The professional progress of Deaf teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Tricia Laing, Sara Pivac Alexander, Judie Alison, Rachel McKee

Deaf Studies Research Unit
School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

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Executive Summary

Watch NZSL version here
(https://vimeo.com/1183235823/b10895221b?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci)

This research project investigated the experiences of a group of Deaf teachers particularly relating to: (1) training experiences; (2) professional progress; (3) work satisfaction; and (4) ideas about the future of Deaf teachers.

All nine of the Deaf teachers who agreed to participate in this study had at some point in their career worked at Ko Taku Reo and before that at either Kelston or van Asch Deaf Education Centres. At the time of the study:

- three of the participants were not currently working as teachers;
- two participants were working at schools other than Ko Taku Reo; and
- four of the Deaf teachers were working at Ko Taku Reo.

Five of the participants have experienced being in leadership roles at Ko Taku Reo at some time in their career. Since the interviews were undertaken and the report prepared there have been some changes to the employment of the Deaf teachers.

The Deaf teachers were interviewed using NZSL on Zoom. Specific research questions explored the experiences of Deaf teachers, in particular: (1) What professional progress have Deaf teachers experienced? (2) What would Deaf teachers like to see organised differently to increase their work satisfaction? (3) What vision do Deaf teachers have for their future as educators of deaf children?

The interviews were interpreted in the context of historical and recent international literature such as Deaf scholar Paddy Ladd's (2022) *Seeing Through New Eyes, Deaf Culture and Deaf Pedagogies: The Unrecognized Curriculum.* The interviews were also interpreted in the context of advocacy (ongoing for more than thirty years) for recognition of: NZSL as a medium for accessing the New Zealand curriculum, NZSL as an official language, Deaf schools as centres for Deaf communities, and replacing an oralist approach with a bilingual/bicultural approach in deaf education. Research on the vitality of NZSL and key reports such as the Human Rights Commission Report (2013) and the Ombudsman's report (2024) also provided context for interpreting the Deaf teachers' responses.

One Deaf teacher summed up the motivation of the participants for being a teacher, saying, I love teaching deaf students. I love watching them thrive and blossom into the world." The participants identified two interrelated points which made them, as Deaf teachers, unique. One point concerned the relationship they had with deaf students. The other point concerned their bilingual and bicultural awareness compared with hearing teachers. All but one of the Deaf teachers would encourage young Deaf people to train as teachers while at the same time warning them of the barriers they would encounter.

The process of qualifying as a specialist teacher for deaf students entails gaining a teaching degree, then becoming a fully registered teacher following two years of mentored teaching experience and subsequently completing a postgraduate Diploma or Master of specialist teaching. One participant felt challenged about the length of time (five to seven years) it took to achieve these qualifications because it had implications for the extent of access that deaf students had to Deaf teachers.

As registered teachers, many of our participants had experienced being moved around among the various Ko Taku Reo provisions for deaf students. There also seemed to have been a tendency for Deaf teachers to be required to juggle roles between being classroom teachers at various Ko Taku Reo provisions and preparing resources for Deaf and hearing Teachers of the Deaf. Often the Deaf teachers qualifications are a mismatch with the group of deaf students they are teaching resulting in some primary trained teachers teaching secondary school students and vice versa. Participants described the inconsistencies in placement and the juggling of various roles as resulting from the scarcity of Deaf teachers and the geographic dispersal of the relatively small deaf student population around Aotearoa New Zealand.

Online teaching has become a feature of deaf education as one of the consequences of this scarcity of Deaf teachers and the geographic dispersal of the deaf student population. The participants identified the specialist nature of online teaching and the efforts they had made to achieve in this area. The participants also noted that online teaching of NZSL needed to be balanced with face-to-face teaching.

Deaf teachers identified a range of tactics they saw as being used to prevent their promotion including being told that they: (1) needed more years of teaching experience; (2) lived in the wrong place although the Deaf Education Service is nation-wide and much of the communication is online; (3) didn't have enough leadership experience; and (4) didn't have specific skills like the ability to lead teams. The participants had navigated around the hearing world to become qualified teachers. Their frustration at not having their skills acknowledged and used to benefit deaf students was palpable in the interviews. The reasons given for their lack of success did not make sense to them, especially when the hearing people who were promoted were not proficient in NZSL, and their teaching philosophy was not bilingual/bicultural.

If anything inhibited the Deaf teachers' professional progress it was audism, the prejudice that people who hear and speak are superior. At least five of the Deaf teachers had left positions in the Deaf Education Service because they could no longer cope with the audism directed at them. Several Deaf teachers stepped down from positions in middle management because of stress that could be attributed to audism. "Having doubts", feeling diminished" or less than" and "feeling fearful" are ways that Deaf teachers described the personal consequence of individual and institutional audism. Meetings were an integral part of Deaf teachers' work experience but were a site of potential

disempowerment for participants because they were run according to hearing norms. Several participants thought that the settings where they taught became spaces that were not “culturally safe” because of the audism.

One of the striking characteristics of the Deaf teachers’ comments about individual and institutional audism was how, despite encountering audism at almost every turn, they remained reflective and thoughtful about how to improve the situation. Analysis of the participants’ experiences suggests that they have been caught between two institutions. One institution lacks a close understanding of their situation (NZEI) yet is expected to represent them and to make things right in another institution (Ko Taku Reo). NZEI s institutional audism seemed to be based on ignorance about a minority group of teachers, whereas Ko Taku Reo s audism was evident at many levels - individual, institutional and metaphysical.

Most of the Deaf teachers did not acquire shared Deaf cultural understandings in the process of growing up because they were born into hearing families. The increasing awareness that they lived bilingually and biculturally in two worlds - the hearing and the Deaf – only developed later, mostly after they had graduated as students from the Deaf Education Service. Navigating both the hearing and Deaf worlds often required the Deaf teachers to code switch’ from one culture to another, from one language to another. Despite the Deaf teachers’ considerable expertise and cultural match with deaf students, they were regularly overlooked in favour of hearing teachers with more years of experience teaching, even when this extensive teaching experience included neither fluency in NZSL nor awareness of Deaf culture. Using the concepts of culture, biculturalism and bilingualism, the Deaf teachers had reflected on issues arising from cultural differences and code switching between Deaf and hearing worlds. Their reflections had led them to develop strategies that enabled them to manage mental health risks from cross-cultural communication in order to live successful lives. These strategies they wanted to share with deaf students to help them improve their quality of life and educational achievement.

The Deaf teachers had all developed strategies for coping and used them so consistently that they can be identified as Deaf cultural characteristics. These strategies supported the use of NZSL in the face of discouragement, and challenges to their Deaf identity and Deafhood. The Deaf Teachers expressed the hope that future generations would be able to use these strategies to participate more fully in society than they had yet managed.

The research found that the professional progress of Deaf teachers does not follow the same pattern as hearing teachers with equivalent qualifications and experience. Deaf teachers’ professional progress and job satisfaction is hindered by frequent instances of audism and cross-cultural misunderstandings. The Deaf teachers hoped for changes to the Deaf Education Service that would make it more Deaf-centric.

Recommended changes in employment to make the Deaf Education Service more Deaf-centric include:

- Employing more Deaf teachers to improve the ratio of Deaf teachers to deaf students;
- Employing Turi Māori teachers to improve the ratio of Turi Māori teachers to Turi Māori students;
- Deaf Beginning Teachers being hosted in settings within the Deaf Education Service (not just Auckland and Christchurch), and provided with qualified Deaf mentors or at least mentors fluent in NZSL and competent in Deaf culture;
- Hearing teachers employed in the future being required to demonstrate fluency in NZSL, and awareness of Deaf culture; and
- Hearing teachers and other personnel currently employed in the Service being required to meet a minimum standard of proficiency in NZSL, and participate in Deaf awareness workshops.

Recommended changes in culture to make the Deaf Education Service more Deaf-centric are:

- Appointment of an Executive Principal who is Deaf and fluent in NZSL. (Such an appointment was made in September 2025);
- The school board of Ko Taku Reo be elected with a majority of Deaf members or hearing people fluent in NZSL and competent in Deaf culture. (Such an election has recently been held and a Deaf Chairperson appointed);
- Changes to ensure that a majority of the senior leaders at Ko Taku Reo are fluent in NZSL and have an in-depth understanding of Deaf culture. (Standards of staff NZSL proficiency are currently being assessed and improved through a project supported by the Ministry of Education);
- When conflicts between hearing and Deaf culture arise, resolution prioritise the use of Deaf cultural practices;
- All meetings should be run using a Deaf-friendly protocol;
- The expansion of Professional Development that focuses on a bilingual/bicultural approach to Deaf teaching and learning;
- Provision of Professional Development that explores how to enhance the educational achievement of deaf students; and,
- The expertise of Deaf teachers be acknowledged and used to improve the educational experience and achievements of deaf students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this research report, the term ‘Deaf teachers’ refers to teachers who have lived experience of being deaf. The report argues that these teachers are an essential professional group to be involved in the education of deaf children, but that their experiences and roles in deaf education in Aotearoa New Zealand do not always reflect this importance. (When we refer to ‘deaf education’, we are referring to the system providing education for deaf students.)

The first Deaf researcher to document the experiences of deaf people in this country, Pat Dugdale (2001), described the local Deaf community’s culture, history and language:

> The people now usually referred to as Deaf (with a capital D) are mainly people born with profound hearing loss, but the term includes many not born deaf and others not profoundly deaf who are happiest in the company of other Deaf people. People who are Deaf differ in their communication habits and in other ways from people who become deaf later in life. Many have limitations of education and literacy in English, and may find it difficult to communicate in speech, while on the other hand the Deaf community has its own distinct language - New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) - and its own culture, history and traditions (p.6).

No research has been completed about Deaf teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand since Eileen Smith’s MA thesis entitled “*Deaf Ways”: Literacy Teaching Strategies of Deaf Teachers in New Zealand* (2003). This thesis identified key features of Deaf ways of teaching Deaf children and highlighted the important contribution of trained Deaf teachers.

More than twenty years have passed since Smith’s thesis was published, and significant events have occurred with the potential to influence the role of Deaf teachers long term such as: the introduction of NZSL interpreters in the mid 1980s (Mckee, R. 2019); the reorganisation of the education system in 1989 (commonly known as Tomorrow’s Schools) that enabled Deaf people to have a governance role in deaf education; the introduction of the first bilingual class in 1995 taught at Kelston Deaf Education Centre; the passing of the 2006 New Zealand Sign Language Act making NZSL our second official language alongside Te Reo Māori; and, the increasing availability of online teaching and learning. It seems timely to provide a new account of Deaf teachers’ experiences.

A key feature of the history of deaf education in this country has seen advocacy to replace oralism with a bilingual/bicultural approach. NZSL is crucial to this bilingual approach. The Human Rights Commission’s Inquiry into NZSL in 2013 indicated the need for young children to have easy access to NZSL as a basis for achieving educationally. An Ombudsman’s decision in 2024 concerning a complaint about the availability of NZSL in the education of deaf children reiterated that the Government needed to do more to implement this.

Our study interprets and presents the results of this study of Deaf teachers’ professional progress within this local context at the same time as referring to deaf education internationally. The aims, the introductions of the research team, and the methods used to

collect and analyse information from the participants are followed by an outline of the report to complete this introduction.

The Aims of the Research

The aims of the research were to look at the experiences of Deaf teachers particularly relating to: (1) training experiences; (2) professional progress; (3) work satisfaction; and (4) ideas about the future of Deaf teachers.

The Research Team

Members of the research team all have relevant experience for this work, and their backgrounds are described here.

The lead author, Dr Tricia Laing, is hearing and lives in a multi-generational household with her profoundly Deaf daughter and son-in-law; and, CODA grand-daughter, where NZSL is the preferred language for communication. She has been President of Wellington Parents for Deaf Children; a member of the Executive Committee of the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children now Deaf Children New Zealand; a member of the Board of Trustees of van Asch Deaf Education Centre and for a period Deputy Chairperson. She has been advocating for improvements in deaf education for more than 30 years. She completed a one-year post-graduate teacher training course for secondary teaching. She gained a PhD from Victoria University of Wellington in Education and Anthropology (1976) which was on the topic of how Samoan secondary school students become bilingual and bicultural, and introduced the concept of cultural competence. Her PhD provided evidence for *Talking Past Each Other: Problems of Cross-cultural Communication* (1978). For more than 50 years she has worked as a Medical/ Health Research Council and government funded researcher studying the relationship between traditional healing in the Pacific (including Māori). She has led multi-cultural research teams studying the experience of Housing New Zealand tenants. She has been a reviewer for the Foundation of Research Science and Technology, the Health Research Council, the Royal Society Social Sciences Advisory Committee; and the PBRF. She has supervised and examined post-graduate degrees and also held management positions in government and university research teams such as being the founding Associate Dean, Research and Graduate in the Faculty of Arts at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington.

The second author, Sara Pivac Alexander, is Deaf and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. She is a member of the Deaf Studies Research Unit. She trains Deaf people to become NZSL teachers through the Certificate in Deaf Studies. She teaches NZSL to undergraduate students. Sara's work includes research and documentation of NZSL, and she has authored NZSL teaching curricula and resources that are used nationally. She is a leader in the NZSL teaching sector and contributes to strengthening the quality and professionalisation of NZSL teaching. Sara comes from a Deaf family, where she grew up 'listening' to discussions about deaf education. Both of her parents served on the Board of Trustees for Kelston Deaf Education Centre and her mother was the first Deaf

Chairperson. Her husband is also Deaf and a registered teacher. She is heavily involved with the Deaf community and she currently serves as a board member of Wellington Deaf Society.

The third author, Dr Judie Alison, is hearing and holds a Diploma in the Education of Handicapped Children [sic] from Auckland College of Education, 1987, in addition to a Doctorate in Education awarded in 2007 by Massey University. She has taught in both mainstream high schools (as a teacher and middle leader in English) and special education as Director of the Papakura Activity Centre in the 1980's. From 1997 to 2002, she was Head of the Languages Faculty at Kelston Girls' High School, and in that capacity had the pleasure of working with a number of deaf students in her classes, and with the professionals in the Deaf Resource Centre there. As an Executive member of the teacher union PPTA from 1994 to 2000, her role included national responsibilities in the area of special education. She joined the National Office of PPTA in 2002 as a member of the Policy and Advocacy team with responsibility for a range of professional areas including special education, teacher education and registration, curriculum and school qualifications. Since her 'retirement' in 2018, she has continued to engage in education research across a number of areas.

The fourth author, Dr Rachel McKee, is an Associate Professor in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and Director of the Deaf Studies Research Unit. Rachel is hearing and trained as an NZSL interpreter in 1985 and subsequently studied and worked in the sign language field in USA. With her husband David, Rachel established programmes for training NZSL interpreters, Deaf teachers of NZSL, and undergraduate NZSL studies at Victoria University of Wellington. Her publications include documentation of Deaf life stories, research on the lexicon and grammar of NZSL, sociolinguistic variation in NZSL, studies of interpreting, sign language teaching, and sign language policy and planning. Rachel has previously conducted and supervised research on the use of NZSL in education, and been involved in advocacy relevant to this topic.

Method

In this research we studied the experiences of a group of nine Deaf teachers. All nine of the Deaf teachers who agreed to participate in this study have at some point in their career worked at Ko Taku Reo and before that at either Kelston or van Asch Deaf Education Centres. Three of the participants are not currently working as teachers. At the time of the study, two participants were working at schools which are not part of Ko Taku Reo. Also at the time of the study, four of the Deaf teachers were working at Ko Taku Reo. Five of the participants have experienced being in leadership roles at Ko Taku Reo at some time in their career. Three of the Deaf teachers currently hold middle management roles at Ko Taku Reo. During this research some of the Deaf teachers circumstances have changed following their desire to share their knowledge and experiences with deaf students. This research follows the timeline from when the participants gained university qualifications, completed teacher education qualifications, and progressed professionally after they attained their teaching qualification.

There are no official figures on the number of Deaf people who have qualified as teachers. Our estimate in 2026 is that there may be thirty Deaf teachers. This estimate is based on information provided by the Deaf teachers that participated in our study, a video compiled by the Deaf teacher, Pollyanna Ferguson, in 2020 entitled *Deaf Teachers in Deaf Education Aotearoa* which she posted on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSSz94-gps0), and anecdotal evidence about the number of Deaf teachers known to our research team who neither participated in our study nor Pollyanna Ferguson's video. Some of the Deaf teachers featured in Pollyanna Ferguson's video have now retired so the estimate of thirty currently registered Deaf teachers is on the high side. Our group of nine Deaf teachers therefore represents approximately a third of all the Deaf individuals who have qualified as teachers.

All the Deaf teachers who participated are members of the Deaf community, and use NZSL as their preferred language. All of the Deaf teachers had experience of the Deaf Education Service before and after the merger of Kelston and van Asch Deaf Education Centres into Ko Taku Reo which occurred in 2020. The research team used their networks to identify Deaf teachers and to invite them to participate in the study. Nine Deaf teachers accepted the invitation to participate. (See Appendix One for the invitation to participate.) Since the Deaf teachers and members of the research team belong to the same very small Deaf community, particular attention has been paid to ensuring the anonymity of the participants. The study received ethics approval from Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington's Ethics Committee (2024/HE000121).

Sara Pivac Alexander interviewed the Deaf teachers using NZSL on Zoom. The video clip includes the consent to participate followed by the interview itself. Specific research questions explored the experiences of Deaf teachers, in particular: (1) What professional progress have Deaf teachers experienced? (2) What would Deaf teachers like to see organised differently to increase their work satisfaction? And (3) What vision do Deaf teachers have for their future as educators of deaf children? (See Appendix Two for a list of the interview questions.)

The interviews each took approximately an hour to one and a half hours. The interview videos were then translated from NZSL into written English by a Deaf research assistant and members of the research team fluent in NZSL. Tricia Laing summarised the English translations of the interviews and these summaries were reviewed by Sara Pivac Alexander, after which they were sent to the participants for their review. Two of the Deaf teachers requested small changes relating to the accuracy of descriptions in the summaries of their interviews. Seven of the Deaf teachers accepted the summaries as correct.

The reviewed summaries formed the basis for the thematic analysis of the experiences of Deaf teachers. In the first instance the thematic analysis followed the answers the Deaf teachers gave to the questions in the questionnaire, wherever possible focussing on the positive aspects of their work and the future they see for Deaf teachers. The thematic analysis further identified two themes that cut across all the Deaf teachers' experiences, and had negative connotations. One theme related to access, attitudes and audism, where

audism refers to the idea that people who hear and speak are superior, and Deaf people are oppressed as a result of these attitudes and actions. The other theme related to cross-cultural differences and the problems of communication between Deaf and hearing teachers associated with these differences. A series of recommendations for change that would result in a more Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service were identified based on the thematic analyses. The draft report was sent to the participants who generally agreed that it represented their views accurately with only one or two participants asking for small revisions to clarify their contributions.

This report will be used as a basis for advocacy to agencies that can help change the Deaf Education Service to become more Deaf-centric.

Organisation of the Report

This Introduction has outlined the research aims, membership of the research team, specific research questions, and method used.

In Chapter Two we provide a brief history of deaf education internationally and some of the historical events that have shaped deaf education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This historical background provides a context within which the information the Deaf teachers shared about their experiences in interviews can be interpreted.

Chapter Three begins to report the findings, particularly in relation to Deaf teachers' motivations to teach deaf students. It highlights why they chose to be Deaf teachers; what they like about being a Deaf teacher; what they see as unique about Deaf teachers teaching deaf students; and, what advice Deaf teachers would give young Deaf people interested in becoming a Deaf teacher.

Chapter Four covers the process Deaf teachers followed to become registered as a teacher including their tertiary qualifications; the support and mentoring of other Deaf and hearing teachers they received; and the access they had to support resources such as note-taking, interpreters and captioning of videos. It includes descriptions of the Deaf teachers' experiences as Beginning Teachers (BTs) with provisional registration.

In Chapter Five, the focus is on Deaf teachers' experiences once they secured teaching roles. It includes identifying the settings where the Deaf teachers were working, their experiences of professional development, seeking promotion, and leadership roles.

Chapter Six provides an account of the issues Deaf teachers had with access to resources that could support them in becoming registered and continuing as registered teachers. The Deaf teachers experienced varying issues with access, attitudes and audism when: completing a university qualification; undertaking teacher education; as a Beginning Teacher with provisional registration; in relationship to hearing colleagues; in professional development; as members of their teachers' union; and, in leadership roles.

Chapter Seven explores the notions of cultural and language differences in relation to the participants' experiences of working in teams of Deaf and hearing teachers and the cross-cultural communication issues that arise as a result.

Finally, Chapter Eight presents recommendations for changes to the Deaf Education Service that would result in it being more Deaf-friendly. These recommendations are based on the interviews with the Deaf teachers who participated in our study. Recommendations include: employing more Deaf teachers; providing Deaf awareness/cultural competence workshops for hearing staff; Deaf culture being prioritised at Ko Taku Reo as the only Deaf Education Service; no employment of teachers in deaf education without NZSL competency; and, Deaf-centred professional development.

Chapter 2: The Context for this Research

As discussed above in the Introduction, until recently there has been relatively little research specific to the experiences of Deaf teachers. In 2022, Deaf scholar Paddy Ladd published a significant exposition of deaf pedagogy drawing from the experiences and insights of deaf educators in *Seeing Through New Eyes, Deaf Culture and Deaf Pedagogies: The Unrecognized Curriculum.* However, there are earlier studies and reports which provide a broad historical context for interpreting the experiences of our participants.

Recognition of Deaf Teachers Internationally

The British neurologist Oliver Sacks, in his book, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (1989) based his journey - from being a hearing doctor who saw Deaf people as disabled to recognising sign languages and Deaf culture - on reviewing available literature. It was Sacks' experience of visiting Martha's Vineyard in the United States, where from the 18th century on there was a thriving deaf community with its own local version of sign language, that convinced him that sign "was a fundamental language of the brain" (p.30).

America's first university for the Deaf was named Gallaudet after Thomas Gallaudet. His son Edward, had travelled extensively in Europe in the late 1870s (see https://gallaudet.edu/museum/history/the-history-of-names-for-gallaudet-university/). He had toured deaf schools in fourteen countries, and found that "the sign language schools did as well as the oral schools as far as articulating speech was concerned, but obtained superior results in general education" (Sacks, 1989, p.30). At about the same time in,"1869 there were 550 teachers of the deaf worldwide and that 41 percent of the teachers of the deaf in the United States were themselves deaf" (Sacks, 1989, p.21). Sacks described how:

> Deaf students of the 1850s who had been to the Hartford Asylum, or other such schools, were highly literate and educated - fully the equal of their hearing counterparts. Today the reverse is true. Oralism and suppression of Sign have resulted in a dramatic deterioration in the educational achievement of deaf children and in the literacy of the deaf generally (p.25).

He went on to say that: "[I]t was only during the 1900s that historians and psychologists, as well as parents and teachers of deaf children, started asking, 'What has happened? What *is* happening?' It was only in the 1960s and early 1970s that this situation reached the public" (p.25). The balance between using sign and oralism to educate deaf children was upset when Alexander Bell:

> [T]hrew all the weight of his immense authority and prestige into the advocacy of oralism, the scales were, finally, overbalanced and tipped and at the notorious International Congress of Educators of the Deaf (ICED) held at Milan in 1880, where deaf teachers were themselves excluded from the vote, oralism won the day and the use of Sign in schools was "officially" proscribed (Sacks, 1989, p.24).

The establishment of a school for educating Deaf students in Aotearoa New Zealand and the ICED at Milan both occurred in 1880. Sumner School for the Deaf was opened on March 10, 1880, while the congress at Milan was from 6-11 September. An oralist approach with the negative consequences that are now well documented, was used from the outset in deaf education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Collins-Ahlgren 1989).

Sacks had the opportunity to compare two Schools for the Deaf in the United States which highlighted how a residential school for the Deaf employing Deaf teachers has special significance for establishing a local Deaf community. He wrote:

> [A]t the chiefly residential California School for the Deaf in Fremont, many of the students have reasonable reading and writing skills, almost comparable to hearing students, whereas students at Braefield, more typically, average only a fourth-grade reading level at graduation. Many of the children at Fremont have larger vocabularies, sign well, are full of curiosity and questions, speak (or, more often, sign) fully and freely; have a sense of self-confidence and power of a sort I scarcely saw in Braefield. I was not surprised to hear of how well they did academically (far better than the average, scholastically retarded deaf).
>
> Many factors seem to be at work here. On the whole the children at Fremont come from more secure homes and backgrounds. A relatively high percentage of the teachers themselves are deaf; Fremont is one of the few schools in the United States with a policy of employing deaf teachers - such teachers are not only native signers but can transmit deaf culture and a positive image of deafness to the children. There is - and it is this that is so dramatically different from what I saw at Braefield - over and above the formal schooling, a community of children living together, signing together, playing together, sharing lives and meanings (1989 pp.47-48).

On the transmission of sign language, and following extensive research, Sacks concluded: “Language must be introduced and acquired as early as possible or its development may be permanently retarded and impaired …Deaf children must first be exposed to fluent signers, whether these be their parents, or teachers, or whoever” (1989, p.27). Sacks came to understand how sign language and Deaf culture were transmitted and the importance of residential schools for the Deaf as centres for Deaf communities. He was also able to witness first-hand Deaf people take control of their own futures at Gallaudet University (Sacks 1989, pp 99-100). Deaf people sought Deaf academic leadership on March 8,1988 : “[T]he students closed the university and barricaded the campus” (p 99). Four demands that the faculty and staff supported were:

> 1) that a new, deaf president be named immediately; (2) that the chairman of the board, Jane Bassett Spilman, resign immediately; (3) that the board have a 51 percent majority of deaf members (at present it has seventeen hearing members and only four deaf); and (4) that there be no reprisals (pp.99-100).

Sacks reflected on the strike saying: “Many revolutions, transformations, awakenings are in response to immediate (and intolerable) circumstances. What is so remarkable about the Gallaudet strike of 1988 is its historical perspective that informs it.” (1989 p. 108). “[O]n March 10 the newly appointed hearing president resigned saying, ‘I have responded to this extraordinary social movement of deaf people having come to see this as a very special moment in time, one that was ‘unique, a civil rights moment in history for deaf people’” (Sacks 1989 pp. 123-124). Sacks noted that, “Support is coming from every quarter …I see signs from Iowa and Alabama, from Canada, from South America, as well as from Europe, even from New Zealand” (p.124). On March 13, a deaf candidate, I. King Jordan, became the newly elected university president. Sacks concluded:

> Will there be a lasting ‘transformation of consciousness’? Will deaf people at Gallaudet, and the deaf community at large indeed find the opportunities they seek? Will we, the hearing, allow them these opportunities? Allow them to be themselves, a unique culture in our midst, yet admit them as co-equals, to every sphere of activity? One hopes the events at Gallaudet will be but the beginning (p.130).

Deaf Education and Advocacy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand’s relationship to Gallaudet began in the early 1980s according to Pat Dugdale, a Deaf academic. In her book, *Talking Hands, Listening Eyes: The History of The Deaf Association of New Zealand* (2001) she says, “In 1981 the three Gallaudet “doctors” toured New Zealand to talk about deaf education, Deaf rights and culture etc. NZAD [the New Zealand Association of the Deaf] was the host…Local people arranged meetings for them with Deaf and hearing people” (p.69). Dugdale reports that “The 1981 visit of the three Gallaudet experts made a big impression… Their report to the NZDA said an interpreter service was a priority” (p.135). Their report also underlined the value of leadership training (p.187). While their proposal about leadership training was not followed up on “it had the effect of making the Government and funding agencies think seriously about Deaf Leadership Training” (p.187). As a consequence of the developing relationship with Gallaudet two deaf and one hearing parent of a deaf child accepted an invitation from Gallaudet to look at their leadership and other programmes (p.188). When this group returned to New Zealand they were involved in leadership training camps and “Leadership Training became accepted as a way to increase Deaf independence and assertiveness” (p.189). In 1984 the Government accepted the need for interpreters for Deaf people and provided funding for their training (p.139). In April 1985 an American, Dan Levitt, was contracted as the trainer (p.139). “In 1989 the Roy McKenzie Foundation established a $5,000 scholarship to be awarded annually for the next five years and its first recipient was Kevin Stokes, who was enabled to attend the ‘Deaf Way’ conference at Gallaudet” (p.279). Subsequently, some other Deaf New Zealanders had opportunities to attend the high school attached to Gallaudet or Gallaudet University itself, exposing them to Deaf professional leadership in education and the Deaf pride movement that was gaining momentum in the USA from the 1980s onwards.

Advocacy in Aotearoa New Zealand from Deaf people, parents and teachers of deaf children has been ongoing for the more than 30 years. This advocacy has sought the

recognition of NZSL as a medium for accessing the New Zealand Curriculum; NZSL as an official language, Deaf history and culture including the special place of the Deaf schools as centres for Deaf communities. This advocacy also sought to replace the oralist approach to educating Deaf children with a bilingual and bicultural approach.

Recognition of NZSL as a medium for accessing the New Zealand Curriculum

In the 1989 reorganisation of the governance of the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand (generally referred to as the Tomorrow's Schools reforms) Deaf people were enabled to have a governance role in deaf education through membership of the Boards of Trustees of van Asch and Kelston Deaf Education Centres. By the early 1990s, Deaf representation on these Boards and growing awareness of bilingual approaches being used in deaf education overseas led to acceptance of NZSL being used in the deaf schools. Smith (2003) identified the number of Deaf people who held positions within the Deaf Education Service, including Deaf teachers. She said that "the nine qualified Deaf teachers employed in deaf education represented only 5.5% of the 163 teaching positions in deaf education" (p.74). Principal of Kelston Deaf Education Centre at the time, Eileen Smith, created new roles for Deaf paraprofessionals and teachers to strengthen the presence of NZSL and Deaf culture in deaf education. The Ministry of Education subsequently recognised the value of NZSL in a national guideline for deaf education, which states that it "supports the use of NZSL and written and spoken English", and recognizes the Deaf community as "a natural community of interest and as a cultural resource in relation to Deaf and hearing impaired children" (Deaf Education Aotearoa New Zealand, 2005, p. 21). Further progress needs to be made, however, if all deaf children are to access the New Zealand Curriculum using NZSL, and if Deaf teachers are to be recognised as having a unique culture to share with deaf students.

Recognition of NZSL as an official language

NZSL became an official language in 2006. This followed two decades of lobbying led by the Deaf Association with support from the Disabled People's Assembly and the Labour Government which took office in 2000. The NZSL Act (2006) elevated the status of NZSL but lacked relating to its use in education, which was a key concern in the Deaf community's advocacy for language recognition (McKee 2011). The Human Rights Commission (2013) and the Ombudsman (2024) supported the right of deaf children to access the New Zealand Curriculum using NZSL in response to cumulative evidence that this is not widely available.

Recognition of the Deaf schools as centres for Deaf communities

International researchers have described how residential schools for the Deaf "become hubs of the communities that surround them, preserving for the next generation the culture of earlier generations. …This unique pattern of transmission lies at the heart of the culture" (Padden 1996b, p.87). It was not surprising to discover the same pattern in Aotearoa New Zealand with Deaf communities growing up around the residential schools for deaf students in Auckland and Christchurch. On the basis of a survey, Smith reported a pattern of Deaf people's participation in deaf education that was similar to that evident internationally:

> [A] higher proportion of deaf students have the opportunity for regular social contact and face-to face instruction with deaf adults in Deaf Education Centres, in comparison to the mainstream. …The extent of contact by deaf people in administrative positions is unknown and no instructional work is included in their job descriptions. However as all these staff work at, or are based in Deaf Education Centres, they do add to critical mass of deaf people available within those school settings (p.84).

Recently (September 2025) a Deaf Executive Principal has been appointed for the first time at Ko Taku Reo, the Deaf Education Service, and the election of a Deaf chairperson to the Board of Trustees. But we do not yet see Deaf people's aspirations for deaf education fully realised in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Replacing an oralist approach with a bilingual/bicultural approach in deaf education

Deaf teachers and their role in the education of deaf children in Aotearoa New Zealand felt the impact of the Milan ICED:

> [O]ne significant effect was that from 1880 until 1985 there were no deaf teachers trained or employed in New Zealand. It was taken for granted by van Asch, and subsequent administrators, that deaf people could not participate in a system which promoted speech and listening and proscribed sign language (Smith 2003, p.24).

This changed with the introduction of bilingual programmes, as Smith explained: "Bilingual education pre-supposes the existence of a recognised community of deaf people and it is necessary to employ members of that community to ensure the authenticity of such approaches" (pp.15-16). She reported on findings from other countries, such as Denmark, Sweden and the United States that supported this approach.

Smith went into some detail about the importance of Deaf teachers as linguistic role models; as providers of knowledge and information about how Deaf people experience the world; and, as cultural and social models. Smith said that this compensated in some measure for the fact that for most deaf children the process of enculturation into the Deaf world is not possible in their hearing homes. Smith noted the importance of Deaf teachers' links into the Deaf community:

> [It enabled them] to introduce a wide range of deaf people into classrooms, to discuss their lives and histories and the culture and heritage of their community. This promotes in young people a sense of shared identity with a local, national and even global deaf community, which exists parallel to the hearing community of their families. Deaf teachers can lead their community colleagues into discussions and demonstrations of the way they live amongst the two communities (2003, p.42).

And, Smith referred to Carol Padden's view that Deaf teachers who drew Deaf community members into classroom discussions could show how they were able "to negotiate tensions between competing and profoundly contradictory beliefs, lives and activities" (Padden, 1996b, p.87).

Not only are Deaf teachers role models for deaf students but also for hearing teachers and parents of deaf students. Yet despite the evidence identifying the importance of Deaf teachers in bilingual-bicultural education of deaf children, Smith noted that:

> [T]heir employment in deaf education continues to be limited and they form a minority of trained teachers of the deaf. This situation is mainly attributed to the process of certification and teacher registration demanded by most countries. Deaf people need to complete a course of regular teacher training based on hearing norms before they can be accepted onto a course which trains them to be teachers of the deaf (which often include requirements such as experience of teaching hearing students). For many deaf people, the outcomes of their own educational experience are such that they do not meet the academic criteria for acceptance onto such courses. For those who are accepted, the programme may prove too demanding, or inaccessible in terms of communication and/or cultural comfort (2003 p.45).

The first bilingual class was established at Kelston Centre for Deaf Education in 1995. Smith reported that it was conceived as a 'pilot' programme for a two year trial period. Its coordinator, Beatrice Nuthall, described the model as one "using NZSL as the first language to develop a second language, English, through reading and writing" (Smith, 2003 p.51). In February 2000, of the reported 2124 deaf and hearing impaired students in New Zealand "[t]he majority, 85%, were in mainstream schools, with the remaining 15% in classes in the Deaf Education Centres or Deaf Resource Classes" (Smith 2003 p.48). The settings where bilingual classes were able to be established meant they were available to a limited percentage of the student population. Smith's study provides an important context for understanding the professional progress of the Deaf teachers we interviewed. All of the participants in this current research had experience (as students and teachers) of the Deaf Education System she describes. In the current organisation of deaf education, implementation of a bilingual approach is still complicated by the fact that most deaf students are individually enrolled in mainstream schools rather than in collective settings where NZSL is a shared language, and only a small proportion of teachers and teacher aides working with deaf students are Deaf themselves or fluent in NZSL (Powell, Boon and Luckner, 2019). These circumstances also shape the work context for Deaf teachers.

NZSL as an Official Language of Aotearoa New Zealand and its Vitality

One success from all the local advocacy was achieved when NZSL became an official language with the passing of the New Zealand Sign Language Act (2006).

> The purpose of this Act is to promote and maintain the use of New Zealand Sign Language by— a) declaring New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand; and b) providing for the use of New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings; and c) empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand

Sign Language; and d) stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of New Zealand Sign Language (Section 3).

Oversight of NZSL is vested in the NZSL Board, established by a Government Cabinet paper in 2014 with all the Board members being Cabinet appointees.

The purpose of the NZSL Board is to:

- promote and maintain the use of NZSL by ensuring the development and preservation and acquisition of the language;
- ensure the rights of Deaf people and NZSL users to use NZSL as outlined in the NZSL Act 2006, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other national and relevant international legislation; and
- provide expert advice to Government and the community on NZSL, including recommendations on allocation of the NZSL Fund (https://www.nzsl.govt.nz/nzsl-board/about-the-nzsl-board#the-nzsl-board-s-role-and-responsibilities)

The Government established the NZSL Fund to support projects that promote and maintain NZSL. The NZSL Board is said to be responsible for oversight of the Fund, but it is the Minister for Disability Issues, not the NZSL Board, that agrees policies and criteria for the NZSL Fund to ensure it is being used for things that are most important to NZSL and Deaf community.

The education of deaf children in NZSL is critical to the ongoing vitality of the NZSL community. Applying a language vitality and endangerment framework to assessing the vitality of NZSL, McKee (2017) concluded that, “Like many minority languages New Zealand Sign Language gained official recognition (NZSL Act 2006) at a time when its vitality was already under pressure” and that the Deaf NZSL-using community “is certainly smaller than indicated by previous estimates, likely between 2,000 and 3,000” (McKee, 2017, pp.322-335). McKee writes:

> [F]indings about the intergenerational transmission of NZSL show that a small, and apparently decreasing, proportion of deaf children use NZSL and that conditions for acquisition are constrained by attitudes, practices and resources at home and in school. However, it is clear that some deaf children deemed not to be SL users will later identify with a sign language community… It is interesting that 49 percent of parents in the survey agreed that their child is ‘likely to use NZSL later in life’, whereas a quarter reported their child to be currently signing. This reveals parents’ awareness that SL is potentially relevant to their child’s adult identity and well-being, but, from the perspective of language maintenance, it also highlights a disjunction between the limited support available for children to acquire NZSL and the assumption that an adult NZSL collective will autonomously sustain itself as a cultural resource to be discovered later in life (2017, p.344).

The threats to the vitality of NZSL seen by participants in McKee's study aligned with the objective findings of her study, and included:

> (1) prevalence of CI in young deaf children, followed by an exclusive focus on spoken language; (2) the loss of schools for deaf children, associated with limited exposure to NZSL and deaf identity; (3) apparently declining participation in deaf organisations, together with more diffuse social networks among younger generations of deaf people (2017, p.352).

Although McKee's assessment resulted in NZSL being rated as "threatened", NZSL demonstrates factors relating to language resilience, for instance:

> Optimism about the future of the NZSL community reflects a sense of validation resulting from institutional recognition and the Deaf community's increasing engagement in activities that overtly support positive attitudes toward NZSL and Deaf identity. The status of those who use SL is also important, and middle-class SL users powerfully influence representations of the language both within the deaf community and to outsiders. … Recognition of NZSL improved access to higher education, and better employment opportunities have enabled a small number of deaf people to assume professional roles (mainly in education) and a middle-class status. Their influence in promoting a discourse of linguistic rights is evident in community led LPP [Language Planning and Policy] actions and in the public policy space related to NZSL, all of which engender a sense of positivity about its vitality (McKee, 2017, p.353).

Human Rights Commission and Ombudsman on NZSL

The legally required review of the NZSL Act 2006 was undertaken in 2011, and since then has been postponed indefinitely, however the Human Rights Commission published a report following an enquiry into NZSL in 2013, focusing on persisting barriers faced by NZSL users in interactions with state agencies. This report, *A New Era in the Right to Sign/He Houhanga Rongo Te Tika ki Te Reo Turi: Report of the New Zealand Sign Language Inquiry* said that:

> It is crucial that children acquire language skills early in life. Children born deaf or who become deaf before their speech is well-established often depend on NZSL to communicate. Most deaf children are born into hearing families who do not have prior experience of childhood deafness. The current mix of locally available evening classes, minimal NZSL resources and limited support for families is not enough. It makes it too difficult to create a natural learning environment for children to acquire NZSL skills as a foundational language (p.9).

It also noted that the New Zealand Curriculum:

> [R]ecognises the official status of NZSL and the right of deaf learners to access education in NZSL. The official language section of the NZ curriculum states that

> English, Māori and NZSL may be studied as first or additional languages. They "may also be the medium of instruction across all learning areas" (NZC 2007, p14).

And,

> The Disability Convention calls on governments to take appropriate steps to facilitate the learning of sign language and the linguistic identity of the Deaf community. It also requires them to employ teachers who are appropriately qualified in sign language (Human Rights Commission 2013, pp.32-33).

The report provided a description of what is offered in early childhood following the diagnosis of a baby or child as deaf but concluded that:

> Where significant hearing loss is identified, an audiologist refers the baby or child to medical specialists and provides information to the family/whanau on deafness. Parents may also be referred to the Ministry of Education's advisors on deaf children and parent support organisation, the NZ Federation for Deaf Children. … Too little is being done too late to facilitate children's and families' access to NZSL in these crucial years…there are insufficient resources available to support families who want NZSL to be their child's foundational language … Families' decisions about the communication modality for their deaf child occur within a context that is skewed towards medical rather than linguistic responses to deafness…families who want or need to use NZSL to communicate with their child are largely left to develop NZSL skills on their own (2013, pp.34-35).

Overall, the Human Rights Commission Report emphasised the lack of funding and other support needed for parents to make an informed choice about the communication modality for their deaf children and to sustain a multi-generational NZSL-using community.

In 2021 a group of advocates representing parents of Deaf children, Deaf Aotearoa (Deaf adults), the Victoria University Deaf Studies Research Unit and others who had been seeking improvements in Deaf children's access to the New Zealand Curriculum using NZSL for over 30 years, felt that the situation was going backwards. This backward movement was despite the Human Rights Commission's report (2013), the establishment of the NZSL Board (2014) and the Board's advice since then; and, the existence of the 'NZSL Development Map' that the Ministry of Education had prepared. A complaint was lodged with the Ombudsman. The group met with the Ombudsman and he took up the case. In December 2023 about three years after the first meeting, the Ombudsman published his opinion. And then on the 28 of February 2024, the Ombudsman issued the following statement:

> [T]he Ministry of Education acted unreasonably when it failed to ensure its strategy for progressing access to education in New Zealand Sign Language included specific ways to achieve its goals… The Ministry produced the 'Development Map' as its strategy, accompanied by an A3 graphic, in 2019 in consultation with the NZSL Board and groups including Deaf Aotearoa. Deaf Aotearoa believed the

> Development Map did not adequately address the long-term issues Deaf learners faced in the provision of NZSL in the New Zealand education system (https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/news/ministry-educations-unreasonable-omissions-nzsl-education-strategy).

Deaf Teachers Support Deaf Children's Hearing Families into the Deaf World

The first encounter that hearing parents in Aotearoa New Zealand have with professional advice about how to support their deaf children usually comes from Advisors on Deaf Children (AODC),none of whom are Deaf. As McKee said in her paper 'Connecting Hearing Parents with the Deaf World':

> Parents seldom encounter early advice or role modelling from professionals which informs them that NZSL is a language used by a community of Deaf people who have linguistic and cultural knowledge that can help them and their child to communicate and to learn. They are not routinely introduced to people from that community who can guide them, nor provided with realistic background information that prepared them for finding a connection with the Deaf world (2006, p.151).

In 2006, recognising how difficult it was for families of deaf children to access the Deaf community and culture, and being unable to find hearing parents discussing their cultural position in relationship to the Deaf world, Ruth Fitzgerald and Patricia Laing edited a collection of articles entitled 'Cultural Positions in New Zealand's Deaf World' (pp.2-4).

In one of the papers in this collection McKee said of hearing parents:

> Without knowledge of how Deaf adults manage participation in two social worlds, hearing parents struggle to balance knowledge of their Deaf child's easy affinity with Deaf peers against the prevailing image of a successful future as being in the hearing world. Unlike Deaf parents, hearing parents generally have no picture of a Deaf community as a point of reference for interpreting their child's experiences, or weighing up the relative importance of Deaf social connection in relation to belonging to the family's community (2006, p.154).

On the basis of her experience as a parent of a deaf child Laing suggested that:

> Migration theory provides a conceptual model that supports hearing parents of deaf children to take an active role in assessing the advice that we receive about appropriate modes of communicating with our children, how to think about hearing aid technology and expectations of educational achievement (2006, p.96).

McKee argued that perhaps if more hearing parents of deaf children were exposed to role models using this concept of migration to frame their experiences, far fewer parents would accept "that their child would achieve at lower levels because of the limitations they saw as intrinsic to being 'Deaf in a hearing world'." And she concluded: "The importance of

exposure to successful Deaf learners and Deaf parenting role models cannot be overstated in response to altering parents' insights and images" (2006, p.161).

The British Deaf scholar, Paddy Ladd coined the term 'Deafhood' in response to ideas such as the hearing parent's view of their children being 'Deaf in a hearing world', and the idea of 'deafness' as a medical characteristic of Deaf people. He said, "In order to create a space within which Deaf people's own self-conceptions can be situated and examined, another term is needed, and this I have designated as *Deafhood"* (2003, p.1). He elaborated:

> [J]ust as Deaf history is framed and penetrated from without by discourses on deafness, so the internal frame of Deafhood, looking outwards, can render visible those unwritten Deaf discourses, and thus encompass and for the first time, go beyond those framings. In so doing, one is essentially in search of a *Deaf epistemology*, that is, Deaf ways of being in the world, of conceiving that world and their own place within it (both in actuality and in potentiality). It will emerge that a crucial aspect of that epistemology is that it is not simply oppositional, but that it examines and presents the nature and significance of Deaf people's relationships to each other" (2003, p.81).

Ladd's book, *Seeing Through New Eyes, Deaf Culture and Deaf Pedagogies: The Unrecognized Curriculum* (2022), illuminates the ways in which Deaf educators' presence and pedagogies foster the cultural-linguistic identity and educational development of deaf children. In this book, Ladd aims to show that "the skills and numerous positive qualities demonstrated by Deaf educators" are "sites to explore both Deaf cultures and Deafhood processes in action" (p. 1). In a UK context, Ladd also describes the struggle of deaf teachers to gain formal teaching qualifications within an education system that privileges spoken language and hearing worldviews. Our study takes these premises as a relevant starting point for investigating the professional experiences of Deaf teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter 3: The Motivation of Deaf Teachers

All nine of the Deaf teachers who participated in this study completed a tertiary qualification and a diploma in teacher education before seeking to register as a teacher. All of them are bilingual in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and English literacy, and some of them are multi-lingual - competent in more than one sign language and/or spoken language. While the participants described various pathways into the teaching profession, they were of one mind about their motivation. They identified this as being their desire to see deaf students achieve happy and fulfilled lives. They could see that as role models they offered deaf children shared experiences, language and culture. They saw the deaf children as able to relate to them easily. When asked what they would say to a young deaf person who wanted to follow in their footstep they had advice about the barriers they would encounter and ways to be prepared.

Why Choose to be a Deaf teacher?

The time period in which participants chose to become a teacher of the Deaf influenced their experience. Participants described a number of pathways to becoming a teacher. One pathway was teaching NZSL to hearing people in a variety of settings such as school or night classes and realising that they wanted to use their teaching skills to benefit Deaf young people. For some participants, becoming a teacher was a second choice of career inspired by the desire to improve the learning experience of deaf students. Some participants lacked confidence but were encouraged by others, both Deaf and hearing, who were already teachers in deaf education.

Effects of schooling experiences on choosing to become teachers
Some of the teachers suffered from the quality of the education they received in deaf education growing up. For instance, one participant said:

> *I had missed out on education growing up. I did not have the best education … I knew I was bright, but there should have been more. I was in Deaf Education growing up. I felt it did not give me what I needed. …It was good being in [teacher training] college. I felt that I wanted to become a teacher because I felt that Deaf children needed Deaf teachers. At the time there were no Deaf teachers. …There were no Deaf role models.*

Another participant was dismayed when her parents suggested she become a teacher because she didn't think her English would be good enough for university level study. On her first try she failed to gain university entrance, and she said, "I went to [van Asch] for one year when I was 21…. the year where I couldn't get into university. I was like, 'What should I do? 'I went and improved my English and Maths skills at van Asch for one year. It was like polishing up my schooling."

Not only did the teachers suffer from the quality of the education they had received but also from the attitudes of their teachers. As one participant said:

When I was 16, I was having a chat with some students in the deaf unit …we were talking about what we wanted to do when we left school. I was saying I thought I'd like to be a teacher - you know I was often explaining things and I thought I'd be good at that. …Then later on I asked a senior teacher, 'What do you think about me becoming a teacher? 'And she told me no way, I couldn't do that! That really took me aback. When I said I wanted to go to university she also said, 'Oh no!' Back then that was the attitude. …But I had the dream of being a teacher - why not?

Teaching NZSL and choosing to become teachers

Three participants were teaching NZSL and decided to become teachers because they enjoyed teaching. One of them said that at school, "People would ask me if I could teach NZSL …[to my] hearing classmates. This felt natural - teaching. The attitudes of my classmates improved." Another person who was teaching night classes in NZSL to hearing people said, "I would rather give my skills in teaching towards deaf children…who need a future. I wanted to see the Deaf community thrive… I thought I could train to become a teacher for deaf children". Two participants were motivated by their experience working as teacher aides to become teachers of deaf students. One participant felt that opportunities were limited and said:

I could teach NZSL and Deaf studies, but it's limited. I had to follow the [classroom] teacher and her planning. Sometimes I felt I could be better – I felt I could teach more than the teacher. The teacher is hearing and I compared myself to her – I had a thought about it, that if I became a teacher, I could do more things and teach my style, the Deaf way. That's why I became a teacher.

Not everyone started out wanting to be a teacher

One person didn't think that a career in [their preferred subject] was doable for family reasons and therefore considered other options, only deciding on doing a teacher education course having completed a university degree. Another person graduated with a university degree but was in limbo because the industry for which the degree was relevant closed due to a new structure, so this participant had to look elsewhere for a job. This participant said, "[M]y friend was working in [a specific field]. I was intrigued so I joined them. Later I started training people …I thought about becoming a teacher and just went for it."

Recommended to become teachers

Several participants took the initiative to become teachers following recommendations from people who had observed them in teaching situations and who recognised that more Deaf teachers were needed. For instance one participant said, "I was doing things like that when another friend suggested I train to become a teacher." Another participant said, "An RTD (Resource Teacher of the Deaf) told me that I should become a teacher. The RTD told me I had the skills. 'What are you waiting for?' the RTD told me." A third participant said, "[A] hearing teacher. She told me we needed more Deaf teachers. I didn't want to do it at first, I was like not me. I honestly thought I was going to fail. …I was really surprised that I passed."

What Do You Like about being a Deaf Teacher of Deaf Students?

One Deaf teacher summed up the view of most of the participants, saying, “I love teaching deaf students. I love watching them thrive and blossom into the world. I love this.” Another participant added:

> *Some of my students have low language and/or literacy levels. I love it when they understand a new concept. I like to encourage students, so they understand. … I try to teach them and they struggle – they get frustrated, and when they finally understand, they are so happy! I love that. It’s about relationships. It is number one – the most important thing. I also love it when students thank and hug me before they go away for the summer holidays. I love that!*

When referring to places where they worked teachers referred to ‘Deaf Education provisions’. (A provision refers to a “school within a school” or a specialist class or unit located in a regular school.) One participant worked at a Deaf Education provision for two years and elaborated on this positive experience saying:

> *This provision was my passion, because there were many deaf students. I didn’t want to just visit [students] here and there, and chat briefly. I preferred [working at] the provision because it was good to see deaf [students] interact, to see language growth, to see more growth of Deaf identities. …I love teaching deaf children… Also, I liked connecting with their families.*

A participant who was a Resource Teacher of the Deaf (RTD) expressed the same sentiments from the RTD perspective:

> *I liked my jobs. I was really lucky across these different areas. I had good support from other classroom teachers. There were small issues, but it was never anything major. …It is very important to have good relationships - attitude. I love working with children. Engaging with them. They need a Deaf person. …It is natural. You have very strong connections with the children. As an RTD, I would always chat every time I visited. It would take 5-10 minutes. It is natural for Deaf to have conversations. Students and I would chat for a bit and then get on with learning.*

Another participant who visited deaf students at various provisions to deliver the NZSL programme said:

> *Well I love seeing the deaf children become more confident in themselves and the ability to express themselves; and also, seeing development in their reading and writing skills. …I’d visit deaf students at various provisions and deliver the NZSL programme. …I’ve loved working on NZSL for NCEA.*

What is Unique about Deaf teachers Teaching Deaf Students?

The participants identified two interrelated points which made them unique. One point was concerned with the relationship they had with deaf students. The other point was

concerned with their bilingual and bicultural awareness compared to hearing teachers. For instance, when asked if Deaf teachers have extra skills one participant replied:

> *I wouldn't say we have 'extra skills'. Instead we have natural skills in working with deaf students. Deaf teachers have 'extra skills' in working with hearing people. You must adapt. You must match hearing people. Whereas with deaf students it is just normal and natural. People ask me, 'Oh tell me more about a Deaf lens'. I'm like argghhh. 'Tell me more about Deaf culture'. I'll respond with, 'Tell me more about hearing culture! And I make them stumble, and I go, 'This is the problem! I can't explain it!' It comes naturally to Deaf teachers.*

Deaf teachers were able to elaborate on how they were different from hearing teachers. One participant said, "Lots of Deaf teachers have knowledge about 'Deafhood', bilingualism, NZSL and [Deaf] culture. We know how to teach social emotions to Deaf children. These children see us as Deaf and they can therefore relate to us. …Relationships are important - that's the key."

And another participant said:

> *We have our Deafhood. Our lived experiences and fluency in signing. If a hearing teacher is fluent in signing, that's fine as long they know and understand Deaf culture. Deaf students see us as role models because we're Deaf like them. Students have struggled in the past and have had frustrations with learning – they look at Deaf teachers and realise they can do it too. That's really important. A lot of students are frustrated. It's simple but really important. Hearing teachers try to explain but Deaf students are like, oh well.*

Being a role model and showing that Deaf people can do anything was seen as important for teachers to share with deaf students. A third participant said:

> *I think developing the resilience to cope with everyday life. The challenges you experience on a day-to-day basis. A lot of hearing people don't realise about some of the things we live with… our strategies for coping with these. …The students can reflect on themselves and what they can do, if they have you in mind.*

And as a fourth participant put it:

> *Deaf teachers have lived experiences. They have grown up deaf. They have been to Deaf schools. They know how the minds of deaf people work… [S]ometimes I would see a child and understand why they had barriers with a particular thing. I can offer the child different strategies. Hearing teachers do not have this, they must learn this through work. Deaf teachers already have this knowledge. Correct strategies can be derived more quickly, and deaf students can be supported. …I think Deaf [teachers] make good role models for students… Deaf students can see the 'Deaf Can' which is inspiring for deaf students.*

The value of Deaf teachers was summed up by one participant who said:

Just one word – connection. You feel connected to each other. This has been raised in [professional development], that connection should be number one. They say no – it's identity, that should be number one. Yeah but connection starts earlier. Identity happens because of connections. I'm here in the Deaf community because first of all, I connect because I'm Deaf. Then it becomes my identity. That's who I am. So connection is number one. … Connections are about language, culture – that's the fundamental. So that's what students are missing out on. Connections are also about passing on prior knowledge – that background information, which students are missing out when they are educated by hearing teachers. … Families do have their own values and prior experiences, but the behaviours and cultural nuances of being Deaf isn't shown explicitly until they meet another role model. They make a connection and everything is shown explicitly.

What Advice would you give to a Potential Deaf Person wanting to Teach Deaf Students?

Currently there are no new Deaf Beginning Teachers although in a recent TV One News item focusing on why the education system is failing deaf students, five Deaf young people identified the desire to train as teachers of deaf students (Higgins, 2025). The participants in our study were asked what advice they would give to a young Deaf person who indicated that they wanted to become a teacher. One participant chose not to reply and all the responses were qualified with mention of 'barriers'. Most of the participants said "Go for it." Several of the participants stressed the importance of knowing NZSL and being clear about your identity. For instance, one participant who wanted to encourage young Deaf people to become teachers said:

[T]o be strong in the language first. If [one] is strong in a first language, [one] will know how to advocate…. I think for anything in life you need to make sure that your foundations are clear first and foremost. What do I need? Where am I going? You can then tell people to help you go where you want to go.

Another participant who had been asked for advice by a number of young people elaborated on this saying, "If you are under 25 years old, wait. You need lived experience of the world and a social life to be a good teacher. I would also ask if a person had experience of teaching children, babies, adults, high school." This participant gave an example, "[T]here was a hard-of-hearing man who volunteered as a teacher aide. He worked with deaf students. He realised it was not the right experience for him…he didn't want to teach." And also, a third participant said:

I have a Deaf student who wants to become a teacher - she's 10. …I was like ah, right you want to become a teacher. I'd tell her you need NZSL, be bright, and have good allies to support you on your journey. She also needs to plan and prepare well. She'll need to accept that admin is a big part, like it is at the moment. I'd say teaching is fun. …I'll say it isn't an easy journey based on my experience. It has been hard, but for her it may be easier because Deaf awareness may be better by then.

While recognising the barriers a new Deaf teacher is likely to encounter, participants were generally encouraging, for instance one participant said:

> *I would say do it. I encourage it, yes. We need more Deaf teachers. …My only issue is will they get the job under Ko Taku Reo? There is training, and then there is a barrier. You can't get the job. That is my big concern. … I would warn them. But do it, follow your gut. …I think Deaf teachers are vulnerable currently. I see a 'crack' coming. …Things will collapse. There is wellbeing. I see out there that people are not happy. Some people have patience to put up with it and continue. It is a big concern. …For the future, I think Deaf teachers need to be looked after.*

The participants are hopeful things will change for the better and there will be fewer barriers for Deaf teachers wanting to teach deaf students in the future. One participant put it this way:

> *Go for it! Hopefully things turn out better in the future and more people are allowed into work… Hopefully Ko Taku Reo and the Ministry of Education will …realise that they need to stop the barrier that is currently in place. It needs to change. An exception needs to be made for Deaf teachers … to work for a Deaf school.*

This participant identified the barrier of having to teach in a hearing school for two years in order to become registered, saying:

> *Deaf don't need this … It is natural for Deaf teachers to teach deaf students … so this requirement needs to be removed. … I was thinking …that most Deaf teachers are from the age 45 onwards. Where are the younger teachers? … I just feel it would be nice to have strong Deaf culture, or a strong person to work really well to uplift the Deaf school.*

A number of the participants raised this issue that under current policy settings, it appeared difficult for Deaf teachers to progress from provisional to full registration in the Deaf Education Service or in 'mainstream' schools. An attempt was made to get information from the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Council of Aotearoa as to their policies that may be preventing Deaf BTs from being employed in positions that can lead to their achieving full practising certificates. An Official Information Act request to the Ministry of Education, dated 14 March 2024, asked whether the Ministry had given consideration, in the period from 2000 to the present, to policies and practices with regard to the employment in schools of teachers who are deaf, and what that consideration had covered. On 27 May 2024, we received just one relevant Ministry Memo, because the Ministry exempted itself from providing any information that related to the personal circumstances of individual teachers. (It was not stated how many of these cases they might have dealt with, nor the issues involved.)

The Memo was titled 'Disability workforce accommodations' and addressed the question of who should be expected to pay if a school employed a teacher with a disability that required extra support. The Memo argued that largely, this was the purpose of a school's operational grant funding and entitlement staffing and the Ministry had no responsibility for

that, although there was a resource that they could use in the case of “specific and unique unforeseeable events”.

The Memo identified various sources of funding that could be accessed, for instance, for interpreters, but noted that all of these were for short-term purposes, not for ongoing employment. In arguing that further work was required in this area, the Memo noted that risks of failure to make changes disincentivised inclusive employment practices for boards and schools, impeded the Ministry’s ability to promote a diverse teaching workforce, and left the Ministry “open to reputational risk and review”. The first step identified in the Memo was to have further discussion on the most appropriate team in the Ministry to lead a longer-term work programme on this. To date, we have seen no evidence that this has happened (see the Ministry of Education website for the full text of the OIA and response).

We also sought clarification from the Teaching Council of Aotearoa as to whether it was their policy settings that were behind the perception of Deaf teachers that it is not possible to achieve full registration while working at Ko Taku Reo, and if so, what those policy settings entailed. We emailed the Registration Manager at the Teaching Council on 1 December 2025, but at the time of publication, the Teaching Council of Aotearoa had still not replied to a request for clarification of their policy.

With reference to the barriers a young Deaf person might encounter in the process of becoming a teacher one participant reflected on what might become possible:

> *It has been the same story for many years. Barriers exist. …I think if there’s a Deaf leader, more Deaf people will follow that person. More teachers will follow. More support workers will follow. A person who leads will also need to educate and coach others to give an understanding and awareness of issues in the Deaf Education System. There needs to be transparency and honesty. It’s about being safe as well – culturally safe. Make sure, you know, students are protected to reach their outcomes. …If that happens, then we probably will have a culturally safe Deaf community. The school has a huge impact on the [Deaf] community.*

Another participant seemed disillusioned with the extent of the barriers a new teacher would face and said, “I have been offered a teaching job in Australia. They seem keen on getting Deaf teachers, so maybe my advice for Kiwis is that it is worth looking overseas. In New Zealand there are just barriers. Is it worth waiting for a change? Or is it better to go overseas and grab those opportunities?”

Chapter 4: Deaf People Registering as a Teacher

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the process of qualifying as a specialist teacher for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students entails gaining a teaching degree, then becoming a fully registered teacher following two years of mentored teaching experience, and subsequently completing a postgraduate Diploma or Master of specialist teaching. It has been long known that this pathway presents barriers to Deaf aspiring teachers. For example, Powell and Hyde explain that,

> Those who were accepted [for the postgraduate specialist training] were recruited from their permanent teaching positions and paid their full teacher's salary while they trained. This system presented a barrier for Deaf people wishing to become teachers of the deaf, as it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to fulfil the prerequisite of successful mainstream teaching with hearing children. Since the 1990s, however, there have been numerous exceptions made which have enabled Deaf people to become Deaf teachers of the deaf (2014, p.4).

Before becoming registered, all the participants in this study had completed a university qualification and a teacher education course. Some of them had also completed a Certificate in Deaf Studies. Even before some participants became registered some of them had completed the required Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching: Deaf and Hard of Hearing. From the point when the participants had completed their university qualification and teacher education, and had decided to become registered, their experience focused on being BTs with a provisional registration. As BTs with provisional registration, the support and mentoring they received from other Deaf and hearing teachers seemed to have a strong influence on whether their experiences were positive, and whether they were successful in becoming registered teachers.

University Qualifications

Identifying the exact tertiary qualifications of the Deaf teachers who participated in this study would give away their identity, given the small number of Deaf individuals in the profession. Needless to say, all of them qualified with university degrees. The universities in Aotearoa New Zealand at which they completed their undergraduate degrees included: Auckland; Canterbury; Auckland University of Technology; Massey and Victoria University of Wellington. One participant had completed their degree at a university overseas. Three participants have continued their university qualifications in response to uncertainty about the usefulness of the professional development to which they had access - they have either completed an MA or are enrolled to complete an MA. One participant felt challenged about the length of time (approximately five to seven years) it took to achieve qualifications because it had implications for the extent of access that deaf students had to Deaf teachers.

Deaf Studies Qualifications

Of the Deaf teachers who had competed a Deaf Studies qualification at either Auckland University of Technology or Victoria University of Wellington, one participant said, the Deaf

Studies programme “helped me to reflect on who and what I was.” Another participant said, “At that time I did some self-reflection and felt that my sign language was not good enough so I went to Deaf Studies in 2008.” A third participant used the classroom communication in the Deaf Studies programme as a reference point for deaf-friendly communication: “Like when I did… Deaf Studies, it was managed at a Deaf pace. It was clear. Signing was clear and the pace was suitable.”

Six of the participants had completed the postgraduate specialist ‘Teacher of the Deaf’ course. According to one participant, in order to enrol a person “needed a full-time job to receive a study award for the Teacher of the Deaf course.” One participant said:

> *I tried to get into the Teacher of the Deaf course. I failed three times [to get into the course]. I was determined to be a Teacher of the Deaf…but I had not done two full years …I could not get into the course as I had not yet worked as a teacher of the Deaf. …It was my third time applying. I begged. Eventually I was allowed discretionary entrance. …This was for one year. I finally got the study award. The school accepted this and supported me. But I had a circle of supporters with me. I advocated, and then I was finally let in.*

Two Deaf teachers who gained registration, taught primary for a year and then did the Teacher of the Deaf Course. One of these participants said: “The Teacher of the Deaf course was different back then. I was in a class for one full year. …There were four hearing students and two [deaf students].”

One participant who applied for a Teacher of the Deaf course after having graduated to become a primary teacher said, “We were the last group. This was in 1999. I was accepted into the course and then I found out later I was not supposed to have been accepted… Four Deaf people enrolled in the course but two dropped out.”

Another participant said:

> *I worked as a teacher for one year then I did the Teacher of the Deaf course. Normally, we need to work for two years before doing that course but I was allowed to go straight there after one year. I took two years off [to study]. After that, I returned to Kelston [Deaf Education Centre] as a qualified Teacher of the Deaf.*

And, one participant taught for two years and then completed the Teacher of the Deaf Course. This participant “felt like a guinea pig” and reflecting on the experience said:

> *I shared ideas and experiences but wasn’t getting anything in return. I didn’t have anyone to bounce ideas off from regarding Deaf cultural input, pedagogies, and ideas – especially those focused on Deaf culture and bilingual practices. Most were like, bilingual – oh yea, that's it. It was superficial. I would like discussions to be richer. I feel like I talked about bilingualism in my assignments, and it was like, they agreed with it – but where’s the action? …I wanted more. You’re right – I’m the only Deaf person in the class. They focused on the ear, the auditory aspect of it. Or*

literacy – because it's their first language, so they felt strongly about these topics as these were more relevant to them. It's about English, spoken language.

Teacher Education Courses

Four participants did their initial teacher education at the Auckland College of Education, the College of Education in Palmerston North or Canterbury Teachers' College in Christchurch. These teacher education colleges were later incorporated into Auckland University, Massey University and Canterbury University respectively. The other five participants did their initial teacher education more recently at Auckland University, Massey University and Victoria University of Wellington. Two participants enrolled in three-year primary teacher education diploma courses as their first experience of tertiary education. The other seven participants enrolled in graduate diplomas in teacher education.

All of the teacher education courses required students to complete at least two practicums where they observed experienced teachers, then practised some supervised teaching leading up to taking charge of a classroom and full-time teaching. The settings included some mainstream classrooms with hearing teachers mentoring, and some Deaf Education provision classrooms with hearing and/or Deaf teachers mentoring. One participant spent all three placements in mainstream classrooms. Two participants spent all their placements in Deaf Education provision classrooms. The other six participants spent their placements in a mix of mainstream and Deaf Education provision classrooms.

Accessing Support Resources

While studying in teacher education, the participants needed support services to access communication with other teachers and students and with educational resources. The accessibility measures they reported included note-taking, interpreters, captioning of videos, and lecturer awareness of how to pace classroom interaction in a Deaf-friendly way. They also needed provision of this support to complete their placements during their teacher education course.

The participants who did their teacher education before the 1990s had very little accessibility support when they were students because trained interpreters were scarcely available then. One participant who had no interpreters or notetakers when doing the teacher training course, said:

I got on okay with some [lecturers]. They shared information on the screen and I looked at resources. There was only one interpreter in the community at that time - she came for the odd booking. I had a lecturer in Social Studies - I had no interpreter or support at all… he spoke so fast. …I didn't understand a thing, ….I decided to give up. …In 1995 I went to Auckland because it [the teacher training] was accessible. …It was positive. One lecturer higher up - she did PhD research on Deaf people and English. She knew Deaf people.

A communicator and notetaker was eventually available to another participant:

At the time there were communicators. There were no interpreters. I had an interview with the deputy principal. A communicator was there. There was funding that covered a photocopy card. This meant I could photocopy anything. The reason being was that I had a notetaker. I could take the notes written by other students in my class and have these photocopied. The communicator could do both. They could do note-taking and assisting with communication. The communicator would listen for any important information. …The communicator would write down this information.

The eventual provision of an interpreter surprised a third participant who said:

I didn't know what access there was. So, there was one interpreter and advocate that I saw. I had no idea what an interpreter was. …The first semester I did not have any support. In the second semester it was only five or six hours a week. …A new principal was bought in. The new principal had organised an interpreter and everything, so it was good. When the interpreter was brought in I was taken aback. Everything was clear and I could understand.

One participant who had little or no access to interpreters went overseas, and observed:

I started to meet a lot more deaf people and many of them had gone to university and I asked them, 'How?' They said they'd had notetakers and interpreters - that had never occurred to me. …In New Zealand we didn't have Deaf Studies. I thought it was impossible to go to university in New Zealand but at the same time I just decided to try and find a way so we agreed we would come back to New Zealand. …I was successful in getting a scholarship which would cover the cost of note-taking and interpreting the courses to study at university. …I began to think well perhaps I can achieve my dream of becoming a teacher.

Having one consistent interpreter made all the difference for another participant: "One interpreter, just one person who worked with me right throughout, including visits to schools, lectures and placements."

The participants who did their teacher education more recently had better accessibility support than the participants who did their teacher education earlier. For instance three participant who did their teacher education more recently said they mostly had an interpreter when they needed one. A fourth participant said, "Luckily the university… at the time had a good disability coordinator…They arranged interpreters for everything - lectures, workshops as well as the practicum. When I was teaching in mainstream classes I had an interpreter with me." Another of these participants said:

Before I attended the classes, there were a lot of discussions as to how to set up the classes properly. The videos would have captions. If the videos did not have captions, the videos would get sent to disability support services. A transcript would be made. There were notetakers. I got to decide when and which classes I needed notetakers…. There were interpreters for every class…There was one interpreter who attended all the classes…This interpreter would have a 'partner-interpreter',

and this role would consist of a different interpreter every week. This one interpreter was fantastic. The interpreter knew what had happened in the previous class. In the morning there would be a teacher for the course. In the afternoon there would be a different teacher for the same course. The one interpreter would remain on campus for the afternoon class, whilst the 'partner-interpreter' would be swapped with someone else. This one interpreter already knew what was covered in the morning. This meant that the interpreting was consistent. …Disability support was amazing. …I explained that I wanted… he would organise transcripts, interpreters and notetakers.

Support and Mentoring from Deaf and Hearing Teachers and Classmates

As well as the participants accessing support resources, the support and mentoring of Deaf and hearing teachers, and good relationships with classmates were crucial in the process of qualifying as trained teachers. One participant summed up how ideal relationships could help them to achieve their goals, "Honestly, it was easy. I already knew everyone – all teacher aides, language assistants, the principal, head of schools. They all knew that I wanted to teach. It was an easy experience."

When the Deaf teachers were doing their teacher education they were aware of teachers who 'knew Deaf people'. One participant said, "I was lucky as some of the teachers were already Teachers of the Deaf themselves." Another participant said, "One lecturer higher up - she did her PhD research on Deaf people and English. She knew Deaf people." A third participant did a practicum at a remote country school. "The teacher that worked at this school was previously a Teacher of the Deaf." A fourth participant had had an uncomfortable experience in one practicum but described how in the next practicum, "There was a Deaf mentor. …[A]fter the first four days, I had full control for the remainder of the practicum. The lecturer was right. I could have control. I could teach. I could plan and everything. …I finished my practicum. …I graduated."

Support was also forthcoming from hearing teachers. One participant said, "The teacher-training lecturers included two lecturers who had some Deaf awareness and were very supportive." Another participant said, "I had great support from the deputy principal at the teachers' college." A third participant encountered a hearing teacher who gave a negative report, but as this participant said:

> *[M]y lecturer [who also was hearing] disagreed with this teacher, and I passed. This was because my lecturer had seen what I had done in previous semesters and immediately dismissed the last semester. It was good. I think I had to adapt/change a few things and then I could pass.*

During one practicum a participant encountered a great hearing teacher: "They were very supportive, also I enjoyed it because I wanted… to learn how to teach deaf students. That was my goal."

One participant described classmates as lovely. “Some of us are still friends to this day. I’ll see them and hug them. Yeah, I became quite close to some of the students there.” When another participant was asked about the attitudes of lecturers and classmates the response was, “Sometimes there were small things, sometimes with the lecturers there would be a bit of attitude. I had to be assertive and forthright. …I would teach them and then after that things would be smooth.” A third participant said:

> *Later I finally had a friend in the class who would take notes for me. It was better and it helped. … Towards the end I had an interpreter full time. But I was almost finished with the course. Oh well… Anyway, I finally had a notetaker and an interpreter for some classes. I also had some help from my classmates to succeed. I got an A for all papers! Some became more aware and helped me a lot, which was good. … I picked my friends – I explained to the disability services that I didn’t have any interpreter, so that meant I needed my lecturers to be more Deaf-aware. They allowed me to pick who I wanted to support me as a notetaker in each class. …Their [the students] attitudes were okay. …One person was interested in NZSL and she knew a bit. She became more interested to learn when she met me. She was a good helper.*

Experience as a Beginning Teacher with Provisional Registration

The nine Deaf teachers who participated in this study have gained their full teacher registration. In this report, we use the term ‘registration’ because that is what the participants used. The Teaching Council now refers to registration as simply recognition of teaching qualifications and some other requirements and a status a person can hold for life, but to actually practise in a classroom, teachers must apply for provisional certification and then move to full certification, that is, they hold a current practising certificate.

Three of the four Deaf teacher who had completed their teacher training earlier gained their registration in the usual period of two years. One of these participants, who had a straightforward experience and was registered after two years, said:

> *The [teacher] registration process was fine. There were no issues. I was lucky to have a good supervisor for two years. This person was the head of school. …this person supported me. Also I went through the normal professional development process. Beginner teachers would go to a place. …I went there frequently. I had an interpreter with me at the time.*

Another of these participants said of a mentor, “[I]t took us a while to get to know each other and she was sometimes quite helpful and supportive. Sometimes not. It was always a bit up and down with her. Finally, two years later I did get registered.” A third participant described the process of getting registered as ‘a roller coaster'. The first year there was a lead teacher with whom the participant didn’t get along. S/he spoke up about this person, there was a change and it was better in the second year. The new person could sign - not fluent in NZSL but “at an understandable level” - and this helped. “After I had completed two years I was fully registered as a teacher… I was a new primary teacher, and here I

was teaching the transition students. I was like, 'Oh my God.'" Teaching transition students involves preparing senior students for the outside world.

The fourth of these participants said:

> *I had a mentor when I was a Beginning Teacher. I attended one-day workshops and courses, prepared for study. The registration process should be two years long but they recommended that I go and do the Teacher of the Deaf Course. I applied in 1997 and they accepted me.*

After seeking advice on how much NZSL and Deaf culture was included in the course and being told there was very little, this participant said "I had thoughts and mixed feeling - I wasn't sure so I abandoned my plans." This participant then went overseas and on return to Aotearoa New Zealand some years later set out again to become a registered teacher. Describing the second process, the participant said: "Yes, I had a mentor. I needed that job to do the Teacher of the Deaf course so I wasn't working as a qualified Teacher of the Deaf at the time. I was just a relieving teacher [with provisional registration] for one year." As for the Teacher of the Deaf course in Auckland, this participant continued, "Everything was perfect. Beautiful, very clear. The lecturers were knowledgeable and talked about the continuum between oralism and NZSL over time. They talked about language and culture. It was full time for one year. …I had two other Deaf people on the course." After completing the Teacher of the Deaf Course this participant said:

> *I got a job in the Deaf Unit [at a primary school]. I was the only Deaf teacher there. …There were some issues with admin and paperwork, but yes I continued with mentoring and it was finally done. All sorted, I got registration. …The process was pretty standard and my mentor was an experienced Teacher of the Deaf. I did placement and she was helpful.*

Three of the five participants who became registered more recently took longer than the usual period of two years to gain their registration. One of these participants took three years to get registration. In the first year, this participant said, "I did bits here and there" such as being a reliever teacher if someone was away sick. "I made a lot of NZSL resources." In this participant's second year there was one teacher who could only do half a week, so, "Half the time I would teach. I would carry on with resources for the other half." In this participant's third year things changed:

> *I finally got a full-time position. …It was easy to get registration. Luckily, I had a good mentor/teacher. They made sure everything was good. When I applied for full registration, they supported me…it was Kelston [Deaf Education Centre]. … Really a lot of people supported me. Also, there were hearing staff who supported me. It was incredible…It made it easier for me. Also they would give me what I needed to do. They would give me tips. It was helpful.*

Another more recently registered participant took more than six years to become fully registered because personal circumstances were prioritised ahead of gaining registration. This participant said:

I was relieving as a Beginning Teacher… I was always given plenty of work. However, I never got permanent work. … They did give me a job… after three years. But it was quite hard to commit. … After eight years, I was told that I had to go to a refresher programme for teachers.

One of the more recently graduated participants had a difficult time as a BT. During the time when s/he was not fully registered as a teacher, this participant was still sought after as a teacher of Deaf culture and NZSL, including by Ko Taku Reo. When a second attempt was made to organise this participant's pathway towards full registration, the mentor identified was a person who did not get along with the participant. The participant commented that, "I wanted a person experienced in deaf education. A person from that background who could provide me feedback and polish my skills. I did not want a person who had no experience of deaf education." The participant says their difficulties result from issues in the Deaf Education System: "Ko Taku Reo, the Teachers' Council, and the Ministry of Education do not agree. There is no shared pathway for BTs in the future. The issue gets tossed around to be sorted out by someone else… They all need to investigate how to improve the pathway together."

It is clear that the selection of mentors for Deaf BTs is crucial to the positive or negative experience of getting registered. Participants clearly acknowledged hearing teachers who knew some sign language and were supportive. The preferred mentor for a Deaf BT was a person (not necessarily Deaf) who was fluent in NZSL and knew Deaf culture. Under the current teacher registration rules and level of accessibility support, there seems to be no way in which a Deaf BT can organise two years teaching in the mainstream with both a supportive mentor and an interpreter.

Currently there are no BTs who are Deaf. Ko Taku Reo has indicated that BTs can only be accepted in Auckland and Christchurch where appropriate mentors are said to be potentially available. As one participant said:

Ko Taku Reo can't have BTs. …Because Ko Taku Reo wants teachers to know the NZ curriculum. BTs don't know yet – they don't have the experience. So Ko Taku Reo doesn't want BTs. Young Deaf people finish their studies then apply for jobs at Ko Taku Reo. Ko Taku Reo says sorry and they're declined. They need to teach in the mainstream to get two years' experience. They can apply again once they get full registration. That's not really fair. It's hard for Deaf students to teach in the mainstream for two years. …It's really sad. Deaf teachers have good connection with Deaf students. But they can't [work at Ko Taku Reo]. It's difficult to encourage young people. Some have told me they want to become teachers but Ko Taku Reo currently can't accept BTs. So they're thinking of not doing it at all. …Sad yeah.

Chapter 5: The Experience of Being a Deaf Teacher

As indicated earlier, Smith estimated that there were twenty-five Deaf teachers in the late 1990s early 2000s (2003, p.48). There are still no official figures on the number of Deaf people who have qualified as teachers. Our estimate in 2026 is that there may be thirty qualified Deaf teachers although this is probably on the high side and not all of these are currently working as teachers.

Twenty-two years before the merger of Kelston and van Asch Deaf Education Centres into Ko Taku Reo there was a population of deaf and hearing impaired students in Aotearoa New Zealand of 2124 students (https://flanz.org.nz/dl-pulse/profiles/kotakureo/). The number of notifications to the New Zealand Deaf Notification Database (DND) in 2024 was 2924 deaf and hearing impaired children. The DND was established in 1982, but the current annual report describes notifications of deaf and hearing impaired children to DND between 2010 and the end of 2024. Estimates of the number of students enrolled in Ko Taku Reo Provisions - reasonable given the number of DND numbers - suggests a school population of approximately 3000 students distributed across the country (Digby, 2025, p.9).

While the number of students appears to show an increase of approximately 800 students, the number of Deaf teachers does not seem to have changed, therefore the ratio of deaf students to Deaf teachers has deteriorated. The statistical analysis of ethnicity reported in the DND showed that “[F]or 2010-2024 European children are under-represented and Māori overrepresented within notifications, relative to their population size” (Digby, 2025, p.9). Despite the number of Māori Deaf students being overrepresented in that population, Māori Deaf teachers are notable for their absence. All nine of the Deaf teachers who participated in this study are working in a similar selection of settings to the ones Smith (2003) identified with one significant difference: online teaching has become a common feature of deaf education.

As with the process of becoming fully registered teachers, all the participants referred to the importance of the support and mentoring of Deaf and hearing teachers to their success as teachers. Similarly, the provision of support such as note-taking and interpreters was crucial to their capacity to do their job successfully. While it would be politically correct to describe the provision of note-taking and intrepreters as the provision of accessibility meansures, the participants consistently referred to ‘the provision of support’. Wherever possible we have followed the participants’ language use in this report. All of the participants described some instances when the lack of support, mentoring, and accessibility undermined their ability to do the job.

All of the participants had experience of professional development relating to updates of the New Zealand Curriculum but indicated that they wanted more specific training on Deaf pedagogy. Six of the participants had experience of seeking promotion and in some cases they were successful. Six participants had experience of leadership roles in middle management, but none had senior leadership experience. Some of the participants persevered in these leadership roles while others found them too stressful. All the

participants kept up their union membership despite feeling there was a lack of understanding of the predicament of Deaf teachers. (See Chapter Six, Access Attitudes and Audism, below for a discussion of the role of union membership in the experience of Deaf teachers).

Deaf Teachers Discuss Settings for Teaching Deaf Students

Smith (2003)observed that:

> [A] higher proportion of deaf students have the opportunity for regular social contact and face-to face instruction with deaf adults in Deaf Education Centres, in comparison to the mainstream. … The deaf staff employed in the Deaf Education Centres work with students on a daily basis. Teacher Aides in the mainstream may also do this. However the majority of deaf staff visit mainstream schools and may instruct deaf students on a less regular basis. A deaf itinerant teacher may visit four to six students once or twice each week, while a Deaf Mentor/ Deaf Resource Person has less contact than this, since they cover large numbers of students across an entire region. Other deaf staff, including managers and sign language tutors may have contact with deaf students, but not as instructors. The extent of contact by deaf people in administrative positions is unknown and no instructional work is included in their job descriptions. However as all these staff work at, or are based in Deaf Education Centres, they do add to critical mass of deaf people available within those school settings (p.84).

Smith's survey probably captured the total number of Deaf teachers in the Deaf Education Service at the time of her research, that is, twelve. All nine of the Deaf teachers we interviewed had at some time worked in the Deaf Education Service before and after the merger. Through our networks we know of four or five other Deaf teachers who work for Ko Taku Reo but we could not find the total number of Deaf teachers currently working for Ko Taku Reo. The data suggests that there may be a trend towards fewer Deaf teachers teaching deaf students in classrooms. While Powell and Hyde (2014) did not interview Deaf teachers' contribution to enhancing the communication skills of deaf students, they did interviewed RTD and Teacher Aids who worked with deaf students. They concluded:

> The ultimate goal being to ensure these students achieve outcomes that are comparable to their hearing peers. To do this, RTDs and TAs (currently referred to as Communication/Education Support Workers) should have appropriate NZSL knowledge and skills. They will also need resources, professional development and administrative support in order to continue to improve their skills so they can enhance the communication skills of the students they serve (p. 237).

The commitment Deaf teachers have to teaching deaf students is without doubt, and they had to be flexible in order to continue to do this work that they loved. (See Chapter Three, The Motivation of Deaf Teachers, above.) Many of our participants had experienced being moved around among the various Ko Taku Reo provisions for deaf students.

One Deaf teacher described how there was a shortage of students at one setting and so s/he was moved to another setting where there were more students. This participant used NZSL as a medium of instruction for accessing the New Zealand Curriculum:

> *This provision was my passion… I preferred [working at] the provision because it was good to see deaf [students] interact, to see language growth, to see more growth of Deaf identities. …I taught all the subjects: English, Maths, art, science…The same as a primary school teacher normally would… I did not teach NZSL because the school provided NZSL tutors to focus on NZSL.*

Another Deaf teacher was allocated a small class (three students) at a Ko Taku Reo provision. This participant did not think that such a small class was 'healthy' and said, "I am strict about this…It is not an effective way of teaching languages, especially sign languages."

There also seems to have been a tendency for Deaf teachers to end up juggling roles between being classroom teachers at various Ko Taku Reo provisions and preparing resources for Deaf and hearing Teachers of the Deaf, or, as one participant said, being a classroom teacher at a provision and being a member of the NZSL team. This participant taught NZSL for NCEA some days, and used NZSL as a medium of instruction for English and Maths at Ko Taku Reo provisions on other days. Another participant, teaching at a mainstream school, only teaches NZSL for NCEA to deaf students. A third participant, when working as a Resource Teacher of the Deaf (RTD), worked with signing deaf students on their fingerspelling and English literacy. The hearing classroom teacher and teacher's aide worked with the deaf students on other components of the curriculum.

Often the Deaf teachers' qualifications are a mismatch with the group of deaf students they are teaching. In the words of one participant, "[Y]ou have to be prepared to work with students at any level in deaf education." Two participants who are qualified to be high school teachers said, "I taught all the subjects: English, Maths, art, science…The same as a primary school teacher normally would." And, "My first job was at …Primary School. …I had four students at that time – they all used NZSL fully. Like I said, I was trained in high school [teaching] but [the school] …is a primary provision. It was a bit hard for me." Another participant who qualified to be a primary school teacher, spent most of his/her career teaching transition (senior high school) students. S/he said:

> *My first job was working with transition students. I have never taught primary for 25 years! I still haven't … Currently, I'm back teaching students in transition this year. I prepare the students for the outside world. This involves understanding what insurance is, what is rates, what is rent, what is a debit card.*

This participant also works to improve the language skills of these late adolescent students:

> *I teach NZSL grammar. The reason for this is because the students are messy with their tenses and are not giving clear information on the topics of their sentences. The students start in the middle and expect me to know everything [about the*

context of their sentence beforehand]. …There is also English that I teach, particularly how to fill out forms, and understanding terms used in forms. …There is also reading and Deaf Studies.

The participants' interviews suggest that there is no consistency in the placement of Deaf teachers in the Deaf Education Service. Some participants only use NZSL as a medium for giving Deaf students access to the New Zealand Curriculum. Other participants are only teaching NZSL as an NCEA subject although some of our participants described this work as the prerogative of NZSL Tutors who are not usually trained as school teachers. Participants described the inconsistencies in placement and the juggling of various roles as a consequence of the scarcity of Deaf teachers and the geographic dispersal of the relatively small deaf student population around Aotearoa New Zealand.

Online Teaching and Learning

The scarcity of Deaf teachers and the geographical spread of the deaf student population has made online synchronous teaching in NZSL a valuable mode of teaching and learning in deaf education. However most, if not all, the participants preferred working with groups of deaf students face-to-face when teaching NZSL and when using NZSL as a medium for accessing the New Zealand Curriculum. A number of participants mentioned using Zoom and communicating online with deaf students. They teach online in addition to in-person teaching at Ko Taku Reo provisions. One participant describe what s/he thought felt like a heavy work load: "I had to teach five Zoom NCEA classes, visit students at [a mainstream school], and teach in the Deaf Unit. I tried to envisage how it would work. … I decided to apply for another job … and I got it."

Some Deaf teachers moved to online teaching of NZSL because it meant that there were more deaf students who could access NZSL and learn the language together. It is a cheaper option than moving teachers and students to Deaf Education Centres. As one participant said, "I think there is a huge potential for online learning under Ko Taku Reo. Most of our students are outreach, but they are not accessing the language and the culture. I have concerns about the language and the culture dying…. There are only a few [Deaf teachers] doing outreach."

While teaching online overcame the fact that most of the deaf students are geographically dispersed, it is a specialist skillset. One participant described how "there was a new person employed who had no understanding of how to teach NZSL for NCEA online nor an understanding of how to teach deaf students differently, and how hard it is to teach online." So this participant ended up mentoring this new employee. Consistent with their self-reflective approach to teaching, some of the participants realised they would need to understand the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching and hone their skills in this area. Some taught themselves, while others took the initiative to enrol in postgraduate courses on the topic of online teaching and learning.

Discussion of online teaching led one participant to reflect further on the effects of deaf teachers working in relative isolation from one another saying,

> *There's one thing we need to acknowledge - the size of the New Zealand population. We are spread out geographically. Yeah, we connect with each other via Zoom but it doesn't replace the importance of face-to-face interactions. So how do we maintain collaborations? To support each other in our common goals, for the best for deaf children. How to change the working environment so we can all be on the same page? Paddy Ladd has done research about Deafhood and so on - he talks about the hidden [Deaf] curriculum. …I look abroad and see larger school populations like Riverside School for the Deaf in California. They have 450 Deaf kids in one place, with a diverse student population. …Yes, we do have bilingual provisions here in NZ and there are lots of good placements for teachers to work with these students. But we're just too small - it's rare to find precious places to work.*

One participant reflecting on the current situation said, "I think sometimes it is very isolating in a Deaf provision because you don't see other teachers. …I think a big Deaf school would be good. There would be many Deaf staff, in comparison to what there is now. Currently, Deaf teachers are separated from each other." The only way to improve the situation seems to be to significantly increase the number of Deaf teachers working in deaf education.

The Content of Professional Development

All nine Deaf teachers had navigated their way around the hearing world to gain a university degree, and become qualified as a teacher. In addition to their navigation skills, and without exception, the Deaf teachers exhibited high levels of self-reflection and a dedication to life-long learning. This was particularly evident when discussing Professional Development (PD), with some of the Deaf teachers specifically referring to Paddy Ladd's work, *Seeing Through New Eyes, Deaf Culture and Deaf Pedagogies: The Unrecognized Curriculum* (2022).

Several of the Deaf teachers felt that the PD available to them was too oralist in that it focussed on the extent to which deaf students could hear and speak, and was therefore not relevant to their needs. It did not focus enough attention on the bilingual and bicultural needs of deaf students. Some of them addressed this with personal study and others enrolled to do MA degrees in relevant topics.

The Deaf teachers noticed that most of the PD offered was "about the Ministry". As one participant said:

> *If the Ministry released a new Maths programme, it was like, 'Oh let's do professional development in this.' Likewise English. However, there was not much for sign language, Deaf culture or anything Deaf-related. …If you are talking about English, you should talk about how to teach English to deaf students. … I thought there would be a lot of professional development about deaf students. The learning of deaf students. I was surprised that there was none.*

This same participant thought, “All the teachers need to work together more often. Work out how we can better support deaf students. At the moment what I am seeing is inconsistency…There is a need to share information, like strategies, new information like Paddy Ladd’s book.” One participant initiated conversations about bilingual and bicultural education for deaf students among Deaf teachers and Teachers of the Deaf in the course of doing their job, but lamented that there were few, if any, opportunities for Deaf teachers to get together for such discussions as a community of practice. Another participant elaborated on this view, saying:

> *It is a hard one because there are some things that we have to do for professional development. This is because the government tells us what needs to be done. As correlated to Deaf pedagogies, I don’t think that there is enough of that. We need more. We need to learn from people outside of the organisation, learn about what has been done overseas. How can we see if the students have improved? How could we find out their ways? …This would mean more of the Deaf staff could get together and discuss things. How can we improve our teaching styles? … One head alone does not work. It takes three or four heads to get together and figure it out. We can feed each other ideas. …. The Deaf teachers are spread out. …There is a lot of watching the screen. …There is not enough interaction. …If there were more PD courses provided for Deaf teachers or Teachers of the Deaf it would be good.*

All the Deaf teachers recognise that they need PD to keep up with changes. As one participant said:

> *I always need more professional support. …[T]hings are always changing. There is the Curriculum Refresh. There are new ways of doing literacy and numeracy. NCEA is changing all the time. …The Code of Conduct changes. There are so many changes. There is IEP. This has changed. There are always changes. … Ko Taku Reo also implements changes. … A Deaf Studies curriculum …was launched just recently…There is always something new to learn.*

Another participant noted that: “I had plenty of professional development for NZSL NCEA. … For general teaching PD in the past… very little. … Also the English language used for PD tended to be ‘jargony’.” A third participant concluded that:

> *Professional development was limited. … [T]here were some where everyone had to go. If it was oralist-based professional development you had to go. It was a waste of my time. There were a lot of barriers. There was professional development that didn’t suit Deaf teachers. …It was disappointing.*

Accessing Information from Professional Development

One participant described accessing information from staff meetings many of which were part of PD. S/he said

> *[T]he way staff meetings were run sometimes, these were more suitable for hearing. Like, the Deaf way of teaching wasn’t really there. … I had to watch the*

interpreter. I didn't have time to take notes. … There were quizzes and people jumped in, there was overlapping [talking]. It felt like it wasn't done at a Deaf pace. At Ko Taku Reo staff meetings, it was like everyone was blabbing out. … For hearing, such as pedagogy, there was a lot of vocabulary (unknown sign) to learn. I just nodded, pretending to understand. … I remember going to a staff meeting once at Ko Taku Reo in Auckland. All of us Deaf people were just passive, we didn't say anything. If you speak too much, you get in trouble. Back then I would raise my hand at meetings and some people hated it. One [Deaf] person gave me some feedback, 'Shut up! Don't say anything.' … I think meetings should be more of a dialogue - asking everyone what they think, sharing tips and having a good conversation, like about deaf students' needs. It should be about sharing ideas, not constantly being told what to do. It's all about their ideologies. They expect us to just apply their ideas to our teaching practice. … They've given us resources but they never ask us what we need. … It'd be nice to ask us what we need, our ideas [about how] to meet deaf students' needs.

This participant's in-depth description suggests that in order for PD to be more accessible, two cultures (Deaf and hearing) and two languages (NZSL and English) need to be managed respectfully. Only if both cultures and languages are managed well can both Deaf and hearing teachers have equal access to information. Unpacking this participant's description suggests that a meeting protocol needs developing that at least respects: turn-taking; giving enough time to process information/moves at a Deaf pace; and elaborating on the meaning of jargon.

Issues with Career Progression

Among the participants were Deaf teachers who had successfully and unsuccessfully sought promotion. The experiences in leadership of the participants who were successful in seeking promotion are included in the next section, "Experience of Leadership Roles". This section focuses on the participants who at some point were unsuccessful in seeking promotion.

One participant said, "I would often see the hearing staff get promoted…However, there were no opportunities given to the Deaf staff. …I did apply for a promotion to become a provision leader… I did ask as to why it [my application] was declined. They said I did not have enough experience for the role." This participant said:

I had been working at the provision for seven years. The hearing teacher had plenty of teaching experience but no knowledge of NZSL. This person had not yet trained as a Teacher of the Deaf. …I have not seen Ko Taku Reo employing new Deaf teachers, or even hearing teachers, skilled at signing.

This participant asked how s/he could get more experience and was told to carry on for two more years and s/he wondered where the number "two more years" came from. Looking at the job description, the only thing s/he didn't have was leadership experience.

This Deaf teacher's experience epitomised the experiences of participants who sought promotion unsuccessfully. Other participants had similar experiences of missing out to hearing teachers who were not fluent in NZSL or qualified Teachers of the Deaf as they were, but who had more years of teaching experience. Some Deaf teachers undertook nation-wide development projects and were led to expect that reporting arrangements would reflect these wider responsibilities only to find that reporting responsibilities may not have changed but reporting lines were changed once projects were completed. The regret they expressed was that in the changed arrangement they were working with people who couldn't sign fluently.

Some Deaf teachers have been given promotions but have decided not to stay in the positions to which they had been promoted. For instance one participant said:

> *I was once given a position to lead a team. …[T]his went on for 18 months. It was a good experience. But I stopped it. …I realised that this was too stressful. …I didn't want to work higher up in management. I could see that it was stressful. Education is stressful. It is easy to burn out. …I didn't want my life to be like this. I wanted to enjoy my job. Management? I don't mind, but sometimes it is not my thing.*

Another participant was similarly ambiguous about being promoted:

> *I would have loved to progress further in leadership. However, another side of me does not want to progress further in leadership given the number of complications that come with running a nation-wide school. I teach online on top of teaching at the provision. Would I be in a leadership position higher up? I find that would be hard. There are also the attitudes of some people. As a Teacher of the Deaf and as an expert in the education of deaf students, I feel that I would end up being stretched too thin if I did this. There are not enough Deaf teachers to get involved in a lot of things. There is burnout … if I were to rewind time to 20 years ago, I would have been more of an advocate back then. However, now that I am older … I am worn out. I have a family to look after.*

A third participant said s/he would only think about going for further promotion if there were more Deaf teachers and/or teachers who could sign in senior management roles:

> *I could go a little further in leadership maybe. Yes, I think the biggest problem is that there are too many hearing staff. If I move further up and try to communicate with them all there would not be good relationships. I have a hearing person in a leadership position above me. We get on ok, but I do not feel like we are equal. …I would be a good role model for them; however, it is their attitude towards me that is a challenge. …There are not enough teachers who are trained as Teachers of the Deaf with fluency in NZSL.*

When this participant was asked if having more teachers that could sign would make a difference s/he said:

It would be equal. Why can't we be equal? …Why are we employing people that struggle to sign? Does this mean I should do the same for talking? Should I struggle to talk and utter a word here and there? … If you get the job do it. …It is not like I argue with them or I'm grumpy. …No I must see them on an equal basis and to get to understand each other. This is how you work together with people. I prefer Deaf who sign. We have a lot of staff who can sign. I can relax and chat away with them and don't have to slow down and struggle with communication. …There are some who struggle with signing and I run out of patience watching them. It's like, 'Come on. You have been here for more than 20 years and you're still signing like this'. Sigh!

One of the disadvantages of Deaf teachers being promoted is that they then have less time in front of classes of deaf students. One participant sought promotion and was successful but said, "I also wanted to teach more. I was hoping to be a part time [middle manager] and teach part time. So I asked about it in the interview …I told them I'm interested to do both. They thought about it and they eventually gave me the job, that I could do both." This fragmenting of roles is common among the Deaf teachers.

More than one participant tried to take up issues of concern with a hearing manager without positive resolution. One participant described a situation which made them feel that the employer was not taking any responsibility for their needs or caring for them in a culturally appropriate manner. When they tried to raise this in a carefully considered submission, they felt that the response was too quick to be well-considered, and was defensive. They felt that the service could be better: "T]he service can be better when led by Deaf people. We know what it's like. We live and breathe deaf education, and we can learn new skills when given the opportunities to grow and be promoted. …I know I'm capable of certain things but they see it differently*".*

The tactics Deaf teachers identified as being used to prevent their promotion, include them being told that they: (1) need more years of teaching experience; (2) live in the wrong place although the Deaf Education Service is nation-wide and much of the communication is online; (3) don't have enough leadership experience; and, (4) don't have specific skills like the ability to lead teams. The participants have navigated around the hearing world to gain university qualifications, qualify as teachers and Teachers of the Deaf, becoming strongly bilingual and bicultural in the process. Their frustration at not having their skills acknowledged and used to benefit deaf children is palpable in the interviews. The reasons given to them for their lack of success do not make sense to them especially when the people who get promoted are not proficient in NZSL, and their teaching philosophy is not bilingual/bicultural.

The participants in our study cited some perverse consequences of these strategies which exclude Deaf teachers from being promoted, such as a Deaf teacher mentoring the hearing manager to whom s/he reported; and in the words of another participant, "Anyway, the job was given to a hearing person. She has some NZSL knowledge… and here she was, managing NZSL tutors. …She worked in that role for like three months then she quit. She was replaced by another hearing person."

As one Deaf teacher said, “I feel it has all been a waste – getting qualified and gaining experience. It’s so easy for hearing people to move up quickly. Look at them - it’s totally unfair. How can that be?!” Among the participants in our study were some who gave up and left the Deaf Education Service, however their current roles still contribute to the education of deaf students in various ways. After one hearing person got a position ahead of a participant, s/he said:

> *I tick all the boxes. How can I be declined? Based on what criteria? I don’t understand. I think they’re playing games. They probably don’t want me. I think, I don’t know – it’s because I’m Deaf? Or it’s me as a person? Perhaps they have a blacklist? …I’m Deaf and I’m a role model.*

Experience of Leadership Roles

The leadership roles that the Deaf teachers held at the time we interviewed them were all in middle management which they found stressful because all the senior managers were hearing. Some of the stress was related to finding that being in a leadership role took away class time with deaf students.

One participant sought to compensate for this by working with groups outside the organisation. S/he said:

> *I’ve been given the opportunity of a leadership role. However, this is only a middle-leadership role. … I don’t want leadership roles and having to be above people. You see the amount of stress these roles require. … You see people become very unwell…. I want to make positive changes in other ways like research or setting up projects. … I work with [a range of organisations], I feel that makes more of a positive impact. The impact on my wellbeing is less. It is actually good for my wellbeing, Leadership at Ko Taku Reo feels stressful for me. I feel it can be heavy. Demanding. Also quite negative. So I’ve been reluctant… The further away I am from the students the less connected I will become to deaf education. There are not enough Deaf teachers working with the students.*

Another participant who is in middle management expressed a sense of fatigue at re-establishing relationships and shared knowledge about Deaf culture with an array of changing management personnel who were hearing:

> *There are too many people in leadership positions above. You don’t know who to approach for certain things. It can be quite complicated. … Things are changing all the time. … Sometimes I just sigh if there is a new person in a role. You have to ask what this person knows about Deaf. … Yeah, there are positives and negatives.*

Asked if the situation would be the same in a hearing school, this participant highlighted how Deaf teachers are dispersed across space, with limited opportunities for the incidental interactions that build a sense of collegiality:

I think it would be easier. This is because it would all be within the same school. So, you will have a Head of English in the school. The teachers would be in the same room and offices whereas we don't have that. We're spread out across the country. It is more complicated.

One Deaf teacher who moved up into a middle management position summarised the views of other participants who had been in similar positions, including the additional burden of being expected to arrange accessibility provisions for themselves and other Deaf staff. S/he said:

[T]here wasn't a clear direction in which we were going. For example, I kept getting duties …not relevant to the role - booking interpreters for students in the three provisions. They gave me that role and there wasn't a proper interpreting system. They expected me to contact an interpreter, make bookings, and [ensure] that there were interpreters for meetings. I had to fill in booking forms and make sure all names were correct on the schedule. But I'm not trained for that. …Some staff meetings were okay, some were strange. For that level, the hearing people involved needed some sort of induction. …So I left the role.... In some ways it was like, whew! It was like a load off my shoulders. But I didn't realise that it was so draining physically! I didn't realise it at the time. …I tried to explain how stressful it was … but they didn't listen.

Another participant in middle leadership added, "There was no mentoring or guidance for my role … I really didn't get any support." According to several participants, one of the responsibilities of being a [a middle leader] is covering for staff who are on leave. As one participant said, "[A] teacher is on leave so I need to take over and teach full-time there. I teach all subjects like English, Maths, writing, reading, PE. Yeah all of it." Another participant described the conflicting requirements of being in middle leadership as follows:

I'm in middle management – I have to deal with senior management and the staff below me. Expectations are passed down. My team explain their situation to me and I explain to the leaders above me, but they have different views. Being in the middle is frustrating, dealing with both. I don't like that. …[T]he leaders above me tell me to do something. I understand where they're coming from because we're looking at the big picture …The provisions know what they're teaching. I understand how provision teachers feel and their needs, such as interpreters, for example. They really need to book an interpreter but the leaders above me, they say there is no money and to try somehow. I'm stuck in the middle – I try to advocate for my team's needs, and I need to go back to the team and explain, …I'm not sure if some of them really understand our students. …Students can be difficult at times. But it's more about managing staff. Adults can be more difficult.

Chapter 6: Access, Attitudes and Audism

The Deaf scholar, Tom Humphries, felt the need to name the treatment hearing people handed out to Deaf people and therefore coined the term 'audism', defining it as "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears." He continued, "What is this audism? It is the bias and prejudice of hearing people against Deaf people." And he described how it manifests in the lives of Deaf and hearing people, for instance, "It appears when the assumption is made when the Deaf person's happiness depends on acquiring fluency in the language of the hearing culture" (Humphries, 1975).

Bauman (2004) used the work of the philosopher, Jacques Derrida, on "phonocentrism" to present the familiar argument about language being speech, dependent on hearing; and, to suggest that Western identity as a human has depended on being able to listen, hear and speak. He suggested that Western metaphysics has privileged the ear over the eye, in other words, metaphysical audism. And he wondered what would have happened if the eye had been privileged over the ear, or that both had been equally privileged. He concluded:

> But herein lies its promise—the recovery of a history *that might have been*, the specular history of *what if* we had not only identified ourselves as the speaking animal but also as the signing animal? How has the absence of sign shaped our ideas, categories, thinking, experience, and being? The map of audism, therefore, is not a local map to be read only by the Deaf community; it is rather the beginning of an atlas of sorts, wrapping around the whole of what it means to be human (p.246).

In the interviews with Deaf teachers, few used Tom Humphries' term 'audism'. Most talked about 'access' and 'attitudes'. However, when they described issues relating to lack of access to support and attitudes that were undermining, they agreed these were examples of audism. If anything inhibited the Deaf teachers' professional progress it was audism. At least five of the Deaf teachers left positions in the Deaf Education Service because they could no longer cope with the audism directed at them. Several Deaf teachers stepped down from positions in middle management because of stress that could be attributed to audism.

This chapter begins with a review of how the lack of access, and undermining attitudes of hearing colleagues, illustrated audism in the experiences of participants. This is followed by how some of the Deaf teachers felt caught between the Teachers' Union (NZEI) and Ko Taku Reo as an illustration of institutional audism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of metaphysical audism which manifested in the teaching lives of Deaf teachers as a tension between the oralist teaching approaches of many hearing teachers and bilingual/bicultural teaching approaches of Deaf and some hearing teachers.

Lack of Access and Undermining Attitudes: Individual and Institutional Audism

Some of the Deaf teachers who participated in our study used the words 'audism' and 'attitude' interchangeably. One participant said, "[If] some of the hearing staff had an attitude like audism there was no process to make sure this attitude stopped." S/he went on to say:

> *I saw hearing teacher aides having attitudes that were not respectful of Deaf teachers. … I have seen Deaf teachers instruct hearing [teacher] aides on what to do. The hearing teacher aides [in these cases] won't really listen. However, if another teacher (who is hearing) were to instruct them on what to do, the teacher aides would be more respectful towards the hearing teacher. … I reported this but there was no reaction from management…. It was like: 'You sort it out yourself. It's your staff.'*

When asked, "What do you mean by attitude? Do you mean audism?" one participant said, "I think audism, it is everywhere. I think it is worse now compared to back then. … Deaf teachers can't get a job. Some of the Deaf teachers are probably not treated well." Another participant highlighted audism as being particularly entrenched in Deaf-hearing relationships within the context of deaf education, saying, "I feel more free in the mainstream. Yes there is some audism. I don't mind being left behind. I have regular duties like other teachers." Describing an example of audism within the Deaf Education System, one participant said, "I would often see the hearing staff get promoted…However, there were no opportunities given to the Deaf staff." Another participant thought that the experience s/he had getting employed was an example of audism. S/he was only employed as a last resort when there was no one else who could do the work that was available. S/he said:

> *I applied for a [teaching job] but I got turned down. Around halfway through the year someone reached out to me. … I was asked if I could work as an itinerant teacher. … I was approached because one teacher was sick, so I had to replace this teacher. … Most of those students were signers. This was a big challenge, but it was a good challenge. I learnt a lot from them. I was an itinerant teacher for six months. The contract was not permanent for this job. I was called in to work because they couldn't find anyone. I applied again… and then I got a job.*

A participant identified a different example of audism where management always supported hearing teachers over Deaf teachers. S/he described this kind of audism in relationship to making a complaint. Another participant commenting on this kind of audism said:

> *I have not seen management supporting Deaf staff when a conflict arose between Deaf culture and hearing culture. Management would always support the hearing. I can't think of any examples where Deaf staff could prove a point to the hearing staff, to convince them that they needed to change their attitudes. It was always the*

case of: 'Deaf staff have to respect the hearing staff.' I was like, hang on! This is a Deaf school. It should be the other way around.

A third participant concluded that, "People feel that it is not culturally safe. People feel like they can't speak up. … [P]eople have to stay quiet otherwise they get fired. You see people being dismissed. People are afraid of losing their jobs." This same Deaf teacher observed instances of 'internalised audism' in Deaf individuals who held positions of authority. S/he said:

I found Deaf people in management upsetting. Just the way [Deaf management] would talk to us. However, I do feel that some hearing people higher up are like, 'Hmmm, I don't know how to work with these difficult Deaf people. I will tell the Deaf people in middle-management/leadership positions to do the growling for me'. It feels like they are going, 'Okay, well we don't want to be the hearing management that puts down Deaf, so we'll tell Deaf people in management that they need to control their own 'naughty Deaf staff'… I got very resentful.

This participant identified lack of access to resources as a form of institutional audism. Lack of access to interpreters to enable Deaf teachers to fully participate in teaching, and teaching related activities, was a common experience for participants combining both individual and institutional audism. One participant describe a change after the merge of Kelston and van Asch Deaf Education Centres. S/he said: "I got an email informing me that I was not allowed to book interpreters…. If a partner school wanted to meet with staff from a provision the hearing teachers had to meet. The Deaf teachers could not meet." On one occasion this participant was required to meet a partner school and reported that,

[Management] said I could use [the teacher aide] as an interpreter… And I was like, 'I can't use someone with level one [sign language competency]'. Secondly, [Management] said I didn't need an interpreter. There were other hearing staff that could chat with the hearing teacher[s]. … I felt 'less-than'… Also, it is my right to have an interpreter…. If I worked in another place I would have Workbridge funding, I would have been able to choose [what to do with the funding]. At the Deaf school, the hearing managers decide whether Deaf staff need to have an interpreter or not. … You can't get Workbridge as there is already money allocated to Ko Taku Reo.

In the first six months after the merger happened in the middle of 2020 one participant managed to successfully book an interpreter only three or four times. S/he said:

[A] group of Deaf teachers got together and wrote a formal letter of complaint. This letter was for the Board of Trustees. … The Board did finally change - It was early 2021 when you could finally book interpreters. When booking interpreters I still had [thoughts/doubts] in the back of my mind. I would wonder if my bookings were approved of.

The doubts this teacher noted are an example of a consequence of individual and institutional audism. At this time, one participant noticed that if a Deaf staff member reported a hearing staff member for being audist, that this would lead to cover ups such

as, "'Oh, this hearing [person] did not mean to' or 'This is a misunderstanding for the hearing person' or '[I]t is the Deaf person's fault for misunderstanding'. This meant that the Deaf staff would often feel diminished." As well as 'having doubts', 'feeling diminished' or 'less than' are ways that Deaf teachers described the personal consequence of individual and institutional audism. From the perspective of a number of participants, the settings where they taught became spaces that were not 'culturally safe' for Deaf. 'Hearing ways, hearing principles' were followed.

One participant described in full the experience of not having access to interpreters:

> *I don't have full access to interpreters. …For example, we are in the mainstream a lot today – such as the school assembly and technology classes. We need an interpreter for those situations, but I've been told from those above there is no money for it. Students really need an interpreter and me too – I'm a Deaf teacher so I need an interpreter. I don't understand when other teachers are talking, so if I don't understand, I can't teach and support my students. …[T]hey emailed me about it, why I made too many bookings and I explained. They said it was expensive and that I needed to reduce my bookings. I was like, how? I can't reduce my bookings. …[S]ome teams don't need an interpreter. My team needs an interpreter. …Also the leaders up there – they're all hearing.*

Another participant, who left Ko Taku Reo because of experiencing audism, said:

> *I was scolded by a lead teacher for the way I managed a… student with [an illness]. Now I feel relaxed and I can manage things myself - my teaching is going well and I'm succeeding. …They [the Deaf Education System] were like, picking on me for certain things …They keep saying I should do this and that. …I'm sure if we unpack it - they were following due process. But I think it wasn't done in a Deaf-friendly way to uplift, support and solve issues appropriately. … I feared them - what's going on? Am I in trouble? It shouldn't feel like that. …I went through this for a while. I went to the person above and HR was involved. They investigated and it wasn't positive, like nine positives and one negative. It was the other way around. …There were three Deaf people at the time who left. The three of us faced the same issues. They were concerned about our competency.*

'Feeling fearful' is another way that Deaf teachers describe the personal consequence of individual and institutional audism. A third participant, who also no longer works at Ko Taku Reo, thought that some of the audism could be addressed if people were 'open minded'. Summing up the situation s/he said:

> *Wherever you are under Ko Taku Reo you have to follow them. …For me management needs to treat all the Deaf teachers the same. To be open to our feedback, our lived experiences. Use our life experiences with children. We know what it is like when they grow up. The hearing ignore us. They think it is speech that needs to be fixed up. The hearing need to have an open mind. …Having an open*

mind in thinking what is best for the child. We [Deaf teachers] know what is the best for the child but others don't see it that way.

The participants shared instances of audism they had experienced at university during initial and specialist teacher education courses. Describing an instance during teacher education one participant said: "There was another lecturer who actually disagreed with sign language - she believed that sign language would eventually fade out/disappear and that we should go back to oralism again." This participant also experienced audism during a teaching placement which was part of the teacher education course. S/he said:

There was one principal who [the Deaf teacher] met without an interpreter and there was a big blow up and I was really nervous about that person for the following three weeks. But I had to go back. She said, '[Y]ou can teach year nine, ten and eleven but definitely not year 12 and 13'. Again, I felt a little bit chastised. … [A]fter three weeks they begged me to come and teach year 13. I said 'I'm sorry I can't, I'm not allowed to, I'm sorry but no, and so they were annoyed about that.

Another participant described a practicum (the third) which was part of the Teacher Training Course saying:

It was seriously awful. … [T]here were three teachers for the third practicum. It was open plan. There were 78 students. One of the three teachers was my mentor, the other, a teacher, and one, a classmate of mine from the previous year. This classmate was now a BT at that school… It was discriminatory towards Deaf people. The mentor would try often to give things to me to do. The second teacher would always refuse, and there were arguments… The second practicum gave me full control after five weeks. As for the third placement, there was nothing. I informed the university that this placement was not giving me full charge, that there were different stories going around. The university sent someone to investigate but the teachers told different stories. … [T]he university wanted the views of the interpreters. … My classmate from the previous year was like, 'Yep, [the Deaf teacher] is telling the truth. But I can't go against my colleague.' For the rest of this placement I did not teach.

Interpreting this example from a Deaf perspective, there are multiple illustrations of audism. For instance, the participant was expected to work in a large open space with a lot of people so that the Deaf person would not know where to look for information, and would find it hard (if not impossible) to track communication. Secondly, despite clear direction from the mentor, there was a lack of cooperation between hearing teachers so that the Deaf person would not know what to do. Thirdly, undermining of a previous good relationship with a classmate meant that expected support from a colleague was not forthcoming.

One participant said that as the only Deaf person on the Teacher of the Deaf course, "s/he felt like a guinea pig." Reflecting on this experience s/he said:

I shared ideas and experiences but wasn't getting anything in return. I didn't have anyone to bounce ideas off from regarding Deaf cultural input, pedagogies, and ideas – especially those focused on Deaf culture and bilingual practices. Most were like, 'bilingual – oh yeah', that's it. It was superficial. I would like discussions to be richer. I feel like I talked about bilingualism in my assignments, and it was like, they agreed with it – but where's the action? … I wanted more. You're right – I'm the only Deaf person in the class. They focused on the ear, the auditory aspect of it. Or literacy – because it's their first language, so they felt strongly about these topics as these were more relevant to them. It's about English, spoken language.

One of the striking characteristics of the Deaf teachers' comments about individual and institutional audism was how, despite encountering audism at almost every turn, they remained reflective and thoughtful about how to improve the situation of Deaf teachers and their deaf students as well as communication with their hearing colleagues.

Between the Union and the Deaf Education Service: Institutional Audism

Eight of the nine Deaf teachers we interviewed were members of the teachers' union, NZEI. Because of Ko Taku Reo's status as a 'special school', its employees are covered by NZEI. Only teachers directly employed by secondary schools would be eligible for membership of PPTA. All the participants kept up their union membership despite feeling there was a lack of understanding regarding the situation of Deaf teachers. One participant said, "I think NZEI have a role. Like the frustrations of Deaf teachers, it is the union's job to represent the teachers, like to reach out and relay the issues, but I saw none of this." Another participant acknowledged that the union had been involved in negotiations around the merger, but felt that NZEI staff needed better understandings about Deaf people and deaf culture. A third participant reported that NZEI had told them that there was a high number of complaints from within the Deaf Education Service, but that dealing with these was difficult because of the geographical spread of members employed in the service which was not organised into regions, whereas the union operated by regions. A fourth participant described similar experiences with NZEI:

I joined NZEI when I became a teacher. NZEI were not supportive so I did not engage with them… Ko Taku Reo is a hard one for them. NZEI is more supportive now. Two years ago they were not. … NZEI were shocked about the threatening behaviour from teachers and the fact that the school did nothing to remedy this. … The staff who work for NZEI throughout the country have no knowledge about Ko Taku Reo. Neither do they have knowledge about Special Education. … If you were to ask NZEI, 'Do you know what Special Education rules?' They won't have an answer.

A participant who uses NZEI as 'backup' said:

I don't think they support Deaf teachers because they don't have the knowledge. They don't have an understanding, so most of the time I don't bother with NZEI.

> *However, I am still a member for my position. If anything were to happen I have backup… Currently I have been using NZEI to get advice on what to do, especially in the best ways to approach people.*

Several participants, while agreeing that NZEI doesn't have the knowledge to support Deaf teachers, noted that the Union did book and pay for interpreters if Deaf teachers attended Union meetings. As one participant said, "No specific support for Deaf. But for interpreter booking, yes. Like if there's a big meeting, they book interpreters. We tell our representative to book an interpreter. They're good with that. But specific support for Deaf teachers – there's none of that." Another participant said NZEI had started to take notice:

> *[A]s of recently [NZEI] have realised that there are Deaf teachers that are calling for help. They have found this within the last couple of years. NZEI did set up a meeting recently. … [T]hey are looking into the wellbeing of Deaf teachers now. In the past there were issues but this was mostly about pay rises. … Some Deaf teachers did go through NZEI for things related to discrimination - bad things that happened at work. These were few and far between. However recently, things have been raised regarding wellbeing.*

One participant who understood the relationship between NZEI and the Deaf teachers as an example of institutional audism said:

> *It's hard to unpack audism – how to describe it to hearing people [that is, NZEI]. I have to type in English, which is my second language. Or, we have to explain it through interpreters. It's hard to explain audism to hearing people. It's the same for racism – it's hard to unpack it. You need to see it to get it. So, the teachers' union is not helpful.*

The experiences of the participants suggest that they have been caught between one institution that lacks close understanding of their situation (NZEI) to represent them to make things right in another institution (Ko Taku Reo) that also shows evidence of audism. NZEI's institutional audism seemed to be based on ignorance about a minority group of teachers, whereas Ko Taku Reo's audism was evident at many levels - individual, institutional and metaphysical (see next section).

Oralist versus Bilingual/bicultural approaches: Metaphysical Audism

In documenting the individual and institutional audism the Deaf teachers experienced daily we have, as Bauman (2004) described, "identified instances of audism above ground." He goes on to suggest that, "[

> O]nce we start pulling up its roots, we see how vast and hidden are its systems. These roots run so deep and are so pervasive that they have implications not only for Deaf persons and those who work and live with them, but also for anyone interested in issues of language, human rights, and the question of human nature (p.240).

Bauman notes that we should not be surprised that Deaf teachers experience both individual and institutional audism on a daily basis because, “One would hope that specially designed institutions would be vigilant in preventing such pervasive audism; the reality, however, is quite different. Audism becomes most prevalent in the institutions that ‘serve’ deaf populations, especially in medicine and education” (2004, p.241).

All nine of the Deaf teachers interviewed were bilingual and bicultural. NZSL was their preferred language, and their link to the Deaf world was in terms of their understanding of Deafhood. They had navigated the hearing world to graduate with degrees from university, and qualifications from teacher education, Deaf studies and the Teacher of the Deaf course. They wanted to share their experiences of becoming bilingual and bicultural with deaf students and to provide deaf students with strategies to cope with the audism they would encounter so that they could minimise its effects - “feeling like you are a troublemaker”, “feeling fearful”, “having doubts”, “feeling depleted” or “feeling less than”. They wanted deaf students to have strategies so that they could minimise potential mental health issue. For a discussion of the mental health issues facing Deaf teachers and students see for instance, McRae et al (2025). They wanted to provide themselves as models for deaf students showing that Deaf people can succeed. As one participant said:

> *[S]ometimes I would see a child and understand why they had barriers with a particular thing. I can offer the child different strategies. Other hearing teachers do not have this, they must learn this through work. Deaf teachers already have this knowledge. Correct strategies can be derived more quickly, and deaf students can be supported… I think Deaf [teachers] make good role models for students… deaf students can see the ‘Deaf Can’ which is inspiring for deaf students.*

Although the Deaf teachers had encountered experiences that led to them feeling low self-esteem and anxiety, they had all developed strategies for coping with these experiences such as becoming reflective about interpersonal and cross-cultural relationships and communication, and thoughtful about how situations could be improved. When asked what Deaf teachers uniquely offer deaf students, one participant said:

> *[T]he natural language. The communication. The role modelling. I think developing the resilience to cope with everyday life. The challenges you experience on a day-to-day basis. A lot of hearing people don’t realise about some of the things we live with… our strategies for coping with these…. The students can reflect on themselves and what they can do, if they have you in mind.*

The Deaf teachers used these strategies so consistently that they can be identified as Deaf cultural characteristics supportive of the use of NZSL in the face of discouragement, and challenges to their Deaf identity and Deafhood. The Deaf Teachers expressed the hope that future generations of Deaf teachers and deaf students would be able to use the strategies they had developed to participate more fully in society than they had yet managed.

Chapter 7: Talking Past Each Other Revisited

The focus of the first part of this chapter is on cultural differences that arose between the Deaf teachers and the hearing teachers who were their colleagues. The cultural differences are ones which hearing teachers usually don't recognise but all the Deaf teachers usually do recognise. For the Deaf teachers the recognition of these cultural differences was frequently associated with distress. These cultural differences are often intertwined with language gaps. The second part of the chapter covers intertwined language issues.

Cultural Differences

In focusing on cultural differences, we are revisiting *Talking Past Each Other: Problems of Cross-cultural Communication* (1978) which Dame Joan Metge wrote with Patricia Kinloch. (Patricia Kinloch has published as Patricia Laing since 1984.) In *Talking Past Each Other* the authors suggested that:

> Where members of different cultural groups come together in formal and informal situations, misunderstandings and tensions arise even where there is the greatest goodwill on both sides, misunderstanding which the parties themselves find it hard to explain. On the basis of our experience working with Maoris and Samoans in their dealing with Pakehas, we the writers of this paper have become convinced that a good deal of mis-communication occurs between members of these groups because the parties interpret each others' words and actions in terms of their own understandings, assuming that these are shared when in fact they are not - in other words, because of cultural differences that are not recognised because we all take our own culture very largely for granted and do not question its general applicability. A culture can be simply and usefully defined as 'a system of shared understandings' - understandings of what words and actions mean, of what things are really important, and of how these values should be expressed (p.8).

While this suggestion may still hold true for misunderstandings among Māori, Samoan and Pākehā - the latest reprint of *Talking Past Each Other* was in 2014 - the experiences of Deaf teachers add a whole other understanding of how the idea of culture can be used to understand cultural differences. Timothy Reagan (2020) elaborated on the complexity of bicultural identity for Deaf teachers in terms of culture, separation and inclusion. He wrote:

> One interesting and important aspect of Deaf identity is that the individual is simultaneously required to function in and acknowledge the norms of two very different communities, the DEAF-WORLD and the hearing world. In other words, the idea that the deaf person can make a choice with respect to choosing to identify with the Deaf community or with the hearing world is in fact often something of a phantasm, since for the individual deaf person, both constructions of identity are necessary. … The relationship between the DEAF-WORLD and the hearing world is in many ways a paradoxical one. Not only do deaf people live their lives interacting with hearing people but as we have seen, the vast majority has hearing parents and will have hearing children. At the same time, they believe (arguably very accurately)

> that both they and their language and culture are marginalized by the hearing world (pp 1494-1495).

Various Deaf scholars such as Padden and Humphries (2005) have reflected on the paradox that sees Deaf people wanting separation from the hearing world but at the same time wanting to be included in it. Reagan maintains that the idea of culture is central to understanding this paradox:

> Culture provides a frame for Deaf people to separate themselves from an undefined group of those with hearing impairments, but at the same time, they are included in the world of human communities that share long histories, durable languages, and common social practices. Separation allows Deaf people to define political goals that may be distinct from other groups. Inclusion allows Deaf people to work toward humanist goals that are common to other groups such as civil rights and access. In this way, the concept of culture is not merely an academic abstraction, but very much a lived concept (2020, p.1495).

Young, Ackerman and Kyle (2000) offer ethnographic insights into the key problem experienced when Deaf and hearing professionals team up. Included in the group they interviewed were staff from one Deaf school that adopts a bilingual/bicultural approach to education and two specialist psychiatric units for Deaf people that offers intervention and support in sign language. They argue that the key problem encountered by a deaf/hearing team was “mismatched communicative resources and needs”. When hearing staff are not fluent in sign language, even if they are in the process of learning, they will make mistakes and miscommunications and may try to compromise by mixing sign and speaking, which limits accessibility for deaf colleagues. These problems are ongoing as membership of the team changes over time (p.187).

Hearing and Deaf teachers may misunderstand each other despite there being goodwill on both sides, particularly in their desire to do the best for deaf students. As one participant said, “Many of the [hearing] teachers have a heart for deaf children”.

Deaf Teachers and their Bilingual/Bicultural Understanding

Most of the participants did not acquire shared Deaf cultural understandings in the process of growing up because they were born into hearing families. Their cultural understandings are not “so thoroughly internalised” that they “cease to be aware of them, coming to think to them (if at all) as ‘natural’ or at least ‘second nature’, not only the right but only conceivable way of doing and looking at things identifying ‘our way’ as ‘the human way’” (Metge and Kinloch, 1978, p.8). The increasing awareness that they lived bilingually and biculturally in two worlds - the hearing and the Deaf – only developed later, mostly after they had graduated as students from the Deaf Education Service. Some of the participants who trained early were inspired to become Deaf teachers because of their belief as young students that they would become hearing when they grew up. One participant said:

> *Growing up, I always thought that I would become hearing. This was the same for my friends. When we grew up, we were confused to discover that we were all still*

the same. I was lucky as my parents brought me into the Deaf Community. This happened when I finished school. I realised that this was 'Deaf Life'. So I didn't want the same thing happening to Deaf children. I wanted to become a teacher so that the Deaf children could feel that they were Deaf inside, and they could see me as Deaf. The children would know what it would be like having a life as a Deaf person. I saw that this worked. I wanted to connect with Deaf children. I wanted to provide them with culture.

A survey of hearing parents of deaf children reported that while only a quarter of the hearing parents said that their deaf children were currently signing, a half of them "agreed that their child is likely to use NZSL later in life" (McKee 2017, p.323). It seems that there is still a gap between how hearing parents understand deaf childhood and Deaf adulthood as a bilingual and bicultural experience.

The Deaf teachers learnt from early on how to navigate the hearing and Deaf worlds in order to live successful lives. Navigating both the hearing and Deaf worlds often required the Deaf teachers to 'code switch' from one culture to another, from one language to another. This cross-cultural code switching has been shown to be associated with negative mental health outcomes (see for example McRae et al, 2025, p.9). For the Deaf teachers, being required to code switch had resulted in them developing bilingual/bicultural strategies to manage this. Our participants expressed a desire to share the strategies that they had learnt with deaf students so that the deaf students could avoid any potential negative mental health consequences.

We have described the Deaf teachers' accounts of their bilingual/bicultural understandings. One participant summed up the Deaf teachers' views about identity creation by focusing on the sense of connection between members of the deaf community, and argued that deaf students educated by hearing teachers miss out on that connection.

Signing, Speaking, Reading and Writing

All nine participants described having bilingual, bimodal language repertoires including signing, speaking, reading and writing. All of them were fluent in NZSL and said it was their preferred if not their first language. It was the language they used to communicate with each other and deaf students. Some of the participants were fluent speakers of English. They were so fluent that at first meeting people thought they were hearing. This led to hearing people thinking that they were rude when they ignored people speaking to them. As one participant said, "I am fine with speaking with students. There are no problems. It is just when they speak to me that I have problems." Another participant working with transition students, described polishing their NZSL so that they communicated clearly, and introducing deaf students to everyday encounters in their second language - English.

To have gained a degree and qualified as registered teachers, the Deaf teachers had succeeded in becoming proficient readers and writers. Reflecting on their own higher education experience, they noted that they couldn't read or write and listen at the same time, in the way that hearing people can. Many of them compensated for not having full

access to classes using interpreters by reading books relevant to the courses in which they were enrolled. Reading books was also used to compensate where they thought they needed more PD. But some of the participants said that they were slow readers and writers, and needed more time to do this as they were reading and writing in English which they identified as their second language.

When Deaf teachers were asked what it was about their job that they disliked, most of them said the administration, or the paperwork. As one participant said, “There is a lot of paperwork! A lot of meetings” and “We’re always asked to fully plan our explanations. We need pages and pages of research to answer the question. It is a lot of work.” It is much more work than a hearing teacher might imagine, since for the Deaf teachers writing is in their second language. The dislike of administration requirements and paperwork may be shared among all teachers but unlike the Deaf teachers, most of the hearing teachers are at least working in their preferred of first language.

Talking specifically about reading to understand, one participant said:

> *As for the new curriculum, I need to learn more about it. I need to read it thoroughly first and if I don’t understand something, I may need support. I’m okay for now. …I definitely need more time to read properly, without rushing. I feel I’m falling behind. I need more time. …I don’t necessarily need support, but I do need more time. …They just need to be more Deaf aware, maybe… for example… yes I know they’re all busy though…. They give me information and I read – I think I understand. But hearing people pick up things faster and they talk about it at a speed. I read and if I don’t understand a thing, then I need to ask them about it. But I’m already behind. Most hearing people – when they receive information, they speak with each other on the side to get clarification. It means they process faster. I’m just reading and when I’m done, I ask them about it. I’m behind – too slow. … I need everyone to be on an equal footing, to understand things like that. Do you understand? It’s hard to explain.*

About access to professional discourse in sign, speech, reading and writing, one participant said:

> *They could communicate with each other easily because they’re hearing – they’re all at a senior level. I asked questions but it wasn’t enough – they had the upper hand. When we had provision meetings – everyone talked in Spoken English. I was like, they should sign! …[W]e are working with a bilingual philosophy. …There was an interpreter just for “me” (signed sarcastically). This practice didn’t align with the bilingual philosophy …it was completely different.*

Deaf teachers described situations where they remained silent when asked questions. This silence was not that which might follow an interpreting lag. Sometimes participants described needing time to process the question and think up an appropriate answer which happened in a necessary silence. These silences led to hearing people judging them, as Pākehā had judged Māori and Samoan. Metge and Kinloch said:

> Less troubled by silence in the course of a conversation than Pakehas, Samoans in particular expect to be accorded a pause to collect their thoughts before answering questions about needs and desires: they were caught off balance by Pakehas who impatiently repeat the questions or, concluding they are 'slow' in the sense of stupid, answer or make decisions for them (1978, p.15).

Deaf Teachers and Meeting Participation

Meetings were an integral part of Deaf teachers work experience and, as explored in studies of interpreted meetings were a site of potential disempowerment for Deaf participants (in a local context see Henley and McKee 2020). Meetings run according to hearing norms were situations where communication often became fraught for Deaf teachers. One participant thought that not only did the English language used in PD "tend to be 'jargony'" but also s/he said:

> *[T]he way staff meetings were run sometimes, these were more suitable for hearing. Like, the Deaf way of teaching wasn't really there. … [L]ike Deaf pedagogy… I had to watch the interpreter. I didn't have time to take notes. … There were quizzes and people jumped in, there was overlapping [talking]. It felt like it wasn't done at a Deaf pace. … [I]t was like everyone was blabbing out.*

Deaf people's management of meetings in Deaf groups allow time for participants to shift their visual attention between different information sources, such as changing speakers and reference to printed text. Similarly, the pace of communication when using interpreters or when reading in preparation for meetings may require more time for the Deaf teachers than for hearing teachers. Allowance for preparation time and more deliberate, visually-oriented facilitation of bimodal meetings (involving speaking and signing for instance) is very important if the Deaf teachers are to be included in meetings with their hearing colleagues. Deaf teachers need to receive reading material earlier than hearing teachers in order to have time to prepare adequately for meetings so that they did not, as they said, "fall behind".

Watching the interpreter and taking notes or reading papers are mutually exclusive activities of which at least some hearing colleagues were reportedly unaware. Most of the Deaf teachers said that they preferred face-to-face meetings than online meetings. The participants' preference for face-to-face meetings may be linked to the fact that body language and eye-to-eye communication, which are an integral part of sign language, are much harder to read online than in face-to-face meetings. The management of turn-taking in an online group is often difficult in a bimodal (visual/aural) situation.

Several of the Deaf teachers described hearing colleagues talking over each other during meetings which became for them "a babble". When more than one hearing person was talking, Deaf teachers were immediately excluded from following the conversation. An analysis of the Deaf teachers' comments about meetings suggested that a "Deaf-Friendly Meeting Protocol" needs to be agreed if Deaf teachers are to be included.

Deaf teachers' Cultural Expertise for Educating Deaf Children

Participants all expressed the view that they have cultural and pedagogical expertise that is not acknowledged, but needs to be. As one participant concluded, "I want the team to be more Deaf aware… I want the importance placed on language development – to sign more. They need to be aware about that." Another participant suggested a remedy for increasing Deaf awareness, namely, "Hearing people could do an immersion course focusing on Deaf Studies or a little bit about Deafhood. It'd be helpful. I feel appointing clueless hearing people makes a mess of things."

For all nine participants, NZSL is their preferred language and all of them navigate successfully in both the Deaf and hearing worlds. They have developed strategies to manage the need to code-switch cross-culturally, and are conscious of the potential risks of negative mental health consequences in this process. One participant said, "Lots of Deaf teachers have knowledge about Deafhood, bilingualism, NZSL and [Deaf] culture. We know how to teach social emotions to deaf children. These children see us as Deaf and they can therefore relate to us." Another participant linked this view to the well-being of deaf students, saying that deaf students needed teachers who had both fluency in signing and understood Deaf culture. Deaf teachers were role models for students and understood what kind of support they may need.

Despite the Deaf teachers' considerable expertise and appropriate cultural match with deaf students, they were regularly overlooked in favour of hearing teachers with more years of experience teaching, even when this extensive teaching experience did not include fluency in NZSL and awareness of Deaf culture. One participant demonstrated his/her expertise when asked to present on the marae about Deaf awareness, and how to teach deaf children. S/he said, "The hearing audience was amazed. I was respected from there on."

A number of Deaf teachers were surprised at how little Deaf pedagogy was included in the PD they attended. As one participant said, "If you are talking about English, you should talk about how to teach English to deaf students. …I thought there would be a lot of professional development about deaf students. The learning of deaf students. I was surprised that there was none." Another participant elaborated on this saying:

> *As for professional development related to Deaf pedagogies, I don't think that there is enough of that. We need more. We need to learn from people outside of the organisation, learn about what has been done overseas. How can we see if the students have improved? How could we find out their ways? …This would mean more of the Deaf staff could get together and discuss things. How can we improve our teaching styles? … One head alone does not work. It takes three or four heads to get together and figure it out.*

This Deaf teacher had not visited any other deaf school because none exist in Aotearoa New Zealand. S/he would love to go overseas to be exposed to other models of practice. S/he thought, "This would give me more knowledge of what is available - there is WFD [World Federation of the Deaf]. …The New Zealand Government focuses so much on

‘normal children’ … but I want to know how we can improve our deaf children to learn the language."

All the participants were sensitive to the varying language needs of their deaf students. One participant said:

> *I’m always using their [the deaf students’] language. I try to empathise with them … They are not there to become A+ students. That is not their goal. They just want to get through the day and understand what is happening around them. It is very different from my goals. I’m a highly academic person. I love studying. But I understand that is not the goal of the students. I don’t expect them to achieve the same level as what I achieved. I understand that there is your way and there is my way. I accept the difference.*

A few of the Deaf teachers who had qualified earlier had received funding to participate in PD that was focused on the bilingual/ bicultural education of deaf students in Australia. One participant described PD that involved working in a bilingual classroom for an extended period. S/he said:

> *In the morning, all the deaf students would come in. I would teach them literacy. After morning tea, the children would go to their classrooms. …There were mostly Deaf teachers. …There would be a normal [hearing] teacher accompanied by an interpreter. This happened throughout the day. It was a lovely experience.*

Using the concepts of culture, biculturalism and bilingualism, the Deaf teachers had reflected on issues arising from cultural differences and code switching between Deaf and hearing worlds. Their reflections had led to them developing strategies that enabled them to manage problems arising from cross-cultural communication with minimal mental health risks. These strategies they wanted to share with deaf students to help them improve their quality of life and educational achievement.

Chapter 8: Towards a Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service

From their Deaf cultural perspective, the Deaf teachers offered some recommendations for change to the Deaf Education Service in Aotearoa New Zealand that would make the Service more Deaf-centric. Deaf teachers had developed strategies to maintain their resilience in the face of audism and cultural discrimination. One such strategy was to reflect on what changes might be made to improve the experiences of Deaf teachers and to improve the educational outcomes for deaf students.

The Deaf teachers' recommendations for change can be grouped into: changes in the employment relationships between Deaf and hearing teachers; and, changes in the culture of the Deaf Education Service. These changes the Deaf teachers expected would lead to changes in the organisation of Deaf Education as a service.

Recommended Changes in the Employment of Deaf and Hearing Teachers

All the participants recommended that Ko Taku Reo employ more Deaf teachers. As one participant said, "There is a shortage of staff at Ko Taku Reo. Especially Deaf teachers who can sign. … There are no NZSL teachers in mainstream schools. … I find that at [Deaf Education] provisions I'm always the only Deaf staff there." Another participant said:

> *What I want … is more Deaf teachers …. Lots of old teachers are stepping down. We're advertising for new teachers. All have experience teaching in the mainstream but they have no knowledge of Deaf language and culture. They're starting to learn NZSL slowly. Some are quick at picking it up, but most are slow. They don't know how to teach deaf students. They're really naive. It's such a difficult situation. They do try but it's not really good.*

Currently there are no Deaf BTs teaching at Ko Taku Reo. One participant describing the experience of having mentors as a BT said, "The best mentors [both Deaf] I had for the BT programme …would check on me and ask questions. I had to think on the spot. I had to show evidence of being able to teach directly in NZSL one day."

The need for Ko Taku Reo to employ more Deaf teachers arises partly because older Deaf teachers are retiring and not being replaced. One participant said, "I was thinking the other day that most Deaf teachers are from the age 45 onwards. Where are the younger teachers?" The outlook is not good for an increase in the number of Deaf teachers to match the proportion of deaf students enrolled at Ko Taku Reo. Not only are there not enough Deaf teachers but also they are geographically dispersed. The recommendation of our participants is for more Deaf teachers located in proximity or able to attend block courses to address some of the isolation the Deaf teachers described.

A gap in the population of Deaf teachers is the lack of Turi Māori (Māori Deaf) Teachers. This is despite the number of Turi Māori students being higher in proportion to the general

population than for deaf students from other cultural backgrounds. The view of one participant who was able to identify as Māori was that the training and employment of Turi Māori Teachers is an issue needing urgently to be addressed.

One participant said, “There are not enough Deaf teachers to get involved in a lot of things.” For this participant, the lack of Deaf teachers meant that the biggest problem was “that there are too many hearing staff”. The problem with so many hearing staff was, according to one participant, that, “The hearing teacher had plenty of teaching experience but no knowledge of NZSL.” Another participant modified this view saying, “They [the hearing teachers] did understand some things about Deaf culture. The language, yes, but at the same time it still felt like a hearing environment with the staff.” Participants were aware that the hearing teachers thought that interpreters were needed in order for the Deaf teachers to participate in the Deaf Education Service. One participant said, “At the Deaf school, the hearing managers decide whether Deaf staff need to have an interpreter or not.” The participants thought it should work the other way around, that NZSL should be prioritised in a deaf education environment.

There is a belief, which may or may not be accurate, that Deaf teachers are expected to teach in a hearing school prior to registration which constitutes a barrier for them. When seeking to clarify whether there is a requirement that Deaf teachers must work for two years in a hearing school we have received conflicting advice from various agencies.

A participant summed up the views of the Deaf teachers when s/he said, “People feel that it is not culturally safe. People feel like they can’t speak up… It can strongly feel like a ‘hearing and white’ way sometimes.” Another participant expanded on this view saying, “It’s all about their ideologies. They expect us to just apply their ideas to our teaching practice… They’ve given us resources but they never ask us what we need… It’d be nice to ask us what we need, our ideas [about how] to meet deaf students’ needs.”

In summary, participants’ recommendations to create changes in employment in the Deaf Education Service to make it more Deaf-centric include:

- Employing more Deaf teachers to improve the ratio of Deaf teachers to deaf students;
- Training and employing Turi Māori teachers to improve the ratio of Turi Māori teachers to Turi Māori students;
- Deaf BTs hosted in settings within the Deaf Education System (not just Auckland and Christchurch) and provided with qualified Deaf mentors or at least mentors fluent in NZSL and competent in Deaf culture;
- Hearing teachers employed in the future being required to demonstrate fluency in NZSL, and awareness of Deaf culture;

- Hearing teachers and other personnel currently employed in the Service being required to meet a minimum standard of proficiency in NZSL, and participate in Deaf awareness workshops.

Recommended Changes in the Culture of Ko Taku Reo to become more Deaf-centric

The number of Deaf teachers Ko Taku Reo employs could be increased quickly if the culture of the Deaf Education Service changed to become more Deaf-centric. All five of the participants who were employed outside Ko Taku Reo at the time they were interviewed for our study said they would return if the Deaf Education Service was: Deaf led; prioritised a Deaf-friendly culture; and, where Deaf teachers and deaf students could feel culturally safe. The four Deaf teachers who were working at Ko Taku Reo at the time they were interviewed agreed that they also wanted the same changes, which they expected would result in a more Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service. The culture of the Deaf Education Service is manifest in its employment strategy (see section above). Other instances where participants wanted the culture of the Deaf Education Service to become more Deaf-centric included: the choice of leadership; the management of conflicts; conduct of staff meetings, and opportunities for PD that address Deaf pedagogy and the specific needs of deaf learners.

The interviews with the Deaf teachers were undertaken at the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025. In September 2025 a Deaf Executive Principal was appointed to Ko Taku Reo, thereby fulfilling one of the changes that the Deaf teachers wanted to see realised if the Deaf Education Service is to become more Deaf-centric. As one participant said, “I just feel it would be nice to have strong Deaf culture, or a strong person to work really well to uplift the Deaf school. Especially as a principal. … It is the same for leaders.” For the last few years Ko Taku Reo has had a Ministry-appointed Commissioner rather than a school board of trustees. Recently a board has been elected including Deaf parent representation and a Deaf chairperson. These developments go some way to addressing the concerns of the participants. One participant expressed a commonly held view that the consequences of Deaf leadership would be wide reaching.

Based on a reading of the international literature, Reagan (2020) provides a checklist of the necessary components of deaf education that would lead to deaf children living happy and successful lives. To some extent the list of components Reagan proposes for use in the United States is echoed in the views expressed by Deaf teachers in this study and in Smith (2003). Therefore, his checklist could be a reference for Deaf teachers participating in the design of a Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service in Aotearoa New Zealand. Reagan’s checklist is as follows:

> 1. Regardless of the child’s individual linguistic background, for educational purposes, it would be assumed that his/her first and dominant language would be ASL. This means that all classroom instruction would take place bilingually in both ASL and English, with a focus on literacy, signacy, and oracy, in that order.

2. All teachers working in the program would need to be fully functional in ASL, and hearing teachers would need to be fully functional in English, and would need specialized training for teaching English to non-native speakers.

3. Teaching methodologies would need to be designed with the special needs and requirements of deaf students in mind, and instructional technology would be utilized to maximize the learning of deaf students.

4. The relevant parts of the curriculum (literature, history, social studies, art, etc.) would need to be Deaf-centric and taught by deaf teachers.

5. Literacy in English would be an important educational objective, but neither speech nor speech reading would be a focus of the curriculum.

6. Assessment in all curricular areas would need to be designed with the special needs and requirements of deaf students in mind.

7. The physical architecture of the classroom should be designed with DeafSpace in mind and classroom organization should similarly be designed with the needs of deaf students in mind.

8. Efforts would be made to ensure that all students had frequent opportunities to interact with deaf adults, in addition to those employed in the school.

9. Helping students to become self-competent and empowered critical agents of change would be an important component of the curriculum. An important part of this empowerment would consist of preparing students to understand, recognize, and resist audism and ableism in appropriate ways.

10. Teaching students to be respectful of all adults and children, and ensure that there is no bullying in the classroom, on the playground, or anywhere else in the school environment.

11. Staff training and development would be a key element of the school's strategic plan, and this training and development would be largely determined by the identified needs of the classroom teachers themselves (2020, p.1501).

In summary, recommended changes in the culture of the Deaf Education Service to make it more Deaf-centric emerging from this study are that:

- The Executive Principal be Deaf and fluent in NZSL. (Such an appointment was made in September 2025);

- The school board of Ko Taku Reo be elected with a majority of Deaf members or hearing people fluent in NZSL and competent in Deaf culture. (Such an election has recently been held and a Deaf Chairperson appointed.);

- A majority of the senior leaders at Ko Taku Reo be appointed who are fluent in NZSL and have an in-depth understanding of Deaf culture. (Standards of staff NZSL proficiency are currently being assessed and improved through a project supported by the Ministry of Education);

- When conflicts between hearing and Deaf culture arise, resolution involve prioritising Deaf cultural practices;

- All meetings should be run using a Deaf-friendly protocol;

- The expansion of PD that focuses on a bilingual/bicultural approach to Deaf teaching and learning;

- Provision of PD that explores how to enhance the educational achievement of deaf students.

- The expertise of Deaf teachers be acknowledged and used to improve the educational experience and achievements of deaf students.

Final Words

An aim of this research was to record and publicise the experiences and insights of Deaf teachers concerning their professional progress. We have seen that their professional progress does not follow the same pattern as hearing teachers with equivalent qualifications and experience. Deaf teachers' professional progress and job satisfaction is hindered by frequent instances of audism and cross-cultural misunderstandings. Among the hopes that Deaf teachers expressed were changes to the Deaf Education Service that would make it more Deaf-centric. The participants thought that in a more Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service, Deaf and hearing teachers would be treated as having equivalent status and opportunities.

One of the messages we received strongly from the Deaf teachers was that the Deaf Education Service does not formally recognise the value of the cultural expertise they bring to their roles in educating deaf learners. We recommend that the next step the Deaf Education Service should take is to work collaboratively, and in consultation, with Deaf teachers, recognising them as experts, and giving them oversight of how barriers they face in the workplace will be addressed and monitored, with the purpose of designing a Deaf-centric Deaf Education Service.

Appendices

Appendix One: Invitation to Participate

The professional progress of Deaf teachers

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS FOR INTERVIEWS

NZSL translation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPpgFxhnM4A

To whom it may concern,

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Research team
DSRU is working with two outside researchers (below) who proposed this project, because they are concerned about issues for Deaf teachers and want to raise awareness of the problems.

- Tricia Laing - mother of Deaf adult, many years as a parent advocate in deaf education including Chair of Van Asch BoT, has a professional background in cross-cultural research (anthropology), education, social policy
- Judie Allison – has experience in research on Teacher Unions, previously a teacher

These DSRU staff are working on the project:

- Sara Pivac Alexander
- Rachel McKee
- Kyle Cloete (RA transcribing interviews)

He aha te whāinga mō tēnei rangahau / What is the aim of the project?
This project aims to look at the experiences of Deaf teachers particularly relating to: training experiences; professional progress; work satisfaction; and ideas about the future of Deaf teachers.

Your participation will support this research by providing valuable professional insight on current practice This research has been approved by the Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (reference number 2024/HE000121).

Ka pēhea tō āwhina mai / How can you help?
We hope to interview around 8 Deaf teachers, including a mix of teachers who have left the profession, currently working teachers, and recently trained (younger) teachers. You have been invited to participate because you fit into one of these groups. If you agree to take part, Sara Pivac Alexander will interview you over video call (zoom) at a time which is convenient to you. She will ask you questions about your professional experiences around:

- your background in the profession;
- your experience of professional progression in your development as a teacher;
- your ideas about what would improve the satisfaction you gain from teaching
- your ideas about the future of Deaf teachers.

The interview will take around 1 – 1.5 hours. We will record the interview on Zoom with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before 1 March 2025. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

Ka ahatia ngā kōrero ka tukuna mai / What will happen to the information you give?
This research is confidential unless you request otherwise. This means that the researchers named below will be aware of your identity:

- Tricia Laing
- Sara Pivac Alexander (interviewer)
- Rachel McKee (consultant on the project)
- Kyle Cloete (transcribing interviews)

However, the research data will be combined and your personal identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your profession. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on or before 1 Dec 2026.

He aha ngā hua o te rangahau / What will the project produce?
The information from my research will be used in a report available to teachers, education policy makers, union, academic publications and possibly conference presentation.

Ki te whakaae mai koe, he aha ō mōtika hei kaitautoko i tēnei rangahau / If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?
You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study before 1 March 2025;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording;
- receive a copy of your interview transcript;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;

- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy

Mehemea ngā pātai, he raruraru rānei, me whakapā ki a wai / If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?
If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact any of us:

Tricia Laing tricia.laing@vuw.ac.nz
Rachel McKee: rachel.mckee@vuw.ac.nz
Name: Sara Pivac Alexander
Email: sara.pivacalexander@vuw.ac.nz

He kōrero whakamārama mō HEC / Human Ethics Committee information
If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington HEC Convenor, Associate Professor Rhonda Shaw, by emailing hec@vuw.ac.nz.

Please see Consent form on next page

The professional progress of Deaf teachers

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for a minimum of five years.

Lead Researcher: Dr Tricia Laing, Deaf Studies Research Unit, Te Herenga Waka—VUW

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in a video recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point before 1 March 2025, and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on or before 1 Dec 2026.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisors unless I provide consent otherwise below.
- The findings may be used for a report, academic publications and/or presented to conferences.
- The interview notes and recordings will be kept confidential to the researchers
- I am able to provide comment the written summary of my interview.

• I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to me in any reports on this research. Should I select 'No' here, my name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me:	Yes	No
• I would like a copy of the recording of my interview:	Yes	No

- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes No
- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes No

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details (please include email address if you have requested for a copy of the interview recording/transcript/summary to be sent to you):

_____

Appendix Two: Interview Questions

1. Name of Deaf Teacher
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. Tell me about your training:
   - When? Where?
   - Accessibility of training? (communication, attitudes, deaf peers?)
   - What teaching qualification did you get?
5. How has your registration process gone?
6. What level of practising certificate do you currently have?
7. What settings have you taught in? (*Don't name schools)*
8. What are your teaching responsibilities now: subject(s), level(s), students
9. What has your teaching experience been like? How is it going?
10. Tell me about your experience of professional progression over your teaching career.
    - Mentoring? Other support for your development as a teacher?
    - Opportunities/ encouragement to seek extra responsibilities/promotion
11. Have you had any barriers to professional development or progression?
    - If yes, how have you dealt with them?
    - What professional support would improve your satisfaction in teaching?
12. Which Teachers' Union do you belong to?
    - What do you see your Teachers' Union doing to support Deaf teachers like you?

13. What goals do you hope to achieve in your professional progress as a teacher?
14. What extra value/skills do deaf teachers bring to deaf students?
15. If a young Deaf person asks your advice about becoming a teacher, what would you say?
16. Anything you want to add that I haven't asked you about?

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