a deaf experience. They [parents] need to meet deaf adults so they can see the different viewpoints.*

Even qualified by the sense of caution that accompanies subordinate status, Deaf mentors nevertheless see themselves as agents of change in the attitudes and knowledge of people involved in deaf education, as this participant expresses:

> *I wouldn't disagree with someone outright in a meeting and slam them for what they thought because I could be wrong, not having had enough training. I prefer to sit back and observe, listen, and after the meeting I might talk one to one with someone and explain the appropriate way to do something… Some people are open to different perspectives and they change their*

mind about what they think, but with some other people, who have been working there for a long time and really believe their own ideas, it can be really tricky. You need to give people time to change.

Such comments indicate a clear awareness of the potential divide between Deaf views and hearing professionals and parents. Some are more cautious than others to leap across that gap in professional situations, perhaps instinctively realising how difficult it can be to give others enough cultural context to fully understand where their views are coming from.

A more pragmatic consideration affecting Deaf paraprofessionals' ability to express their views in situations such as meetings is the lack of an interpreters; this was mentioned as a common factor by many participants - for instance one mentor wrote: "Interpreter will be useful to impact something I would have said". Even where other professionals are felt to be positively receptive to the Deaf person's input, their expression of ideas can be limited in situations where those professionals are not able or willing to conduct the meeting in sign language, and there is no interpreter present. This results in loss of understanding in both directions.

5.0 Perceptions of hearing Teacher Aides

Because teacher aides are the main source of communication access and tuition for most 'very high needs' deaf students in mainstream classrooms, deaf mentors were asked to comment specifically on their observation of the skills and effectiveness of hearing teacher aides. While all participants noted one or two individual exceptions, their overall impression is that teacher aides are poorly-equipped for their two main functions of interpreting and tutoring deaf students. Their responses can be grouped under the following common concerns:

5.1 Inadequate NZSL skills

Teacher aides working with signing students were observed to have a generally low standard of NZSL proficiency, below the level needed for their tasks of interpreting and acting as the primary language model for a deaf child in the mainstream. This was seen as being due to the unavailability of training and/or lack of aptitude for sign language in some individuals employed in this role:

Where can they get the skills for working with deaf or hearing impaired students? There is no training available for them.

Some teacher aides are really enthusiastic and committed in going to NZSL night classes – more than itinerant teachers. Most of the older ones find it hard to retain what they've learned.

Going beyond the need for more grammatical fluency and vocabulary in NZSL, deaf mentors described gaps in communication skills at a deeper level – including ineptitude with deaf communication strategies, and a lack of expertise in explaining concepts in ways that are comprehensible yet challenging to a deaf child:

> S*ome teacher aides are motivated to learn NZSL, but don't understand about Deaf behaviour, or how to manage a young deaf child. The child needs a deaf role model and skilled interpreter to explain things clearly.*
>
> *Not enough NZSL/communication skills. They need to know how to communicate with the child, and also how to scaffold the students up to higher levels of learning, not baby them.*
>
> *One teacher aide has a Deaf mother: she's really good, she has comfortable communication skills and she's firm with the student. For example, she insists that the student watches when she's signing, and doesn't let her get away with gazing about the room and mucking around. Other teacher aides often don't know how to handle that kind of behaviour and so they don't correct it.*
>
> *Teacher aides don't know how to identify what the deaf students hasn't understood, or how to go back and 'unpack' a concept so the child can understand it fully.*

From a slightly different position, a deaf teacher aide in the study who works with a young native signer of NZSL, commented that even for hearing teacher aides and ITODs who have relatively 'good' second language proficiency in NZSL, their interactions with the child reveal that they actually lack the depth of skill to fine-tune their communication to the child's level and style of comprehension and expression. This frequently results in miscommunications where the child does not fully understand the adult, and the adult misunderstands the child's intent. Often the source of the problem is the teacher's expression of an idea in English-structured syntax and use of English word lip-patterns that are incomprehensible to the child (i.e. foreign to the way the child might express an idea); conversely the child may use non-manual NZSL grammar and embedded, cryptic reference to assumed contextual knowledge, rather than elaborating in a more 'lexical' or 'formal' style that a second language user of NZSL would find easier to de-code.

5.2 Dependence-promoting behaviours

According to Deaf observers, the nature of teacher aide's role (intensive one-to-one support) combined with well-intentioned but ill-informed behaviours and attitudes on their part often creates over-dependence and learned helplessness in deaf students; in some cases, this also creates a false impression of students' learning.

Teacher aides should be interpreting for deaf students – giving communication access and support in NZSL, not helping them with their work.

Some communicators (teacher aides) help students pass tests. It looks as though the students are achieving well, but really they haven't learned much – the communicator is just doing it for them.

Participants observe that in many cases –particularly where the mainstream teacher feels unable to communicate directly with a student - teacher aides are given a great deal of responsibility for the deaf student's learning in class:

Often the class teacher steps back and gives almost all the teaching responsibility to the teacher aide (or the visiting deaf mentor or the ITOD). They seem very 'hands off' with the deaf student.

This concurs with teacher aides' own assessment of the situation (McKee & Smith 2003a).

5.3 Selection and supervision of teacher aides

As noted already, the more-or-less untrained status of teacher aides and the absence of effective monitoring of their performance contributes to deaf mentors' perception of unsatisfactory learning situations. In addition, they note that the selection of teacher aides can be problematic; that is, they are generally appointed by school personnel who do not have specialised knowledge of deafness, using criteria different from those which deaf mentors and deaf education professionals would consider to be important:

From what I have seen in my area, we have a number of wrong people for teacher aide jobs. The reason for this is that the school chooses them – with very little knowledge about Deaf issues, and no input from Deaf community, ITODs, Advisor, Deaf resource person.

Deaf mentors thus view teacher aides as performing what should rightly be considered as specialised tasks requiring very particular skills, on the basis of no specialised person specifications, training or supervision.

6.0 Perceptions of Deaf children's access to learning in the mainstream

6.1 Positive aspects

Recognising that it might be difficult (or conversely dangerously easy) to generalise, interviewees were asked to comment overall, for deaf students on their caseload, how successfully they perceive them to be integrated into their mainstream school, academically and socially. Some

stated that this varies, depending on the child, and the degree to which the staff and social environment of the school convey a 'deaf-friendly' attitude and encouragement towards the deaf student. This was noted as more likely to happen in smaller schools, or in situations where the child had stayed with the same class and teacher for several consecutive years, and therefore been able to develop a shared system of communication and a familiar social network. Deaf educators identified the positive aspects of mainstreaming as:

- Learning to negotiate the hearing world, as preparation for adult participation in two worlds
- Gaining independence and confidence through facing the challenges of mainstream education
- Learning a second language (it was not specified which language was 'second')
- Receiving better support resources, compared to the past – e.g. some students having a notetaker and communicator at high school, in contrast to the deaf mentor's own experience of attending a mainstream secondary school completely unassisted. (Although she added that the additional supports do not seem to result in the students being any more diligent or academically successful.)

These positive points were stated in the abstract, rather than by specific example – although all acknowledged that there will be a certain –in their view, small minority - of mainstreamed students who will thrive and achieve well in this environment, with good family support.

6.2 Problems observed for mainstreamed students

Deaf mentors readily identified a consistent set of problems or characteristics of mainstreamed deaf students they have observed, of which the following statement provides a fairly representative summary: "I feel sorry for those in the mainstream because they are isolated, they are behind, and they have no identity." The issues they discussed at length, and with considerable feeling, can be grouped under the following headings:

6.2.1 Social isolation.

This includes superficial interaction and relationships with peers, unequal or restricted social roles taken by the deaf student, and instances of bullying.

> *In a very few cases, they are doing okay, but overall they are very isolated. The students don't realise it, because that's become normal for them. Staff also think it's normal for them, because of course - they are deaf. But from my perspective, it's not normal. I can see that they don't have any close friends – friends that they can chat with, communicate easily with. The staff and students believe they have friends, but it's obvious that they aren't real friendships – you don't see them gossiping, challenging, arguing over trivial things – none of that normal interaction really happens. What they have is quite superficial communication, and then clashes or mis-communications that end up in big blow-ups. It's very different from normal social experience. This happens to both oral children and signers.*

One mentor commented that where a child has been in the same class for several years, some hearing children may sign reasonably well and their social situation might appear to be 'okay' - but nevertheless, the child's social role tends to remain limited to 'tagging along' behind the group. They observe that many deaf children's school friendships don't extend to regular after-school and weekend contact.

Unlike hearing teachers and other onlookers, Deaf people implicitly compare the social experience of a single deaf child in the mainstream with what they themselves have experienced as more 'normal' interaction amongst deaf peers and equals.

> *Interaction between the deaf student and hearing kids is very different than when the student has another deaf child visit. With hearing children, she hangs back and follows the crowd. With the deaf student, they compete for a leadership role; there is negotiating and jostling for power – it's much more equal. They criticise each other's signs, boss each other around, question each other – they never do that with hearing children at all.*

> *They look so lonely and unhappy. When I see them during breaks, they are always on their own. I feel sorry for them. It's so different from my experience at deaf school. We were very comfortable because in the playground we chatted non-stop with everyone; it was like having lots of brothers and sisters. The mainstream kids don't have that. They have no real conversation or easy interaction with friends – that's completely missing.*

> *My own experience of mainstreaming is that you never fully 'fit in' – you can seem to, but you're really on the fringes. I had deaf family at home so I could handle that, and all the frustrations, but it can be hard for others [from hearing families]. I did have friends, but always the low status, 'un-cool' kids, not the 'in group'.*

6.2.2 Limited (inadequate) communication access

Like many other observers, Deaf mentors believe that effective provision for communication access is lacking for most mainstreamed deaf students. They comment that most "get much less than 100%" (and sometimes not much more than 0%) of the message in the classroom, and in group situations like school assembly and sports. They note also that communication barriers and lack of communication support limit Deaf students' participation in extra-curricular activities offered at mainstream schools.

During classroom instruction and interaction, most students rely heavily on a teacher aide who may not have the level of skill needed to interpret effectively, or who convey information selectively. Many students are observed to also depend on 'buddies' to find out what's happening in class. Given that deaf students usually bring much less background knowledge to the learning situation than their

classmates, this combination typically results in the child being 'out of synch' with the rest of the class, as this mentor's description illustrates:

> *While interpreting, the teacher aide doesn't stand near the teacher, in the student's line of sight … I worry that sometimes he is not actually following what is being said and is off track in his understanding. Deaf in this situation are always 'off track'. I want to teach him about how to ask and respond to open-ended questions. I have noticed that if a deaf child has a question, and is raising their hand, the teacher might ask what the deaf child wants to say - but not very often. I know that all the children in the class have to wait their turn, but the teacher knows that the deaf child sometimes does not follow what is being talked about and is going to ask questions that are off-track.*

Deaf mentors observe that while few deaf students use sign language, many of the others cannot adequately follow spoken classroom communication either:

> *The most common thing that oral children tell me is that they can't hear a lot in class, but the teacher doesn't seem to believe them. They tell me that they miss out on a lot. They feel frustrated; they need face-to-face communication all the time.*

> *There are very few children who have support in the mainstream by way of sign language, and few teacher aides who have NZSL skills. For instance, I was once signing to a teacher aide in a mainstream class and I could tell that the deaf child was watching me sign. I asked the ITOD what support the child had and they said that he had a teacher aide part time. When I asked how the child copes the rest of the time the itinerant said that he is oral and can lipread. But when I was signing with the itinerant I could see the deaf child constantly watching us, not his teacher. I asked him afterwards what the teacher was saying and he said he didn't know because the teacher was speaking. When I pointed this out to the ITOD she was rather taken aback . She also asked the child whether he could tell her what his teacher was talking about - to which he replied that he didn't know. She was surprised. So you have a deaf child in a class of hearing children who doesn't understand their teacher talking. I wish that they were in a deaf unit together – that would be the best way to do it.*

Taking into account their own adult experiences of communication through interpreters, some deaf mentors doubt that even trained interpreters could effectively bridge the communication and learning gaps that exist for deaf students in hearing classrooms:

> *Personally I don't think having an interpreter solves things – it doesn't help the situation work at all. Why I say this is because when the teacher talks directly to hearing students the students can access the same language and the meanings inherent in that language, and they can relate to what the teacher is talking about. But when the deaf child is reliant on an interpreter's translation they do not have the same access to what the teacher is saying as the hearing*

children. For instance if I am talking to you directly I can understand readily what you are saying but if I am relying on an interpreter for what you are saying it's a bit cumbersome. I have to do a lot of work myself to figure out what is really being said, which takes time and mental effort. I do not get the message as easily as I would if the communication were direct. But I can do this because I am an adult and have certain background knowledge that helps me, but for a child who is reliant on this type of communication for learning new concepts - an interpreter is not going to work. But, if a child is in the mainstream, an interpreter is better than nothing. Whether they will be able to access what they should with an interpreter - I'm not convinced.

This perception accords with educational interpreting research which demonstrates how much information is potentially lost in mediated classroom communication *(Ramsey 2001; Winston 2001).*

6.2.3 Underdeveloped language and communication skills.

Deaf paraprofessionals often work with children who are acquiring basic NZSL and/or English at relatively late ages, after some years of an oral approach has not yielded expected results, for example:

A nine-year old I work with still refuses to write at all, and is now learning basic vocabulary in both NZSL and English.

Insufficient early and accessible communication at home (which is linked to the nature of professional early intervention offered) is seen to be a major factor in such language delays and low achievement at school:

Students need to be educated at home as well as at school. Many do not have good family learning environment – [they are] okay at school, then get home and it's 'blank' – communication barriers – [they] can't wait to get to school.

I don't like to see students allowed to develop a huge language and learning delay, and then have to try and catch up later. I believe they should be exposed to language(s) – of course I mean including NZSL - from the very start. The pre-schoolers who are exposed to NZSL show that it does work. But so many of them wait, get a cochlear implant, try oralism, then see what happens later.

Of course, these characteristics only compound the difficulty of the child accessing the language and interactional dynamics of the classroom, as discussed above in Section 6.2.2.

6.2.4 Academic delay and under-achievement

There was general consensus among respondents that the majority of mainstreamed students are considerably behind their peers, although two deaf teacher aides who work with six year olds (using

NZSL as L1) described them as doing well so far: one developing sound literacy skills, and the other working at age-level in maths (although she predicted future delays in other areas). Deaf observers attribute the general under-achievement of both oral and signing students at least partly to problems with the quality and quantity of specialised support and teaching.

At least half are struggling; they don't get enough support – usually 10-15 hrs a week from ITOD and/or a teacher aide. What about the rest of the hours in the week?! It's not 100% support.

They're consistently behind their peers. There are only a very few children I have seen who are up there with their peers but most are behind... I don't want children to have the same experience that I had - missing out on things like English, general information. If I had had sign language I would have been able to learn a lot more.

What have they been doing in school all those years? I can't see any good results from all the work the ITODs have supposedly been doing – it doesn't seem to be working. They often claim successes, but I think it's mainly in their own interests to make themselves look more effective. One teacher I work with is quite negative and blames parents for learning problems, but I don't agree.

I can see that some are years behind. They have superficial learning, and mostly not very good literacy. Some oral students can 'read', but if you ask them to re-tell the story, they can't. Or they can complete the written exercises, but if you ask them to re-tell the meaning they can't. That's a big difference from when I worked with students in a bilingual deaf unit, where there was a lot of emphasis on developing comprehension and re-telling skills.

If you see what's going on out there - it's so inconsistent – a mess. I would say that 5 % of mainstreamed children are successful – and they will have good English skills. The rest are at a range of varying levels... the home environment with the family needs to improve too. Communication needs to happen in the home environment.

Participants observe that deaf students' gaps in understanding and their 'disguise strategies' frequently go unrecognised by teachers who do not have insight into deaf learners, as this mentor explains.

For example, during maths the children in class copy the problems as the teacher writes them on the board, and then they work them out. But the deaf child is often behind, and cleverly

waits until the teacher writes the answer on the board, which he then copies down… then he goes up and shows the teacher his 'finished' work. The teacher thinks that the child knows the work, but they haven't actually done the work. After I saw this situation happening, I approached the teacher and asked if they could wait a bit longer before putting the answers up. The teacher was quite surprised when I explained what was happening with the child copying the answers. The student would never learn that way, so I'm not accepting it.

Sometimes itinerant teachers think that deaf children can understand the reading that they've been doing, but when I ask them to explain it to me, they have no idea what the story is about… Sometimes the teacher forgets the need to re-explain what various words mean. They have to talk to each other while reading. Often the child won't ask the meaning of words they come across - they just pretend they know, hiding what they don't. They may be too frightened to ask.

While such unproductive strategies are quite obvious to Deaf observers (possibly from personal experience), they worry that they are too often overlooked or not addressed effectively by hearing staff.

Deaf observers pinpoint the root cause of academic delays as a lack of teaching in a language that is comprehensible to deaf students, as these comments imply:

Hearing impaired students are less behind. Actually, deaf students and those with cochlear implants are similar in being behind... My preference would be to have them at a Deaf Education Centre. [In the mainstream] there's such delay, wasting of time and a lot of information that children don't get.

It seems to me that all these students in the [highschool] deaf unit are doing is waiting for the next bell. I was asked to go along by a teacher to talk to the students… because some deaf boys were saying that it was the 'deaf way' to arrive late to class. But I think they get to classes late and act like they don't care because they are not enjoying school. If the school offered good support like interpreters I think they would enjoy it more, and I think they would arrive on time. The teachers don't have enough NZSL skills. There's only one who can sign but it's not particularly clear signing. It's hard to follow what's being said. There are two others who have just started learning sign.

6.2.5 Lack of independence as learners - academic and social

According to deaf mentors, unnatural dependence on an adult teacher aide is a common characteristic of mainstreamed deaf children. This is caused by the child not fully sharing a language with peers at school, and by the intense one-to-one dynamic that is inevitably created for a deaf child in a classroom where much information, tuition and even social contact is channelled through a teacher aide. (This is in contrast to the 'one-to-many' relationship that a teacher normally has with a class.)

For his age he' s not too bad, but there's a lot of reliance on the teacher aide… there's not much focus on who he is himself as a deaf person. He doesn't pay attention to me very well, but I don't work with him everyday and he is used to all his attention being on the teacher aide. For instance, I will be talking with him and I think he has understood me, but then he looks to the teacher aide for confirmation. [5] *It's really interesting – this total focus on the teacher aide.*

I have noticed one child spending a lot of time with the teacher aide. At play time once I saw him peering through the staffroom window, looking for the teacher aide – I think because she can sign. This child can't really communicate with anybody else - the other teachers or the children. He wanted to talk to the teacher aide, so he was just standing, watching her through the window.

In addition to dependence on teacher aides for ordinary social contact and conversation that other children would have with peers, Deaf mentors expressed strong concerns that teacher aides tend to be overly 'helpful' or directive in assisting deaf students to complete their work, with long-term educational outcomes that are not constructive (as also noted in Section 5.2).

80% of students do not interact like normal students do – they don't ask the class teacher when needing help – they rely on the teacher aide

I have grave concerns about the number of teacher aides doing the student's work instead of the student doing it; teacher aides are taking too much responsibility in asking questions, showing things … etc, while the student learns nothing … they should give more responsibility to the student alone to gain independence. Most of them are TOO motherly to the student!

6.2.6 Identity confusion

According to Deaf mentors, mainstreamed deaf children often struggle to develop a positive sense of who they are and what it means to be deaf, through a lack of opportunities to compare and identify themselves with other deaf people. They believe that undue focus on the child's need to use

[5] Although this child has a deaf parent (in a rural town), his linguistic and social experience may be limited to understanding only certain people. Possibly the kind of signing he is exposed to at school and at home is not

hearing and speech in the mainstream setting (e.g. through continual attention to the use of hearing aids) may negatively distort the child's view of themselves and what 'deaf' means, and can also deflect attention from the child's deeper psycho-social needs.

> *My view is that most teachers of the deaf and mainstream teachers put a lot of focus on the child's ability to hear and speak, but they don't really see the whole child. Often the child has lots of other issues. That's an area I'm having problems breaking through* [i.e., getting in contact with those oral students] – *but it will have to happen, because in my area, the number of signing children in the mainstream is decreasing and the majority are oral.*

Issues of confused identity were often linked by participants to language use labels, 'oral' and 'signing':

> *Sometimes oral children think that they have to be oral so that they can be like the hearing children around them. When they first meet me they are quite stunned, never having seen sign language but they can pick up enough to understand what I'm saying … and these 'oral' children themselves often sign to me - they can sign! … It's heart wrenching. You don't want the child to feel pressured or confused between using NZSL, TC, or speech.*

> *Some students, the first time they meet me, say straight off, "I don't sign". I respond by saying, "that's fine, I can do both". After a little while they relax and come to accept signing.*

These experiences suggest that regular contact with an adult who openly signs, behaves and identifies as a deaf person enables the child to feel more comfortable with accepting his own deaf characteristics and being different from the hearing people around him.

In describing deaf students' response to deaf mentor visits, the theme was children's obvious hunger for contact with an adult who is like them in an obvious way. Deaf adults' relationship with deaf children is reciprocal in a way that deaf-hearing relationships never can be – they each see themselves and their experiences reflected in the other.

The Deaf mentor role thus provides an opportunity for students to articulate and seek answers to their questions about being deaf, which could not be addressed to the hearing adults around them at home and school. Mentors describe deaf students as always "full of questions about being deaf", and reluctant to return to class when the time is up – "The teacher has to almost drag them away because they have so many questions they want to ask me." Self-knowledge is attained through the evaluation of one's own experience in relation to the experiences, perspectives, and responses of

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sophisticated enough to enable him to understand unfamiliar Deaf people who use NZSL fluently, in a different style, or in a new context.

others. By providing a mirror of deaf children's own characteristics in an adult form, deaf adults in the educational setting are a critical resource for developing self-knowledge and a sense of personal and linguistic identity. One participant's comment reflects this idea: "Deaf mentor visits make deaf students feel more normal" - much like Harry Potter's experience when he entered the wizarding world of Hogwarts and met adult versions of himself.[6]

The importance of identity development, and the difficulties mainstreamed students face in this regard, are neatly summed up in this participant's description of the most important aspect of the mentor's role:

> *Deaf mentors are valuable for mainstreamed children. Some deaf children have never met a deaf adult before. After a getting to know them I tell them about other deaf people out there. This is extremely important for one's deaf identity - to know who you are. It's important to let them know they're not the only deaf person in the world. This is good for their confidence. The sooner you can develop the child's awareness of other deaf people, the better.*

7.0 Improving learning contexts for deaf students

When asked what they would do if they had the power to improve the learning situation for mainstreamed deaf students, all Deaf participants raised nearly identical points, summarised as follows, in order of the emphasis each was given:

7.1 Group and educate deaf children together

The value of having deaf peers was unanimously and strongly expressed. From a deaf perspective, grouping deaf students together makes sense for linguistic, social, emotional, pedagogical, and economic reasons:

> *… don't mainstream them individually. It's important to have peers. I can't understand why there are deaf children placed in different schools near each other. Why not bring them together? But Advisors don't encourage this - they say there are transport costs, they should be in local schools, parental choice, etc. In one case I know of, the parents wanted the children to be enrolled at the same school, and the Advisor said "no".*

> *My dream for the future is for all those children out there isolated in the mainstream, to bring them all together into a deaf unit, or set up another deaf school that is part of a hearing school as well, where the children can interact with each other so they can learn about two different worlds. The government spends so much money paying for all those different people involved, like teacher aides and all these people working all over the place on their own, one on one with deaf children. It would be a lot cheaper to …transport these children to a deaf unit where there is*

[6] Thanks to David McKee for noting this analogy.

a teacher of the deaf who can actually sign fluently, and possibly a teacher aide if they need one, but that would be all! I don't understand it.

One mentor stated, "In a big group of deaf children they could have normal interaction". This expresses an intuitive understanding that education is, above all, a social process, and that for individual deaf students in a hearing school, the crucial social processes based on everyday communication and a sense of group membership do not develop fully or frequently break down.

Participants suggested that outside of deaf schools, such deaf groupings should be established in association with regular schools to allow interaction with non-deaf students and participation in wider school activities.

These children have to live in two worlds: I think it would be good to have a deaf school next to a hearing school where students can have access to both places. Mainstream is not working.

Ideally such an arrangement would include deaf and hearing teachers fluent in NZSL, demonstrating genuine co-teaching, and opportunities for more equal interaction with hearing students, (i.e. balanced in numbers and communication skills).

The ideal situation would be <u>good</u> Deaf and Hearing teachers of the Deaf co-teaching a group of deaf children, maybe with some hearing students too. From my experience of being a language assistant, and from what I know happens overseas, this can be a really successful model… it brings two different perspectives. That would be wonderful. But when you have one deaf child in a completely hearing situation, where is the deaf focus for that child?

7.2 Educate deaf children in a language they understand

Inseparable from their concern about social isolation was participants' paramount desire to see deaf children in learning situations where the language of instruction and social life is fully accessible; as one mentor put it: "… if that language is not English, then use NZSL. Give them both languages instead of limited communication". Some expressed the view that policy should explicitly state that education be provided in whatever language the child needs, based on the premise that "no-one should fail to get an education because of one thing – communication".

The need for comprehensible communication goes in two directions: deaf participants cited concern about their observation that even staff who can apparently sign competently often fail to correctly understand the deaf child's communication to them. This results in miscommunication, frustration or confusion on the child's part, not to mention lost opportunities for enrichment of language skills and the kind of extended dialogue that scaffolds children's learning.

7.3 More Deaf teachers

Following logically from the two points above, teachers who are deaf themselves are seen by deaf paraprofessionals as a necessary and natural enhancement of deaf children's school experience. (There are currently fewer than 10 trained Deaf teachers working in NZ, only one of whom is employed in an itinerant position with mainstreamed students.) Deaf teachers were described as, "appropriate language models for children. Students could learn visually, through sign language, in a comfortable way."

In deaf peoples' view, a larger presence of deaf professionals in deaf education would positively alter the balance of power in decision making, and provide 'insider' insight into how best to support deaf children's development, as this deaf teacher aide suggests:

> *[I'd like to see] less hearing control of the situation. Deaf people have firsthand experience of being Deaf. They have experienced the barriers and have a better understanding of deaf children. Deaf children need deaf role models to understand about themselves, to develop normal social and communication skills and better self esteem. Deaf people have been deaf kids so they can answer their questions better, without making the child feel their questions are irrelevant.*

7. 4 Broaden and increase early advice and communication support to parents

Deaf participants made a strong call for a "more balanced" spectrum of information and advice to be given to parents during a deaf child's earliest years, as a basis for their decision making. By this, they mean the inclusion of Deaf perspectives on communication and identity, including early contact with a range of deaf people, NZSL, and the reality of bilingualism in deaf adults' lives. Deaf mentors see this perspective as generally absent in the professional advisory service offered to families, which they perceive to be heavily – and unrealistically - weighted towards the promotion of speech and cochlear implants. They express recognition that "parents need time to gradually understand the various approaches", but also note within the system a paucity of opportunities for families (and deaf children) to learn NZSL, or even to become aware of its importance as a potential element in their communication and relationship with their deaf child:

The function and orientation of the Advisory service came in for some critical comment, such as this:

> *The Advisor service needs reviewing. They have huge caseloads, but not much actual contact with the deaf children. They seem to focus unequally on children with cochlear implants and give much less attention and support to lower SES families. These families have lots of obstacles and make slower progress, and it can be frustrating to work with them, but they still need support. I've noticed that Pacific Island and Maori families seem more comfortable*

with me as a Deaf person, than with Advisors; perhaps they see them as more white, middle-class, professional, and feel more at ease with me as another 'minority' person, who is less 'professional'. Anyway, the Advisors seem to leave the 'lower class' families to me. Advisors are still very focused on listening and speaking, getting cochlear implants – but often at the expense of real language development for preschoolers. What <u>are</u> they actually doing with the children? I don't think they do much hands-on language work with parents and young children. They can't do language development in NZSL anyway because they mostly aren't skilled signers themselves. They have an attitude that they don't need to be.

7.5 Re-orient training of professionals in deaf education

Criticisms such as the above statement suggest that in the view of Deaf people, the training of professionals in deaf education should proceed from a core of knowledge that is informed by Deaf sociocultural perspectives. This would include, specifically, competence in NZSL, which is a prerequisite to appreciation of the experiences, values and ways of the adult Deaf world – rather than a desirable 'add-on skill'. In their perception, this dimension in professional preparation is currently inadequate. Deaf paraprofessionals in this study indicate that while this paradigm shift has taken place in the attitudes and practice of some individuals, if more widespread, it would alter professionals' outlook to align more closely with Deaf people's reality. Furthermore, Deaf people this would equip them with what they regard as relevant skills for guiding parents and deaf children towards successful learning and social outcomes.

8.0 Summary

8.1 Goals and scope of deaf paraprofessionals' work

- Deaf paraprofessionals see their most important goal and responsibility as fostering deaf children's communicative competence (including language proficiency and interpersonal skills) and the development of positive deaf identity. They regard these characteristics as an essential foundation for emotional wellbeing and academic learning, and observe them to be under-developed in many of the students they see in mainstream schools. Deaf mentors feel that their holistic emphasis on students' social and communicative needs (as preparation for both school learning and becoming a well adjusted deaf adult) is in contrast to teachers' tendency to focus on formal, measurable outcomes in literacy, speech, and curriculum learning. *("The teacher's priority is reading, while my focus is on <u>communication skills</u> first".)*

- Deaf mentors particularly, but also deaf teacher aides, perform a wide range of tasks and roles, functioning as informal educators of multiple audiences - including deaf students (from pre-school to highschool age), hearing students, hearing parents, mainstream teachers, teachers of the deaf, advisors, and teacher aides. Given the high degree of autonomy reported in their day to day

work, the role of deaf mentors is apparently evolving largely at their own initiative. In their various interactions - which are relatively 'new' in deaf education - they are aware of their implicit role as agents of change in challenging certain attitudes, knowledge and practices surrounding deaf students. This element of their role is definitely regarded by them as a positive opportunity, yet also brings some inherent tensions and a sense of caution to their relationships with professionals and parents.

8.2 Employment conditions

- Due to their small number, geographical spread, and newly established role, Deaf paraprofessionals feel themselves to work in relative isolation. Although they all have regular contact with other deaf education and mainstream school professionals, they do not perceive themselves to have clearly defined operational relationships within a larger 'team' structure – (for example, a few are regularly invited to attend IEP meetings, some occasionally, and others not at all). Deaf paraprofessionals are keen to retain this autonomy in their work, but with a greater sense of empowerment that would come from formal training and more equitable access to communication in professional interactions - chiefly, through provision of interpreters at meetings and in school or home situations as needed. Other employment conditions such as their part-time status and lack of school holiday entitlement are issues that deaf paraprofessionals wish to see improved.

- Deaf paraprofessionals identify a need for more training in administrative and teaching aspects of their work, and in some cases, clarification of the scope of their role - both for themselves and for the benefit of other professionals with whom they interact, (for example, some regularly make home visits, while others do not; some are assigned to work only with signing students, while others work with a broader range of students).

- Experiencing a degree of cultural isolation in the mainstream education environment, Deaf paraprofessionals seek collegial support within their small and scattered group of Deaf colleagues, as well as from those hearing professionals with whom they feel able to communicate easily (reported to be few). They strongly value opportunities for the development of their skills through training and working alongside other deaf educators, whom they consider to be 'on the same wavelength'. Participants generally wished for more supervision and role-modelling by Deaf professionals whom they believe would bring deaf insight to the many challenges they encounter on the job.

8.3 Perceptions of current learning conditions for deaf students in the mainstream

- From Deaf paraprofessionals' perspective, the majority of mainstreamed students are characterised as socially isolated, linguistically impoverished, and academically "behind their peers" to varying degrees. Deaf mentors thus perceive the mainstream learning context

(including current support arrangements) to be less than conducive to good academic outcomes for most of the deaf students they work with. Much of their work with students can be seen as remedial, attempting to address linguistic, social, and academic gaps created by school and home learning conditions – chiefly, the lack of accessible communication environments surrounding deaf students. Such environments, in their view, are attributable to insufficient practical support of parents to develop effective communication skills (in particular, a lack of early contact with NZSL models), heavy reliance at school on teacher aides who are minimally trained for their roles of facilitating communication and tutoring, combined with class teachers who are generally unfamiliar with teaching deaf students.

- Deaf mentors emphasise deaf children's restricted access to normal interaction with hearing classmates, with whom they usually only partially share a language. Even in the case of signing students, Deaf people's description of the communication environment in mainstream schools corresponds to a subtractive or de facto model of bilingualism, in which a minority language speaker is submersed in a majority language environment, usually with unfavourable academic outcomes and less than optimal development of either language (cf. Skutnabb- Kangas 2003; Krashen 1996).

- According to deaf educators, teacher aides collectively - with some individual exceptions - are not adequately skilled for the tasks and the level of responsibility they undertake in facilitating deaf students' communication access and learning in mainstream classrooms. They are seen by deaf paraprofessionals to need much higher levels of NZSL proficiency, interpreting skills, and greater knowledge of appropriate strategies for teaching and socialising deaf students as independent learners. Deaf participants are concerned at what they see as deaf students' over-dependence on teacher aides for tackling learning tasks and for social contact; they observe that both the untrained 'helping' behaviours of teacher aides and the structure of the situation itself contribute to this.

8.4 Deaf perspectives on improving the current situation

- Deaf mentors unanimously advocate the grouping of deaf learners together, in deaf classes within mainstream schools, or in deaf schools. They regard this arrangement not only as a more rational use of human resources, but more importantly, as enabling a learning and social environment in which 'live' communication in class is visually accessible through NZSL on an equal and unrestricted basis to all deaf and hearing impaired students. Deaf paraprofessionals want to see deaf students in such a contexts being taught by a teacher - preferably Deaf - who can communicate directly and engage students in learning by using teaching strategies appropriate to deaf learners. This is in contrast to what deaf people observe to be currently happening in most mainstream situations.

- In contrast to the observed beliefs and practices of many professionals and parents, Deaf participants express the view that the sociolinguistic identity of deaf individuals cannot be 'pigeonholed' or determined by the communication mode favoured by others during childhood. Deaf mentors in the study expressed the opinion that *all* deaf and hearing impaired children have an inherent right to contact with other deaf people for psychological and linguistic reasons, since their long-term futures potentially include identity and communication choices different from those made by parents and professionals. This conviction reflects deaf participants' own experience of being raised in an oralist education system (in a variety of school settings), yet now being members of a Deaf community that includes considerable linguistic and social diversity. From these deaf people's point of view, the labels 'oral' and 'signing' (and the associated educational practices) promote a false dichotomy that is educationally and psychologically harmful, and does not correspond with the more fluid spectrum of language use that typifies most deaf people's actual lives. They advocate that learning contexts and educational practices be more effectively structured to expand rather than narrow deaf students' options for communication and personal identity, in preparation for the benefits and complexities of potentially bilingual lives.

- Following from this point, some deaf mentors express regret that they work predominantly with the small proportion of mainstreamed students who use NZSL - while their services are regarded as less relevant to the majority of students who are designated as 'oral'. Deaf mentors' contact with student and families is at the discretion of hearing professionals and occasionally parents, which effectively limits their access to the wider population of deaf students who, in their view, would universally benefit from exposure to deaf adults in the educational context.

- Utlimately, by changing the learning conditions and context for deaf students (i.e. by creating accessible language and social environments for learning), Deaf paraprofessionals suggest that expectations for deaf students' academic outcomes can (and must) be raised and achieved.

9.0 Conclusion

While the presence of Deaf paraprofessionals brings an element of positive change into the educational experiences of deaf students with whom they work, their perspectives documented in this study draw a clear picture of a situation for mainstreamed deaf students which, overall, is far from ideal or even satisfactory, in their eyes. The shortcomings and the solutions they describe are by no means exclusive to a Deaf viewpoint (cf. Johnson, Liddell & Erting 1989; Lane 1992; McKee & Smith 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d), unique to the New Zealand context (cf. Bahan 1986; Bailes 1999; Levesque 1991; Schreiber 1969), nor novel to this historical time. In 1886 an American Deaf educator, George Wing, commented on experiments with co-enrolling deaf and hearing children in regular schools:

> "In prescribing 'environment of hearing children' as a remedy for the ills existing in the methods of instructing the deaf it is remarkable that the doctors have unanimously ordered that the medicine shall swallow the patient - in other words that deaf children shall be 'assimilated' by the mass of children in the public schools. Naturally all attempts to carry out their directions have resulted in disaster, and a remedy, excellent if properly administered, has fallen into disrepute. Environment of hearing children, to be of any help to the deaf, must be within the walls of special schools where it can be controlled and directed by trained specialists." (Wing 1886:170)

Wing's observations more than a century ago echo closely what Deaf paraprofessionals in this study have expressed. His recommendations for more suitable learning conditions essentially outline the foundations of a bilingual approach which is also advocated intuitively by these Deaf paraprofessionals in 2003, as follows: (i) that acquisition of a signed language as a means of full and natural expression of ideas needs to precede English literacy, (ii) that this first language (and the mental development that accompanies it) can only be effectively learned through social interaction with a critical mass of other Deaf people, and (iii) that co-enrolment and co-teaching of groups of hearing and deaf children can be mutually beneficial when the hearing children are also proficient in sign language and teaching is genuinely approached within the framework of both languages and cultures.

The key concerns for mainstreamed deaf students which participants in this study want to see addressed – including social isolation, communication access, academic under-achievement, and psychological impacts - have been empirically investigated and discussed at length in the professional literature for at least a century. Yet the frank and heartfelt re-articulation of these issues by Deaf paraprofessionals, whose new role gives them a fresh voice as 'outside' observers of deaf education mechanisms, whilst also being 'insiders' to understanding the experience of deaf children, make them a perennially important set of insights to be reiterated in planning better educational outcomes for deaf students in New Zealand. This study also shows that to a certain extent, Deaf paraprofessionals working in the mainstream education context share deaf students' sense of cultural isolation as a result of barriers which could be addressed in systemic ways in order to maximise their potential contribution as educators and agents of change.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule for Deaf Paraprofessionals

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DEAF MENTORS/RESOURCE PERSONS

There are three groups of questions to answer (25 questions altogether):

- About your job
- About working with other professionals
- Views about the mainstream school situation

I. JOB DESCRIPTION

1. What is your job title?
2. Briefly describe what you do in your job. (E.g., what do you do in a normal working week?)
3. Briefly describe the range of children you work with. (How many? Age? School settings - unit/mainstream? Communication mode? Other important information?)
4. When you visit a student at school (or home), what are the main things you do?
5. How often do you visit each student? Do you feel you have enough time with them?
6. Who decides which children you will work with? (How is this decided – reasons?)
7. What contact do you have with parents? (Home visits? IEP meetings? Other?)
8. Do you have special training for this job?
9. What supervision/ support do you have for your every day work and planning? (from Deaf/ hearing? Who?)
10. What do you see as the main goal or most important priority in your job?
11. How do deaf students respond to you as a Deaf person – do you think your role makes a makes a difference to deaf students? Please explain.

II. WORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

12. Do you sometimes you work with itinerant teachers of the deaf, advisors, teacher aides, or mainstream class teachers? Do you feel this is like a "team situation"?
13. How would you describe your relationships with hearing professionals – thinking about communication, attitudes, understanding of your role, etc.?
14. Do you feel that you are a resource or benefit for hearing staff? (e.g. to improve their knowledge of NZSL/ Deaf ways/ to deal with difficult students…) If yes, please explain.
15. I want to ask you about Teacher Aides:
    - Have you had the chance to observe teacher aides interpreting/ tutoring in classes?
    - If yes, do you have any comment on level of T.A. skills, generally?
    - How well do you see T.A.s supporting deaf children's learning?
16. In meetings and everyday professional situations are you normally the only deaf person there? If yes, are there any issues/problems around this for you?

17. Do you ever feel you have different views on a deaf child's needs or situation from hearing professionals and parents? If yes –explain what kind of issues.
18. How do you feel about speaking up about your point of view in work situations?

III. VIEWS ON MAINSTREAM SITUATION

19. Did you go to a deaf school, deaf unit, or were you mainstreamed?
20. For the children you see in your work, how successfully do you think they get on in mainstream classes - in terms of being included socially, access to learning, access to full communication?
21. What positive things do you see about mainstream school situations for deaf children you work with?
22. From your experience visiting mainstream schools, what is generally the biggest problem(s)/negatives that deaf children face in mainstream situations?
23. For the students you work with, what is their level of achievement in reading writing, maths, and curriculum – are they equal or close to the hearing students in mainstream classes?
24. If you had the power to improve the education situation for your deaf students, what would you change?
25. Is there anything else you want to add – ideas that you think are important for people planning deaf education to be aware of?